


PAGEANT
THEATER

MARCH 22 - 28
FROM THE FILMMAKERS OF
EMBRACE OF THE SERPENT



BIRDS OF PASSAGE

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REEL WORLD



Tribal drug war

'A rural folktale verging on classical tragedy'

Birds of Passage begins with a traditional courtship dance in a remote Colombian village. The dancers and onlookers are living in the 20th century, but the traditions are ancient and indigenous, with family and tribal honor as prime values.

by
**Juan-Carlos
Selznick**



Birds of Passage
Opens Friday, March
22. Starring Carmina
Martínez, José
Acosta and Natalia
Reyes. Directed by
Cristina Gallego and
Ciro Guerra. Pageant
Theatre. Not Rated.

cousins are growing somewhere in the hills. That leads to unexpected wealth and excess, but also to a skein of calamities born of the clash of tradition and modernity, and the half-hidden contradictions within both.

The film plays, at times, like a folkloric epic, or an ethnographic pageant, and, at others, like a rural folktale verging on classical tragedy. And with its spectacular widescreen imagery, its bleak and luminous desert settings, and its bursts of vengeful gunfire, the film also has the feel of a sly, offbeat variation on the spaghetti westerns of the '70s and '80s.

There's no clear-cut tragic hero in all this, unless it's that traditional code of values—an array of apparent noble virtues that here seem to carry the seeds of their

own destruction, especially when put in contact with the dramatic entanglements portrayed here. But even the most nearly noble of the chief characters gets outside the story's circles of vengeance.

The stately, almost biblical progression of events in *Birds of Passage* is fascinating all by itself. And the conviction that the chief characters bring to their split-second choices on matters of honor and fate provides dramatic momentum quite apart from any questions of whether we care about them or not.

Carmina Martínez is particularly striking as the matriarchal Úrsula, mother of Zaida and conflicted moral sage among the villagers. Acosta and Reyes as the young lovers exude modest heroic potential and doomed vulnerability in more or less equal amounts. Juan Martínez (as the cowboy-hatted proto-mafioso Anibal) and José Vicente Cote (as the wryly avuncular Peregrino) make strong impressions as contrasting figureheads of embattled clans.

Narváez, as the heedlessly reckless Moisés, steals every scene he's in. Youthfully arrogant Leonidas, who inherits leadership of a family before he even qualifies as an adolescent, is played by Greider Meza with a kind of childish diabolical venom.

This film's directorial team, Cristina Gallego and Ciró Guerra, also made one of the very best films of 2015, *Embrace of the Serpent*. This one is not quite at the same level of achievement, but both films are especially noteworthy for their dazzling mixtures of realism and mythic spirit. □



Poor



Fair



Good



Very Good



Excellent