

The Olive Tree

Spain | 2016 | 100 mins | Cert 15

Director: Icíar Bollaín Screenplay: Paul Laverty

Cast: Anna Castillo, Javier Gutiérrez, Pep Ambròs, Manuel Cucala, Miguel Angel, Carme Pla



SYNOPSIS

Spain, the present. Twenty-year old Alma has always been deeply attached to her grandfather Ramón, but the old chap hasn't spoken for twelve years, ever since her father sold the family's ancient olive tree to raise money to open a restaurant. Everyday he visits the site where the tree used to be, hoping for its return.

Unable to bear Ramón's sadness any longer, Alma persuades her uncle Alcachofa and her friend Rafa to help her track the tree down, starting a journey that leads to unexpected consequences for everyone...

REVIEW

It turns out there are many more ways than one to uproot a tree in *The Olive Tree*, an earthy, quietly stirring Spanish fable that finds familial, regional and environmental grievances inseparably tangled in its branches. The third collaboration between Madrid-born helmer Icíar Bollaín and Scottish screenwriter Paul Laverty - the team behind 2010's Oscar-shortlisted *Even the Rain* - should prove their most universally appealing, grafting gentle comedy, bristling social consciousness and a salty-teared streak of family tragedy in its tale of a fiery young farmer determined to reclaim her grandfather's beloved olive tree from foreign purchasers. Reminiscent at its most jauntily righteous of Laverty's lighter-toned work with Ken Loach, Bollaín's latest will continue to engage audiences following a rapturously received premiere in Miami.

The spirit of grassroots activism that characterized both Bollaín and Laverty's previous films, *Even the Rain* and 2011's *Katmandu*, is present once more in *The Olive Tree* - though the narrative here surprises most when it places social and individual concerns in bittersweet conflict. Spunky heroine Alma (TV-trained actress Anna Castillo, making a confident transition to big-screen leads) turns out to be a more charismatic carrier of a cause than even she expects or intends to be.

...With her choppy undercut hairdo and wiry physicality, Castillo carries proceedings with just the right degree of toughness and strength of conviction, playing Alma's vulnerability against her resilience all the while. She has a most endearingly crumpled foil in Gutiérrez, who wrings the pic's biggest laughs from Alcachofa's careworn bewilderment at his niece's ideals, with a doleful undertow of knowing guilt over what has caused it. For the role of Ramon, casting director Mireia Suarez has served the film well by considering amateur locals: while he's spryly game in his scenes with Alma's younger self, the very skin of Cucala's hands has a labour-shaped authenticity that can't be forged.

Accomplished craft elements are all of a piece with the picture's unobtrusive, summer-faded naturalism, with extra credit due to Pascal Gaigne's lovely score, which sustains a tricky balance of lilting melancholy throughout.

Guy Lodge, Variety, February 2017



DID YOU KNOW?

- The film premiered at the Miami International Film Festival in May 2017
- Anna Castillo won the Best New Actress Goya Award 2017 for her role as Alma
- Paul Laverty got the idea for the film after reading a newspaper article about the selling of Spanish ancient trees to Europe or Asia for decorative reasons. He mulled over it for a decade before actually writing it.

COMING UP NEXT...

Friday 23rd March @ 7:45pm

BURN, BURN, BURN

Following the death of their friend, two girls in their late twenties embark on a road trip to spread his ashes. Seph and Alex take turns driving. Dan is in the glove compartment, in tupperware, decreasing in volume as the trip progresses.

Cert 15, 106 mins

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