



## interview to **David Trueba**

Journalist, writer, actor, scriptwriter,  
film and television director



David Trueba was born in Madrid in 1969 and studied journalism at Universidad Complutense in Madrid.

He is a press contributor. His weekly articles for *El Periódico de Catalunya* are collected in the anthology entitled *Tragarse la lengua y Artículos de ocasión*, published by *Ediciones B*. He is currently a TV columnist in *El País*.

He also works in television; he was the co-director of *El Peor Programa de la Semana* (1993-94) and he filmed *Qué fue de Jorge Sanz* (2010), a six-episode series for *Canal Plus*.

Regarding cinema, he has worked on the scripts of films such as *Amo tu cama rica* (1991), *Los peores años de nuestra vida* (1994), *Two Much* (1994), *Perdita Durango* (1997), *La niña de tus ojos* (1998), and on the documentary *Balseros* (2003), which was nominated for the Oscar for the best documentary of 2004. Films on which he worked as director and scriptwriter include *La buena vida* (1996), *Obra Maestra* (2000) and *Soldados de Salamina* (2003), *Bienvenido a casa* (2006) and *La silla de Fernando* (2006). He has also launched his career as an actor by appearing in at least nine Spanish films, such as *Airbag* (1997), directed by Juanma Bajo Ulloa.

As an author, he has written three novels, all published by the Anagrama publishing house: *Abierto toda la noche* (1995), *Cuatro amigos* (1999) y *Saber Perder* (2008), which was awarded the National Critics' Prize in 2008 and was shortlisted for the Médicis Prize in its French version. His novels have been translated into ten languages.



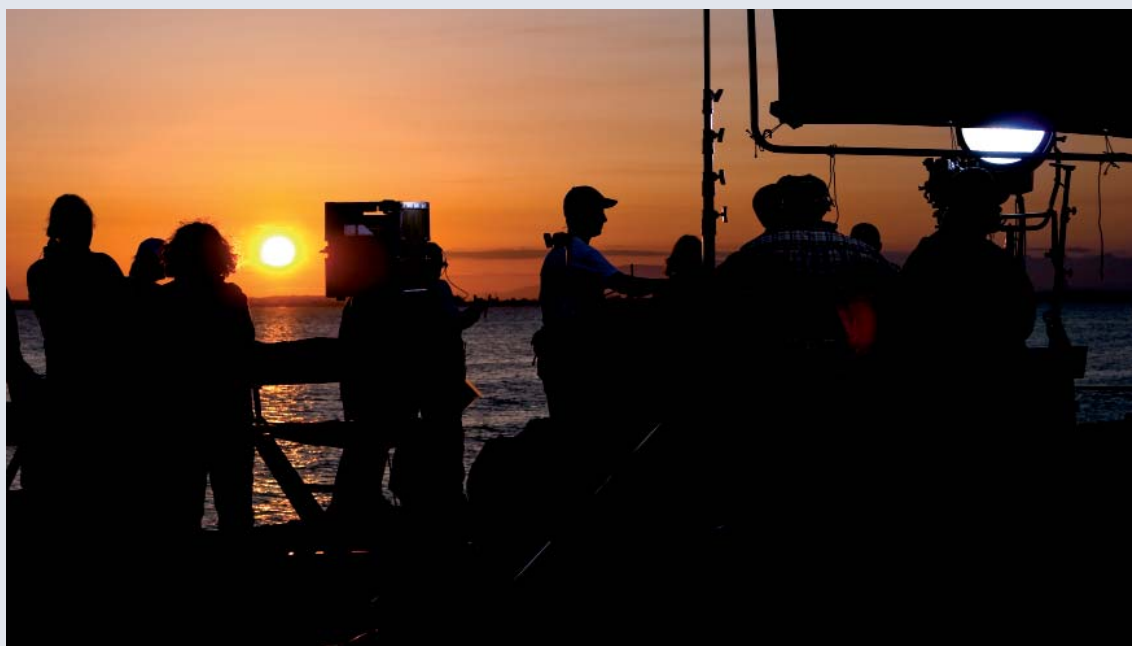
## *“When facing risk, I trust my instincts”*

In your first novel, *“Abierto toda la noche”* (1995), a multiple-viewpoint novel which seems to include some autobiographical elements, one of the characters -the father- is an insurance sales agent. Does that profession evoke any family memories for you? How would you describe them?

