

ELASTICA (SPAIN)
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PRESENT



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
2025 OFFICIAL SELECTION
COMPETITION

ROMERÍA

A FILM BY CARLA SIMÓN

2025 – SPAIN, GERMANY – DRAMA – SPANISH, CATALAN, FRENCH – 112'

mk2
FILMS

SYNOPSIS

Marina, 18, orphaned at a young age, must travel to Spain's Atlantic coast to obtain a signature for a scholarship application from the paternal grandparents she has never met. She navigates a sea of new aunts, uncles, and cousins, uncertain whether she will be embraced or met with resistance. Stirring long-buried emotions, reviving tenderness, and uncovering unspoken wounds tied to the past, Marina pieces together the fragmented and often contradictory memories of the parents she barely remembers.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I am fortunate to be part of a large family full of stories, which has become my main source of inspiration. Family relationships fascinate me because we don't choose them. My father died when I was three, and my mother when I was six, both of AIDS. The last time I saw my father's family was at my mother's funeral, after which we lost contact. When I was about to go to university, I needed my parents' death certificates, so I contacted my grandparents. A few hours later, one of my uncles contacted me to invite me to visit them. Curiosity and the desire to know my origins overcame the resentment of years of silence. At the age of 18, I travelled alone to Vigo, Galicia, to meet my father's family and uncover the story of my parents.

My parents were young during Spain's democratic transition in the 1980s, a time of freedom and experimentation, when young people broke with the inherited values of a deeply Catholic and conservative society. However, this long-awaited period of freedom, known as "La Movida", also brought with it a heroin crisis, which made Spain the country with the highest rate of AIDS-related deaths in Europe. These stories, however, have often been silenced.

Romería is a film about memory - the elusive family moments that we may never fully understand. I tried to reconstruct my parents' story through the memories of my family and those who knew them, but failed. The inherently fragmented nature of memory plays a role, but the main obstacle is the stigma surrounding AIDS, which clouds these memories. This story aims to recover the legacy of a forgotten generation that endured the dual consequences of heroin addiction and the emergence of a new virus. A part of Spanish historical memory that deserves to be revisited.

Frustrated by the impossibility of uncovering the complete history of my parents, I dedicated myself to creating the memory I was missing. Can we create our own memory when it does not exist? I believe we can - and must - establish a healthier relationship with the past and shape our identity. Fortunately, I have cinema.

Interview with Carla Simón

All your films are marked by the theme of family. Why does it occupy such a central place in your work?

It has a lot to do with my personal history. When I was very young, I lost my parents, who died of AIDS, and I went to live with my aunt and uncle, a new family that was also part of my own. For many people, family is something that is just there, but for me those relationships had to be built. I never took the family bond for granted, I analysed them with a distance that not everyone has. Besides, both my biological and adoptive families are very numerous: there are many siblings, cousins, uncles, aunts, uncles, grandparents... I have always been surrounded by family and I have observed their dynamics. There is a deep love in it, but also a load of wounds, traumas and aspects that are difficult to manage. In that mix there is a lot of material to tell human stories.

In *Romería*, the protagonist uses a home video camera to record that familiar environment, as if trying to understand it better. For you, has film also been a way of processing what you didn't always understand in your life?

I'm convinced that my desire to narrate has a lot to do with growing up in such storytelling environments. At some point I felt the need to portray them in order to understand myself better, but also to get to know those around me more deeply. I don't think I would have discovered much about my own family without film. In fact, *Romería* has ended up becoming a film about the desire to make films, even though that was not the initial idea. It was something that came up while I was writing the script: at a certain point, I thought that the main character should carry a camera. I realised that this made her a much more active character. For me it was something very natural, because it was all born out of a very personal experience. In the end, that camera took on a very important role, and I think the film can also be understood, among other things, as a story about the birth of a filmmaker's gaze.

Do you think that film has helped you to let go of feelings of incomprehension, discomfort or even shame linked to your family history?

Yes, I think it has. *Romería* is, above all, a film about memory and the need to explain ourselves, to find a story that makes sense of who we are. But it also stems from a certain frustration: what happens when you don't have that story, when no one around you can satisfactorily tell you where you come from and who you are? In my case, film has been the tool that has allowed me to invent it, to construct it for myself. The images I have created are based on the imagined, but when they are captured on the screen they become real. And that speaks of the freedom we have to invent when we don't have a clear version of our story. As the film shows, memory is neither objective nor reliable, it is deeply subjective. What we lived through has already happened, but we remember it differently each time, and each person does it in his or her own way. For me, accepting that there are things I will never know has been liberating. Even if my parents were here and told me their version, it wouldn't be an absolute truth either. Film has given me the possibility to invent my own story and to be able to live in peace with my history.

