



Lincoln Film Society

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Patron: Jim Broadbent
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Friday May 10th 2019
Summer 1993 (12a)

dir: **Carla Simón**

Starring: **Laia Artigas, Paula Robles, David Verdaguer,**
Bruna Cusi

Sponsors: **The Venue cinema**

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Synopsis: Spain 1993. 6 year old orphan Frida leaves her Barcelona home following her mother's death from AIDS related complications and moves in with her mother's brother Esteve in the rural house he shares with his wife Marga and their three-year-old daughter Anna. Frida struggles to find her place in this new family setup, though she enjoys moments of play and complicity with her younger cousin. She is visited by her grandparents, her aunt Lola and the latter's partner; on their second visit she pleads to return to the city with them. At the end of the film she asks Marga how her mother died.

There is a long history of child protagonists in Spanish cinema, from the mischievous Marcelino in Ladislao Vajda's *Miracle of Marcelino* (1955) to inquisitive Ana in Victor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973). 6 year-old Frida, the central character of Carla Simón's impressive debut feature, is a new addition to this lineage: a sharp, alert and wide-eyed girl negotiating the aftermath of her mother's death from AIDS related pneumonia in the year of the film's title.

We first see Frida from behind, watching an outdoor firework display, arms raised and fists clenched. It's a pose of defiance and determination. Returning to the flat where she has lived with her mother, she sits alone, watching from a distance while family and friends pack up the belongings that remain. From the very beginning, Frida is established as an observer, intently viewing what is happening around her. Her opening gaze is fixed and intense, and it establishes her as a melancholy and often silent witness to a series of events that she cannot emotionally process or understand.

The film is very much presented from Frida's perspective, with DP Santiago Racaj capturing much of the action from the young protagonist's height. From the back seat of a car, she watches her uncle Esteve (0,000 km's David Verdaguer) and her aunt Marga (Bruna Cusi) bid farewell to her grandmother as they prepare to drive her back with them to their rural home. Frida provides either the viewpoint for the action or is positioned as the dominant figure in the frame, and often one follows the other; shots of garlic and grapes hanging from the kitchen ceiling are then followed by Frida looking up, clutching her doll closely to her in the unfamiliar location of Esteve and Marga's rustic kitchen.

Snatches of conversation that Frida is privy to further reinforce her standpoint. Whisperings about her mother's death from her grandparents, aunts and uncles as they pack Frida's belongings, comments made by the local doctor about the tests Frida needs to undergo, and idle chit-chat in the butchers about the cause of her



mother's death all testify to the stigma of AIDS in a society still negotiating the modernity of the post Franco age.

The film repeatedly catches Frida's sense of isolation in her new home: she shies away from the chickens in the shed as if they are alien beings, and confuses a cabbage and a lettuce in the vegetable plot.

Central to the film is Frida's relationship with Esteve and Marga's young daughter Anna. The children's encounters are often captured in the numerous long-shot sequences favoured by Simón. Anna is keen to befriend Frida and refers to her as her new sister, but Frida establishes a clear hierarchy in the relationship, arranging her dolls and soft toys in ways that make it clear that Anna is not to touch them. In a dressing up game, Frida plays her mother, cigarette in hand, while Anna is relegated to the role of a servile Frida - a sequence that recalls the dynamic of the orphan sisters in Carlos Saura's *Cria Cuervos* (1976).

The playful levity that marks the girls' pastimes is one of the film's strengths, whether it's water entertainments with a garden hose or dance routines to a hit song. Laia Artigas as the pensive, curly-haired Frida and Paula Robles as her moon-faced, chatty cousin boast a natural spontaneity that renders their relationship entirely credible. Anna's innocuous comments - as when she asks Frida if she wants to ring her mother - have a painful resonance for the grieving Frida. Unable to articulate her discontent and disorientation, she lashes out and it is too often Anna who bears the brunt of her conflicted feelings of alienation - two episodes where Anna is injured or put in danger lead the kindly Marga and Jovial Esteve to rare moments of anger.

The arresting Catalan landscape is anything but idyllic for Frida, frequently dwarfing her or frightening her. By occasionally placing her in the margins of the frame - watching Esteve, Marga and Anna in numerous parent-child interactions that she feels excluded from, observing through an as her test results are discussed with the local doctor - Simón further reinforces Frida's sense of isolation. A statue of the Virgin Mary in the woods becomes a focal point for her grief, a place to pray and communicate with her deceased mother. In the final sequence, as she and Anna are tossed up and down on a bed by the good-natured Esteve, Frida bursts into tears, an outpouring of emotion that she has kept under wraps for so much of the film.

Based on a personal story - Simón's own mother died of AIDS

related complications in 1993 the film is a rites-of-passage drama of quiet understatement. The muted colors, the camera's ability to capture the throwaway remarks of the adults and the warm generosity of Marga and Esteve create a palpable, tender resonance. *Summer 1993* captures the conflicting emotions of the young child dealing with a situation that she is not in control of. At the beginning of the film Frida finds the *gegants i capgrossos* (giant and big headed puppets) that parade in the town square frightening. Towards the end she skips alongside them with a wide smile on her face, marking the first steps in a process of integration that hasn't always been easy or comfortable.