Of course, my father was a door-to-door salesman for Ocaso Insurance for many years, almost ever since I was born (I was his eighth child). He tramped all around a district of Madrid including Aravaca and Pozuelo, and since he did not make enough money from insurance to feed us all, he became a sort of doorstep salesman for almost anything, from typewri-

ters to watches and bracelets. My father made a good living as a door-to-door salesman, because he was friendly, pleasant and full of good intentions. His customers were very humble people - people who could only afford a watch by paying in installments for two years. I remember that my father always told me that you can trust humble people, they never leave a bill unpaid; on the other hand, he said that rich people do not understand the value of things or the sacrifice they require, so he tried not to have them among his clientele. What is more, my father does not at all resemble the father in that novel; for me, he was more like the grandfather I never had, he was 53 years old when I

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**The Goya Awards of the Spanish Cinema Academy produce three times as many losers as winners**

was born, and we had a fantastic relationship between an older man and a child in the Spain of the 70s.

**During the period you spent at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles, how did the American way of life influence your way of thinking and your work?**

Perhaps it prompted me to appreciate and enjoy the European model more, especially the Mediterranean lifestyle. Los Angeles is a comfortable, splendid city where I was happy but completely unknown for me. However, it lacks the street life of any major European city; people there are lonely, self-interested and sad behind their facade of success and importance. I do not like the American way of life, it is based too much on money and positions of power, and there is too much social differentiation. In

Spain, the owner of a bank and one of its employees can meet at the same places - concerts, cafes, football matches, or on a balcony somewhere. But not in America.

**What did your role as Vice-President of the Cinema Academy from 2004 to 2007 involve for you personally? How would you assess the part you played?**

It was an outstanding experience. I arrived amid a power vacuum and a very serious institutional crisis following the famous "No to the War" awards ceremony (referring to the Iraq war). Nobody wanted to stand as a candidate; I was a spokesman for the scriptwriters and I became Vice-President after an election in which there were no voluntary candidates. But I had to accept the post, it was a matter of rescuing an institution - yet I came up against the resis-

