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## **The Clan (Cert 15)**

*dir:* **Pablo Trapero**

*Starring:* **Guillermo Francella, Peter Lanzani, Lili Popovich**

*Sponsor:* **Special Edition Chocolates**

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**Synopsis:** Argentina 1984. A report called 'Never Again' is published by the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons. A year later, in Buenos Aires, members of the Puccio family are arrested for the kidnap of the businesswoman Nélida Bollini de Prado. The film flashes back to 1982 to show the kidnap & murder of 3 earlier victims by dictatorship collaborator Arquimedes Puccio & his associates, who include Arquimedes's son Alejandro (known as Alex). One of Puccio's other sons, Guillermo, leaves in fear; another, Maguilla, returns to join the family business. Arquimedes & Alex are tried and sentenced after their arrest. The latter tries to commit suicide at his trial.

Pablo Trapero emerged as one of the emblematic filmmakers of the New Argentine Cinema with edgy tales of individuals driven to the brink by the conditions in which they live and work. His refashioning of genre has generated films with visceral clout and a distinctive social slant: *El Bonaerense* (2002) was a police thriller that explored the culture of corruption underpinning all levels of the force; in *Rolling Family* (2004), the road movie served as interrogating issues of national identity following the 2001 crisis; *Born and Bred* (2006) proffered an existential drama as bleak as the Patagonian landscape in which it evolved; *Lion's Den* (2008) delivered a gritty feminist prison drama; *Carancho* (2010) was a taut noir-ish legal thriller exposing the scams that underpin the medical insurance industry; and *White Elephant* (2012), set in the slums of Buenos Aires, fused a tale of urban drug warfare with issues of care, conscience and the ethics of societal responsibility.

*The Clan* (2015) marks a return to the crime movie for the director - but this is a tale crafted very directly from a news story that horrified mid-80s Argentina, retold with a vigorous, in-her-face virtuosity. Trapero plunges the viewer into the protagonists' world with an unnerving immediacy that may explain why this is his most commercially successful film to date. It has been sold to more than 50 countries and attracted some 2 million viewers in Argentina in its first four months of release.

It revisits the case of the Puccios, who kidnapped four people for extortion between 1982 and 1985, killing three of them before the police broke into their 'respectable' family home, in the Buenos Aires suburb of San Isidro to rescue the fourth victim, businesswoman Nélida Bollini de Prado, abducted a month earlier. The narrative is told very much from the viewpoint of the aggressors, led by steely-eyed patriarch Arquimedes (comic actor Guillermo Francella, here cast resolutely against type). His wife and daughters appear to have ignored what was happening in the family home, while son Alex (Peter Lanzani), a promising rugby player, acted as his father's accomplice - the family's first victim, Ricardo Manoukian, was one of his teammates.



Puccio Snr honed his skills working for the secret service during the 1976-83 dictatorship. The film makes reference to his membership of the Secretariat of State Intelligence (SIDD), effectively the secret police deployed by the juntas to execute their culture of terror. Widespread references to the Triple A death squad further position him among those associated with the crimes of the dictatorship and subsequently granted immunity by Raul Alfonsín's government. *The Clan* is thus a film about the wider structure of complicity through which the dictatorship operated, and the ways in which these continued to function in the democratic era.

Trapero eschews a linear narrative, opting instead to cut across the film's different time periods. He defines his approach as one where "fiction comes first" - underlined here by the dark colour palette, claustrophobic interiors and a deployment of a series of theatrical stages for the action; the dining room table around which the Puccio's 'happy family' is forged; the gruesome bathroom where the first victim is held; the dark cellar where the final victim is found; the cars in which Arquimedes and his accomplices observe and then kidnap their victims. In one of the film's most striking sequences, Alex's ecstatic sexual encounter with his girlfriend Monica is intercut with the grisly torture of second victim Eduardo Aulet. Protracted screams from both scenarios are accompanied by Virus's upbeat song 'Wadu Wadu'.

