

A CATALAN CINEMA OPEN TO EUROPE

THE LATEST TRENDS IN THE CATALAN CINEMA ALL HIGHLIGHT THE WISH TO JOIN THE EUROPEAN AUDIO-VISUAL SPACE THROUGH NEW MODELS OF CO-PRODUCTION.



QUÈ T'HI JUGUES, MARI PILI? [WHAT'S YOUR BET, MARIE?] (1991) BY VENTURA PONS

XAVIER PÉREZ FILM CRITIC

For the Catalan cinema, the nineties have started with a remarkable increase in comedy films. The release in 1990 of *Boom, boom*, Rosa Vergé's first film, earned unanimous recognition from public, critics, professionals and institutions, as is clearly demonstrated by the many prizes awarded it by all these sectors. In 1991, a new comedy, Ventura Pons's *Què t'hi jugues, Mari Pili?* has made a hit with the public as a commercial product worthy of a significant position in the box-office ranking, alongside successful North-American productions. The success of these two recent Catalan comedies shows the public's increasing confidence in products that search for a form of entertainment that is more or less on a level with commercial films from other countries, without at any time renouncing unquestionable signs of national identity. To sum up, our cinema is searching for absolute normality as regards the relationship with its most immediate receptor, while at the same time wanting to occupy its natural place on other markets. In this respect, it is no coincidence that *Boom, boom* should have been jointly produced with Belgium, or that *Què t'hi jugues, Mari Pili?* should also already have found an international distributor.

In fact, these two comedies are the continuation of a feature of Catalan cinema that Jordi Balló, Ramon Espelt and Joan Lorente had pointed out in their book *Cinema català 1975 - 1986*: that it is fundamentally a cinema of genres. Francesc Bellmunt, possibly the most regular and constant director of the past decade, has cultivated comedy to give expression to the aspirations and the problems of the younger generations through films such as *L'orgia* (1978), *La quinta del porro* (1980), *Pa d'àngel* (1984), *Un parell d'ous* (1985) and *La ràdio folla* (1986), before taking



BOOM, BOOM (1990) BY ROSA VERGÉS



RATETA, RATETA (MINNIE AND THE ANIMALS) (1990) BY FRANCESC BELLMUNT

on the thrillers *El complot dels anells* (1987) and *Un negre amb saxo* (1988), finally returning to comedy—with less success—with *Rateta, rateta* (1990). Bellmunt's contribution helped to strengthen comedy as the Catalan genre with most chance of acceptance amongst the public, though often through an unrefined form of humour, consciously vulgar in its visual presenta-

tion and in its characterization. In contrast to this tendency, Rosa Vergés in *Boom, boom* opts for a subtly tempered treatment in an impeccably constructed romantic comedy. The same careful construction can be seen in the script of *Què t'hi jugues, Mari Pili?*, although in this case the situations tend to be more outlandish. But the threads that hold this breathless comedy of intrigue together



EL PONT DE VARSÒVIA [WARSAW BRIDGE] (1990) BY PERE PORTABELLA



LA TERANYINA [THE COBWEB] (1990) BY TONI VERDAGUER

are perfectly controlled thanks to the extraordinary talent for comedy shown by its young scriptwriter Joan Barbero. The strengthening of this type of comedy as an essentially commercial genre contrasts with the uncertain progress of the other established Catalan genre, the thriller, which has also given rise to a whole new style of urban cinema focusing on the fringes of society.

Amongst other productions from the end of the eighties, we could mention films like Jordi Bayona's *Material urbà* (1987), Francesc Betriu's *Sinatra*, Isabel Coixet's *Massa vell per morir jove* (1988) and Ventura Pons's *Putxa misèria* (1989), which, though not based on police intrigue, show the same desire to enter semi-criminal fringe territories which contrast strongly with the placid

but somewhat insipid vision of the city in Ferran Llagostera's *Bar-Cel-Ona* (1986) or of the road in Toni Martí's *Una nit a Casablanca* (1986).

This commercial genre cinema has gradually replaced the historical film or adaptations of great works from Catalan literature, very popular amongst film-makers for some years. Amongst the most recent adaptations are Gonzalo Herralde's *Laura* (1986), based on the novel by Miquel Llor and presented as an unashamed melodrama of passions, or Jordi Grau's *La punyalada* (1989), from the work by Marià Vayreda, in which the director looks at the primitive, telluric nature of people and situations. Another example is *La teranyina*, a historical novel by Jaume Cabré, adapted for the cinema by Toni Verdaguier in 1990.

However, this commercial production should not make us forget the simultaneous experimental vocation present in films produced in Catalonia, especially those made during the sixties by the Barcelona School. One director who is more or less linked to this movement, Pere Portabella, has returned to this type of film with *El pont de Varsòvia* (1990). At the same time, Jordi Cadena and Manuel Cussó have approached the poetic universes of J.V. Foix and Joan Brossa, in their respective films *És quan dormo que hi veig clar* (1988) and *Entreacte* (1989). Also worth mentioning is Gerard Gormezano, who with *El vent de l'illa* (1987) achieved a suggestive approach to the landscape of Minorca during the period of English occupation, and Manuel Hueriga, who in *Gaudí* (1988) takes on a period piece posing fascinating questions about the limits between the documentary image and fiction. Products as far apart as *Boom, boom* and *Gaudí* highlight the wish to join the European audio-visual space through new models of co-production. ■