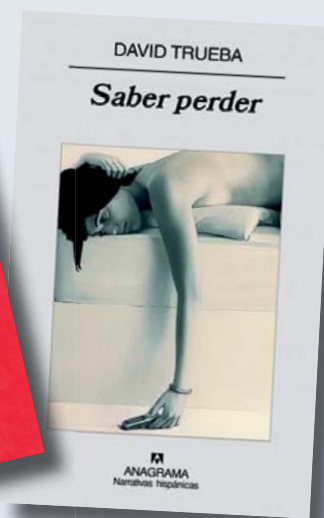
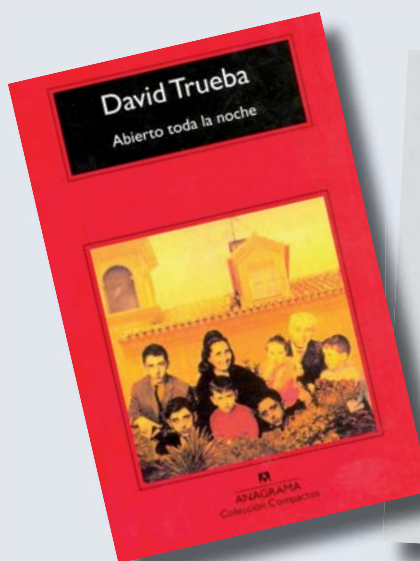
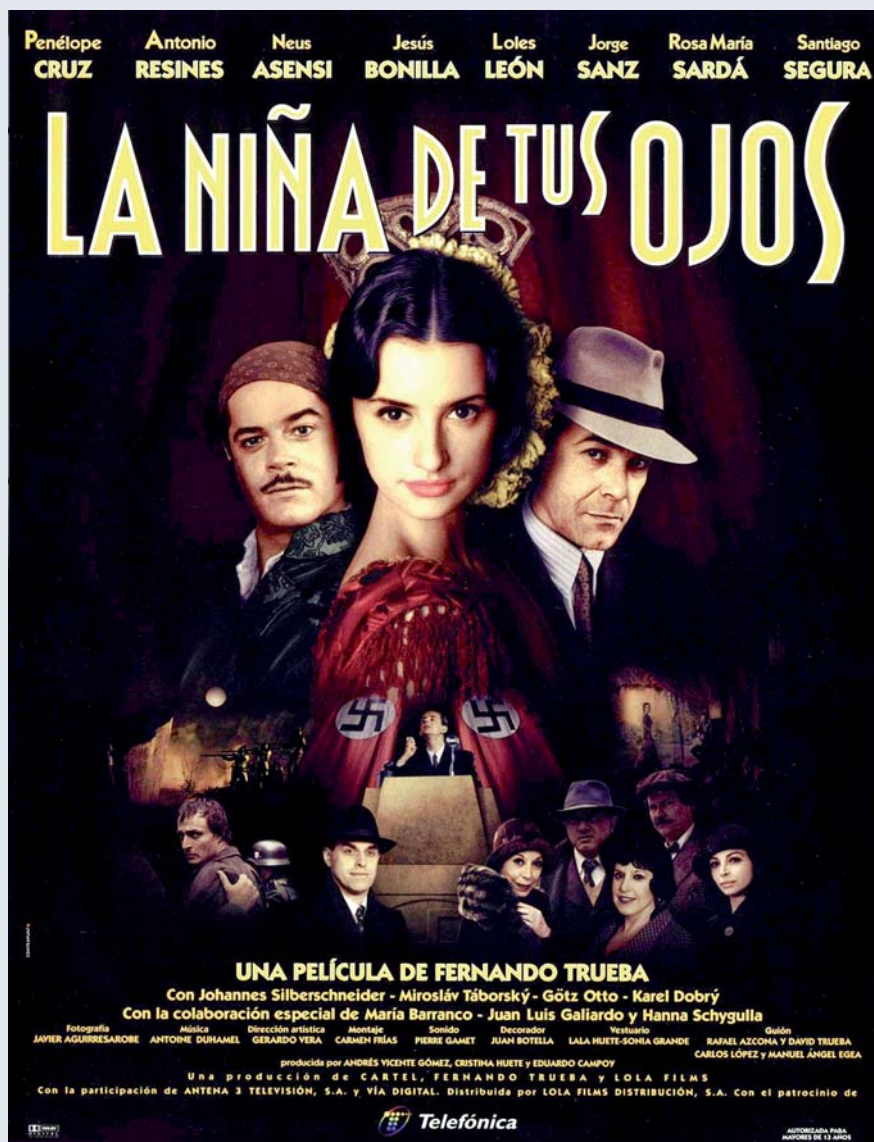
tance from people who did not want things to move or change; I think we managed to move forwards and at the end of our period of office, there were even two candidates standing for election. I came to appreciate the merits of the people who had been in charge of the Academy and the sacrifice that they had made for the group although in many cases, people were only interested in standing out mistakes and controversies. Fortunately, the new headquarters building was finished, so we were able to move into it and start offering more as an Academy than merely the Goya Awards, which produce three times as many losers as winners.

**How did you manage to gain entry to intellectual circles, given that you were one of the youngest? Who are your companions, the people with whom you keep on learning, outside the universities?**

I have never been a member of any "circle". What happened was that when I was young, and I had just started at university, Rafael Azcona invited me to join a lunch group that he hosted on Tuesdays; however, he warned me that this was not an intellectual "circle" but rather a meeting of friends who wanted to have some laughs and perhaps write a script. The people round the table kept changing, but listening to Azcona and laughing along with him was such a pleasure that I continued to show up. I think that relaxed chatting, conversation between the generations, is a major loss to us nowadays -we must encourage it, abandon specific age and interest groups, mix with one another more, learn to talk and persuade people, and to engage in amicable discussions. The café created a way of talking that has been lost, and when the talking stops, people usually resort to verbal violence or rebuffs. Television discussion sessions are just that- often they just consist of badly-argued irrationality.

