



DOS ESTACIONES

A FILM BY JUAN PABLO GONZÁLEZ





Dos Estaciones

A film by Juan Pablo González

2021 – 99' – Mexico, France, US – Color – 1.85 - 5.1 – Spanish

SYNOPSIS

Fifty-year-old María García is the owner of Dos Estaciones, a once-majestic tequila factory struggling to stay afloat and the final hold-over from generations of Mexican-owned tequila plants in the highlands of Jalisco; the rest have folded to foreign corporations. Once one of the wealthiest people in town, María knows her current financial situation is untenable. When a persistent plague and an unexpected flood cause irreversible damage, Maria is forced to do everything she can to save her community's main source of economy and pride.

Dos Estaciones

CAST

Teresa Sánchez (María García), Rafaela Fuentes (Rafaela, Rafita, Rafis), Tatín Vera (Tatín, Tatís), Manuel García-Rulfo (Pepe).

CREW

Director: Juan Pablo González

Screenwriter: Juan Pablo González, Ana Isabel Fernández, Ilana Coleman

DOP: Gerardo Guerra

Editor: Livia Serpa

Sound: Aldonza Contreras, Jean-Guy Verán

Producers: Jamie Gonçalves & Ilana Coleman (Sin Sitio Cine), Bruna Haddad, Makena Buchanan

Coproducers: Louise Bellicaud & Claire Charles-Gervais (In Vivo Films)

Executive producer: Matthew Perniciaro

Dos Estaciones





Juan Pablo González

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Juan Pablo González (b. 1984, Atotonilco el Alto, México) is a Mexican director whose work spans fiction and nonfiction. His debut short film *The Solitude of Memory* (2014) had its World Premiere at the Morelia International Film Festival, its International Premiere at IDFA, and received the Grand Jury Prize for Documentary Short at Slamdance in 2015. His follow-up, the scripted *La espera* (2016), premiered at SXSW and won the Grand Jury Prize at the New Orleans Film Festival. In 2017, Juan Pablo's experimental short, *Las Nubes*, premiered at the Festival de Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano en la Habana, then went on to play at Rotterdam (IFFR), True/False, Lincoln Center of New York, and received the Grand Jury Prize at Festival dei Popoli. His mid-length debut, *Caballerango* premiered at IDFA in 2018 and played at Ambulante, FICUNAM, BAM Cinema Fest, DokuFest, Guadalajara (FICG), True/False, among many others.

In 2020 Juan Pablo had his first solo exhibition titled *What I Do To Remember* at the Visual Arts Center (VAC) at UT Austin's Department of Art and Art history. *Dos Estaciones* (2022) is his feature length debut and will have its world Premiere at the Sundance Film Festival in the World Cinema Dramatic Competition. The film has been supported by IMCINE, Nouvelle Aquitaine Fond de Soutien au Cinéma, the Venice Biennale, San Sebastián, Sundance Institute, Tribeca Film Institute and Cine Qua Non. Juan Pablo's body of work is largely set in his hometown of Atotonilco el Alto, he was named one of Filmmaker Magazine's "25 New Faces of Independent Film" in 2015, has been a fellow of the prestigious Fund for Culture and Arts (FONCA) in Mexico and was awarded the 2021 Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise. Juan Pablo is the co-director of the Film Directing program at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts).

Dos Estaciones



In conversation with Juan Pablo González

You're based in California at the moment, but with your films, you keep returning home to the Jalisco highlands. Can you tell me about growing up there, what the people were like, and how they relate to one another?

JUAN PABLO: When I was growing up in Atotonilco, Jalisco, I wasn't thinking about what it meant to live there. But now that I've been traveling quite a bit, and now that I have a daughter, it's often on my mind. When I grew up it was shifting from being a very rural town to a community that was more aware of urban spaces. And this was not only in my hometown, but in the country in general; there was a national project of pushing these small towns to modernize. It was also a time, in the late 80's and early 90's when this idea of the rural and urban, industrial and non-industrial wasn't that marked. What was more important to everyone was being present and learning from each other,

learning from the work of others. Children had a lot of independence, we were outside all of the time. Being in contact with nature was something we did daily, on our own. It was very special. I remember though, that everytime I left Atotonilco to travel to a bigger city, others would speak of people from my hometown as backwards or ignorant, the typical rural stereotypes. As a child that was a challenge, because you're suddenly made aware that you are different.

