

# Cultural Daily

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## Almodóvar's Actors Get 'So Excited'

Sophia Stein · Thursday, June 20th, 2013

A flight of fancy from director Pedro Almodóvar, *I'm So Excited* is a sex and drug-induced farce set aboard a plane en route from Spain to Mexico City. When a mechanical failure jeopardizes the lives of all aboard, three queeny flight attendants do all within their powers to entertain the eclectic ensemble of passengers in business class, while the economy class travelers all sleep soundly unaware, having been effectively sedated by the crew. Business class and the cockpit become a confessional and a hub of horny escapism. The circling of the aircraft, with no clear landing in sight, serves as a potent metaphor for the plight of Spain and her crippled economy. A quarter of Spaniards is currently unemployed and fear of social unrest remains at an all time high. “I like the idea of helping people to have fun because the atmosphere right now is so very bleak,” admits Almodóvar.

In 2009, Spain became the third country in the world to legalize gay marriage, and Almodóvar calls *I'm So Excited* his “gayest film ever.” The story celebrates this acceptance and the gift of sexuality, which Almodóvar has lauded as a truly democratic inheritance, a gift that every human being can enjoy, regardless of wealth or class. *I'm So Excited* pays tribute to the 1980's of Almodóvar's early adulthood – disco music, mescaline, promiscuity and sexual freedom (pre-AIDs style), actual service on flights, and La Movida Madrileña — the hedonistic cultural wave that emerged in Madrid post-Franco. As such, *I'm So Excited* has a decidedly nostalgic feel. Truths and lies: truths we share, truths we hide, and truths we knowingly or inadvertently broadcast — at this time in history when all privacies are rapidly deteriorating — is another overarching theme at play in the air. Almodóvar acknowledges that he has spent his whole life in rebellion against his birthplace, Calzada de Calatrava, “a harsh place where nobody understood sensuality, the joy of life, or even the idea of color;” as is his signature, the color palate and production design of this film is vibrant and alluring.

I recently had an opportunity to talk with three of the actors in Almodóvar's first comedy in over twenty years:

Javier Cámara has appeared in three Almodóvar films to date – *Talk to Her* and *Bad Education*, in addition to *I'm So Excited*, in which he plays head steward, Joserra;

Blanca Suárez, with two Almodóvar films to her credit, *The Skin I Live In* and *I'm So Excited*, in which she plays Ruth, an ex-girlfriend of a famed actor and one of the few characters who remain on the ground throughout; and

Miguel Ángel Silvestre, a new addition to the El Deseo family, appearing in his first Almodóvar film, *I'm So Excited*, as The Groom.



**Sophia Stein: Pedro Almodóvar describes his actors as part of the El Deseo family. How does he create that atmosphere on set?**

Javier Cámara: We were rehearsing for two months, locked in a plane — two months in a set that looks like a real plane. Pedro needed for this film, above all, to create a new, weird family — with very different characters, who represent different factions of Spanish society. I was really happy when Pedro decided, very specifically, to audition young actors. I was helping with the auditions, and the ages of the actors went down with each passing day. There were more than fifty or sixty actors whom he might have chosen to play these passengers in business class; he could have chosen an actor who is sixty years old, to play the politician, for example. Instead, Pedro chose the energy of a talented generation of young actors — because he needs that energy, he needs new experiences, and new ways of playing. Pedro was going to put a lot of tigers and lions in a plane, and he trusted in this new generation.

**Sophia: How did each of you first meet Pedro Almodóvar?**

Javier: One of the members of El Deseo called me: “Pedro Almodóvar wants to meet you. Are you able to come in for a little five minute talk?” and I said, “Yes.” And I fainted, of course. I tried to revive myself, I cried a little bit, and I talked to my mom: “Mom, mom, I’m going to meet Pedro Almodóvar!” I went in, and I was unconscious about the time, the conversation, everything. I don’t remember anything at all. I only remember that an assistant of Almodóvar’s was looking at me in a funny way — like “you’re flipping out, you’re shocked” — and I was shocked! He offered me the script, *Talk to Her*, and told me, “If you want to be in the film, it would be great.” I went home and discovered that my character Benigno was the main character in the film! I began to cry, because — what the fuck?! — it was a beautiful, bizarre story. And of course, I called him and said, “Yes, yes, yes, yes.”

**Blanca Suárez:** I met Almodóvar in the rehearsal room for *The Skin I Live In*. And I was very, very nervous.

**Miguel Ángel Silvestre:** Some people from El Deseo called me in to read. I also was very, very nervous. I think he noticed that. Pedro knew how to melt that down. We started to read, and he started to read my lines. After a couple of takes, I started to reading with him, overlapping with his voice. [They all laugh in recognition.] I started performing by myself, and when I started relaxing and enjoying the moment, Pedro asked, “What do you think, do you want to be part of this crew?” “Wow, yes, yes, yes, please. I would love to.”

**Javier:** Sometimes it’s so simple, sometimes it’s so complicated – to be an actor. To just play — sometimes it’s easy, sometimes it’s absolutely impossible.

**Sophia: Did the screenplay for *I’m So Excited* change a lot in the course of rehearsals?**

Javier: I remember the screenplay for *Talk to Her*; he didn’t change one single word — not a single comma, not a single period. He sent me an early version of *I’m So Excited*; I can’t imagine the number of versions that he wrote since then?! Pedro is always working, even on set. If he feels that the line is not truthful, that it sounds too literary or whatever, he changes everything. He’s like, [he snaps], “What would you say if you were in the middle of that situation?” “O.k. [Snaps.] Do that!” I love this kind of director! People idolize his work – “Oh, my God, Almodóvar’s script, you are blessed, you can’t change a word!” Pedro is doing that every single moment, and I love that.



