



FILM: **EMILIA PEREZ**

FDG RATING: 3.6 😊😊😊😊😊

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Jacques Audiard: *director, writer*

Karla Sofia Gascon: *actor, Emilia Perez & Manitas Del Monte*

Zoe Saldana: *actress, Rita*

DATE: February 16, 2025

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **EMILIA PEREZ**

Lots of Oscar buzz for this film about a fictional, notorious, Mexican cartel boss, Manitas Del Monte, who is retiring and wants to fulfill a long-held hidden desire to transition into living as a woman. He offers a lot of money to a female lawyer who, stuck in a dead-end unappreciated job (Oscar award winning performance by Zoe Saldana as Rita) agrees to fake his death, arrange for surgery with a trusted surgeon, and handle all the legalities/paperwork/details including making sure his wife and children are well taken care of. It's a strange story premise that some discussion participants found hard to accept. On top of that, It's a musical. But that's where this film shines with showy music and dance sequences led by Rita as she thinks through her options and challenges at pivotal points, Saldana's outstanding talents anchor the entire film, eclipsing the also excellent performances by Gascon as Emilia and Selena Gomez as the wife, Jessi.

Miraculously, they pull it off, with (even more unbelievably) transgender, Emilia, introducing herself as a loving, wealthy (cartel money) aunt who offers Jessi and the two children a lavish life style living in her home in Mexico City. They had been sent to live in Switzerland during the gender transition, not suspecting anything out of the ordinary. When they return, they are told that their father/Jessi's husband had been killed, so, of course, they accepted the generous gesture from Aunt Emilia. (Again, hard to accept that Jessi doesn't see even the slightest resemblance to her late husband although when Emilia kisses the young daughter goodnight at bedtime, the daughter says that Emilia smells like her dad.) Emilia selfishly wants to keep the children close to her. She also reveals to Rita that she wants to make amends for the crimes she committed as a cartel kingpin and so in her new cultured persona she organizes charity events and becomes a generous community leader. All goes well until Jessi decides to leave with the children to live somewhere else and marry her boyfriend Gustavo. Emilia's true nature rebounds.

The film brings the pressing socio-political issues happening in Mexico to the foreground such as the devastating impact of drug cartels, rampant violence, systemic corruption, missing persons, the fragility of societal structures in Mexico and the controversial subject of LGBTQ+ rights, particularly transgender issues.

Those who loved the film praised the unusual, creative endeavor. One discussion participant said it was riveting from beginning to end being so multifaceted combining drama, comedy, musical theater, thriller, action, crime, politics, and Bollywood style dance all rolled into one. It was complex with a lot of substance, was another comment. A successful conglomeration of many styles of filmmaking.

Others disagreed noting holes in the film, inconsistencies, and a hard to accept premise: An extremely violent leader of a Mexican Cartel wants to be a woman. Completely unrealistic. It was a very dark film was another comment adding that they had to include song and dance to make the story entertaining. It was a mediocre story touching on specific sensitive issues, noted a critical discussion participant. We did agree that the makeup was outstanding on Gascon first as Manitas Del Monte and then as Emilia Perez.

Ambitious, creative, entertaining, but flawed...a few low scores riddled the multiple high scores leaving an ambiguous 3.6 rating on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).

Footnote: Emilia Perez only won 2 Oscars: Best Supporting Actress for Saldaña and Best Original Song for "El Mal". The 2024 Spanish-language French musical crime film was written and directed by Jacques Audiard. It is based on Audiard's opera libretto of the same name, which he loosely adapted from a chapter of the 2018 novel Écoute by French writer Boris Razon.



See you at the movies!

Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net

www.filmdiscussiongroup.com