

The Secret in Their Eyes

Cert 18 Spain/Argentina 2009
129 mins

Crew

Director	Juan José Campanella
Screenplay	Eduardo Sacheri
	Juan José Campanella
Cinematography	Félix Monti
Editor	Juan José Campanella
Art Director	Marcelo Pont
Music	Frederico Jusid

Cast

Ricardo Darin	Benjamin Espósito
Soledad Villamil	Irene Menéndez Hastings
Pablo Rago	Ricardo Morales
Javier Godino	Isidoro Gómez
Guillermo Francella	Pablo Sandoval
Mario Alarcón	Judge Fortuna Lacalle
Mariano Argentó	Romano
José Luis Giola	Inspector Báez
Carla Quevedo	Liliana Coloto

Synopsis

SPOILER ALERT!

Buenos Aires, 1974. Benjamin Expósito and Pablo Sandoval, legal investigators at one of the city's criminal courts, are joined by a new boss, Cornell-trained lawyer Irene Menéndez Hastings. Benjamin and Irene are clearly attracted to one another. Benjamin is preoccupied by the brutal rape and murder of young, recently married schoolteacher Liliana Coloto. He refuses to accept his colleague Romano's conclusions (endorsed by senior judge Fortuna) that two builders carrying out work in her apartment building committed the crime, suspecting that her old friend Isidore Gomez may be responsible. With Sandoval's help, Benjamin tracks Gómez down at a football match and brings him to justice. Romano, however, secures Gómez's early release as a police informer. Benjamin begins to fear for his and Irene's safety. Following Sandoval's murder, Irene secures a job for Benjamin in Jujuy, in the extreme north of the country, where Gómez and Romano can't reach him. Twenty-five years later

Abridged from Sight & Sound, Sept. 2010

FILM FACTS

- *The Secret in Their Eyes* was the surprise winner of the 2010 Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film beating *The Prophet* and *The White Ribbon*.
- Campanella's earlier film *Son of the Bride*, also starring Ricardo Darin, was nominated in the 2001 Oscars.



Review

"A man can change anything," remarks Sandoval at a crucial juncture in *The Secret in Their Eyes*, "his face, his home, his family, his girlfriend, his religion, his God. But there's one thing he can't change – he can't change his passion."

It's this unwavering passion, along with memory, regret and justice, that is central to **Juan José Campanella's** brilliant film. Based on Eduardo Sacheri's novel *La Pregunta De Sus Ojos* (*The Question in Her Eyes*), and featuring an excellent cast led by Ricardo Darin and Soledad Villamil, this is another sparkling jewel in modern Argentine cinema's crown.

Campanella flits between past and present as retired Federal Justice Agent Benjamín Espósito (Darin) revisits the ghosts of his past. Bored and unsatisfied with how his life has turned out, he decides to write a novel about a murder case he investigated 25 years earlier, which has haunted him ever since. The flashbacks are set in 1974 – a time of rising violence between rival political factions on the left and right – in the lead-up to Argentina's bloodiest dictatorship. Although Campanella doesn't focus on the dark demons of Argentina's history, the period remains key to the story, focussing in on issues of impunity and retribution.

Espósito struggles with his novel, unsure where to start. "Start at the part you remember the most," suggests Irene Hastings (Villamil), a long-time colleague. And so, he begins with her. We learn that he has loved her from the moment he met her, but has never had the guts to act upon his feelings. We learn that she loved him too, but was waiting for him to make the move. Rich with symbolism (doors opening and closing are particularly prominent), it's a story of words unspoken, business unresolved, and looks with hidden meanings. Fittingly, it is a gaze that gives a secret away, and solves a murder case.

But the murder mystery isn't the only jigsaw puzzle Espósito is trying to complete. He's also scrabbling to fit together the missing pieces of his own life. It is a process that grips throughout, but by the time Campanella brings closure to Espósito's painful soul-searching after 127 minutes, it has also become frustrating to watch for an audience for whom the solution appears blindingly obvious.

The Secret in Their Eyes is one of those films you will find yourself returning to again and again. Not only for its engrossing love story, drama and occasional comic moments (deriving from dialogue between Espósito and drunkard colleague Sandoval, played by Guillermo Francella, Argentina's most popular comedian), but also for its beautiful and artistic cinematography courtesy of veteran Director of Photography, Félix Monti.

Clemmy Manzo, Little White Lies, August 2010