

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

Magical Mooing

Francisca Alegría on her new film **The Cow Who Sang A Song Into The Future**



EVER SINCE SHE WAS A CHILD, Francisca Alegría has been fascinated by the spiritual world. Growing up, she would visit her grandparents' farm, and they would tell her stories about her great-grandparents coming back from the dead and having tea with her cousins.

"Every single story that I heard, they all had comedy," the Chilean director tells Red Alert. "None of the ghosts would come and make the family suffer. They always had an element of the absurd."

MERRY MAGDALENA

Describing Alegría's Sundance sensation *The Cow Who Sang A Song Into The Future* as a comedy or absurd would do it a disservice, but ghosts are central to its story. In fact, the first character we encounter is a phantom.

The film starts with the camera focused on a river in Chile as dead fish float along the surface. Suddenly, a woman (played by *Alias* actor Mía Maestro) emerges from the water, gasping for air. She removes her motorcycle helmet and looks around, lost and disoriented.

Her name is Magdalena and she is a woman out of time; she supposedly died decades ago, though her body was never found. She heads into the nearby town and bumps into her

former husband, now much older than her, and he faints.

Magdalena's not a malicious presence, but one who has come back to help her family reckon with their struggles. "The majority of films that deal with ghosts make us scared of them – and that's not good," Alegría says of not wanting to make a horror. "We have to have a wider umbrella of films, because we need to be more in touch with that other world. And it's not always scary."

For the filmmaker, one of the most personal aspects of the story concerns Magdalena's grandchild Tomás (newcomer Enzo Ferrada),

a transgender teenager whose mother Cecilia (Leonor Varela, best known for playing a vampire princess in *Blade II*) refuses to acknowledge her truth.

"Tomás has dialogue that I had with my mom," Alegría says. "I am not trans, but I am bisexual. The most recent conflict I had with my mother was because she would not understand why I loved the person that I loved. The character, Tomás, started in the bisexual realm, but then years passed and we ended up having someone with a dilemma that might be even more difficult for the mother to understand."



María Velasquez as Felicia: hippy at heart.



Leonor Varela as Cecilia, with an unnamed friend.

Both Tomás and Cecilia have their own complicated relationships with their newly resurrected ancestor, but it's Cecilia who first hears the cows sing. Because, yes, *The Cow Who Sang A Song Into The Future* delivers on its title (we won't spoil anything here, but the animals are not given janky CG mouths). This novel idea came from a fairly traumatic childhood experience of Alegría's.

"I was 10 years old, at my grandparents' farm, and the adults were having lunch under the vine trees," she says. "Me and my sister went to the stables where the animals were. The day before, I had seen the skull of a cow on the roof and I couldn't understand how it got there." They started climbing the stable and got onto the roof. "I was looking at the skull, right into its eyes, and then I heard a scream!"

Alegría's sister had fallen through an aged part of the stable's roof. She raced down and found her sister unconscious on the floor, and Alegría started shouting for her parents, who eventually came and helped.

"That impacted me a lot," she says. "The first time that I started writing this film, 11 years ago, I wrote about this little boy who found a

skull, and I wrote, 'The skull spoke'. And the skull said, 'Death is after your family'. And I just started following that lead."

While the story morphed into something very different, driven partly by Alegría leaving Chile and going to university in America, the idea of a cow speaking persisted. However, in the resulting film, the cows are very much alive when they sing.

"The cows were wonderful," Alegría says of her animal actors. She did a casting session with the cows and the chosen lead was named Leonor, after Leonor Varela. There was one scene, though, where she wasn't such a happy cow. "We were shooting and one of the cows, white with black spots, stole the spotlight from Leonor," Alegría says. "We started calling her 'the Envious One!'"

Thankfully, the Envious One behaved themselves and Leonor managed to complete the scene in four takes. Turns out working with animals doesn't have to be too hard – you just need to give them room to sing. **JS**

The Cow Who Sang A Song Into The Future is in cinemas from 24 March.



NEWS WARP HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Amazon developing a live-action **Spider-Man Noir** show.

→ HBO Max greenlight *It* prequel series **Welcome To Derry**.

→ **The Rig** renewed for a second season on Prime Video. → HBO sell DC Comics adap **Dead Boy Detectives** to Netflix.

→ *Runaways* star Rhenzy Feliz joining Bat-spin-off **The Penguin**.

→ Armando Iannucci's **Avenue 5** axed by HBO.

→ Briana Middleton starring in Apple TV+'s new take on Fritz Lang classic

Metropolis. → **The Peripheral**, **Velma** and **Mayfair Witches** renewed for second seasons. → Marvel's

Rogers: The Musical to be staged at Disney California Adventure Park.

→ **Star Trek: Discovery** to finish after fifth season in 2024.

→ Nick Offerman and Megan Mullally joining **The Umbrella Academy**.

→ Roblox game **Creatures Of Sonaria** set to become a series.

→ Zach Galifianakis joins live-action **Lilo & Stitch** on Disney+.

→ Matthew McConaughey voicing the King in spy-fi toon **Agent Elvis**.



Enrique (Alfredo Castro) sees you.



Mía Maestro as Magdalena, with a young biker.



Cecilia's gone and done herself a mischief.



Magdalena's not doing all that well, either.

► **SCI-FACT!** Leonor Varela also appeared in *Agents Of SHIELD* season one, as a Peruvian armed forces Comandante.

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