

Mon Sept 23 | 8:30 pm |
Jack H. Skirball Series
\$12 [members \$9]

JUAN PABLO GONZÁLEZ

Caballerango

(Horse Wrangler)

Los Angeles Premiere

Juan Pablo González's *Caballerango (Horse Wrangler)* (2018, 62 min, Digital, Spanish/English subtitles) is an intimate portrait of rural Mexican life amidst the deepening presence of tragedy and loss. In the village of Milpillas, a family remembers the last day they saw Nando, their youngest and apprentice of his father José, a horse wrangler. Through a subtle weaving of multiple voices and vivid locales, *Caballerango* poignantly reflects a community's will to survive. Juan Pablo González is a Mexican filmmaker who was among *Filmmaker Magazine's* 2015 "25 New Faces of Independent Film." His work has been screened at Cannes, Rotterdam, IDFA, BAM, Mexico City Cinematheque, and other international venues.

**Via Skype from the San Sebastian International Film Festival:
Juan Pablo González**
**In person: Executive Producer Ana Isabel Fernández De Alba;
Co-Editor Sebastián Salfate**

Special thanks: co-editor and producer Ilana Coleman

"An atmosphere and feeling of loss that will haunt you." —*Indiewire*

"Juan Pablo González's first feature *Caballerango* begins by reusing part of his short *The Solitude of Memory*, in which an Mexican ranch hand recounts the day his son died. Slowly told while driving, it's a sad story—drunkenness, hypothermia, death, with harsh words said beforehand—that's the anchoring incident for this 61-minute film, which proceeds to solicit relatives' and friends' equally unhurried memories of that day." — *Filmmaker Magazine*

"Juan Pablo González's *Caballerango*, captures spare haunted moments in Milpillas... when the unexpected invades the frame, it

engenders surprise or awe... demonstrating how ghosts, metaphoric and literal, permanently disrupt everyday lives.”

- Vikram Murthi, *Roger Ebert Festival & Awards*

Interview with Juan Pablo González (excerpts)

I stopped shooting in December 2016. The last time I was in Atotonilco was for the wedding of José's [Bolaños] daughter, Fernanda. We shot the entire wedding, but it was only in a very early cut of the film... It was the first shoot that wasn't about Nando's suicide...

But the last time I went [to shoot] before the wedding I realized that things were getting somewhat repetitive. At that moment I was feeling it was enough. I had been shooting José's family since December of 2013. I stopped after 3 years.

At some point they felt "How many times are we going to discuss this death?" But now that people know I'm making films in Milpillas, that question no longer comes up. My film *Las Nubes*, for example, is not about their family; it's about another man who has been a friend of my father's for many years. [People] know that I make films there and that maybe I will call someone and tell them, "Hey, now it's time to make YOUR film." We're casting down there for another film, too, so now I'm getting involved with the entire town, not just a few families... For *Caballerango* had a tough time raising the funds. In the end, Sundance helped us a lot. I'm at a different point in my thought-process as a filmmaker than I was three years ago – I feel a lot less intimidated about just making a film. If I want to make three films, I'm going to make them. But when I was making *Caballerango*, I had all sorts of doubts...

The reason why I have a job at CalArts is that they sincerely don't care if you make features or you make 1-minute films. That has taught me that the industry – even the independent film industry; even festivals! – are incredibly conservative in that sense...

I set very specific formal guidelines. One of my objectives is that all of the people working with me are really comfortable and feel like they're not working and everybody's having a good time. [I would tell them]: "We're going to get to a place, and frame [the shot] together. Then we're going to leave the camera rolling for 40 minutes and things are going to happen," much more like how you'd make a fiction. That allowed me to be close to the camera people at all times. In a way, even though they were the ones framing, it was always through my eyes because I was always there with them...

It is difficult for some [programmers] to pin down what *Caballerango* is, starting with its length. It has these beautiful landscape shots, but also this interview with [José's daughter] Vero in the nail salon that's

purple and red and green – all these weird colors, weird framing, strange elements in the frame. To me, that shot is so telling of the film and the confusion that it generates: it's not a beautiful frame for some people, but it's beautiful to me...

Making this kind of films is a constant conflict. You're dealing with peoples' lives, and peoples' pain, and peoples' grief. It's traumatic for you; it's traumatic for them; and then you show it at a festival! Then, when it plays in front of audiences, is the moment where you think it was worth it... The thing that matters and is actually relevant is when people watch it, and it has an effect on them.

I also realized that I was beginning to assemble a personal archive of Atotonilco. Someone asked me recently, "Do you think that between *The Solitude of Memory* (2014) and *Las Nubes* (2018) you've represented your community?" And I was emphatic in saying, "Absolutely not." These are two characters in a community of thousands of people that are incredibly complex and rich and multifaceted. I just hope that, when I stop making films in this place, there is a glimpse of truth in the work that I've done.

There are always going to be ethical questions about what we do and how we do it. But it's the price you pay in order to share these things with other people. You do it because you cannot not do it. It sounds like a cliché, but it is also true. Once you start, you have to just finish, even though a lot of times when you are finishing a film, you have already moved on in so many aspects...

Caballerango was inspired, or should I say pushed, by urgency in the sense that making films is my way of resisting all of these crazy politics. Another film that we are making now reflects upon a changing Mexico that has been heavily affected by global corporations that have reshaped the rural landscape there. I'm also working on a film with my wife [Ana] Isabel [Fernández] about contemporary ways of seeing landscape and its relationship to violence. How do we look at landscapes in Mexico which are in many ways mass graves versus how did we look at landscapes in the 19th century? And how did we look at landscapes in 20th century muralism? What does that mean for Mexico as a country? What does it mean for Mexican-ness? And what does it mean for me?

There is a major political discourse happening now that has no connection to what has actually happened historically in the 24 years that NAFTA has existed. This disconnect between discourse and reality is so representative of Trump. It has made me less interested in what "the issue" is, and more interested in the questions I have about being Mexican. My way of resisting is not by making a film about Trump; it's not making a film about the border; it's not making a film about immigration. It's making a film about what I think Mexico really is.

These are films that reflect towards the inside, not the outside. And now that I'm moving away from this story, it's sad for me in a way, and I'm apprehensive about it...but at the same time, it allows me to see other questions I can explore. Not the answers, though – just the questions.

Named one of *Filmmaker Magazine's* "25 New Faces of Independent Film" for 2015, **Juan Pablo González** is a Mexican filmmaker whose work has screened at Cannes, Rotterdam, IDFA, the Lincoln Center of New York, the Mexico City Cinematheque, Habana, Ambulante, among others. He has received support from the Mexican National Fund for Culture and Arts, the Sundance Institute, the Venice Biennale and the Austin Film Society. He currently teaches in the Film Directing Program at the California Institute of the Arts. His practice spans between fiction and non-fiction cinema. His work is primarily set in Atotonilco el Alto, the town where he grew up in rural Mexico. Gonzalez is concerned with representations of the rural, drug violence, immigration and the intersection between urban and country life in different communities around the Jalisco Highlands. His work reflects deeply on the immutability of memory and its trace across the spaces we inhabit.

Curated by Steve Anker and Bérénice Reynaud as part of the Jack H. Skirball Series. Funded in part by the Ostrovsky Family Fund.