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# Operation E (Operación E): Film Review

10:10 AM PST 11/29/2012 by Bernard Besserglik

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### The Bottom Line

Blend of pace and documentary give hostage child rescue drama real commercial potential.

### Director

Miguel Courtois Paternina

### Cast

Luis Tosar, Martina Garcia

## From director Miguel Courtois Paternina, the story of a little guy swept up in power politics over hostage child has pace and tension.

The E in the film's title stands for Emmanuel, the name of the child whose fate lies at the heart of the intrigue. Born in captivity, his mother Clara Rojas being a hostage of the Colombian guerrilla movement FARC, the infant Emmanuel, less than a year old and in failing health, is handed to a peasant family in the hope that they might arrange for him to receive desperately needed medical treatment.

Franco-Spanish director **Miguel Courtois Paternina** has cannily chosen to tell what happens next from the point of view of the peasant rather than that of the mother. Based on a true story, Operation E is a model of committed filmmaking. It is always absorbing, with close attention to detail, and often gripping, with some of the pace and tension of a thriller, and has real commercial potential.

The peasant, José Crisanto (**Luis Tosar**), scrapes a living for his wife Lilita (**Martina Garcia**) and their four children by growing coca which he sells to the FARC rebels and their friends in the drugs trade. Saddled with the child and fearful that he might die, he treks through the jungle with his family and medicine-man father-in-law Don Ramon (**Alberto Ramirez**) to the regional capital where, aided by Miguel (**Sigifredo Vega**), his wheeler-dealer godfather, he succeeds in placing Emmanuel in a clinic.

But Miguel is also a police informer, Crisanto is suspected of complicity with the rebels, and the child is removed from his care to be given out to foster parents. When, three years later, following high-level negotiations for the release of the hostages between the Colombian and Venezuelan authorities, everything is seen to hinge on tracing Emmanuel, the FARC bully boys come knocking on Crisanto's door, demanding that he hand the child back, or else. José is given three days to trace the child, a race against time in which he is also competing against the state's security forces.

The political complexities are no obstacle to appreciating this tale of the little guy swept up by social forces beyond his grasp or understanding. The pattern of events and protagonists is clearly structured in a script by longtime Courtois collaborator **Antonio Onetti**. Spanish star Tosar shines as the bewildered, well-meaning Crisanto, striking a fine balance between ruse and innocence, fear and courage, powerlessness and adaptability. Frequent use of hand-held camera in locations close to where the real-life events on which the story is based took place lend a sense of immediacy and a documentary feel. Courtois succeeds in conveying some of the texture and detail of the life of ordinary

people in Colombia and, while this is by no means a politically militant movie, the director has clearly set out his stall in favor of the underdog.

Opened: Wednesday, Nov. 28

Production companies: Tormenta Films, Ajoz Films, ZircoZine

Cast: Luis Tosar, Martina Garcia, Roberto Ramirez, Sigifredo Vega

Director: Miguel Courtois Paternina

Writer: Antonio Onetti

Photography: Josu Inchaustegui

Producer: Ariel Zeitoun

Editor: Jean-Paul Husson

Music: Thierry Westermeyer

Sales: EuropaCorp International

No MPAA rating

Running time: 109 minutes

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