High-octane sequences are consistently amplified by a score that deploys 1980s tracks to signal both time and place and non-period pieces to heighten ambience, mark out mood and offer a further level of fictionalisation. Ella Fitzgerald and the Ink Spots' 'Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall' plays as the ransom is dropped off for the first victim, the song ending as the news of Ricardo's death reaches Alex. The Kinks' 1966 hit 'Sunny Afternoon' features on two occasions: we first hear it early on, as Alex enjoys a rugby victory and is congratulated by fans on the pitch; then at the film's end when he is taken to the court building with his brother Maguilla and their accomplices, culminating in his spectacular jump from the fifth floor, his brother's distressed response and a series of captions on the subsequent fate of each Puccio family member.

What is perhaps most extraordinary about the film is that it offers a few of *White Elephant*'s psychological insights to help us understand the protagonists' actions. In Francella's impressive performance, Arquimedes's creepily composed expression gives nothing away. In one of the most disturbing sequences, the camera follows him through the house as he carries a plate of food to his victim, who is being held in the bathroom and whose screams are chillingly ignored by the rest of the family as they go about their early evening routine.

The inclusion of archive footage of Alfonsín and General Galtieri is not only part of Trapero's attention to period detail but also

serves to contextualise the film within a wider culture of memory politics. Arquimedes is visually identified with Galtieri as he watches him give his famous television broadcast on 15 June 1982, boasting of Argentine pride in the aftermath of the Malvinas/Falklands defeat. Here, adroit visual storytelling delivers a tale in which the skeletons tumble out of the cupboard. *The Clan* exposes the warped sense of ‘the normal’ that is legitimised in compromised times, with Arquimedes never doubting the righteousness of his actions, and the family turning a blind eye to the crimes.

## Credits

<b>Arquimedes Puccio</b>	Guillermo Francella
<b>Alejandro Puccio ‘Alex’</b>	Peter Lanzani
<b>Epifania Puccio</b>	Lili Popovich
<b>Maguila Puccio</b>	Gastón Cocchiarale
<b>Silvia Puccio</b>	Giselle Motta
<b>Guillermo Puccio</b>	Franco Masini
<b>Adriana Puccio</b>	Antonia Bengoechea
<b>Mónica</b>	Stefania Koessl
<b>Basualdo</b>	Anibal Barengo
<b>Ordóñez</b>	Aldo Onofri
<b>Eduardo Aulet</b>	Juan Santiago Privitera
<b>Ricardo Manoukian</b>	Francisco Donovan
<b>Nélida Bollini de Prado</b>	Mario Nydia Ursi-Ducó
<b>Director</b>	Pablo Trapero
<b>Screenplay</b>	Pablo Trapero
<b>Script Collaborators</b>	Esteban Student, Julián Loyola
<b>Director of photography</b>	Julián Apezteguia
<b>Editors</b>	Pablo Trapero, Alejandro Carrillo Penovi
<b>Art Direction</b>	Sebastián Orgambide
<b>Original Music</b>	Sebastián Escofet
<b>Sound</b>	Vincent D’Elia, Leandro de Loredo
<b>Costume</b>	Julio Suárez

**Argentina/Spain/USA 2015**

**108 mins**

## Another View

Acclaimed Argentine director Pablo Trapero returns with this true-crime noir thriller focusing on a mob family operating in the nation’s post-junta era. This isn’t the first time Trapero has explored the darker side of his country and the long shadow cast by years of military rule; his previous films *White Elephant* and *Carancho* showcased a fascination with both the wafer-thin line between law and criminality and the far greater gap between the top tier and 99 per cent of society.

This film, which looks at the nature of evil and the true cost of family loyalty, mines the same territory and will inevitably get called the “Argentine Godfather”. That comparison is not entirely inaccurate given many of the plot beats here will seem very familiar to anyone acquainted with the genre: this is very much a “rise and fall” gangster story, with the required elements such as the chilling patriarch and his troubled heir all present and correct. But it is well-acted and darkly entertaining nonetheless.

