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ENTERTAINMENT

**SIN
NOMBRE**

DIRECTED BY Cary Fukunaga
STARRING Paulina Gaitan,
Edgar Flores, Tenoch Huerta

RELEASED
August 14

The winner of the Directing and Excellence in Cinematography awards at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival, *Sin Nombre* is a fascinating fusion of road movie, gangster epic and tragic love story. Written and directed by Cary Fukunaga, this visually vibrant debut reflects the filmmaker's firsthand experiences with Central American immigrants seeking the often-tainted promise of new lives and fresh opportunities in the United States.

Sayra (Paulina Gaitan), a teenager living in Honduras, hungers for a brighter future. A reunion with her estranged father gives Sayra her only real option – emigrating from her home to Mexico, and then making the perilous journey on to the US, where her father has settled with a new family. Meanwhile, Casper (Edgar Flores) is a young adult living in Tapachula, Mexico, and facing an uncertain future. A member of the ultra-violent Mara Salvatrucha brotherhood, he has just inducted

a new recruit, 12-year-old Smiley (Kristian Ferrer), who undergoes a rough initiation. When a conflict between Casper and fearsome Mara lynchpin Lil' Mago (Tenoch Huerta) erupts, an abiding feud is set in motion.

Meanwhile, Sayra and her relatives manage to cross over into Mexico, joining countless other immigrants waiting at the Tapachula train yards. When a States-bound freight train arrives, they successfully clamber atop, as does Lil' Mago, who has commandeered Casper and Smiley to carry out violent robberies on the already desperate and afraid human cargo. As day breaks, Lil' Mago makes his move and Casper in turn makes a fateful decision to navigate the psychological gauntlet of his violent existence and the physical one of the unforgiving Mara. Sayra allies herself with him as the train journeys through the Mexican countryside towards the hope of new lives.

Executive produced by the poster boy pair of Diego Luna and

Gael García Bernal for Canana – their production outfit designed to foster emerging Mexican talent and films dealing with Latin American issues – *Sin Nombre* directly evolved from Cary Fukunaga's 2004 *Victoria Para Chino*. A multi-award winning short about a truckload of immigrants who were found abandoned and suffocated in Victoria, Texas, the production led to extensive research and fresh insights into the Central American side of immigration.

Working with a tight-knit crew, including Sao Paulo-born cinematographer Adriano Goldman, Fukunaga travelled to Chiapas and Tapachula, Mexico, and met with gang members – distinguished by their striking body art – who were involved in the immigrant smuggling trade. The result is a breathless, uncompromising and frequently gruelling account of the desperate struggle for survival, and a sobering portrait of the seemingly endless cycle of poverty, violence and

retribution that thrives in the ranks of the underclass.

Mildly evocative of classic lovers-on-the-run dramas such as *Days of Heaven* (in *Sin Nombre*, the wonders of the natural world similarly provide a fleeting respite from suffering and hardship), the film also incorporates the kinetic power of Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Amores Perros* and the topicality of the Guillermo Arriaga-scripted *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*, as well as Amat Escalante's thus far little seen *Los Bastardos*. **Jason Wood**

Anticipation. Trails a sizeable reputation following festival success, especially at Sundan where it was one of the 'hot' titles. ❶

Enjoyment. Engrossing both in the emotionally affecting story that it tells and in its evocation of character and place. ❸

In Retrospect. Likely to be one of the must-see foreign language titles of the year, opening our eyes to a world of desperation, hope and pain. ❶



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