In the film you sense a willingness to accept your family history as it is, without evasion: with a luminous part and an extremely painful part.

Yes, totally. This was something we talked about a lot with the team. We were clear that we had to transmit the pain, but without falling into judgement or condemnation of the characters inspired by my parents, or excessive romanticisation. We had to find that right point, and in the end it came very naturally, because that's how I feel. It was important to define that tone well, because it is a delicate terrain. The film is also a portrait of a generation, the one that was young in the 80s in Spain, which has been left out of many family memories, because there was a lot of pain behind it: heroin, overdoses, AIDS, premature deaths... All this is part of our historical memory, but we still haven't accepted it as such. For me, as a child of all this, it was very important to recover these stories and accept them as part of what constitutes us, to be able to talk about them normally and, above all, without any kind of judgement. Because I think we still have a job to do as a society: to recognise this part of our history with the dignity it deserves.

How do you explain the fact that there has been such a narrative vacuum around that generation?

On the one hand, many of the protagonists are dead, they are no longer here to tell the story. There is a huge generation gap. It was a generation that grew up in the last decades of the dictatorship and that, after Franco's death, broke with everything that had been established: with what had been learned at home, at school, in the church, in society. That had a very strong impact on the generations that came after us, and I think that sometimes it is not given enough value.

Do the excesses experienced by your parents' generation have to do with the post-dictatorship historical context? Does the thirst for freedom explain certain excesses?

Yes, absolutely. The burst of freedom was immense and had very positive consequences, but it is also true that some paid a very high price. The freedom that came after the dictatorship brought with it a kind of urge to try everything. There was a need to experiment at any cost. And that, added to the lack of knowledge about the effects of certain drugs, ended up being a bombshell. For many it all ended very badly, let's tell it like it is. The history of HIV is very different from country to country. In the United States, for example, it was closely linked to the homosexual community and the stigmatisation it suffered. In Spain, although it also killed many gay people, it is very much associated with the heroin crisis. There is still a lot of guilt, a lot of taboo, and many families have not been able or have not known how to deal with this mourning. That is why there are so few stories about the issue.

The autobiographical roots of *Romería* are evident. Did you make that journey in real life? And why did you choose that title?

The story is autobiographical in origin, although in reality there are many things modified in the story, which is a completely fictional creation. The film's journey is based on trips I made and is rooted in my experience, but I think it transcends it. In 2004 I didn't go to Galicia, the place where my father and all his family come from, but to Madrid, to meet two of my uncles. Little by little I got to know the rest of the family, including my grandparents, respecting the rhythm that each one needed. The trip to Galicia, in reality, I made much later, in 2015, and it was not the same as the one shown in the film. The configuration I show in the film does not have much to do with that of my paternal family. As for the word "*romería*", it is a very common term in

southern Spain, where it is used to designate the pilgrimage of the faithful to a shrine or hermitage to pay homage to a religious figure, such as a virgin or a saint. But it is also used in Galicia and the rest of northern Spain in another sense, as a synonym for a popular festival. In the film, both meanings of the word are present, both the celebration and the spiritual journey.

In the film, the Galician family's reception of the protagonist oscillates between coldness and affection. Did something similar happen in real life? Are you worried about how they will react to seeing her?

No, it was quite different, although there are things they will identify with emotionally. They haven't seen it yet and I'm curious to know what they will think when they do. In any case, it's normal that they will react unevenly, each according to their own way of experiencing the loss of my father. In the film, the arrival of this girl is like the arrival of a ghost that awakens their repressed memories.

How did you incorporate your mother's diaries into the film? They are fascinating material, with a language from another era, an impure Catalan, full of slang and old-fashioned expressions.

In reality, they were not diaries, but letters she wrote to her friends from Galicia and other places she travelled to. They were given to me by a close friend and a cousin of hers some time ago, and it was a very powerful discovery, because for the first time I felt I could almost hear her speak. I had never had anything so close to her; until then I had only known her through a small video and a handful of photos. Those letters were much more revealing. I decided to use them in the film, transforming them into a diary, with some modifications to make them clearer or highlight certain nuances.

The film deconstructs a family story full of lies and half-truths. The protagonist discovers very painful aspects of her father's life, even if they are also healing and liberating.

In trying to reconstruct my family history, I realised that it was a puzzle that would never quite fit together. That's when I felt the need to create a narrative of my own with everything that didn't fit. When you go on a journey like the one in the film, you inevitably discover painful things. Discovering that my father was absent during my early years because of heroin was very revealing. It's hard to understand how the drug works if you haven't tried it. It was a very long process of research and reflection. So I managed to understand, even if it was from a distance, what my parents went through...

