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# CELL 211

*Celda 211*

a film by  
**Daniel MONZÓN**

Spain / 1h44 / 1.85 / Color

**INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

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## **SYNOPSIS**

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Juan Oliver is about to become a prison officer. On the first day of his new job, two colleagues show him around the old prison, telling him about the rough work and about Apache, a Russian informer. All of a sudden, and due to some building work, some plaster falls from the ceiling and hits Juan Olivier, who passes out. The guards take him into cell 211, which is empty, to try and revive him. But, as luck would have it, that's when a riot breaks out at the high security FIES cell block, the one that houses the most dangerous inmates. Juan's colleagues run away, leaving him stranded. When he wakes up in the cell he takes stock of the situation: if he wants to save his skin, he must pretend to be a prisoner.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

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When “Cell 211” fell into my hands, I read it in one go and knew that I wanted to make a movie about it. The novel’s starting point was forceful and convincing; a powerful, recognizable and human universe, and the story was built on a suffocating tension that included some remarkable turning points. As a film, it represented a major narrative challenge and gave me little leeway to do anything other than stripping the staging of artful devices and placing the camera at the service of the characters. It was therefore necessary to find a fail-proof cast of actors. Now that the film has been finished, I think it would have been really difficult to find more reliable and adequate players than those who were finally selected for the movie; the two leading characters, the gang of convicts, the prison staff members and the other actors –all of whom devoted themselves fully to this adventure.

Notwithstanding the fact that “Cell 211” was a work of fiction, the first step in order to recreate a story that reflected the reality of life in jail was to become acquainted with the secrets and unknown facts of this world of imprisonment which is close to us and yet so remote at the same time. When it came to writing the screenplay, Jorge Guerricaechevarría and I had to know what we were talking about, even for the purpose of knowing to what extent and at what point we were telling lies. During the year it took us to write the script, we spoke with convicts, visited them, even lived and coexisted as much as possible with the prisoners, their relatives, the prison staff and educators whose daily life was directly associated with the jail itself. Surprisingly, though also understandably, all of them opened their world to us in a most hospitable manner. When one lives in a confined environment, far away from the outside world, it is a relief to communicate with the exterior... We realized that, in essence, the closed realm of prison reflected the very same society that gave rise to it, albeit in a concentrated form. As a convict from the Valdemoro Prison said to us, “the world within these walls is identical to the world outside, the only difference being that the former is in MP3 format”. And subtly, almost unintentionally, one might add that after our series of visits to jail –using the expression “immersion” would be offensive to anybody who has spent a single

night in there- our version of the story was acquiring certain allegorical connotations as we plowed ahead; it was becoming a sort of parable...

The first thing my intuition told me about the style of this film was that it should closely resemble that of a documentary. The process of developing the script confirmed to me that this was the right approach. The story would only become solid and powerful if it was based on an "illusion of genuineness". It should be filmed with the spirit and determination one encounters in a mutiny, with the camera at hand and in a real space; we had to find a real prison whose energy might flow right into all of us, to the very core. Thanks to the help from the Penitentiary Authorities, an old penitentiary that had been closed down for over twelve years was placed at our disposal. Our artistic team spent several months cleaning it of rubble and rebuilding it in order to "bring it back to life".

As we strolled around the galleries, yards, cells and every nook and cranny of the Provincial Prison of Zamora, the script was gradually adapting itself to the physical spaces, in chameleon-like fashion; the distribution and arrangement of the bars, the staircases, the shape of the cells, etc. were "dictating to us" each of the film frames, and the power emanating from the place almost whispered to the actors what their attitude, poses and movements should be like. At times, it seemed like the jail itself was calling out for the staging, rewriting the rhythm of the sequences, giving clear instructions about the exact location of the camera... I avoided resorting to preconceived ideas, I didn't rely on a story board and stayed away from rigid planning. We all allowed ourselves to be led by the energy of the place, and by the presence of a number of extras some of whom had at some time been convicts of that very same prison, while others were still serving sentence outside jail and/or under custody. This experience -all of it- was at no time hard, claustrophobic or unbearable; quite on the contrary, it was most creative and stimulating.

More than a genre film, "Cell 211" is definitely a tragedy in the most classical sense of the word. It is a tragedy that any of us would experience if we had to confront the extreme situation Juan Oliver finds himself involved in. It is a story about fate, about "that which is inexorable and unrelenting", about how "turning around a particular corner rather than another one" can change your

life for ever. And yet, at the core of “Cell 211” are the bonds of friendship that develop between Juan and Malamadre under an extreme set of circumstances; two men whose respective lives couldn’t be more dissimilar, but who are brought together in a matter of hours by a turn of fate. And it hits them like a sledge hammer. Juan discovers that being on one side or on the opposite side is really more to do with a mere combination of circumstances than with being free to make a moral choice. He also finds out that everything is relative; the fact that one has committed murder isn’t incompatible with integrity or honesty, and that acting as a law enforcing officer isn’t incompatible with being a real son of a bitch. Juan’s “Journey” is made by the spectator himself when watching the film and the reason why it is so moving is because it digs into a wound that is far more painful than most others; a wound that tells us about human fragility, about the fact that anybody’s life hangs by a thread.

