

Interview: Sebastián Silva Reveals New Side of Michael Cera in 'Crystal Fairy'

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CHICAGO – 12 years ago, Sebastián Silva went on a road trip with his friends. Their goal was to experience the hallucinogenic ecstasy of the San Pedro cactus. Along the way, he encountered a hippie named Crystal Fairy who ended up giving him a more transformative experience than any drug ever could. An evening of soul-bearing confessions caused Silva to have great compassion for the damaged women beneath the eccentric surface.

Cut to 2011. With production delayed on his psychological thriller, "Magic Magic," Silva decided to spend 12 days making a movie about his memorable yet fleeting friendship with Crystal Fairy. With Michael Cera already holed up in his house for three months to learn Spanish for "Magic Magic," Silva decided to cast the actor as the star of his improvisational dramedy opposite Gaby Hoffmann in the titular role. Cera plays Jamie, an insensitive American tourist desperate for drugs and with no patience for any Fairy-related diversions. It's a role unlike any the actor has played before, and he's terrific in it, as is the wildly spontaneous Hoffmann. Silva spoke with Hollywood Chicago about the real Crystal Fairy, why he wouldn't mind getting sued, and his frustrations over the straight-to-DVD release for "Magic Magic."

HollywoodChicago.com: I saw "The Maid" last night and loved it, even though I was fully expecting the film to go in a much darker direction than it did. I had a similar experience with "Crystal Fairy." What inspires you to subvert your audience's narrative expectations?

Sebastián Silva: I really try to just stay away from things that are predictable. It's sort of a life rule for me. Things that are predictable are dead from the beginning. That's why superhero movies don't work for me. You already know that they're going to win, so in a way, the entire story is nonsense. I really learned a lot about storytelling from Pedro Peirano, who co-wrote "The Maid" and "La vida me mata" with me. Like "The Maid," "Crystal Fairy" is based on true events from my life, and life doesn't follow a narrative structure. It always creates the most unexpected stories.



Gaby Hoffmann and Michael Cera star in Sebastián Silva's *Crystal Fairy*.

Photo credit: *Sofía Subercaseaux/Sundance Selects*

HollywoodChicago.com: What made you realize Michael Cera had more sides to his screen persona?

Silva: Just by talking with him, I could tell that he was a very funny, smart, ironic kid who knows how to mine the comedy in tragedy. He can be really evil if he wants to be. He's not at all like how they've portrayed him to be in most American productions—that quirky, nerdy, soft-spoken kid. It's an illusion of who Michael Cera really is. Luckily, when I first met him, I had only seen "Juno." I wasn't consciously trying to break any kind of mold with him. I just told him that I wanted his character in "Magic Magic" to be a really creepy closeted homosexual who tortures women. It just felt so organic for me to propose that role to him. He really enjoyed playing it, but we didn't do it to break him out of getting typecast.

HollywoodChicago.com: You've mentioned that Michael's character in "Crystal Fairy" is somewhat of an alter ego for you.

Silva: I suppose in both "Crystal Fairy" and "Magic Magic," there are elements of me in both of Michael's characters, but I'm not necessarily either Jamie or Brink. [laughs] They're characters that Michael and I constructed together. If there is any of me in Jamie, it would be how obsessed or driven he was in getting the cactus to the point where he would manipulate anyone. He would pretend to be nice or grateful and then reveal his selfishness. I may have been like that in my early '20s, but he really is a fictional character. Brink is a totally constructed character, though the fact that I was able to write him may indicate that there is a little bit of him in me.

HollywoodChicago.com: What sort of impact did your encounter with the real-life Crystal Fairy have on you?

Silva: It was huge. The fact that it led me to feel compassion for someone else's tragedy was the reason why I decided to make this movie. I was most interested in sharing Jamie's journey. It was sitting on my desktop, and I knew that I wanted to do something with it, but I wasn't sure if it was going to be a movie. Then while we were waiting to make "Magic Magic," it made sense for Michael to play that character, and for Jamie to be an American. I'd say about 35 percent of the movie is based on real events, and the rest is fiction. Even the confrontation that they have in the last stages of their relationship is totally fictional.