Credits

Frida	Laia Artigas
Esteve	David Verdager
Marga	Bruna Cusi
Anna	Paula Robles
Grandfather	Fermi Reixach
Lola	Montise Sanz
Grandmother	Isabel Roncatti
Angela	Berta Pipó
Irene	Etna Campillo
Cesca	Paula Blanco
Gabriel	Quimet Pla
Director	Carla Simón
Screenplay	Carla Simón
Director of Photography	Santiago Racaj
Editors	Ana Pfaff, Didac Palou
Art Direction	Mónica Bernuy
Original music	Ernest Pipó, Pau Boigues
Sound	Eva Valiño
Costume	Anna Aguilá

Spain 2017. 97 mins

Another View

Nothing much happens in *Summer 1993*, and yet everything changes. Autobiographical films tend to race through life, highlighting significant moments of tragedy and joy without everyday banality. In her feature film debut, Catalan director Carla Simón delivers a microstudy of one such event from her childhood in meticulous detail. Rocked by the deaths of her parents from AIDS and her hesitant adaptation to a new family, it largely justifies her intricate meditation.

Simón's camera hones in on her fictionalised self, renamed Frida (Laia Artigas), and it is through her haunted perspective that the sun-drenched world is explored. The premise is similar to Sean Baker's *The Florida Project*, which focuses on the ability of children to transform the mundane into the magical. There are fewer moments of juvenile frivolity in *Summer 1993*, for Frida has a far stronger grasp of her situation than the effervescent Moonee (Brooklyn Prince) in Baker's film. The contrast between tones here is thus less jarring, somewhat undermining its emotive power.

Nevertheless, 10-year old Artigas portrays Frida with a striking ignorance of her deep disturbances, allowing the audience to derive their own analysis of her behaviour. In a game of dress-up, we see a version of her mother in role-play, smearing bright lipstick on her cheeks and lugging on a twig-cigarette. Her bright-eyed cousin, Anna, represents the good-natured foil to this spoiled amorality, the product of attentive love from the aunt and uncle who have adopted Frida. Watching them develop an entirely convincing familial bond converts the sedateness of the film into melancholic pleasure.

Occasionally the slowness causes the mind to wander, and it is not until an hour in that sparks of affection are fully observed in the central characters. Artigas' performance becomes more natural as the film progresses, her confidence as an actor blossoming in the final heartbreaking scenes. Their poignancy similarly relies on the gradual breakdown of her aunt's hostility to her niece, with Bruna

Cusi skilfully playing to her frequent mood swings (a refreshingly realistic portrayal of the menstrual cycle all-too-seldom seen in cinema).

Rather than revelling in blind nostalgia, Simón reminisces in atmospheres and moods – that which is perceptible to a child. She presents a humbled reflection on the impact of the AIDS crisis in Catalonia, and further on the extent to which youth predetermines the rest of our lives. In the case of Simón, we are sure to expect wonderful things.

Lilian Crawford: Little White Lies

That's it for another season. Thanks to all of our members and guests who have turned out over the last 9 months in support of the Society. With a good audience tonight, we expect to have attracted more than 4000 attendances to the films we've shown., a number that now represents our benchmark for the appeal of the films we bring to the city
We hope you have enjoyed the season and look forward to seeing many of you in June and July for *The Heat is On*, our summer season (there's still time to sign up if you haven't already done so - just £10 for 4 films, or £5 per film on the door.)
But if you have had enough of the silver screen for the time being, we hope you have a lovely summer and we look forward to seeing you all again when we return for our 67th season,, which begins

Friday September 6th, 2019, 7.30pm
Cold War (Poland 2018. Cert 15)

The Heat is On - films to fit with summer
(sponsored by Lincoln Piano Centre)

June 21st - Plein Soleil (France Italy, 1960)

Tom Ripley travels to Italy to visit his playboy friend Phillippe Greenleaf and Phillippe's new fiancée, Marge Duval. What Phillippe doesn't know is that his father has paid Tom to convince his son to abandon Europe and return to his family responsibilities in San Francisco. But when Phillippe's family cuts off their funding of Tom's extravagant lifestyle during his covert mission, he discovers another way to maintain his newfound standard of living.

June 28 - The Kings of Summer (USA 2013)

Three teenage friends, in the ultimate act of independence, decide to spend their summer building a house in the woods and living off the land

July 5th - The Green Ray (France 1985)

Delphine is a beautiful young Parisian who is still smarting from a recent break-up. When a friend nixes their travel plans shortly before the trip, Delphine is left to decide how to spend her holiday. Soon she is dealing with various uncomfortable situations, including a beach getaway where she is the only single person. After attempting a trip to the overcrowded Alps, Delphine entertains more vacation options, but will the restless soul ever find what she's looking for?

July 12th - Local Hero (UK 1983)

Up-and-coming Houston oil executive "Mac" MacIntyre gets more than he bargained for when a seemingly simple business trip to Scotland changes his outlook on life. Sent by his colourful boss to the small village of Ferness, Mac is looking to quickly buy out the townspeople so his company can build a new refinery. But after a taste of country life Mac begins to question whether he is on the right side of this transaction.