

**CAPITAL FILM FESTIVAL 2024  
ONLY AT DENDY CANBERRA**

**EMILIA PEREZ**

**DIRECTOR STATEMENT (Condensed Interview)**



Six years ago, I read Boris Razon’s novel *Écoute*. Halfway through the book, a transgender drug dealer comes along who wishes to have surgery. As the character wasn’t that developed over the following chapters, I decided to start my story with him. During the first [covid] lockdown, I wrote a treatment quickly and I realized along the way that it was closer to an opera libretto than to a film script – it was broken down into acts, there were few sets, the characters were archetypal... A producer friend of mine, who’s also a music lover, told me about Clément Ducol, and I met with him. His companion Camille quickly joined us as a lyricist. The four of us, including Thomas Bidegain, holed up in a house outside Paris to start working. This was in spring 2020.

We scouted locations in Mexico on several occasions. But it didn’t add up - all the sets felt too real, too sturdy, too small, too complicated... My original intuition was connected to an opera – so why not go back to this premise? Why not go back to the essence of the project’s DNA and shoot on a soundstage? When you shoot on a soundstage, however clichéd this sounds like, it’s a blank page and you must create everything – the lighting, the scale, the colours, the liveness. It would also help cut down on the design cost and give the narrative a strong visual identity.

Zoe and Selena we’re easy to cast, but Karla Sofía’s role was the most difficult. I met quite a few transgender actresses in Mexico City, but I couldn’t find the right person. I think that what I had issues with every time was that their transition was what mattered most in their lives. Now I admit that this is extraordinary, but when it takes center stage, it gets intrusive. Karla Sofía was an actor before she became an actress but there’s a consistency about her journey that solved the problem. She’s sharp-witted, she has an acute mind, she’s inventive and she has a great sense of comedy.

I don’t have any academic knowledge about the transgender issue. Karla Sofía actually educated me on the topic. I’d ask her questions via email and she’d answer me. What has stayed with me is her determination and courage (both mental and physical). How brave she must have been to have surgery and how much pain she went through before the surgery – she spent a whole life trapped in a body she did not belong in.

Something else about her – Karla still lives with the mother of her daughter who must now be around 15. I don’t know if you can claim this is an example of freedom, but basically I tend to believe so.

I must admit that my films almost always include themes of fatherhood and the legacy of violence. Indeed – how do you get rid of fathers’ violence? Emilia Perez is basically a redemption story – does changing genders help you see men’s violence in a different light? To be honest, I don’t think so. Emilia’s character may well embrace that belief, but she’s still caught up with violence. It’s the journey that drives her away from this cycle of violence that is virtuous in itself. At the end of the day, whether you lose your life or survive, you’ve learned something along the way.

- Jacques Audiard