HollywoodChicago.com: I interviewed a Chicago director, Nathan Adloff, who worked with Gaby on his film, "Nate & Margaret," and he witnessed firsthand her fearlessness and intensity as a performer. How much did she bring to the role of Crystal Fairy?

Silva: She brought a lot to it. Crystal's personality was not as strong as Gaby's. Her personality is really strong. Whenever she walks into a room, she soaks up all the energy, and her charisma is really huge. When you see Gaby walking in the desert while wearing nothing except Reebok Hi Tops, that's an image only she could've come up with. The way that Crystal groomed her hair was also Gaby's idea. I don't remember if Crystal Fairy had hairy armpits, and it wasn't something that I asked Gaby to do for her character. She just did it. Gaby didn't want to wear deodorant either, and we put that in the screenplay. Her words, particularly during her emotional monologues, were much more articulate than the real Crystal's. When she's talking about the 2012 prophecies, that's a full-on, passionate speech that the real Crystal Fairy never gave us. I can't imagine anyone else being so self-confident and articulating such a long speech so perfectly in character. She's really an amazing actress.



Gaby Hoffmann stars in Sebastián Silva's *Crystal Fairy*.

Photo credit: Sofía Subercaseaux/Sundance Selects

HollywoodChicago.com: Was the tragedy that *Crystal Fairy* reveals from her past in the movie also based on real life?

Silva: It wasn't exactly what the real *Crystal Fairy* revealed, but she did share a tragedy like that. To be completely honest, I'm sort of

nervous about it. It's kind of f—ked up that I would expose a secret that was told in such an intimate environment, but at the same time, I'm willing to cope with the repercussions of doing it. I don't want to sound preachy, but I think that there are so many taboo things in society that shouldn't be hidden, such as sexual harassment. Whoever goes through that experience should immediately speak out about it. You should never be ashamed about that. It isn't something that you did, it's something that happened to you. I'm willing to cope with lawyers if she tries to sue me for revealing this because I feel like I'm inspiring people to tell the truth and speak out if something like that happens to them. Same with HIV and same with being homosexual. There are so many taboos related to sexual issues, and that just isn't right.

HollywoodChicago.com: I'm absolutely crushed that "Magic Magic" won't receive a theatrical release in the U.S.

Silva: Maybe if someone wrote an article like, "Why Did Sony Not Release 'Magic Magic' in Theaters?" we could still fight for it. They've said that they might do a one-week engagement in LA to make it eligible for awards. It's such a shame because it's beautifully shot by Christopher Doyle, Juno Temple's performance is beautiful, Michael's character is really unique, and there just aren't any movies like this that are being made anymore. I made an effort to bring that Polanski [style] from the '70s back into theaters. I wish I could've seen "Rosemary's Baby" when it was released, but I wasn't even born yet. That would've been such a treat for me. I feel that "Magic Magic" has that atmosphere, but Sony decided not to release it. It's weird.

HollywoodChicago.com: Did Sony think audiences wouldn't accept Michael Cera in such a different role? His uncharacteristically profane cameo in "This Is the End" seemed to go over well with moviegoers stateside.

Silva: Yes, exactly. They were skittish about marketing it, but not only because of Michael Cera. They just felt that it was a hard movie to market because the genre wasn't defined. It wasn't a comedy or a drama, and I tried to explain that it was both. That's how I make movies. They hadn't even seen "The Maid," so I was like, "Why did you get involved in the first place?" I delivered exactly what I had written. The film did get released theatrically in Paris, and people liked it there. Maybe if "Crystal Fairy" does really well or maybe if the press starts questioning Sony for making such a decision, things might be different. It's such an awful decision, a real bummer.

HollywoodChicago.com: Just rest assured that there are plenty of people in America who want to see "Magic Magic" on the biggest screen possible.

Silva: Thank you, that's really validating. It feels great to hear that.

'Crystal Fairy' stars Michael Cera, Gaby Hoffmann, Juan Andrés Silva, José Miguel Silva and Agustín Silva. It was written and directed by Sebastián Silva. It opens Friday, July 19th at the Music Box Theatre. It is not rated.



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