

# He's caught in a trap, he can't go out

Armando Bo's *El último Elvis* shatters a man's delusions of grandeur

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They can't go on together / With suspicious minds. But I certainly could go on and on about Armando Bo's directorial debut *El último Elvis*, an official selection at the last Sundance Festival and the Opening Night Feature of this year's BAFICI.

I must admit that I have seldom witnessed so much expectation about an upcoming movie. "Is it good?" is the first question people ask, and it's evident from the look on their faces that they expect it to be. To answer the question, I must say that the film, minor quibbles and all, is indeed a very good study not in the personality of Elvis but in the self-replicating events in the life of an ordinary man, your average next-door guy who aches to be someone else.

In *El último Elvis*, with exquisite cinematography by Javier Julia, there's this forty-something guy, Carlos Gutiérrez (John Mc Inerny), who scrapes a living as an Elvis impersonator. Very little is left after picking up the crumbs at the seedy joints he and his band members play every weekend. That is, provided their agent can book them on a date.

Estranged from his wife, Alejandra (Griselda Siciliani) and daughter Lisa Marie (Margarita López), Elvis/Gutiérrez leads a rather lonesome life, occasionally seeing friends at his life-time *club de barrio* and performing daylight chores to supplement his modest (insufficient) income as his alter ego — Elvis, the man he sees on the mirror instead of a chubby middle-aged man living in the southern suburbs of Buenos Aires.

Succinctly put, *El último Elvis* is a coming-of-age story developing against the background of someone who, for fear of perceiving his own emptiness, plays a game of mirrors doubling as the one revered personality he will never be. This Elvis (our own) is very good in this regard, with a profound bass voice that conveys Elvis' (the real one) and his own excruciating pain over the lack of professional and popular recognition.

He's not alone there. In one of the film's most hilarious and self-contemplating scenes, there's dozens like our own Elvis — posing as somebody else, making a living out of their likenesses with certain personalities but knowing, deep inside, that all they will ever be is a shadow of the real thing.

Writer-director Armando Bo — third in line of a dynasty of filmmakers-actors — is certainly familiar with the technical side of producing and directing compact, beautiful, self-contained scenes. After all, he's been in the publicity business for over six years, running his own company with international success and renown. Producing commercials and co-writing the script for Alejandro González Iñárritu's acclaimed movie *Biutiful*, Bo knows very well how to pull the strings at the right time, and evidently has a knack for perfection, which he almost always achieves on the sound stage or in the editing room.

But before that process there's this thing called script. In this regard, *El último Elvis* is very neatly laid out, developing and illustrating a conventional story in a gripping manner, interspersing the lead's perambulations with the troubles and tribulations of pretending to be someone else, and having the world (mainly his estranged wife) remind him that his name is Carlos Gutiérrez, not Elvis, and that no way is he going up the Graceland way.

Reality has strange ways of having us confront things as they are. Due to unexpected circumstances, Elvis/Carlos, nearing the age when the real Elvis died, is forced to take care of his little daughter, Lisa Marie.

The moment of realization strikes Elvis/Carlos when least expected — the climactic point in *El último Elvis*, about which no more will be said here by way of plot or story development, lest I spoil its twists and turns for readers.

At times captivating, at times losing momentum, *El último Elvis* is fairly well narrated, and it's a good try at dissecting (denuding, rather) the truth behind the mask we're all made to wear in public. It is in this sense, and rightly so, that *El último Elvis* ultimately succeeds: it is not as much about an Elvis impersonator as it is an exploration of the true self behind every individual.

Suspicious minds or not, *El último Elvis*, striking the highly flammable notes of *Unchained Melody*, stands for the true Graceland the fictional Elvis and the real Carlos Gutiérrez would have certainly chosen to live in.

## **PRODUCTION NOTES**

*El último Elvis*. Argentina, 2012. In Spanish. Written by: Armando Bo and Nicolás Jacobone. Directed by: Armando Bo. Cinematography: Javier Julia. Edited by: Patricio Peña. Music by: Sebastián Escofet. With: John McInerney, Griselda Siciliani, Margarita Gutiérrez. NC13. Distributed by: Buenavista. Running time: 92 minutes.