

Venice Film Festival: Argentina 1985 Explores Landmark Trial That Put Powerful Military Men in the Dock

By: [Gautaman Bhaskaran](#)[News18.com](#)

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Venice



Competing for the top Golden Lion, Argentina 1985 is punched with power and laced with wry humour that makes it a compelling watch.

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Argentina 1985 is based on real events which rattled the country in the 1980s.

One of the best courtroom dramas I have seen in recent times was the Venice Film Festival title, Argentina 1985. Competing for the top Golden Lion, the work is punched with power and laced with wry humour that makes it a compelling watch. Based on real events which rattled Argentina in the 1980s, director Santiago Mitre's creation about a civil trial was comparable to Nuremberg in which the defeated Nazi leaders were placed in the dock. But the difference was that Argentina's David vs. Goliath story happened while the country's military junta still had a firm grip on power when it was taken to court.

Structured like a thriller – on the lines of a Perry Mason legal battle – Argentina 1985 traces the story of prosecutors Julio Strassera and his deputy, Luis Moreno Ocampo, as well as their young legal team (actually apprentices) as they tried beating time. They were up against some of the most vicious men in uniform who tried all kinds of intimidation: Death threats and car bombs!

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Ricardo Darin gives a very strong performance as Julio Strassera, the Argentinian chief prosecutor who was put in charge of the junta trial in 1985. He is witty (despite the enormity of the task fraught with intense tension) and has some of the best lines that had the theatre roaring with laughter. It was not easy dragging nine top military men to court for human rights violations in the period before democracy was restored in 1983. Some 30,000 people had disappeared, and the rule was brutally vicious.

Strassera's task was by no means easy. For one, the men in uniform were haughty and refused to recognise the authority of a civil court. They included Leopoldo Galtieri – who had been in charge of the shameful invasion the Falklands some years back. As the director conveys, the military was made up of cowards who tortured women and children with impunity but not tough enough make a dent in the Falklands war.

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“For me and my fellow Argentines, this had always been an important and exciting event,” says Mitre, who was surprised to discover that the trial had never been brought to either big or small screens in Argentina.

“It started as a conversation between us some four years ago. We had been asking ourselves what in Argentina's history had not been told yet,” says lead producer Axel Kuschewatzky of Infinity Hill, who has known Mitre since he produced the director's debut feature, Paulina.

Along with his regular writing partner, Mariano Llinas, Mitre spent two years going through the archives and interviewing just about everybody who had been in some way involved with the ghastly crimes. “We wanted a meticulous and truthful reconstruction of the events, although we took creative license with some details,” he recalls.

As luck would have it, they were able to film in the actual courtroom, which had remained intact. “We felt like we had traveled back in time,” he muses, detailing how he worked closely with art director Micaela Saiegh and cinematographer Javier Julia to re-create that era. “Trial scenes can be methodical and dry so it was a challenge to make it a courtroom thriller with elements of tension and intense emotion,” he says. “It was a great learning experience, I think Argentines and the rest of the world will learn of many little-known details,” he adds.

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Argentina 1985 — which has a good chance of winning an award — would soon be on [Amazon Prime](#) Video, and Indians (including our writers and directors) would have a chance to see how Mitre and his team had conceptualised a gripping piece of cinematic work – which is both substantial and breezy without being silly or trivial.

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About the Author

GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN Gautaman Bhaskaran is a movie critic, commentator and an author, who penned the first ever biography of Adoor Gopalakrishnan, and has been covering ma...[Read More](#)



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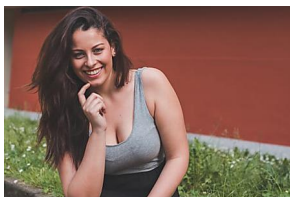
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