

# A Successful Man

Cuba | 1986 | 103 minutes

## Credits

Director	Humbero Solas
Screenplay	Juan Iglesias, Humberto Solás
Photography	Livio Delgado
Music	Luigi Nono

## Cast

Javier Argüelles	César Évora
Raquel	Raquel Revuelta
Rita	Daisy Granados
Darío Argüelles	Jorge Trinchet

Like his previous 1983 film, *Amada*, Humberto Solás's *A Successful Man* (*Un Hombre de Éxito*) ambitiously attempts to tie the changing political climate in Cuba with the fortunes of one wealthy family. The scope in the latter film is however even greater, beginning in 1932 during the years of the Machado dictatorship, taking in the years of the country's support of Franco in Spain and the Nazi regime, up through to the revolution in 1959 with the arrival of Fidel Castro. Although the rather soap-opera family drama approach does again tend somewhat overshadow the larger scale historical events, it is better balanced here than in *Amada*, the sweeping melodrama actually working well with the sweeping changes of a turbulent political period.

The two figures who represent the opposing ends of the political spectrum here are Darío and Javier, two brothers from the wealthy Argüelles family. There is a wealthy bourgeois society prevailing under the old class regime under the dictator Gerardo Machado, and, supported and funded by American agencies looking to retain influence in the country, it intends to keep hold of the position of power it enjoys. The old society ensures its security and maintains the status quo not only through its control over the

press and through its own appointments of friends and family into important positions, but even in through the arrangement of marriage alliances between influential families. The admittance of outsiders is somewhat "discouraged".

The Argüelles brothers have an important part to play in the scheme of things, but those who pull the strings are uncertain of how best to ensure their loyalty and obedience, since both show troubling republican tendencies and are involved with revolutionary elements. It is Javier (César Évora), who appears to be the wildest element, defying attempts to exert influence over his relationships and planting bombs in public places. His behaviour is reckless however –he's a bon viveur who despite his political outlook still takes advantage of his privileged position, and Dario (Jorge Trinchet) believes that his brother's actions threaten to undermine the ideals of the cause. The powers that be realise that it's this side of Javier that makes him the one most likely to be manipulated towards their cause, and they have ways and means of doing so through the application of the right kind of pressure.

Inevitably, this makes for a tangled web of family crises, racy affairs, duplicitous behaviour and complex political manoeuvring, all dramatically played out against a glamorous backdrop of Havana high-society from the roaring thirties through to the revolutionary fifties. Solás depicts this world marvellously, with its elaborate homes, its nightclubs, jazz and exotic dancers, although again, as with *Amada*, it must be said that he appears to be more interested in the complications of powerful, wealthy, influential families than in the ordinary people on the street, which is an unusual perspective to chart the history of the people's revolution in Cuba. Some documentary footage is integrated into the film at one point, giving the proceedings an injection of historical realism, but it feels slightly contrived and the actual situation somewhat ludicrous, if technically well achieved.

The film consequently never seems to convincingly rise to

the ambitious level it sets for itself, and its tragic soap-operatic saga of family downfall, while certainly being sufficiently dramatic and eventful, has something of the air of a telenovela about it. It doesn't help that the script is filled with clichéd power struggle situations and double-dealing, with dialogue to match in this dog-eat-dog world, where only the fittest will survive.



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