**You write excellent articles on football players or trainers. Can we say that there is a school of journalists and writers who discuss football and sports in general without indulging in "gobbledygook"?**

Since the start of the last century, sports journalism has been in a class of its own. In the USA, some of the greatest writers cut their teeth by writing about baseball, boxing or fishing. In Spain, perhaps, sport has always been associated with anti-intellectualism, and that has been a mistake. In this context, I think it





it is almost an interactive experience. I know people who watch the DVD again when their spirits are low and they feel like having a chat with someone. It is something that I feel proud of doing, and I am glad that I did not leave it on the shelf like some of the other projects that you set up but never decide to carry out. The Azcona film was a short program on his work as a scriptwriter; I would like to recover the full hour and a half of the conversation because as far as Rafael was concerned, talking about his work was basically the least important thing in the world; however, that was the assignment from Canal Plus and Rafael said that if I asked the questions, he would be prepared to accept. And the Jorge Sanz project is a fiction series, entertaining and daring, with a kind of humor

that people are not used to in Spain; I hope it is well received, because it aims to tackle our inability to laugh at ourselves.

**Creating a story for a film, writing a novel or directing a feature film entail risks. They are inevitable, of course, but how do you deal with them? What is your attitude to risk in general?**

Trust your instincts, do not take things for granted and try not to pay too much attention to fashion or to your previous work. In my line of business, I think that guidelines can start to condition you. Authenticity, and the risk of always starting from scratch, are things that should always be pursued. Do not look back. What you have already done is not important in the next film or novel. And steer well clear of

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success and acclaim, never forget that this is a manual profession - a craft.

**The complex nature of a film shoot also involves a wide range of risks: people, equipment, transportation, locations and so on. How do you take these risks into account when you are planning the shoot?**

It has a lot to do with the concept of "architecture". Predicting requirements and attempting to deal with mishaps without changing the original commitment. This is complicated, because it calls for a very individual sort of strength, and at the same time a considerable ability for teamwork - that is often where the friction and the problems arise. At the end of the day, choosing the right people to have around you is more important than your own character. Every film needs a different team.

**The people in the team for a film shoot who are responsible for managing the specific risks involved in the activities on a day-to-day basis, and for deciding whether to buy insurance cover - do they keep you informed?**

Well, as a director you have a medical examina-

tion as do the actors, and everyone who would cause the shoot to be stopped if they dropped out. I remember that when I was working with Luis Cuenca, he was already quite old and his health was in such a precarious state that the insurance companies would not sign the clause for him; but in a case like that, you have to take the final decision and for me, the pleasure of filming him -and he was in my films until the day he died- far outweighed any risk that I had to take on. Audiences like you to film special, unusual people.

**Scriptwriter, novelist, author of articles, actor and film director - When will you turn your hand to production? Have you ever thought of putting one of your novels on the screen?**

No, my novels are fine as they are. I wrote them to be novels, not films. But in the cinema, it is essential to become a producer, it is the only way to generate your own projects, rather than becoming somebody else's paid hand working on other people's projects. Eventually, you start to understand what finance is all about. The age of the great Hollywood studios is over. From the 1960s onwards, the major writers have had to be director-producers.

**If we want to enjoy your next work, will we have to go to the cinema or to a bookshop?**

I do not know yet. Sometimes you start at one point, but then you think of another project and it becomes uppermost in your mind. What I do know is that I shall be doing things, I like doing things; in my work, you do not have to dream - you have to do things, to tackle the job - and do not let anyone tell you otherwise. This is a trade like any other, it involves effort and tenacity, and putting in the hours. Last summer, for instance, I shot a film called "*Madrid, 1987*". The television channels offered no financing and they were not enthusiastic but the actors and my technicians were; so, under very difficult conditions but with absolute dedication, we shot the film as cheap-ly as we could, and with superb commitment. What will happen to this film now, when I finish editing it? I do not know, I do not have any distribution or support, but now it is finished - mission accomplished. This is the great joy of doing something, when you are confronted with defeat due to despair or resentment because nothing moves. I hope to maintain this strength of spirit as long as I keep my physical strength.



David Trueba, during the shooting of his film "*Madrid, 1987*", at Café Comercial in Madrid