Can you discuss your approach to capturing this place and how you're making sense of that transition from what it was then to what it is now?

JUAN PABLO: That's definitely a question I've been trying to answer through my work. There's been a material and political change. I was a kid right before the signing of The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (in 1994), and one could already feel something was changing. Local politics were becoming something different, so much more aligned with national politics and politicians, and new industries and technologies



Dos Estaciones



were being introduced. With globalization came a modernization of morality and education. Subsequently, a huge exodus of people in rural places into the cities and to the U.S., partially born out of rural farmers and workers who did not have the means to modernize. So for me, coming back to my hometown means remembering how things were when I was growing up, and identifying the remnants of that past in rivers, certain landscapes, old roads, as well as experiencing all of the new things that are happening and have happened since I left. Not to romanticize it, but I'm aware of the complex social dynamics and sensual characteristics of the community as it was, and I see how it's radically altered since I left, and in navigating those shifts, I find myself connecting to the land where this story is unfolding.

Why did you decide to focus on a tequila plant, and how does that speak to these shifts you're describing?

JUAN PABLO: I'm not interested in business itself nor business people really, but what drew

me to María is that, on a human level, I see her as someone who became trapped as a result of this national modernization project. And what I find especially compelling is that María comes from this place. She is not a transplant from Mexico City, Guadalajara or the U.S., she is someone whose bloodline has been rooted here for centuries. She comes from a family that went from being farmers, to artisans, traders and eventually became big business people. Not in the contemporary meaning of that term – her family did not aspire to be a global corporation – but they had real ambitions to sell their product around the country and eventually the US. They had dreams that this process of industrialization was going to take them and this community to a place of abundance, and that they would become an economic pillar for the community, that everyone would have more because they have more. But the reality is that they are still too small, and they cannot compete. In this world they are excitedly stepping into, they are eaten alive. María represents the people who, for a couple of decades, found vast abundance, and operated with

Dos Estaciones

a loyalty to their hometown communities, but who were then devoured for their inability to compete. This film is about her existential conundrum, the impossible conflict she finds herself in.

Your lead actor, Teresa Sánchez, is incredible at expressing this quiet power and depth. How did you meet, and how did your collaboration work?

JUAN PABLO: Teresa is a professional actor and a very special person who has appeared in many Mexican films, although this is her first time playing the lead role in a feature. I was a fan of her supporting performances and reached out in 2016 when I was making a fiction short called "La espera". She ended up playing the main character in that project. But even before that, around 2014, I had been conceptualizing *Dos Estaciones* and I couldn't figure out who the main character of the film was. But when I met Teresa, I felt like I found the character. Then I started writing the film with my wife Ana Isabel Fernández and Ilana Coleman. In the summer of 2017, our team met with Teresa in Jalisco to film

some things with her. I described the character to Teresa without anything written down, and she just played the role. It was during this trip that Teresa met Rafaela, who was then and continues to be the factory's actual administrator, and they formed a very deep connection. We decided then that they would be in the film together, and they continued to develop their relationship over text and calls. It was an important part of the process for Teresa. This was a very process-based film. Our writing unfolded in a similarly organic way. We would shoot and write, and shoot and write, and so many of the images you see throughout the film come from 2017, 2018, and 2019 shoots. Then in 2020, we had a more intense five week production to cover dramatic elements from the script.

Tell me about the other characters in the *Dos Estaciones* constellation, such as Tatín. Did all the actors know one another going into the final production?

