

LA SAGRADA FAMILIA (THE SACRED FAMILY)



Family trip into the Amazon becomes a family flash-point in visually gorgeous documentary

🕒 Reading time: 2 mins 📅 Seen on: 12 August 2022



by

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This intimate, visually stunning documentary explores the tension between tradition and modernity. It isn't the first to do so by any means, but does so in a milieu that few of us will recognise.

DIRECTOR:
BORJA ALCALDE
RUBIO
COUNTRY:
UK
YEAR:
2022
LENGTH:
90 MINS

Carmen and Sergio, like many parents, are struggling with raising a family and the pressures of work. It just so happens that they live in the Sacred Valley of the Incas in Peru, and they make their living conducting local Ayahuasca ceremonies. While the couple are plumbed solidly into their spiritual customs and traditions, they're afraid of the overuse of modern technology by their three children. They decide to take a road trip deep into the Amazon to reconnect as a family again.

Given the subject matter, it's ironic that first thing that jumps out at the viewer is the awe-inspiring digital photography. Extra handheld footage is provided by the eldest child Valentin, displaying a talent that suggests his parents shouldn't be rejecting technology so readily.

The friction between nature and modernity isn't exactly a complex narrative, and despite some fascinating footage of the ceremonies carried out by the family, it's often the tiny moments that most piercingly hit a raw truth. One example is a break for a swim by a lake. Carmen becomes peevish and a little petulant when the kids elect to take a dip in the chlorinated pool nearby, rather than the silty lake. Alcalde's storytelling doesn't necessarily come down on the side of the parents.

Despite such moments of emotional force, the central theme doesn't quite stretch to an entirely gripping 90 minutes. In fact, as he family begins to creak and splutter like their knackered old VW camper, a somewhat voyeuristic sense of discomfort begins to creep in.

La Sagrada Familia (a clever title) has great value as a travelogue into a beautiful, diverse country, away from the parts familiar to tourists. The effectiveness of its central drama depends if you interpret it as a frank, candid, and universal portrait of a family, or a somewhat invasive depiction of that family being strained to breaking point. The film is in the 'Heartbreakers' strand of the festival for a reason.

Screening at Everyman 1, Thu 18 Aug 2022 @17:30 and Filmhouse 3, Sat 20 Aug @ 12:45

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