

# Cria!: a child's world gracefully unfolded

By HANK BAKER  
DTH Contributor

Ten-year-old Ana (Ana Torrent) lives in two worlds: with both parents dead, her gloomy reality consists of life with her two sisters and guardian aunt. In her vivid imaginary world, Ana relives moments with her mother (Geraldine Chaplin), that are both tender and terrifying. This schism between the past and the present and the problems resolving it are the major themes in Carlos Saura's marvelous new film *Cria!*

Exploring the world of a child is a tricky feat. Most directors adopt a cloying or patronizing attitude toward the child from the beginning, making it impossible (if not undesirable) to empathize with the child. But Ana is not made into a cute little tyke. She is obsessed with her mother's painful illness and death.

*Cria!* is not a morbid film, but a graceful, moving work that unfolds Ana's world before our eyes. As the film begins, the camera lingers over the well-adorned family dining room at night, then moves forward as Ana comes creeping down the steps. Sounds of lovemaking behind a closed downstairs door are interrupted by panicked choking — Ana's father is dying and his mistress is becoming more frightened. The mistress comes out of the room hurriedly while Ana watches her leave; the dead father lies on the bed. This is Ana's world — fear, death, secrets, muffled pain. Soon we see that as a

result, Ana is obsessed with death.

In vivid memories, Ana sees her mother react despairingly because her callous husband disregards her and is constantly unfaithful to her. Unable to accept her situation, the woman retreats into illness and dies. In one gripping sequence, Ana sees her mother writhing in agony from the illness, begging for death, yet afraid of it. The terrified look in the mother's eyes is reflected in the child's. Afterwards the child creates her own death wish and lives in a fantasy world including a box of poison (or is it?) which Ana uses on those she believes are responsible for her unhappiness.

Contrasting with this are the scenes concerning Ana and her sisters, and their relationship with their unmarried (but still-beautiful) aunt. Some of these scenes are quite funny (as is more of the film), particularly one in which Ana and her older sisters play-act as their parents. But even in this make-believe, there is a sad undercurrent — the sisters re-enacting the fights their parents had.

Director Carlos Saura has managed to convey both sides of a child's world with glowing deftness. Ana is fascinating, sympathetic and, at times, even cruel, but she is always believable. Saura has gotten a wonderful performance from Ana Torrent, a totally captivating child actress. With her large brown eyes (that match Chaplin's), she can convey the open vulnerability of a child, and yet retain an air of closed secrecy about her. Her terror at her mother's illness, her near-hysterical crying out for the woman at night, and her

immediate cruelty to her aunt thereafter show the range of this young girl.

Geraldine Chaplin is equally moving, though her role becomes a bit confusing when she is also brought on occasionally as a grown-up Ana. Yet she and Torrent complement each other beautifully, both visually and vocally. The tender scenes are both moving and painful, since the reality of the mother's death is present. It is to Saura's credit that he keeps *Cria!* from being sentimental by showing us that Ana is no innocent child, and that her mother's illness had its roots in a self-imposed death wish.

The theme of death provides a good counterpoint to the family portrait presented here — the two sisters, the aunt trying to cope with and learn to love three children not her own, the aging grandmother who, like Ana, finds her only happiness in the past. Saura is intensely interested in these people and it is their humanity that makes them and the film linger in the memory. *Cria!* is the most convincing account of the obsessions, joys, sorrows and independence of a child's world I've seen since Jack Clayton's *Our Mother's House*, which was also concerned (though on a more chilling level) with children carrying on after their mother's death and their refusal to believe in the permanence of the woman's death. Saura and Clayton have a talent for presenting children without condescension and with a true sense of the beauty and terror of Childhood. *Cria!* has a longing mood about it that you can't shake off — and you don't want to.

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## Symphony starts 'pops' on Sunday

The North Carolina Symphony will open its Chapel Hill season with a "pops" concert at 5 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 18, in the Forest Theatre. Admission is free for the performance, which is being sponsored by the Carolina Union.

"Pops" concerts, said to take their name from the popping of champagne corks and not from the performance of popular music, have, for the North Carolina Symphony, grown out of the Raleigh fund-raising "pops" concerts which have brought financial support to the symphony. These Raleigh performances have proved so successful that "pops" concerts have been added to the season as regular concerts in several other cities.

John Gosling, artistic director and conductor, will lead the orchestra. Works to be performed include Enesco's "Roumanian Rhapsody No. 1," selections from "Camelot" by Frederick Loewe, and medleys by William Hascombe consisting of standard hits, country and western favorites and television themes.

The symphony, following its critically acclaimed New York debut at Carnegie Hall in March, begins its 46th season of concerts this year. One of the only two major orchestras in the Southeast, the N.C. Symphony performs concerts for adults and educational matinees for school children around the state.



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