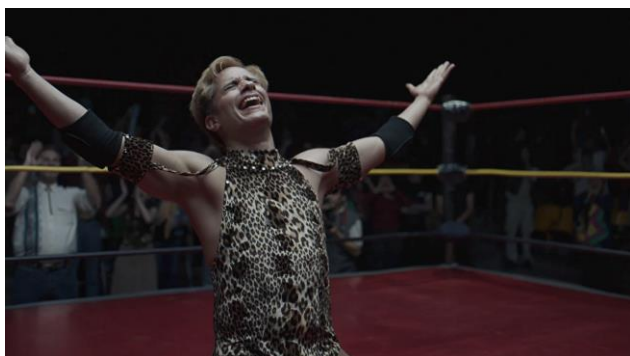


Programme Notes



Monday 2nd October 19:30

Cassandra (15)



This entertaining biopic from Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker Roger Ross Williams is based on the true story of the gay Mexican wrestler Saúl Armendáriz who rose to fame in the 1980s.

As a gay man, Saúl Armendáriz started wrestling as El Tupo, a comedy character always destined to lose in the stage-managed spectacle that is Lucha Libre. Then he met two people who could see his potential – a new trainer, Sabrina, and Lorenzo, a wrestling manager. Together they created a new

“exotico” character, the flamboyant Cassandra, known as the “Liberace of Lucha Libre”.

Exoticos were traditionally the clowns of Mexican wrestling: straight men in drag who served as a diversion to the macho main events, often played for the amusement of hostile audiences. But the openly gay Saúl was determined to take on the luchadores on equal ground, and his entertaining performances, his obvious passion for wrestling and his determination to be himself delighted the crowds. When he started to win matches, it changed his life – and the sport – forever.

Though it is a great “triumph of the underdog” sports story, *Cassandra* isn’t solely about the action in the ring. His experience and his struggles with homophobia and rejection are also shown through the rest of his personal relationships – his inspirational mother, his absent father, and the married lover he must keep secret.

The always excellent Gael García Bernal is absolutely superb as the force of nature that is Saúl/Cassandra: his performance throughout is both powerful and poignant. *Cassandra* is an uplifting story of empowerment that will be heart-warming for all viewers – even those who would not normally consider themselves wrestling fans.

Reviews

The story is so sensational that you almost wish “Cassandra” was instead a feature-length documentary. Yet “Cassandra” will surely bring many more to Armendáriz’s remarkable tale. Bernal, again channelling the feminine side he showed in Almodóvar’s “Bad Education”, makes up for what he lacks in physical strength with charm. It’s a terrific performance, even if it doesn’t measure up to Cassandra’s.

Jake Coyle, Independent

*Director Roger Ross Williams (who in 2016 made a non-fiction short about Armendáriz, titled *The Man Without a Mask*), brings an impressive elegance to the film, framing wrestling scenes and conversations between lovers alike with care and flourish. Refreshingly, too, unlike in so many queer stories, he steers away from a focus on misery and trauma.*

Leila Latif, Total Film

*The focus is on his star quality and the qualities that made him a pioneer: sunniness, grit, passion for his sport, the unconditional love and support of his mother, and his unbreakable confidence to be himself. It’s undeniably heartwarming. It gives Gael García Bernal his best role in years: Saúl is funny, infectiously upbeat, sometimes heartbreakingly vulnerable. He radiates the kind of magnetism that made him a world cinema it-boy in the early 00s (notably in another cross-dressing role: Pedro Almodóvar’s *Bad Education*).*

Cath Clarke, The Guardian

Cast

Saúl Armendáriz/ Cassandro	Gael García Bernal
Sabrina	Roberta Colindrez
Yocasta	Perla De La Rosa
Lorenzo	Joaquín Cosío
Gerardo	Raúl Castillo
Murder Clown	Gigántico
Felipe	Bad Bunny
El Hijo del Santo	Himself

Credits

Director/writer	Roger Ross Williams
Writers	David Teague Roger Ross Williams
Cinematography	Matias Penachino
Editing	Yibran Asuad, Affonso Gonçalves, Sabine Hoffman
Music	Marcelo Zarvos
Country of origin	USA/Mexico
Language	English/Spanish
Running time	107 mins

Film Facts

The film had its world premiere at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival in January 2023.

The first film that Roger Ross Williams directed and produced was *Music by Prudence* (2010), which won the Academy Award for best short documentary.

Williams previously told Cassandro's story in his 2016 documentary short *The Man Without a Mask*.

Quotes from the director:

"I want to tell inspirational stories about people who've overcome great odds."

"[Gael Garcia Bernal] spent months working with real luchadors learning to wrestle. He did most of his stunts himself. He really threw himself into this role and I knew that that's the kind of actor he is. There was no other actor who could play this role, so I didn't stop until I got him to say yes."

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