**Sophia: He is apparently very precise in his direction. What was some interesting direction he gave you on this film?**

Miguel Ángel: He wanted me to play a street-smart guy, a drug-dealer with a childlike innocence. For him, the innocence and vulnerability, as related to my character’s childhood, were very important. The thing that the audience could most connect with, was the childlike innocence of my

character, he insisted. He was very precise about that. My character is asleep for the first half of the film, and I remember Pedro directing my dreams: “Now you are dreaming that you are watching a girl, what a wonderful girl ...” Sometimes I wanted to laugh during the scene because he would say: “Now you’re dreaming that you are inside of a plane, you are doing a thing with Pedro Almodóvar, and you want to wake up, but — no, no, no, no, you prefer to keep dreaming ...”

**Javier:** I remember when all the passengers were entering the cockpit to demand explanations, my character, Joserra, starts talking nonsense: “Oh, this is my boyfriend, but he’s married, and he’s bisexual, and he’s buh-buh-buh-buh-buh-buh-buh ...” [In a high woman’s voice:] “Oh, he’s bisexual?!” Everybody’s like. buh-buh-buh-buh-buh-buh-buh! Suddenly the co-pilot says something and my character makes a discovery, and I want to put an end to this conversation, “Everybody out!” I closed the door, and turned to ask, “Do you want to eat something?” Pedro screams down to me, “Please Javier, more calm. Not like Anne Bancroft in the forties, more like my films in the eighties.” Because the first time, my turn was sooo dramatic. “Okay, Pedro.” “Action!”

**Blanca:** I don’t remember for my character, but I remember for one of the flight attendants, Fajas, the chubby one, played by Carlos Areces. Carlos said that one of the most surreal acting notes that he ever got in his life was, “You must maintain your eyes, 70% shut — with the bovine look of Sylvester Stallone. If you can’t do Stallone (he’s perfection), then at least, give me Angela Lansbury bovine eyes,” Pedro told him.

**Javier:** Carlos was like, “Oh, my God, Pedro, what are you talking about?!” But I remember Carlos looking at me just like that. He was so funny.

**Sophia: La Movida Madrileña, in Madrid – tell me about this time.**

**Javier:** La Movida Madrileña was the first breath of freedom in Spain, just after Franco’s death in 1975. There was a group of actors, artists, directors, and painters, full of energy and drugs, connecting with Europe and America. Previously, all this was forbidden. We had forty years of repression. We suffered a military system for forty years, and suffered above all, the Church. Almodóvar criticizes the Church constantly in his films.

**Miguel Ángel:** It came on so strong, after the dictatorship of Franco. People like Pedro portrayed so well, that explosion of freedom and liberty.

**Javier:** Pedro’s early films are not surreal or over the top, that was the reality of Spain in the eighties — as crazy as you see in his films. Yet, he has always demanded that his actors tell stories in a deeply moving and truthful way.

**Miguel Ángel:** Thank God, my generation was born with the free energy around.

**Javier:** We are very used to being free now. We take advantage of these freedoms.

**Sophia: Almodóvar has been quoted as saying that he likes the idea of people having fun watching this film because the atmosphere is very bleak in Spain right now —**

**Miguel Ángel:** That’s why the film played so well in Spain. Always, when Pedro opens a film, everybody wants to see it. In this case, it was also Pedro’s return to comedy. We are in a tough moment here in Spain, a critical time, and people needed to laugh about all that we are experiencing — but you cannot laugh about all this. In this film, Pedro shows the characters who are more or less guilty of creating the situation that we are living in presently. People allow themselves to laugh about the situation while watching the film. In Spain, we can appreciate the metaphorical significance of the story. As actors when we were shooting *I’m So Excited*, we weren’t aware of all these layers. When I first saw the finished film, it shocked me, because I didn’t realize that Pedro was speaking about so many things. If you’re not from Spain, you’re going to see a celebration of comedy. After seeing the film, you will feel the need to party, to be free, to connect with everybody.

**Sophia: I read about this wild party after the screening in New York, where Pedro invited you to strip, Miguel?**

**Miguel Ángel:** I have been working as an actor for eight years, trying to be very professional, trying to show that — I can do it, I can do it, I can do it! And suddenly you do a film with Pedro — who is an amazing genius — you live a dream, and you go to the United States, and you say, “Wow, we’re here in the United States! Look at that!” ... If somebody had told me that I would be here, I would not have believed it! ... And suddenly, Pedro says, “Miguel Ángel was a former stripper!” (“No!”) [He laughs] That’s Pedro Almodóvar; he’s rock ‘n roll. If you want to be there, you have to dance that rock ‘n roll.

*‘I’m So Excited’ opens June 28, 2013 in NY and LA. Details [here](#).*

*Images: Top: Left to Right: Lola Duenas, Laya Martí, José María Yazpik, Antonio De La Torre, Blanca Suárez, Carlos Areces, Hugo Silva, Cecilia Roth, José Luis Torrijo, Raúl Arévalo, Miguel Ángel Silvestre & Director Pedro Almodovar. Photo by Jean-Paul Goude © El Deseo, Courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics. Below: Left to right: Javier Cámara, Pedro Almodóvar and Carlos Areces. Photo by Paola Ardizzoni & Emilio Pereda © El Deseo, Courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics.*

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