The film takes a formal turn towards the end, with a dream sequence that breaks with the naturalism we associate with your films. What prompted you to adopt this approach?

Precisely because I felt that I had come from making very naturalistic films. Naturalism is something I still believe in, but I'm also interested in moving forward and exploring other forms. When we premiered *Estiu 1993*, I remember I used to say that when you don't have memories, you can't generate them. In recent years I've realised that they can be generated, or at least you can try to imagine them. That's where the idea of making this imagined part came from. Through it, the character has the capacity to configure his or her own story. I decided to have the same actors play other roles in that flashback, which was important because the lack of familiar images forced us to imagine that past in a different

way. All of that is constructed with the imagination and that is, in my opinion, a powerful and very valid way of approaching the truth of what was lived. For that part of *Romería*, I was inspired by films like *Un verano con Mónica*, by the desert scene in *Zabriskie Point* or by the protagonists of *More*, young hippies experimenting with drugs in Ibiza, and also by the paintings of the Galician surrealist painter Maruja Mallo. It is a somewhat dreamlike sequence, but I didn't want it to be exactly a dream.

How has your cinema changed since *Estiu 1993*? How does *Romería* dialogue with the two previous films?

I try to make each film a new exploration. In *Romería* I talk about a very different kind of family to those in *Estiu 1993* and *Alcarràs*. I wanted to leave the rural environment in which I had worked and explore other spaces, such as the sea and a more urban and affluent environment. The project posed many risks that I felt like taking on. As for the script, *Romería* has a more precise structure and the episodes are more millimetric, something that didn't happen so much in *Estiu 1993* or *Alcarràs*, where in the editing we could allow ourselves to turn a scene around, to play with it. In *Romería*, these twists were not possible because of its chapter structure. Everything was more constructed and calculated, there was less room for manoeuvre. This change was a new experience for me, and this precision was also noticeable in the editing. In addition, the imagined part of the film gives it a very different tone to the other two. Although there is continuity in themes and tone, *Romería* brings a new perspective and a more formal approach.

How did you work with the actors this time?

We worked in a very similar way both in the selection of the actors and in the rehearsals. We spent a lot of time with them so that they were able to feel like family, to recreate the family relationships that the film relates. We worked from improvisations about events that took place within the family before the events in the film so that all the actors had a common background. We dedicated a lot of rehearsal time to it, three months in total. It was similar in *Estiu 1993* and *Alcarràs*.

In *Romería* you return to working with professional actors, with some exceptions. Why is that?

With the casting director, we decided that we wanted to shoot with actors who had some important link to Galicia, not so much because of the language, since the family in the film speaks Spanish, but because they had a knowledge of what happened in the eighties in that area. That was the time when the drugs came in, so we wanted the actors to have a connection with the story, something personal that would allow them to get close to the characters in a genuine way. Whenever we asked if they knew anyone who had been affected by drugs or had died of a drug overdose, the answer was always yes. That allowed us to connect with the story in a deeper way. We found the right actors and also some non-professionals. The woman who plays the grandmother, for example, was not an actress, but the retired owner of a furniture shop in Vigo. She went to the casting and fit the role perfectly. As for the leading lady, she wasn't a professional either. It was a very long process. We saw about 3,000 girls and in the end we found the chosen one, Llúcia García, on the street, on her way back from a summer camp. She was one of the last to show up at the casting. We immediately realised it was her. She started rehearsing very quickly, and her adaptation was almost immediate.

Llúcia Garcia transmits a mixture of innocence and character. She looks like a child, but she also has the maturity and determination of an adult. Were you looking for something of yourself in her?

I'm a bit embarrassed to say it, but inevitably yes. I felt very recognisable in her, precisely because of what you mention: she seems very childlike, but she also exudes something very mature, which I think I acquired through my family history. Llúcia knows how to play with that duality, and I also knew how to play with it in my youth. There was something there that made me recognise myself in her. During the filming, we were very in sync.

Since *Estiu 1993*, you have always mixed the different languages spoken in Spain in your films, which has not always been common in Spanish cinema. In *Romería* you do it again: you hear Spanish, Catalan, some Galician and a little French.

For me, stories should be shot in the language that is most natural for telling them. The family we portrayed had to speak Spanish because, like it or not, that is the reality of their rather privileged social class. The families of their sociological profile in that area speak Spanish. However, I also wanted Galician to be present in the film. And Catalan, obviously, could not be left out, as it is the protagonist's mother tongue. Shooting the whole film in just one language would mean that the magic and nuance would be lost. My mother's letters, for example, are written in Catalan, and that was something sacred to me, I didn't want to translate it under any circumstances. Maybe when I make films that are less related to my family I will care less, but for the moment it hasn't been like that.

