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Deaf (12a)

Dir: Eva Libertad

with: Miriam Garlo, Álvaro Cervantes, Elena Irureta

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Synopsis: Spain, present day. Ángela, a deaf pottery artist, is expecting her first child with her hearing partner, Héctor. She is anxious about her ability to communicate with her child. When her baby girl, Ona, is born, a crisis in Ángela and Héctor's relationship develops after Ona is confirmed to be hearing. Ángela finds support with a group of deaf friends but her struggles to be a good mother creates a sense of isolation which she and Héctor have to work hard to resolve.

In recent years, we've seen a remarkable expansion in deaf representation on screen. Films such as Darius Marder's *Sound of Metal* (2020), Sían Heder's Oscar-winning *Coda* (2021) and John Krasinski's quiet place series (2018-), have given substantial roles to deaf actors such as Paul Roci, Marlee Matlin, Troy Kotsur and Millicent Simmonds. A fresh wave of features by deaf filmmakers-including Shoshana Stern's documentary *Marlee Matlin: Not Alone Anymore*, and two forthcoming fiction films, Ted Evans's *Retreat* and Louise Stern's *A Hand Rises*, which also feature majority deaf casts - further cement a sense that we are entering a golden period of deaf-centered cinema.

Eva Libertad's *Deaf* initially appears to be an unassuming addition to this canon. a collaboration between Libertad, who is hearing, and her sister, artist and actor Miriam Garlo, who is deaf. *Deaf* is a naturalistic, unshowy drama. That blunt title - *Deaf*, *Sorda* in Spanish - suggests something confrontational, an issues-led piece with explicit activist intent. In fact, what Libertad and Garlo have made together is altogether quieter, a subtle multi-dimensional story, which has as much to say about relationships and parenthood, as it does about a life lived with or without hearing.

We first encounter Ángela (Garlo) and her partner Héctor (Álvaro Cervantes) in the landscape which surrounds their small cottage in rural Spain. Ángela is deaf and Héctor is hearing, but in the couple's contained world these distinctions are incidental. Communicating mostly through Spanish sign language (LSE), in which Héctor has become proficient, the pair lead a self-sufficient life, sheltered from the outside world.

Despite this outward tranquility, it soon becomes clear that the couple are teetering on the brink of transformation. Ángela is pregnant, and although the prospective parents are excited, there are signs that this change will bring with it new challenges, which might threaten the equitable foundations upon which their relationship is built. While deaf friends greet the news jubilantly, the reaction of Ángela's hearing parents is more subdued. As her pregnancy progresses, and Ángela must interact more with a casually ignorant hearing world - doctors who address Héctor instead of her, assistants at a deaf appliances shop who are unable to sign - and when her parents nervously suggest that



she should try again with her hated hearing aids, Ángela begins to internalize their concerns.

Deaf is a film of details, tiny moments that accumulate to deliver a powerful emotional payoff. Instead of big confrontations, Libertad shows us how microaggressions stack up over time, gradually chipping away at Ángela's self-confidence. During an upsetting and realistic birth scene, Ángela - in pain and needing to lip-read - pulls off her doctor's surgical mask. The moment resonates strongly because it comes at the end of a pregnancy tainted by many small exclusions. When the baby does arrive, and there's a delay establishing whether she can hear, Ángela is surprised one day to see Héctor surreptitiously clicking his fingers by his daughter's ears to test her hearing. It's a credit to Libertad's careful pacing that this fleeting moment reads like a betrayal, sending an almost horror movie chill down the spine. If their relationship is really built on equality between the hearing and the deaf, why is Héctor so impatient to know how his daughter slots into this family? As Ángela struggles to navigate a noisy nursery, or to connect with other hearing parents, we see her belief in herself - and in Héctor's love - begin to erode.

Deaf's big themes emerge organically from a highly specific central story - an approach that works so well largely thanks to two magnetic central performances. Garlo is soulful and charismatic, combining a wonderfully expressive face with a carefully modulated voice performance, which reflects Ángela's backstory as a pre-lingual deaf person. Cervantes, who studied LSE for a year to convincingly portray Héctor as a Second Language signer, is equally impressive. It's not easy to make 'nice guy' parts interesting, but Cervantes is totally believable, a bear-like, comforting presence. The chemistry between the two is also highly convincing, particularly their physical connection; a scene in which the couple dance, Héctor mouthing lyrics for Ángela to lip-read, is gloriously sensuous.

The strength of this connection makes it more devastating when the couple's miscommunications begin to mount. After a bitter argument scene, in which everyone says something they regret - "Before, it was the deaf girl who made your life magical"; "I'm a hearing person and so is your daughter, and so is the world"- the turmoil sparks a shift in the film's form. Héctor disappears and Libertad transports us inside Ángela's perspective for the first time, muting the sound. The removal of the sound track is a familiar device in deaf-centered films, but here

this precise timing prevents the trick from feeling gimmicky. After approaching Ángela from the outside for so long, Libertad uses this moment of fracture to push us deeper into her world. This decision pays off powerfully, leading to a beautifully understated emotional climax, in which the singing of 'Happy Birthday' is weighted with a deep symbolic resonance.

