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Stephen Jones, Executive Producer, *Don't Be Afraid Of The Dark*.



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Film Reviews

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New Int'l. Release

Under the Snow

Nevando voy
(Spain)

By JONATHAN HOLLAND

A Cronopia release of a Cronopia production. (International sales: Cronopia, Pamplona, Spain.) Produced, directed, written by Candela Figueira and Maitena Muruzabal.

With: Laura de Pedro, Gabriel Latorre, Asun Aguinaco, Xabi Yarnoz, Aurora Moneo.

Small things matter in "Under the Snow," an involving micro-budgeter in which four put-upon protags find their own way of briefly beating the system. Pic reveals its lack of funding at every turn, but the carefully crafted script and the film's attention to emotional truths shine through the flawed surface, suggesting that this first helming tandem of Candela Figueira and Maitena Muruzabal, also producing, will deliver good work in the future. Several small fests have already warmed to "Snow"; others are likely to follow.

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Pic is set over a few winter months on the outskirts of the Spanish city of Pamplona. Dull, middle-aged Javier (Gabriel Latorre) and ill-at-ease, twentysomething Jairo (Xabi Yarnoz) spend their days putting car snow chains in boxes and not speaking to one another. Motherly Karmentxu (Asun Aguinaco) and happy-go-lucky Angela (Laura de Pedro, resembling a younger Penelope Cruz) are brought in from an employment agency to help. Slowly but surely, the workplace atmosphere starts to change as Angela's joie de vivre brings the men out of themselves.

All four have problems at home. Javier wants to move to his house in the country, but his wife, Elena (Aurora Moneo), won't allow it. Jairo's life is made miserable by his hysterical sister. Karmentxu's husband is being threatened with unemployment. And Angela, living with her mother and ailing grandparents, looks forward to moving to Germany with her bf.

In a neat twist, the newly playful atmosphere at work comes to rep an escape from life at home. The fact that the team will break up when the weather changes for the better and people don't need snow chains adds a measure of suspense.

Jairo starts to fancy Angela, and she encourages Javier to stand up to his wife. High point comes when Angela uses a bit of red carpet, a few photocopies and a portable computer to create a quasi-cinema in which they watch photos of themselves to the accompaniment of pic's power-pop song.

Plot's conclusion is unexpected but aptly magical-realist.

Performances aren't always up to scratch, with Aguinaco sometimes wobbly; but thesp's energy compensates, and the script is strong enough to ensure that emotional integrity is largely retained.

Camerawork is lively when things are going well for the team, less so when they are not. Still, it successfully evokes the dullness of the industrial park landscape against which the characters are struggling. Attractively melodic score by Gonzalo Diaz Yerro underscores the emotion.

Camera (color), Robert Christopher Webb; editor, Eduardo Chibas; music, Gonzalo Diaz Yerro; sound (Dolby Digital), Fernando Urrutia, Oliver Barriga, Victor Moreno. Reviewed at Cines Golem, Madrid, July 19, 2008. Running time: 99 MIN.

Contact the Variety newsroom at news@variety.com

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CONGRATULATIONS
on the premiere of

DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE DARK.

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