



# EG

entertainment  
guide

## Bullish mood

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

STEPHANIE 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 1978, the year Francoist censorship was relaxed. One of them was invited to Cannes; *Bilbao*, 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 Iberian trilogy. Fouz Hernandez, along with the filmmaker's daughter Betty Bigas, has curated and will introduce a homage to the director, who died in 2013, 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.

*Jamon Jamon* takes place in a stretch of Andalusia 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 to someone else. *Golden Balls* (1993), which also features

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LILY JAMES MICHEL HUISMAN GLEN POWELL JESSICA BROWN FINDLAY KATHERINE PARKINSON MATTHEW GOODE WITH TOM COURTENAY & PENELOPE WILTON



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Penelope Cruz and Javier Bardem were as hot as the parched Andalusian landscape in Bigas Luna's 1992 film *Jamon, Jamon*.

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Bardem as a womanising bad boy, is set in jerry-built Benidorm; *The Tit and the Moon* (1994) is set outside Barcelona, Bigas Luna's home city. You can find the same motifs in all these films: bulls, ham, motorbikes, exuberant sex, tortillas, flamenco, the moon and a lot of exposed breasts. Priapic hombres pursue the women they fancy indefatigably. "No" from the desired one means "keep trying, you filthy pig." Sex soon follows.

So much machismo meant Bigas Luna was seen as a defiant chauvinist, a reputation he would play upon in public. Fouz Hernandez remembers first watching the Iberian trilogy as a student with growing embarrassment; this was exactly the kind of retrograde idea of being Spanish

that his generation hoped was disappearing, to be replaced by liberal, decent Europeanism. Now he sees the films differently, as explorations of ideas of gender which changed dramatically during Spain's early years of democracy.

"You could see these men as dominant and heterosexist," he says. "Or you could see the films as tales of the fall of that stereotype, as they are all shown to be powerless." Meanwhile, whatever else they are, the women are no longer the surrendered wives of Francoist Catholicism. "The sex reflects the fact they are now working, have their own money and can objectify men, which sort of shakes the system and plays with the stereotype of Spanishness." There is just as much male nudity as female, says Fouz Hernandez.

And is the streamlined capitalism of the

European Union such a great replacement for the old Spanish ways? Bardem's Raul in *Jamon, Jamon* is a meathead, appropriately enough given he delivers ham for a living. With his new job as an underwear model, his well-endowed crotch becomes a billboard: modern advertising has just butchered him into a different cut. "The country was changing as it was joining the European Union, both outwards and inwards, wanting to clean up its act and be like northern Europe," says Fouz Hernandez. "Which we are not. It's like the image of Australians in *Priscilla*, a national identity people don't want to remember. But it's part of who we are and it's important to embrace it as well."

Visit [spanishfilmfestival.com](http://spanishfilmfestival.com) for Spanish Film Festival tickets, screening times and more information.

Vamos a ir al cine!

Summer 1993

Carla Simon bases the story of six-year-old Frida, sent to live with her uncle's family after both her parents die of AIDS, on her own life. Lonely, traumatised and aware that nobody will talk about why her parents are dead, Frida takes out her frustrations on her three-year-old cousin Ana. Winner of a clutch of Goya and Gaudi (Catalan film) awards.

Abacadabra

A comic caper in the hit-or-miss, wacky vein of Alex de la Iglesia, this dark comedy overlaid with ghosts and Gothic horror could hardly be more different from the director Pablo Berger's previous work. This story of a working-class housewife whose boorish husband becomes possessed by the spirit of a dead serial killer is a return to the bosom of peculiarly Spanish sensibilities.

Dying

Fernando Franco's new film is a penetrating study of a couple - Luis and Marta - facing the news that Luis has a brain tumour. The prospect of his death and his determination not to try medical intervention exert a pressure that opens previously invisible cracks in their relationship.

Pan's Labyrinth

A little girl in the Alice mould, cursed with a stepfather devoted to the cause and concepts of General Franco, finds pagan gods at the bottom of the garden. If you have never seen this wonderful fantasy by Guillermo del Toro, whose *The Shape of Water* won this year's Oscar for best film, see it now.

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 Woolloomooloo during the Reagan years. And some trouble with a foreign navy type, "maybe American".

But the bit about Ruby, the Kings Cross femme 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 regards 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 album have to do with me trying to expand my competency ... trying to focus what it was that I did."

Come *We're All Gunna Die* and *Cutting Back*, that thing was unassailable: the steely-eyed truck stop/front bar raconteur thinking aloud in front of a road-blasted blues-rock band.

Speaking of which, "solo" obviously undersells the calibre of the various players that blazed that arc from *Unlimited Address* in 1988 to *Hully Gully* in 2013. In practical terms, it serves to separate Walker's own vehicle from his ongoing work with Chisel and Tex, Don and Charlie.

"The Suave F---s has the advantage of being unique," he says of the moniker this band has grown into over time. "There are

a number of bands called Catfish throughout the world but there's only one Suave F---s.

"It comes from a David Lynch movie [*Blue Velvet*]. Dennis Hopper says to Kyle MacLachlan, 'Man, you are one suave f---k'. So for a long time it was part of the general banter of the band."

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

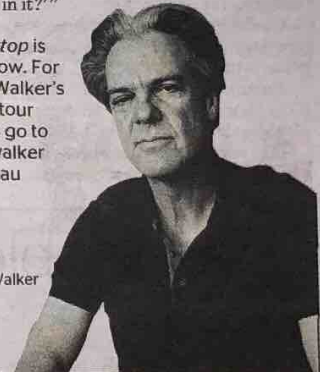
As he prepares to lead his compadres into a few more towns for the umpteenth time in more than 40 years, there's one thing niggling at Walker's conscience.

"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](http://donwalker.com.au)

Don Walker



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