Daniel Monzón

## **THE DIRECTOR DANIEL MONZÓN**

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- 2005      **THE KOVAK BOX** (*starring Timothy Hutton, Lucia Jimenez, and David Kelly. Co-written with Jorge Guerricaechevarría*).
- 2002      **EL ROBO MÁS GRANDE JAMÁS CONTADO**
- 2000      **EL CORAZÓN DEL GUERRERO**  
*European Fantastic Film Festival Amsterdam : Best film*  
*Fantastic Film Festival Montreal / Best international film*  
*Goya 2001: nominated for best novel.*

## **THE SCRIPTWRITER JORGE GUERRICAECHVARRÍA**

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- 2006      THE OXFORD MURDERS, *Álex De la Iglesia*
- 2005      THE KOVAK BOX, *Daniel Monzón*
- 2004      LA HABITACIÓN DEL NIÑO (TV movie), *Álex De la Iglesia*  
CRIMEN FERPECTO, *Álex De la Iglesia*
- 2003      PLATILLOS VOLANTES, *Oscar Aibar*
- 2002      800 BALAS, *Álex de la Iglesia*  
NOS MIRAN, *Norberto López*
- 2000      LA COMUNIDAD, *Álex De la Iglesia*
- 1999      MUERTOS DE RISA, *Álex De la Iglesia*
- 1997      PERDITA DURANGO, *Álex De la Iglesia*
- 1995      EL DÍA DE LA BESTIA, *Álex De la Iglesia*
- 1993      ACCIÓN MUTANTE, *Álex De la Iglesia*

## **THE ACTORS**

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### **LUIS TOSAR (Malamadre)**

- 2009 MR. NICE, *Bernard Rose*  
2008 THE LIMITS OF CONTROL, *Jim Jarmusch*  
CASUAL DAY, *Max Lemcke*  
2007 LA NOCHE QUE DEJÓ DE LLOVER, *Alfonso Zarauza*  
2006 LAS VIDAS DE CELIA, *Antonio Chavarrias*  
MIAMI VICE, *Michael Mann*  
CARGO, *Clive Gordon*  
2004 INCONSCIENTES, *Joaquín Oristrell*  
LA VIDA QUE TE ESPERA, *Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón*  
2003 TE DOY MIS OJOS, *Iciar Bollaín*  
2002 LOS LUNES AL SOL, *Fernando León de Aranoa*  
2001 VISIONARIOS, *Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón*  
SIN NOTICIAS DE DIOS, *Agustín Díaz Yanes*  
2000 LEO, *José Luis Borau*  
EL CORAZÓN DEL GUERRERO, *Daniel Monzón*  
SÉ QUIÉN ERES, *Patricia Ferreira*  
1999 FLORES DE OTRO MUNDO, *Iciar Bollaín*  
CELOS, *Vicente Aranda*

### **ALBERTO AMMANN (Juan Olivier)**

- 2010 LOPE, *Andrucha Waddington*  
2008 LAS FLORES DEL MAL, *Luciana Sgro Ruata*

### **CARLOS BARDEM (Apache)**

- 2009 CHE : PART TWO, *Steven Soderbergh*  
EL NIÑO PEZ, *Lucía Puenzo*  
2007 LA SEÑAL, *Ricardo Darín*  
2006 LA ZONA, *Rodrigo Pla*  
LA BICILETA, *Sigfrid Monleón*  
2004 CIEN MANERAS DE ACABAR CON EL AMOR, *Vicente Pérez Herrero*  
1997 PERDITA DURANGO, *Álex de la Iglesia*

## **CAST**

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Malamadre	LUIS TOSAR
Juan Oliver	ALBERTO AMMANN
Utrilla	ANTONIO RESINES
Elena	MARTA ETURA
Apache	CARLOS BARDEM
Almansa	MANUEL MORÓN
Releches	LUIS ZAHERA
Tachuela	VICENTE ROMERO
Armando Nieto	FERNANDO SOTO
Elvis	JESÚS CARROZA
Director of the prison	MANOLO SOLO

## **CREW**

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Directed by	DANIEL MONZÓN
Produced by	EMMA LUSTRES, BORJA PENA, JUAN GORDON, ÁLVARO AUGUSTIN
Executive Producers	ELENA MANRIQUE, EMMA LUSTRES, BORJA PENA, PILAR BENITO, JAVIER UGARTE
Co-producers	FRANCK RIBIÈRE, VÉRANE FRÉDIANI
Script	JORGE GUERRICAECHEVARRÍA, DANIEL MONZÓN
Director of Photography	CARLES GUSI
Art Director	ANTÓN LAGUNA
Production Manager	ALBERTO TOMÉ
Director assistant	SERGIO FRANCISCO
Line Producer	ALICIA TELLERÍA
Make-up	RAQUEL FIDALGO
Hairdresser	INÉS RODRÍGUEZ
Editor	CRISTINA PASTOR
Music	ROQUE BAÑOS
Casting	EVA LEIRE, YOLANDA SERRANO