JUAN PABLO: For my process, it's more important to spend time with the people I'm working with

Dos Estaciones





than to actually shoot with them. The making of the film involves sharing moments and impressions and ideas long before embarking on production. I met Tatín Vera while shooting my documentary Caballerango, also in Atotonilco. She was doing the make-up for a character's wedding, and, while that's not in the film, she and I immediately bonded. Every time I would go home, I would visit Tatín, and we would often talk about collaborating. Bringing her into the conversation with Teresa and Rafaela was essential to conceptualizing this film. I don't create characters and stories out of thin air. While we had a script for funding, we reduced everything to an outline for production. The actors never read that script but knew the structure, the locations, and the general direction, but the dialogue was written together during the rehearsals. The actors would bring their own ideas to the table, and we worked with our acting coach Diana Sedano to integrate their ideas and help them embody their decisions, so they could become their fictional selves.

Can you talk about the film's relationship with queer identities and relationships?

JUAN PABLO: In Atotonilco and throughout Jalisco, people exist in the way Tatín exists here. That's to say openly: living, performing, existing with dignity in their sexual and gender expression. That's not to say discrimination doesn't also exist, but our film works to show characters as they are in the community. Tatín is a hairdresser, and she has constructed a life in this community, a life that involves her mother, father, brother, and sister. And they, minus her father who passed away, were all involved in the film. This is also her actual salon, and the real casino she goes to with her mom on weekends. It was necessary for us to get away from stereotypical depictions and show our friend living her life as she actually does. As for María, there is much more ambiguity. In order to survive, María has to perform the way she does: as strong, dignified, and withholding. The relationship between her and Rafaela remains open-ended because I feel there are so many forms of desire and love, and people act out these feelings in all different ways. With María, I wanted to give people the freedom to interpret her and for her life to remain undetermined; largely

Dos Estaciones

because María doesn't really have access to her own sexuality or rather allows herself to express it. What is clear is that she wants an intimate connection, but in order to survive in this industry, she has had to live in ways that have hindered her abilities to experience that type of connection. I have relatives who have been the head of their tequila businesses for years, and often they have to perform like María. Their family had tried to keep them in the shadows in a way. We wanted to suggest a world where that sort of person could step out of the shadows.

While you developed this film for many years, you shot many of the narrative scenes in 2020. How did COVID-19 impact the production?

JUAN PABLO: In order to pull this off, we had to reduce the crew size to around 35 people, which was still the largest crew I've ever had, and reallocate funds for COVID protocols. Jamie Gonçalves, Ilana Coleman, Bruna Haddad – the main producers of the film – were so important for all of this to work. They were very open to any

suggestions I had about changes in our shooting plans. I also had to be very open with them when they expressed to me what was possible and what wasn't. I am so indebted to them for accompanying me in this process in such a loving and committed way. They've become like family to me. And then we all had to live together in the same place for three months, with some fairly rigid rules in place to keep everyone safe. While unexpected, this was actually a beautiful development, as we became much more of a family, with all the good and all the complications that can bring. People who had never worked together became incredibly close. We would just create these moments and shoot them. Afterwards, Lívia Serpa and I edited the film as we would edit a documentary: we built the narrative in the edit. The original outline changed in significant ways. The beginning ended up being the end, for instance. As a director, I realized I need so much less than I thought I would. I also came to understand that there's very little difference between me as a director of fiction and as a director of nonfiction.

Dos Estaciones





The cinematography is really striking, I'm wondering if you could speak to the visual tone of the film, the decisions you made around it and how you embraced both the documentary and non-documentary photography styles in constructing *Dos Estaciones*.

JUAN PABLO: The way we constructed the visual language of the film was also very process based. We started shooting even before we began writing the film – as if we were making a non-scripted film. So, as we were writing the film we were parallelly researching the parameters of how we wanted the film to look and sound. Therefore, the documentary or unscripted world of the film naturally bled into what we were doing in the scripted moments. I think Gerardo's

cinematography experience and sensibility and my interest in place, the passage of time and capturing real events, organically blended overtime because of how closely we collaborated. For both of us, it was our first experience working on a feature-length fiction film, so we tried to take it slow and build confidence overtime. When we got to the shoot, we already had so many references with things we'd shot that the process felt incredibly organic. We didn't make a storyboard, we'd decide on every shot at the location. We were very aware of every space and we tried to respond to it as best as we could after all that preparatory work.

*Interview by Lydia Ogwang, programmer for TIFF and writer for Cinema Scope.

Dos Estaciones

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