Do you think that at some point family will cease to be a primary source of inspiration for you?

The family will always interest me, I love talking about it. I don't think it will ever be exhausted as a subject, but it's true that I want to explore other worlds that I don't know. Cinema gives me that possibility. Until now, I have told what I know, because that gave me security in the result. Now I'm at a point where I'd like to explore other subjects that don't have to do directly with me. I'm interested in being able to talk about things that are not so close to me. I have a musical film about flamenco in mind. It's in a very embryonic phase, but I think we'll make it at some point. In *Romería* there are already some references to flamenco, because my mother liked it a lot, according to what my adoptive father, who was her brother, told me. So, as you can see, in the end it's not a subject disconnected from my family history either?

ABOUT CARLA SIMÓN

Carla Simón (born 1986) is a screenwriter and film director who grew up in a small Catalan village. Part of a large family that is a bottomless well of stories, she decided to make films. Graduated in Audiovisual Communication in Barcelona, Carla won a scholarship to complete her master's degree at the London Film School.

Verano 1993 (2017) is her autobiographical debut. It won the Best First Film Award and the Generation Kplus Grand Prix at the Berlinale, as well as three Goya Awards, including Best New Director. The film represented Spain at the 2018 Oscars, earned a Discovery nomination at the European Film Awards and earned Carla the Kering emerging Women in Motion award at Cannes.

In 2022, Simón released her latest short film *Letter to my mother for my son*, a Miu Miu story premiered in Giornate degli Autori at the 79th Venice International Film Festival.

Her second feature film, *Alcarràs* (2022) won the coveted Golden Bear at the Berlinale. It was selected for more than 90 international film festivals and was sold to more than 35 territories. It also represented Spain at the Oscars 2023, obtained three nominations at the European Film Awards and won six Gaudí awards from the Catalan Film Academy. In 2023, Carla won the National Cinematography Award.

Romería, Simón's third feature film, will have its world premiere in the Official Competition at the Cannes Film Festival.

CAST

| | |
|----------|------------------|
| Marina | LLÚCIA GARCIA |
| Nuno | MITCH |
| Lois | TRISTÁN ULLOA |
| Iago | ALBERTO GRACIA |
| Olalla | MIRYAM GALLEGO |
| Xulia | JANET NOVÁS |
| Abuelo | JOSÉ ÁNGEL EGIDO |
| Abuela | MARINA TRONCOSO |
| Virxinia | SARA CASASNOVAS |
| Denise | CELINE TYLL |

CREW

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Director and Screenplay | CARLA SIMÓN |
| Director of photography | HÉLÈNE LOUVART |
| Composer | ERNEST PIPÓ |
| Editing | SERGIO JIMÉNEZ, ANA PFAFF |
| Casting | MARÍA RODRIGO |
| Casting (Marina) | IRENE ROQUÉ |
| Art director | MÓNICA BERNUY |
| Costumes | ANNA AGUILÀ |
| Production manager | ELISA SIRVENT AGUIRRE |
| Assistant director | DANIELA FORN MAYOR |
| Head of make-up | PATY LÓPEZ LÓPEZ |
| Head hairdresser | PACO RODRIGUEZ H. |
| Head of direct sound | EVA VALIÑO |
| Sound supervisor & mixer | ALEJANDRO CASTILLO |
| Producer | MARÍA ZAMORA (Elastica) |
| Co-Producers | OLIMPIA PONT CHÁFER (Ventall Cinema) and ÀNGELS MASCLANS (Dos Soles Media) |

INTERNATIONAL PRESS & SALES

INTERNATIONAL PRESS

Claudia Tomassini

Paola Schettino Nobile

Press@claudiatomassini.com

+49 173 205 5794

US PRESS

Cinetic Media

Alexa Tombs

alexa@cineticmedia.com

+1 973 908 7243



INTERNATIONAL SALES

Fionnuala Jamison, Managing Director

fionnuala.jamison@mk2.com

Emmanuel Pissarra, Head of Acquisitions

emmanuel.pissarra@mk2.com

Quentin Bohanna, International Sales

quentin.bohanna@mk2.com

Elise Cochin, International Sales

elise.cochin@mk2.com

Anne-Laure Barbarit, Festival Manager

anne-laure.barbarit@mk2.com

Mathilde Martin, Head of Marketing

mathilde.martin@mk2.com

Pauline Maghnaoui, Product Marketing Manager

pauline.maghnaoui@gmail.com

Visit our website www.mk2films.com

CINÉFORUM