



# XXY

Directed by Lucía Puenzo



**Argentina/ Spain/ France/ 2007/ in Spanish with English  
Subtitles/ 91 min./ 35 mm/ Color/ 1:1.85 / Dolby SRD**

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## SYNOPSIS

For just about everybody, adolescence means having to confront a number of choices and life decisions, but rarely any as monumental as the one facing 15 year-old Alex (Inés Efron,) who was born an intersex child.\* As Alex begins to explore her sexuality, her mother invites friends from Buenos Aires to come for a visit at their house on the gorgeous Uruguayan shore, along with their 16-year-old son Álvaro (Martín Piroyanski.) Alex is immediately attracted to the young man, which adds yet another level of complexity to her personal search for identity, and forces both families to face their worst fears.

### \*ABOUT THE TERM INTERSEX:

In biology, "hermaphrodite" means an organism that has both "male" and "female" sets of reproductive organs, however in humans, there are no actual "hermaphrodites" in this sense. In the past it has been common to call people with intersex conditions "hermaphrodites" because intersex bodies share sex chromosomes and characteristics of both genders and do not neatly conform to what doctors define as the "normal" male or female bodies. Yet the label, "hermaphrodite" is misleading, mythologizing, and often stigmatizing; members of the community prefer the term "intersex people" or "people with intersex conditions/experiences."

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

XXY is based on a short story called "Cinismo", from the Argentine writer (and my husband) Sergio Bizzio. From the moment I read his story -the sexual awakening of a young girl who has what doctors call genital ambiguity- I couldn't take it out of my head. I began to write with that image in my head: the body of a young person with both sexes in one same body. I was especially interested in the dilemma of inevitable choice: not only having to choose between being a man or a woman, but also having to choose between that binary decision, or intersex as an identity and not as a place of mere passage.

When I began to write XXY I was surprised to see there are almost no stories on this subject, there's a strange cultural silence over it. If the subject is explored, it's in the language of testimony, of medical diagnosis, but with almost no fictions, as if the subject would be a taboo for any kind of poetry and fiction around it, as it was in ancient times.

My interest when I wrote this film was, above all, the relationship between Alex (the teenager) and Alvaro (her love interest). I didn't want my film to become a medical case, a clinical case, almost a documentary. Even if the script had been supervised by doctors and geneticists, it's was important to make them understand I was not looking for any medical realism.

*Lucía Puenzo*

## An interview with Lucía Puenzo

By: Bijan Tehrani, *Cinema Without Borders*

**Cinema Without Borders:** *XXY* is a daring and unusual film, what inspired you to make this film?

**Lucía Puenzo:** *XXY* is based on a short story called "Cinismo," from the Argentine writer Sergio Bizzio. From the moment I read that story, about the sexual awakening of a young girl who has what doctors call genital ambiguity, I couldn't get it out of my head. I began to write with that image in my head—the image of a young person living with both sexes in the same body. I was especially interested in the dilemma of inevitable choice. These young people must not only choose between living as a man or a woman, but they also struggle with the decision of whether to live as a singularly gendered person or with an identity that recognizes intersex itself as an identity and not merely as a place of passage.

**CWB:** How much research was done on the subject before writing the script?

**LP:** Months of research... I worked with doctors, geneticists, teachers, parents of children who were born with different diagnoses of intersexuality, and young adults who had or had not been operated on when they were born. When I lived in Paris, in the Cinéfondation, I contacted Alex Jurgen, a German intersex person who made a documentary of her life (*Octopusalarm*). In the process of filming, after years of operations and taking hormones to become a man, Alex realizes he will never be merely a man or a woman.

**CWB:** How did you choose the actors for the film? Are they all professional actors?

**LP:** Yes, they are all actors. I worked in a different way with the 4 adults than with the 2 young ones. With the adults we didn't rehearse much, we had very long talks and detailed readings of every scene; by the time we started shooting we knew each other, and the characters and the tone we were looking for. With Inés and Martín, we also talked and read. Inés came with me to many interviews with doctors and parents, then we began to rehearse, improvise, play, search for the bodies of the characters (because Inés is feminine and fragile and Martín has nothing of the clumsiness of Alvaro), and the way they spoke. When the shooting began I tried to have as much time as possible to work with the actors in the scene, with only the DP and cameraman watching. I wanted to give the actors as much freedom as possible, so they would not merely move inside the shot I imagined, but rather, the shot would emerge from their movement in the scene.

**CWB:** Ines Efron has great and convincing performance as Alex, did you work with her before you started shooting?

**LP:** With Inés something that was fundamental was finding a way for her to seduce and provoke from a masculine way, because at first everything she did was extremely feminine... Also, [the actors] are 24 years old, they had to appear to be almost 10 years younger, that youth was something to be very careful with...[and] we had to work with Inés' voice everyday, with every line.