The aforementioned gangster patriarch here is Arquimedes Puccio, who rules over his local turf in the traditional neighbourhood of San Isidro, Buenos Aires, at the start of the 1980s. The dictatorship has fallen and things are in flux, or so we are informed via some archival news footage. Arquimedes is played- very well it has to be said- by veteran actor Guillermo Francella (from Oscar-winning *The Secret In Their Eyes*), whose piercing blue eyes and pale face make him look a bit like Data the android from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Early on in the story it becomes clear that in the dictatorship era he – and presumably many others mobsters – enjoyed special access to the elites. One of the first shots we see is of him shaking hands with various bigwigs at what looks like a

meeting of military and political leaders. Later on, we see him brazenly walk into a military prison, fake ID casually in hand, to interrogate an old army associate who has fallen foul of the new regime’s desire to clean up its act. Arquimedes’ imprisoned friend sneers that things will soon be back to normal and he should continue business as usual, with just a few changes. Business as usual for Arquimedes involves, behind the respectable façade of a well-to-do family living above a surf shop, kidnapping his wealthy neighbours for ransom and holding them in the basement. In one neat bit of misdirection, Trapero reveals that Arquimedes’ eldest son, the handsome star rugby player Alejandro (Peter Lanzani), is in on the whole scheme. In fact, Alejandro is helping his father identify possible targets, using his fame and popularity in the region’s league tables to avoid suspicion and mingle with the kinds of targets they want. The grubby, grisly details of Arquimedes’s schemes are grimly fascinating and often provide a lot of tension, with Trapero showcasing just how low-rent this all is.

Whereas Don Corleone in *The Godfather* was always dressed immaculately and hosted lavish dinners, barely speaking openly of the crimes committed in his name, Arquimedes doesn’t seem to have enough minions to avoid having to do a lot of the dirty work himself. Much of his time seems to be spent shoving quarters into coin slots in various run-down phone boxes, haranguing the families of his prisoners over the line. He mixes with the kinds of elites that Corleone would have courted, but dresses like the slob Tony Soprano (albeit with much more care for the domestic chores of the family home). Drive-by grabs of the targets are often messy, and all end in bullets in the head by a river. Eerily, the family’s daily life is increasingly shown to be disrupted by the plaintive cries of the captives down in the basement – something that is starting to undermine their unity, now that all the children are old enough to understand what is going on.

If you have seen a gangster film before you won’t be terribly surprised to see where the story goes, though it has the courage of its convictions to see things through to the dispiriting conclusion, which presumably follows the real-life case. The blurring of the line between family life and criminality starts to tear at the nerves. Alejandro grows increasingly uneasy at the amoral activities he witnesses and partakes in, not least of all because all of Puccio’s kidnapping victims are, in fact, killed rather than released after the ransom has been collected. Puccio threatens and cajoles his son with appeals to loyalty against outsiders, as his will weakens. The police draw closer, while high-up allies in the political and military food chains start to back away.

The film is briskly paced, infused with energy and the backdrop remains interesting. The 80s setting is well-realised, with even a few throwaway lines of dialogue suggesting the damage done to the nation’s psyche by years of military rule and official sanction of mobs. When one of Alejandro’s teammate friends is kidnapped – with his connivance – all the talk in the locker room the day after is of how the military might be responsible. A dark tale from a dark time.

**Owen Van Spall: Eye for Film**

## Our next screening: Friday April 7th, 7.30pm Grandma (USA 2015. Cert 15)

Lily Tomlin plays Elle, an independent 70-year old dealing with an emotional trauma, decides to help when her granddaughter turns up, distressed by an unplanned pregnancy, an overbearing mother and a useless boyfriend (the father of the child).

Director Paul Weitz has no time for fluff in this deliberately female-centric film. It’s about clever women charting tricky territory, and given sparkle by Elle’s acidic one-liners, spending time in their company is an easy choice to make.

