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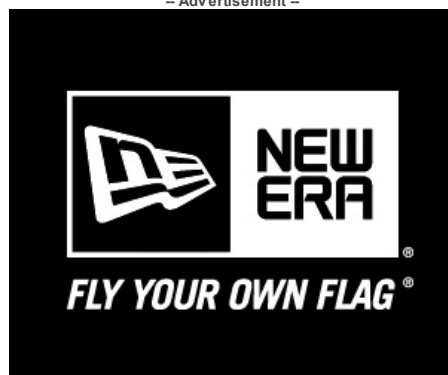
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Toronto

7 Boxes

7 cajas
(Paraguay)

By ROBERT KOEHLER

An Itau presentation of a Maneglia Schembori production in co-production with Synchro Image/Nephilim Producciones. (International sales: Shoreline Entertainment, Los Angeles.) Produced by Maria Victoria Ramirez. Executive producers, Rocio Galiano, Camilo Guanés, Tana Schembori. Directed by Juan Carlos Maneglia, Tana Schembori. Screenplay, Maneglia.

With: Celso Franco, Víctor Sosa, Lali Gonzalez, Nico Garcia, Paletita, Manuel Portillo, Mario Tonanez, Nelly Davalos, Roberto Cardozo, Johnny Kim, Luis Gutierrez, Liliana Alvarez, Katia Garcia. (Spanish, Guarani, Mandarin dialogue)

Turning the Paraguayan capital's biggest public market into an arena for a wild and cunningly plotted chase movie, filmmaking partners Juan Carlos Maneglia and Tana Schembori build a rollicking entertainment with "7 Boxes." Certain to be one of the first titles from Paraguay to make a serious dent in the international marketplace, the pic makes a pleasurable surplus from minimal resources and plenty of ironic-comic-violent storytelling energy. Word of mouth will translate into lusty sales worldwide, with a good chance Stateside to buck the recent trend of a lack of Spanish-language hits.

A 17-year-old with big dreams, scrappy wheelbarrow carter Victor (Celso Franco, in a breakout performance) loses himself in fantasies of being a heartthrob on TV when he should be hustling for more work in, Asuncion's bustling Market No. 4, a center for trade in all manner of goods, covering eight city blocks. His local universe revolves around his pushy gal-pal Liz (Lali Gonzalez, initially annoying and finally winning) and big sister Tamara (Nelly Davalos), who works with friend Leti (Katia Garcia) in the kitchen of a Chinese restaurant where Mandarin (amusingly unsubtitled) is more often heard than Spanish.

What Victor doesn't know is that rival carter Nelson (an increasingly intense Víctor Sosa) has arranged a deal with butcher Dario (Paletita) to transport seven boxes (crates, actually) of unknown goods to a designated dropoff point for a nice payday. Needing the money to pay for meds for his sick child, Nelson goes into a rage when he learns that the deal has instead gone to Victor, since Nelson was tardy.

With Nelson determined to stop Victor, the cops beefing up security, and thieves circulating in every aisle of the outdoor market's massive maze, Victor has enough obstacles for more than a few videogame versions of the movie. And at first, it appears that Maneglia's script is going to do little more than maximize the obstacles for its innocent, puckish hero to overcome.

However, as the movie develops, a more ironic and crafty strategy develops, growing more devious with each succeeding sequence. The image of Victor's rolling, rocking wheelbarrow (sometimes

viewed in Richard Careaga's highly kinetic lensing from the ground's p.o.v.) suggests a metaphor for the wheels-within-wheels of the various parties involved, and how their interests circulate back to Victor, trying against all odds to get the job done.

Only in the case of Dario interacting with immediate boss Luis (Nico Garcia) does the comedy spill over into the ridiculous, but otherwise, the cast is primed for a vital blend of dark comedy and serious bloodletting, especially during the mounting third-act body count. Physical coverage of the actual location, accented by a few dazzling and beautifully staged chase sequences, is one of this poor-man's action movie's biggest achievements. Music by Fran Villalba is overcooked.

Camera (Technicolor, DV), Richard Careaga; editors, Juan Sebastian Zelada, Maneglia; music, Fran Villalba; production designer, Carlo Spatuzza; set designer, Andres Velaziqui, Diego Saravia; set decorator, Velaziqui, Saravia; costume designer, Manuela Gutierrez; sound (Dolby Digital), German Acevedo, Sakyo Hiraiwa; sound designer, Acevedo; supervising sound editors, Ismael Calvo, David Mantecon; sound re-recording mixer, Nicolas Poulpique; visual effects supervisor, Helmut Barnert; special effects supervisor, Leo Sobrino; visual effects, Imasblue; associate producers, Carlos Gonzalez, Juan Carlos Jose Maneglia, Careaga; assistant director, Fabian Enrique Alvarez; casting, Schembori. Reviewed at Toronto Film Festival (Discovery), Sept. 7, 2012. (Also in San Sebastian Film Festival.) Running time: 105 MIN.

Contact the Variety newsroom at news@variety.com



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