**CWB:** And with Ricardo Darin?

**LP:** He is now a friend, but I didn't know him when I sent him the script. He called me some days later, we met to have a conversation, after which he said he would be Kraken. From that day all he has done is support the project in every way he could. Clearly the 4 adult and the 2 young ones are from different worlds. But that was good for the film, because Alex and Alvaro have to be in another world. Their romance is told in a different tone than the dilemma that the parents are trapped in. Ricardo used to say working with Inés and Martín was exciting because he could never tell where their heads were, nor anticipate their reactions, quite a compliment for the kids. We all felt that the actors' different backgrounds were good for everyone.

**CWB:** What was the most challenging aspect of making *XXY*?

**LP:** Everything was a risk: being a writer who is directing a first film, the mix of very well known actors with young kids who were doing their first roles, the subject, having a main actress six months pregnant (with a pregnancy that had to be disguised)... As for the subject, knowing intersex should be discussed as a cultural phenomenon, and should not be reduced to the body of a few individuals and the experience that they might have. While I was certain of these things, I wanted to find a way to show them in a small love story between two very young persons who, while they were falling in love, would be discovering their identity.

**CWB:** What has been the audience's reaction to *XXY* inside and outside Argentina?

**LP:** In Argentina and Italy, and other countries where the film has already been released, it created a debate on what seems almost impossible in our societies: an intersex body that has not been mutilated, and not only survives but demands the opportunity to be desired. Who decides, after all, that there are only two ways to be human? Many intersex friends have told me they liked the film not because of the idea of freedom of choice that many people saw in it, but because of the space the film gives to desire. And I agree: it's not enough to say we should respect any body and any sexual identity and give every individual the right to do as he or she pleases with their identity. The film includes to this the possibility that anybody (a virgin like Alvaro in this case) could fall in love and be aroused by a body like Alex's. Néstor Perlongher, one of my favourite poets, used to say: "We do not want respect, we want to be desired." The search of an identity (not only sexual) is vital in the life of everybody.

**CWB:** Have you ever had the experience of sharing *XXY* with a person with *XXY* condition?

**LP:** Yes, with many. An intersex activist and friend of mine (Mauro Cabral) says: "The 'inter' contained in the word intersex seems to suggest that we are between men and women, creating all type of analogies with transexuality, homosexuality, heterosexuality, bisexuality, etc... As if they were all a family of words and different ways to have sex

with somebody.” Some think intersex means not having a clear sexual orientation, and that the only discussion around this issue is to avoid the mutilation of their body. The movie also brings to light the ostracism that people with a difference suffer from... When I began to write *XXY*, I was surprised to see that there are almost no stories on this subject, there’s a strange cultural silence over it. If the subject is explored it’s in the language of testimony, of medical diagnosis, but with almost no fictions, as if the subject would be a taboo for any kind of poetic and fiction around it, as it was in ancient times.

**CWB:** How did you decide on the visual style of the film?

**LP:** I’ve always liked literature and cinema that work with characters and relationships more than with plots, such as the cinema of Haneke, Bruno Dumont, Cassavetes, and the literature of Cheever, Nabokov, and the Argentines Aira and Puig. My interest when I wrote this film was, above all, the relationship between Alex and Alvaro. I didn’t want my film to become a medical case, a clinical case, almost a documentary. Even if the script had been supervised by doctors and geneticists, it was important to make them understand that I was not looking for any medical realism. I even worked with more than one diagnosis in Alex’s body. I’ve always enjoyed literature and cinema that raises questions more than that which gives answers. Finishing a book or going out of the cinema with the head full of questions is good enough for me. If I have to give an answer I would say *XXY* speaks about freedom of choice, identity and desire.

**CWB:** Please tell us about your future projects.

**LP:** I have just finished the adaptation of my first novel, *The Fish Child*, a love story between two young girls, and I’m writing a new novel and two short stories for two anthologies.

## **FESTIVALS AND AWARDS**

- WINNER – Critics' Week Grand Prize & Golden Rail Award – **Cannes FF**  
WINNER – Golden Athena Award for Best Film– **Athens Int'l FF**  
WINNER – New Director's Award – **Edinburgh Int'l FF** (opening night film)  
WINNER – Association of Quebec's Cinema Critics Prize – **Festival Nouveau Cinema Montreal**  
WINNER – Three Castle Awards – **Castellinaria Int'l Youth FF**  
WINNER – Youth Council Award – **Valladolid Int'l FF**  
WINNER – Best Feature Film – **Festival de Cinéma des 3 Amériques (Quebec City)**  
WINNER – Quebec Film Critics Award – **Montreal Festival of New Cinema**  
WINNER – Pink Peach LGBT Award – **Atlanta FF**  
WINNER – Audience Award for Best Feature Film – **Frameline FF**  
WINNER – Audience Award for Best Feature Film – **Out Film Connecticut**  
WINNER – Best Feature – **Reel Pride FF**  
WINNER – Grand Jury Award for Outstanding International Dramatic Feature – **Outfest Film Festival**  
WINNER – Best Screenplay – **Providence Latino FF**  
WINNER – Audience Award for Best Feature Film – **Inside Out, Ottawa LGBT FF**  
WINNER – Audience Award for Best Foreign Film – **Pittsburgh Int'l Lesbian and Gay FF**  
WINNER – Best Feature Film – **Clip, Tampa Int'l Gay and Lesbian FF**

