



PREVIEW

Close Your Eyes (Cerrar los ojos)

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Director: Víctor Erice

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Production Companies: La Mirada del Adiós A.I.E., Tandem Films, Nautilus Films S.L., Pecado Films S.L., Pampa Films S.A.

Executive Producer: Cristina Zumárraga

Producers: Cristina Zumárraga, Pablo E. Bossi, Víctor Erice, José Alba, Odile Antonio-Baez, Agustín Bossi, Pol Bossi, Maximiliano Lasansky

Post-production Supervisor:

Carolina Redondo Fernandez

Screenplay: Víctor Erice, Michel Gaztambide

Story: Víctor Erice

Director of Photography: Valentín Álvarez

Visual Effects Supervisor: Juliana Lasuncion

Editor: Ascen Marchena

Art Director: Curru Garabal

Costume Designer: Helena Sanchis

Head of Make-up and Hair: Beatushka Wojtowicz

Original Music: Federico Jusid

Sound Design: Juan Ferro

Head of Sound: Iván Marín

Re-recording Mixer: Candela Palencia

Cast

Manolo Solo (*Miguel Garay*)

José Coronado (*Gardel/Julio Arenas*)

Ana Torrent (*Ana Arenas*)

Petra Martínez (*Sor Consuelo*)

María León (*Belén*)

Mario Pardo (*Max Roca*)

Helena Miquel (*Marta Soriano*)

Antonio Dechent (*Tico Mayoral*)

José María Pou (*Mr Levy*)

Soledad Villamil (*Lola San Román*)

Juan Margallo (*Doctor Benavides*)

Venecia Franco (*Qiao Shu/Judith*)

Spain 2023

169 mins

Digital

A New Wave release

Víctor Erice's first feature in three decades is a characteristically ambitious, richly satisfying meditation on memory, identity, family, friendship... and cinema. Twenty years after an actor's mysterious disappearance led to a movie-shoot being abandoned, the director, whose career subsequently stalled, reluctantly contributes to a missing-persons television documentary which, once broadcast, has unexpected consequences for a great many people...

Besides succeeding splendidly as engrossing drama, *Close Your Eyes* is rewarding as a magisterial summation of Erice's abiding preoccupations. Drawing and building on his own earlier films and unfinished projects while paying tribute to admired auteurs (Sternberg, Hawks, Ray et al), Erice has created a lovely, multi-layered work that is deeply personal, psychologically astute, philosophically profound, and very moving in its warm, generous humanity.

Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-large

Few filmmakers have such a hold on cineastes with such a slim body of work (three features, including one documentary, and a handful of acclaimed shorts) as Spain's Víctor Erice. Now, 50 years since his beloved, full-length debut *The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973) and thirty years since his last, *The Quince Tree Sun* (1992), comes a fourth feature that's both a long-awaited return for the eighty-two-year-old director, a career summation and an exquisite reckoning of cinema's power to haunt and enchant, to bring the physically or spiritually dead back to life.

The carefully composed opening sequence of *Close Your Eyes* feels like Erice has never been away. Daylight gradually fills a shadowy interior, just like the opening to 1983's *El Sur*. Characters speak in hushed tones about splintered families and father-daughter recriminations reminiscent of *Beehive*, even if they reference the country's Franco dictatorship in a more direct way than that film's dreamlike allegory.

It's soon revealed, however, that this both is, and isn't, *Close Your Eyes* per se. We're actually watching the opening scene to the film-within-the-film, *The Farewell Gaze*, set in 1947 but shot, then discarded, in 1990 when its charismatic leading man Julio Arenas (Jose Coronado) suddenly and mysteriously disappeared early in the shoot, never to be seen again. This film's director and Arenas's best friend, Miguel Garay (Manolo Solo), never made another feature. In Erice's film's present day of 2012, Garay has been contacted by the producers of true crime-style television show *Unresolved Cases*. They plan to profile the Arenas mystery, and so want to interview Garay and gather as much evidence as they can, pulling the director back into traumatic events from his past.

To reveal where all this ends up, would be to deny viewers the pleasures of what becomes a surprisingly plot-driven narrative from Erice and co-writer Michel Gaztambide. Suffice it to say that memory, loss and the moving image feature heavily. Besides, as with his previous work, the director is far more

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The Art of Seeing: The Lifelong Passion of Víctor Erice

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The Spirit of the Beehive El espíritu de la colmena
Mon 25 Mar 20:45; Thu 28 Mar 14:40; Sat 13 Apr 17:40; Thu 25 Apr 20:50

El sur The South

Tue 26 Mar 18:10; Sun 14 Apr 20:45; Sat 20 Apr 18:30; Tue 30 Apr 20:40

The Quince Tree Sun El sol de membrillo

Thu 28 Mar 18:00; Wed 17 Apr 20:25

Erice-Kiarostami: Correspondences

Sun 31 Mar 12:30; Tue 9 Apr 20:30

Victor Erice Shorts

Sun 7 Apr 16:00; Mon 22 Apr 20:40

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focused on evoking moods and questions, many of which seem to have an at least partial autobiographical slant. *The Farewell Gaze*, or as it's known by its would-be makers, 'the film that never existed', is Garay's second feature. Erice's own sophomore effort, *El Sur*, was released to great acclaim but has often been talked of as a compromised version, based on only half the screenplay and source novel when funding was pulled mid-shoot.

When pondering what drove Arenas to vanish, Garay's old friend and film editor Max (Mario Pardo) speculates whether Arenas 'couldn't handle the supreme issue: getting old.' At this stage of his life and career, it's surely something with which Erice himself grapples. For *Beehive* devotees, there's something hugely moving about seeing its child lead, Ana Torrent, playing Arenas's abandoned adult daughter, reunite with her first-ever director as a fifty-something year-old experienced actor. When her character here echoes a key line of dialogue from *Beehive*, time both collapses and spans a half-century in a heartrending instant.

The unfussy elegance of Erice's filmmaking remains as fresh and clear as ever. It's a contemplative style, allowing his superb cast time and space, regularly fading to black between scenes. More than once, songs sung and shared between characters emotionally transport them to a precious time in their past, while Federico Jusid's plaintive piano and strings-led score subtly guides the narrative beats.

It's a film, then, made by, and about, true believers in the transcendent potential of sound and image. At one point, Garay salvages a small flipbook depicting the iconic Lumiere Brothers' 1896 *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* from a storage unit. And when he proposes what might have happened the night his friend disappeared to his and Arenas's ex-girlfriend Lola (Soledad Vilamil), it's re-enacted by Garay (and Erice) as if it were a thriller flashback, leading Lola to tease him as 'still a film geek!'

Still, this isn't blind cinephile love. The climax, set in a closed down, small town cinema, is no simplistic paean to 'the magic of the movies.' In fact, editor Max gruffly jokes that 'miracles in movies haven't existed since [Carl Theodor] Dreyer died!' And yet Erice has dreamed in light an extraordinary ambition for what film, certainly his films, can strive for. As his characters gaze up at the screen, and out, perhaps for the final time, at their audience, it's hard to envisage a more emotionally overwhelming farewell, if that's what *Close Your Eyes* becomes, from a vital, too-often missing, force in world cinema.

Leigh Singer, *Sight and Sound*, bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound, 26 May 2023