

Alejandro Fernández Almendras about MY HERO ALEXIS

“It seems common for parents to shout at their children”

When making a film, you want it to be remembered for the right reasons, for being a good movie. With a popular football star like Alexis Sanchez in one of the main roles, there is a risk that the presence of such a persona might put the rest of the story into the shadows. *MY HERO ALEXIS* (aka *MY FRIEND ALEXIS*) by Chilean filmmaker Alejandro Fernández Almendras avoids this trap by telling a vibrant story for soccer fans and sports haters alike.

Tito's talent for football is as big as his talent for getting in trouble. Until one of his follies brings him face to face with Alexis Sanchez, Chile's ultimate football idol and one of the world's most famous players. An unexpected bond develops and Tito and Alexis will teach each other a few things about life, about friendship and about the love for football.

Flashback scenes take us back to Alexis Sanchez' youth. Looking dry and dusty, the scenes all have wonderful colours.



Alejandro Fernández Almendras: We were shooting in an extremely photogenic place and decided to have the film design based upon one colour, ranging between yellow and brownish. This awakes a feeling of longing, a way for Sanchez to recall his childhood in Tocopilla as a pleasant and warm memory. Even though he came from a poor family, Sanchez had a happy childhood.

There is a short but remarkable cemetery scene at one of the most

impressive locations I've seen in a long time.

Fernández: In this region the weather is so dry that objects stand the test of time, even for hundreds of years. In that part of the Andes you will find the oldest mummies, because of the dry wind. We found this typical North-Chilean graveyard close to Tocopilla, and we wanted the audience to pick up a glimpse of the mythology that is connected to such wonderful places.

Filming football scenes often requires a certain choreography, and capable players/actors.

Fernández: It was important for us to find a kid that was good at soccer, being a good actor was not enough. Luciano González is a charming boy with beautiful expressive eyes, but he is also a good soccer player who dreams of one day becoming a professional. He was all the time very keen on doing the football scenes, which added to their sense of realism. The older kids in the film are all professionally trained young talents, who know how it feels to be on the pitch. Some scenes were choreographed very loosely, so to never lose the spontaneity of the moment.

How did you convince Alexis Sanchez about this project?

Fernández: It was not me convincing him, it was him convincing us to produce a film in which he would play a small part. This is not a film about his life but about following your dreams. Alexis wanted to make a film with a positive message for children, giving





something back to the community, because he is such a beloved personality in Chile. He was closely involved with the project from an early stage, and was very clear about the kind of story he wanted to tell. Wherever we went, there were hundreds of people following him, wanting to get close to him. Being on the road with a mega star was a surreal experience.

Tito's father is a hard nut to crack. Irritating fathers apparently seem unavoidable in the world of sports.

Fernández: Often parents might push their children beyond their limits to achieve some kind of greatness or to financially secure their future. We filmed in several soccer schools, and

always at the entrance there was a sign saying "Don't shout at your children". It seems common for parents to yell, to humiliate their kids, fight with the coach, etc. In a country as poor as Chile, becoming a successful soccer player stands for a lot of financial and other benefits. Unfortunately many people are shoving their own dreams down their children's throats.

Even with two male heroes, my favourite character is a girl. Tito's sister Gloria (played by Ignacia Uribe) has a strong character and sparkles in her eyes, and she is a great player on the pitch.

Fernández: Tito and Gloria talk and dream together and share a strong

bond, like partners for life. Sweet as she is, Gloria comes up for her rights against the authority of a tyrannical father, which is a statement for the empowerment of women and children.

Women's soccer is growing big nowadays!

Fernández: By the time we were making this film, Chile was playing the Women's World Cup and all of a sudden there was a lot of attention in the media, stadiums were sold out! You could say that Gloria's character is vaguely modelled after Christiane Endler, the goal keeper of our national team, and an inspiring personality, not only in sports (she made a career playing for PSG) but also in the social debate. Endler is a role model for young girls in Chile. She founded three all-female football schools and feels a responsibility towards girls from lower income families. In an interview she said: "It feels like doors are opening for women to realise their dreams, not only in football." In the national sports debate Christiane Endler often represents the voice of women.

How much is football still a part of Chilean street culture?

Fernández: Ever since Chile won the Copa America (the biggest soccer tournament on our continent) in 2015, people are looking at football with a completely different eye. For many Chileans football - more than any other sport - is one of the biggest things in life.

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Gert Hermans
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