

REVIEWS

‘La Sagrada Familia’: Edinburgh Review

BY FIONNUALA HALLIGAN | 18 AUGUST 2022



A fractious family goes on a road trip across Peru in Borja Alcalde’s beautifully-shot doc



SOURCE: YANANTIN FILM
‘LA SAGRADA FAMILIA’

Dir/prod: Borja Alcalde. UK. 2022. 90 mins.

Borja Alcalde’s documentary feature debut takes a tour through Peru with a fractured and sometimes fractious family in an unreliable Kombi van. It’s a completely beautiful and understandably erratic film, if you consider the freethinking mum and dad at the wheel are Shamans who guide Ayahuasca ceremonies. Scotland-based Basque director Alcalde steers between a jaunty tone, a quest for spiritual profundity, and a jaw-dropping look at the marvels of the natural world and humankind’s place in its history. A dramatic swerve to the kerb in its final moments will leave audiences questioning what has gone before, or who is smoking exactly what in the van, although this all seems part of *La Sagrada Familia’s* (*The Sacred Family*) decidedly unusual journey.

Undoubtedly best viewed on a big screen

Premiering at the Edinburgh Film Festival, *La Sagrada Familia* is a UK production. Alcalde apparently found the family before he found his doc, and the decision to travel 1,000 miles across the country — from the Sacred Family of the Incas, where they now live, to their former home in the Amazon rainforest, visiting Shamanic sites en route — was made collaboratively. Putting three children — one very cranky, hairy 16 year-old boy named Valen; 13 year-old Antu, who is addicted to his phone; and bouncy 10 year-old girl Lua — in the back of a van with a separated mum and dad at the wheel would strike any parent with fear. Yet even though Alcalde never achieves the *Little Miss Sunshine* vibe he says he’s aiming for, it’s not as fetid in the back seats as it could have been. The gorgeousness of the scenery takes care of the squabbles, while Juana Molina’s unusual score is a real asset.

That said, Alcalde is certainly guilty of misdirection: initial voice-over leads the viewer to assume that parents Sergio and Carmen are exiled from the jungle, but, in fact, they are former middle-class city dwellers who heard a Shamanic calling and lived there for some years. You could justifiably call them hippies, except that Carmen now runs a natural healing centre which finances the family through Ayahuasca rituals for tourists. Sergio, also a self-declared Shaman, paints: a trip to his family in Lima points to his comfortable background, yet he decries her increasing commercialisation. They don’t live together.

Carmen, whose spirituality will be tested by being asked to open her purse at every stop on the route, is on a goal to nourish her whole family. She misses the rainforest, where she lost a child, and shudders to see her teenage boys gaming and on social media. Sergio is the driver, but he also seems like a passenger, as Carmen reads out tracts from the Dalai Lama to him while the children bicker and sleep. When they stop by an artificial lake, the children demand a chlorinated pool. At an ancient site in Huanca, they perform an old ritual, and Molina’s score turns chanty and otherworldly.

All the way through, though, there are the visuals: empty endless beaches, twisted and turning rock formations, forests, waterfalls, towns by night. Alcalde is fond of drone shots: often they act as visual fillers; here, though, they seem to define the natural grandeur, and help to visualise what Carmen is trying to drive towards. *La Sagrada Familia* is undoubtedly best viewed on a big screen: after a festival tour, and perhaps the toning down of some quirky oddities like the jaunty typeface that establishes character and location, it will face the same struggle as any other documentary in today’s marketplace. The challenges of Carmen’s family are framed against her heightened beliefs and Peru’s natural wonders, but they’ll still be familiar to any parents, anywhere.

Production company: Yanantin World

International sales: Silver Mountain Productions, cf@silvermountainproductions.tv

Cinematography: Borja Alcalde, Nico Landa, Gabriel Paez (Drone footage: Borja Alcalde & Nico Landa)

Editing: Colin Monie

Music: Juana Molina



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