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Private Dancer



Still from the film "From Knee to Heart"

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A fascinating portrait of famous Spanish dancer and choreographer Sol Picó, whose work presents strong and brave women not afraid of showing their weaknesses. We follow her artistic career, from street theatre all the way to the creation of her own company. We also see Sol Picó from a more personal side: the difficulties of growing up as a dancer, the difficulties of creation and how to face her career after turning 50.

Susanna Barranco talks about *From Knee to Heart*

Marta Balaga: Sol is such an exciting dancer, but you are showing that the life she chose is not exactly glamorous. I loved it when she is talking to her knee before the show, asking it to behave.

Susanna Barranco: She always tries to incorporate a sense of humour into everything she does. Or into her shows, but you can find those on YouTube. I wanted to focus on the personal side instead. Show her rehearse, day by day, and all her personal struggles, especially when she is turning 50. For me, that's the exciting part. This moment when you take off your clothes and you aren't this glamorous dancer anymore.

Was she willing to talk about it? She mentions in the film that although aging is hard, it's even harder for a dancer. You have the experience, you have the skills, and yet your body is just refusing to cooperate.

I'm an actress too, and I knew her way before I started to direct documentaries. I saw her shows, and I always saw this strong woman. We always have this image of a beautiful, young dancer. But there was this film *Restless Creature: Wendy Whelan* about a prima ballerina who was dancing in the New York City Ballet for maybe 30 years. It was an inspiration, because I wanted to show what mature women have to offer. They are important as artists.

In her shows, she talks about so many topics. Like in *We Women*, which tries to grasp what it means to be a contemporary woman.

It wasn't always like that. At first her dance was more instinctual, but few years ago she started to have deeper relationships with playwrights. I found that extremely interesting. In my films, I always pay attention to women. I want to show their strength. Sol, she dances like a strong woman. Her body is small, but it's full of life and the topics she wants to explore are very important. But she always does it with a smile. She worries sometimes whether what she does is sophisticated enough. She says: Maybe I am too primitive? But we don't need more theories. With her movements, she is able to convey something important.

Which of her shows did you appreciate the most?

I love *One-Hit Wonders*, *We Woman* and *Dancing with Frogs*. The first time I saw her, I just thought she was so... punk. She didn't have one message, but her dance was just so surprising. *Dancing with Frogs* might be my all-time favourite, but to be honest when I was filming during the premiere, the audience didn't connect with the show. They did on the second day. It's a special kind of humour – Spanish kind. With all this music and its critique of the macho culture. We still have very firm ideas about how men and women should behave. She reflects that in her shows. We have to criticise the clichés, but we can do so with humour.

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One member of her family, when asked to describe her style of dancing, says: Muscular. I found that interesting.

She is strong, but at the same time she is not afraid to show her weaknesses and the difficulty of growing old as a dancer. We are friends now and we have been making this film for two years. Sometimes there would be just us two, I would follow her around and she would say: Susie, you are still here? I was her shadow. But by making this film this way, I could show the truth of her life.

Some people find it difficult to be filmed. But, as somebody points out in the film, she “accumulates people”. Did it make it easier?

I was with her two weeks ago and she confessed that she could only make this film with me. She trusted me. She wasn't afraid to expose herself and yes, I feel like one of these people that she accumulated. And I accumulated her [laughter]. We have a similar take at what life can be for a woman. It's the reason why our chemistry worked I guess, and I think you can see it in the film.

It happened to me when I was making my last film as well. Before *From Knee to Heart*, I made a documentary about Teresa Rebull. She was 95 years old at the time and died during the shoot. We fell in love and there was this complicity between us. I think it's important that they open their hearts to me, because I open their hearts to them when I am filming. We are working together and we want to say something to the world.

But when you finally become friends, this other person can ask: Listen, that's too much. Let's not show that.

I show it all, because it's my creation. She had to trust me – otherwise I wouldn't want to play. It's my documentary about her, but it's my creation. She saw my other films; she knew my work. It happened once that she wanted me to take something out, but I explained how important that scene was. It showed her point of view. When she was crying after turning 50, thinking about her career, I needed to show that. I mean, it's always difficult to watch yourself on the screen. It becomes this mirror, don't you think?

There is this theory that creativity is hard and it can't be shared with other people. That artists are lonely, that they can't co-exist with other people. I don't agree with that. If you truly enjoy your creation and do it with a sense of humour, you can – and should – surround yourself with people. This film shows an artist, but also a certain way to work that doesn't necessarily isolate others. It “accumulates” them.

Susanna Barranco – Actress, poet, director and stage producer. She has worked for theatre companies in Barcelona. In 1999, she founded her own production company, La Barranco Films. She has directed numerous documentaries, including *In Jonc's Silence*, *Teresa Rebull*, *Uprooted Soul* and *Nude*. *From Knee to Heart* is her latest feature-length documentary.