

# Film Reviews

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Mill Valley

## Stigmata

Estigmas  
(Spain)

By JONATHAN HOLLAND

A Nadir Films release of a Jaibo Films, Nadir Films, IB Cinema production with the collaboration of TV3, RTVV, TVG. (International sales: Doc & Film, Paris.) Executive producers, Ignacio Benedeti, Juanjo Gimenez, Miguel Molina, Xose Zapata. Directed, written by Adan Aliaga, based on the book by Lorenzo Mattotti and Claudio Piersanti.

With: Manuel Martinez , Marieta Orozco, Ferran Lahoz, Lourdes Barba, Morgan Blasco, Nuria Casas, Martha Carbonell, Carla Gordillo.

**A richly suggestive, chilly fable about a lonely, gentle giant struggling to deal with the consequences of blood literally pouring from his hands, Adan Aliaga's audacious, haunting debut "Stigmata" reps a distinctive calling card. Largely composed of evocative spaces and silences, this challenging but not too demanding item fuses a traditional morality tale with offbeat visuals redolent of early David Lynch. A solidly planted central perf from non-pro Manuel Martinez prevents the pic from slipping over into mere empty artiness. "Stigmata" has already left its mark on fests, with further manifestations likely.**

Taciturn, ursine Bruno (Martinez, a former Spanish national shot-putter) leads a miserably isolated life, working at a bar for cruel Dino (Ferran Lahoz), getting quietly smashed on red wine, and visiting a sickly girl, Lia (Carla Gordillo), the daughter of his only friend, Rita (Lourdes Barba).

After dreaming that he's uprooted a tree, Bruno wakes with bleeding hands. Reactions to this range from disgust (from the bar's clients), to incomprehension (from his doctor) and adoration from Rita following Lia's recovery.

After beating up Dino, Bruno heads off to find his missing brother, but instead falls in with a troupe at a fairground. Among them, he meets and soon marries vivacious Lorena (Marieta Orozco), with whom he briefly finds happiness.

Pic has little new to say about good and evil that a couple of millennia of Christianity have not already covered, and is more interesting as a study of how even in the modern world, a saint is still an outsider.

Helmer does well to generate sympathy for a character who rarely speaks, whose inner life remains out of reach, and whose passivity sometimes frustrates. The fact that Martinez looks like a well-fed Jesus locates him interestingly somewhere between the human and comicbook worlds, endowing him with a suitably otherworldly air.

Pic is based on Lorenzo Mattotti and Claudio Piersanti's graphic novel, and has negotiated the generally tricky media transfer smoothly if slavishly, closely following the original's plotline. Visually, the pic retains the book's striking, sweeping use of crisp black-and-white.

The potential excesses of such allegorical, abstract material are carefully harnessed. Slow pacing over the early reels allows Aliaga to show off his talent for composing arrestingly textured tableaux. Equal attention is paid both to somewhat cliched closeups of dripping taps and to Martinez's blank but strangely fascinating face and gigantic body. Exterior shots of stunning Spanish landscapes later on are similarly well executed.

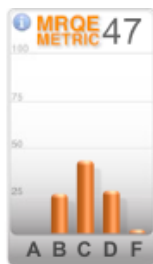
Soundwork and Vincent Barriere's eerie, humming score are crucial to the pic's effect.

Camera (B&W, widescreen), Pere Pueyo; editor, Aurora Sulli; music, Vincent Barriere; art director, Ines Tornadeira; costume designer, Irene Orts; sound (Dolby Digital), Veronica Font. (In Mill Valley Film Festival.) Reviewed on DVD, Madrid, Jan. 14, 2011. Running time: 98 MIN.

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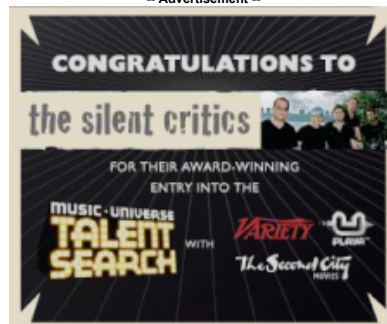
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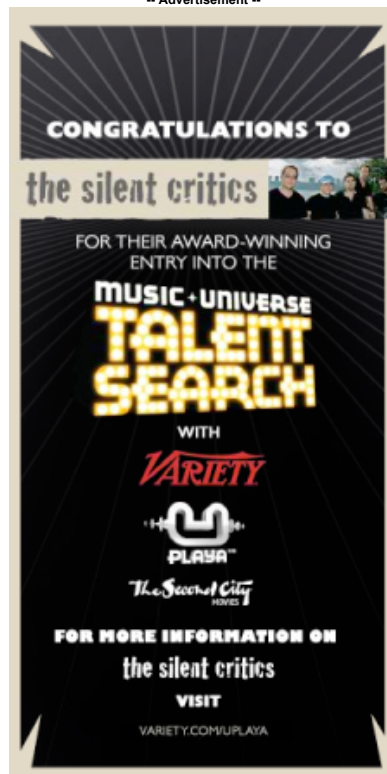
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