Another formal trick which Libertad deploys with great impact is a subtle mirroring of scenes, whereby scenarios play out with different inflections across the film. Juxtaposed sequences in which Ángela and Héctor meet alternately with groups of deaf and hearing friends are particularly effective in demonstrating how this story, seemingly rooted in the specifics of a certain kind of cross-cultural relationship, also offers wider reflections on miscommunication and cultural misunderstandings. Anyone who's been in a relationship with someone whose first language is different from their own will likely relate to scenes in which Ángela and Héctor alternately struggle to navigate the chaos of a big social gathering - overlapping, in-joke-smattered speech and gestures, the sensation of falling into the cracks in a conversation. Through this mirroring we see this dynamic from both perspectives, Ángela adrift in a noisy group despite her fluency with lip reading and Héctor trying to keep pace with the rapid signing of deaf friends. This careful counterbalancing is crucial to *Deaf's* empathetic fairness. Libertad challenges assumptions by demonstrating how alongside hearing life there exists a world in which sound is irrelevant. In one world it is Angela who is defined by her 'lack'; in the other it is Hector who has something missing. In sharing a life, Ángela and Héctor are, like many couples from different backgrounds, choosing to live between the two. Someone must always adapt and compromise, but those compromises are not all in one direction, and it is by making these accommodations that we bind our lives together. *Deaf* is a story about deafness, and the story about hearing; but perhaps most of all, it's a story about love.

Credits

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| Ángela | Miriam Garlo |
| Héctor | Álvaro Cervantes |
| Elvira | Elena Irureta |
| Fede | Joaquín Notario |
| Ona (at different ages) | Felipe Aroca Serrano, María García Fernández, Martina Blaya García, Valentina Arona Fernández, Jade Molina Aroz, Elia Sánchez, Daniela Saura Pérez |
| Luci | Erika Rubia |
| Juan | Marc Blauk |
| Juan | Mark Tapia |
| Ramiro | Agustín Otón |
| Irene | Oti Manzano |
| Vero | Sofía Lopéz |
| Elena | Leticia Ramírez Perea |
| Álex | Antonio Serrano Davo |
| Ana | Paula Peces García |
| Sofía | Rosario Arca |
| Alfredo | Álvaro Leal |
| Teo | Leo Leal |
| Conesa | Agustín Mateo |
| Isa | Marta Megías |
| Pedro | José Ortuño |
| Ester | María Ortiz |
| Director | Eva Libertad |
| Screenplay | Eva Libertad |
| Cinematography | Gina Ferrer |
| Music | Aránzazu Calleja |
| Editing | Marta Velasco |
| Spain 2025. 100 mins | |

Take 2

'I've been fighting my whole life for a dignified life,' rages new mum Ángela in this superb Spanish drama from director Eva Libertad which shines a spotlight on the struggles of a deaf woman, cast adrift in a hearing world. Expanded from Libertad's 2021 Goya-nominated short (co-directed by Nuria Muñoz), it revolves around a devastatingly raw performance from Libertad's sister, the deaf actress Miriam Garlo, and was the deserved winner of the Audience Award at the Berlin International Film Festival earlier this year.

When we are first introduced to pregnant potter Ángela (Garlo), she's living an enviable existence in rural Spain with her hearing partner Héctor (Álvaro Cervantes). Héctor evidently adores her, and Ángela passes time pleasantly in the company of hearing-impaired friends and compassionate colleagues in the studio where she works. However, this blissful balance is thrown into jeopardy when Ángela's baby daughter is born, ripping her out of a carefully cultivated comfort zone and forcing her to re-engage with a society that has rejected and stigmatised her. Meanwhile, her daughter's own ability to hear means that Ángela starts to feel alienated within her own family.

This impeccably judged film gives a keen sense of the battles Ángela has fought thus far, with her sometimes selfish behaviour clearly born from self-preservation and frustration. Garlo is mesmerising, conveying every ounce of Ángela's agony, as well as her gutsiness, in a performance that's both subtle and strong. Stylistically, the movie is a triumph too, from its seductive cinematography to a shift in sound that places us in Ángela's shoes and adds emotional wallop to the film's final act. *Deaf* takes an intimate, incisive look at the all-too common challenges of new parenthood, while presenting circumstances that are fascinatingly specific. Affecting and enlightening, it's a powerful piece of cinema.

Emma Simmonds: The List

Our next screening:

Friday February 6, 2026. 7.30pm

It Was Just an Accident (Iran 2025)

Mechanic Vahid thinks he recognises a stranded motorist seeking help as the prison officer who tortured him. He kidnaps him and decides to take revenge - but because he isn't sure he has the right man, he decides to seek help from a group of friends and fellow victims.

Filmed in secret by Jafar Panahi Iran's most famous director, and distinguished by winning the Palme D'Or at Cannes in 2025 - Panahi's second such award - *It Was Just an Accident* is a powerful exploration of Iran's repressive and punitive culture and the impact it can have on those who offend the system.

Indie-Lincs 2026

Indie-Lincs, Lincoln's own low and micro-budget film festival takes place over the weekend of February 5-7 at the Lincoln Arts Centre. This year, the festival celebrates its 10th anniversary

We always encourage members to go along and see the work of many first-time directors embarking on a career in film. From shorts to full length features, there's something for everyone.

Information about the programme and how to obtain tickets may be found at <https://www.indie-lincs.com/#:~:text=%E2%80%8B>