OFFICIAL SELECTION – Argentina's entry for Best Foreign Film at the **2008 Academy Awards**

OFFICIAL SELECTION – Best Film in Spanish at the **Spanish Goya Awards** (Spanish Oscars)

OFFICIAL SELECTION – **Toronto Int'l FF; Munich Int'l FF; Reykjavik Int'l FF; Jerusalem Int'l FF; Cairo Int'l FF; Bangkok Int'l FF; Hong Kong Gay & Lesbian Int'l FF; Auteur Int'l FF (Belgrade); Bratislava Int'l FF; Black Nights Int'l FF (Tallinn); Tokyo Latin FF; Ljubljana Int'l FF; Tapei Golden Horse Int'l FF; Cairo Int'l FF; Kerala Int'l FF; Palm Springs FF; Santa Barbara Int'l FF; Portland Int'l FF; Miami Int'l FF; New Directors/New Films Festival**

## **Director's Biography**

**Lucía Puenzo** was born in 1976, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to the prominent director Luis Puenzo (Academy Award winner for Best Foreign Film *The Official Story*.) After studying literature, cinema and theater, she published three novels *El Niño Pez* (Beatriz Viterbo, Tusquets, 2004), *9 minutos* (Beatriz Viterbo, Tusquets, 2005) and *La maldición de Jacinta Pichimahuida* (Interzona, 2007). **XXY**, her first feature film, received the support of the Cannes Film Festival's Cine Fondation, Fond Sud, INCAA and ICAA. She has also directed short films, documentaries, and the telefilm *Los Invisibles*.

## **Cast Biographies**

**Ricardo Darín** (Kraken) was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on January 16, 1957. He has worked as an actor since he was a little boy, and has evolved from a star of soap operas and TV comedies to a leading figure of some of the most important Argentinean movies. He is also a renowned theater actor and director.

His international breakthrough role was in the 2000 film *Nine Queens*, followed by *El Hijo de la Novia*, *Kamchatka* and *El Aura* among others.

**Valeria Bertuccelli** (Suli) has appeared in many Argentinean films and television programs. Her filmography includes *Hotel Tívoli*, *La Antena*, *Mientras Tanto*, *Hermanas*, *Próxima Salida*, *Luna de Avellaneda*, *Los Guantes Mágicos*, *Extraño*, *Boca de Fresa*, *Silvia Prieto*, and *1000 Boomerangs*.

**Inés Efron** (Alex) has acted in *Hoy No Estoy*, *Parece la Pierna de una Muñeca*, *Cara de Queso 'Mi Primer Ghetto'*, and the award winning film, *Glue*, a 2007 New Directors/New Films selection.

**Martín Piroyansky** (Alvaro) has appeared in *Hoy no Estoy*, *Cara de Queso 'Mi Primer Ghetto'*, and *Sofacama*.

# CREDITS

## Crew

Director  
Producers

Associate Producers  
Executive Producers

Production Manager  
Script

Based on a tale by  
Cinematographer

Set

Camera Operator

Assistant Director

Make-up

Editing

Sound

Original Score

LUCÍA PUENZO  
LUIS PUENZO &  
JOSE MARÍA MORALES  
FABIENNE VONIER  
FERNANDO SIRIANNI & MIGUEL  
MORALES  
GUSTAVO GUIDO  
LUCÍA PUENZO  
SERGIO BIZZIO  
NATASHA BRAIER  
ROBERTO SAMUELLE  
NICOLÁS PUENZO  
BRUNO ROBERTI  
BEATUSHKA WOJTOWICZ  
ALEX ZITO & HUGO PRIMERO  
FERNANDO SOLDEVILA  
ANDRÉS GOLDSTEIN &  
DANIEL TARRAB

## Cast

Kraken  
Suli  
Ramiro  
Erika  
Alvaro  
Alex  
Juan  
Washington  
Esteban  
Roberta  
Vando  
Saul

RICARDO DARÍN  
VALERIA BERTUCCELLI  
GERMÁN PALACIOS  
CAROLINA PELERITTI  
MARTÍN PIROYANSKY  
INÉS EFRON  
GUILLERMO ANGELELLI  
CÉSAR TRONCOSO  
JEAN PIERRE REGUERRAZ  
AILÍN SALAS  
LUCIANO NOBILE  
LUCAS ESCARIZ