Bullish mood

Discover the allure of Bigas Luna at this month’s Spanish Film Festival.

STEPPHANIE BUNBURY

Censorship was so strict under General Franco, the fascist dictator who ruled Spain for almost 40 years until his death in 1975, that even imported American films would have their plots doctored to eliminate any hint of sin. Of course, there are many sins, but only one kind that matters. Sex outside marriage was wiped from the record, says British-based academic Professor Santiago Fouz.

Hernandez. Visible skin was kept to a minimum. Women on screen were obedient wives and mothers, just as they were supposed to be in life. The end to all that, when it came, was always going to be explosive — not least because Bigas Luna was out there, waiting for his moment.

Bigas Luna’s first two features came out in 1976, the year Franco’s censorship was relaxed. One of them was invited to Cannes: Illusion, a dark drama about a man who becomes obsessed with a sex worker and eventually kills her, established his interest in taboo subjects. The film that made him an international name, however, was Jamon Jamon (1992) the first of his Basque trilogy, Pain Hernandez, along with the filmaker’s daughter Bitty Bigas, has curated and will introduce a homage to the director, who died in 2015, at this year’s Spanish Film Festival. It is a documentary recently put together from his video diaries, Bigas x Bigas, along with the trilogy set in different regions of Spain.

James Jamon takes place in a stretch of Andalucia that looks so hot it is about to combust; the same could be said of its then unknown stars, Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz, who would be reunited and marry 17 years later. Bardem played the neighbourhood tearaway who fights a bull naked to show how tough he is; Cruz is poor, pretty and pregnant in someone else’s Golden Bulls (1983), which also features.

CONTINUED PAGE 3

Based on the best-selling novel

THE GUERNSEY LITERARY & POTATO PEEL PIE SOCIETY

IN CINEMAS APRIL 19
Too many yarns to start slowing up for this storyteller

MICHAEL DWYER

Don Walker can’t remember the actual murder. He remembers the USS Missouri docking at Woodyoomooloo during the Reagan years. And some trouble with a foreign navy type, “maybe American.”

But the bit about Ruby, the Kings Cross female fatale with the ivory razor and a plan to bunk off to Brisbane with a stash of US dollars? “I’m not sure,” he says. “It may have just been something that I made up.”

Ruby was early days for Australia’s greatest songwriter. Sure he’d done all that Cold Chisel stuff – well, most of it, in the 15 years preceding. But those two records by Catfish, the first of six in a new box set of his solo recordings, were a gamble he regarded with mixed feelings.

“In the Catfish albums there are things that make me cringe and there are things that I think are really good,” he says.

“I think the songwriting is very good. I think my skills were developed. The limitations on those albums have to do with me trying to expand my competency – trying to focus what it was that I did.”

“Come We’re All Gonna Die and Cutting Back, that thing was unasailable; the steel-eydred truck stop/ for hair racoons thinking aloud in front of a road-blasted blue-ock band.”

Speaking of which, “solo” obviously underells the calibre of the various players that blazed that are from: Unlimited Address in 1988 to Gully Gully in 2013. In practical terms, it serves to separate Walker’s own vehicle from his ongoing work with Cold Chisel and Tex, Don and Charlie.

“The Suvae F-Se is has the advantage of being unique,” he says of the membre this band has grown into over time. “There are a number of bands called Catfish throughout the world but there’s only one Suvae F-Se.

“It comes from a David Lynch movie [Blue Velvet]. Dennis Hopper says to Kyle MacLachlan, ‘Man, you are one suave f-se.’ So for a long time it was part of the general banner of the band.”

Of course it was, as were many tales, one suspects, from the endless road that gives the box set its title: Backstop. From Flame Trees to Johnny’s Gone to The Hitzch, the highway has been a character in Walker’s work as surely as Ruby, Danielle or that bad buggy named Harry.

As he prepares to lead his compadres into a few more towns for the unpeated time in more than 40 years, there’s one thing nagging at Walker’s conscience.

“The main aim of this tour is to bring in new songs,” he says. “The thing that’s worried me with the whole idea of putting together a box set is, well, what happens when I do a new album? Can we make the box with a bit of room in it?”

Blacktop is out now. For Don Walker’s April tour dates go to donwalker.com.au

Don Walker

FREEZE! Cranbourne Gardens 14 and 15 April Melbourne Gardens 21 and 22 April
Astonishing performing arts in the Gardens Tickets limited | Book now at rbg.vic.gov.au