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'The Good Boss,' a wry comedy at the Orinda Theatre

By Sophie Braccini

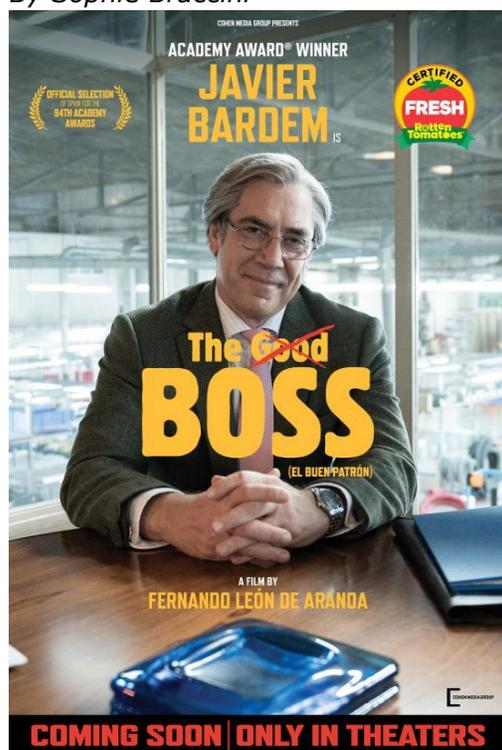


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"The Good Boss (El buen patrón)," a Spanish movie that represented its country at the 94th Academy Awards and has received 30 international awards, makes its Contra Costa debut at the Orinda Theatre on Sept. 23. Ferociously entertaining and fast paced, it portrays Julio Blanco a paternalist business owner played by Javier Bardem (Academy Award winner for Best Supporting Actor for his performance the Coen Brothers' film "No Country for Old Men"). Viewers will love to hate Blanco, the manipulating and charming demi-god who will stop at nothing to get his way.

Blanco is as odious as he is charming. The charismatic leader inherited from his father a professional scale manufacturing company and it is clear that he has learned to handle people from an early age. The movie takes the spectator on a 10-day voyage as the boss will do anything to remove all obstacles on the road to getting the last missing award for his company's brilliant track record. Blanco is struggling with protesting workers, a clueless wife, and a production director on the verge of a nervous breakdown. He is confronted with a situation spiraling out of control and grappling to find good and very bad solutions to have his way no matter what. He is obviously someone with whom no one says no to and who cannot deal with frustration.

The movie opens as the debonair and all-powerful boss explains how he runs his business like a watchful father taking care of his children. A father who has his favorites, and who points out the ugly ducklings. He is the benevolent boss that employees in distress can call upon when they have family issues; and he is the one

who does not hesitate to manipulate and threaten if someone's private life risks to upset the balance of the company. As he explains to a sacked longtime worker, "sometimes you have to trick the scale to get the exact weight." He is also the obnoxious womanizer who does not hesitate to court the new very young intern.

This comedic satire shows that businesses are no democracy. The boss rules, for the good of all and for his own, not hesitating to amputate what he sees as a diseased part, in the name of the survival of the whole body. Blanco perceives himself as above the law, acts accordingly and probably has a very clear conscience.

Bardem brings to this role a natural geniality, and wins the spectators over, until the menace seeps through and his portrayal of total selfishness and insensitivity flourishes. His powerful stature dominates the cast as his position in the company dominates others, but the supporting cast reveals other excellent actors. Almudena Amor as Liliana, the young intern Blanco covets but who outsmarts him, or Manolo Solo as Miralles, the desperate and out of control production manager, create lively and interesting characters, as well as many others.

The movie was directed and written by Fernando Leon de Aranoa, a prolific director who has won multiple awards. In an interview with the AU Review he said that he wanted to explore labor relations in a way that would balance drama and humor. The result is totally up to par.

"The Good Boss" will open at the Orinda Theatre for at least one week starting on Sept. 23. Tickets and further information at www.internationalshowcase.org

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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