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ANITA TAKES A CHANCE

(ANITA NO PERD EL TREN)
(SPAIN)

A Lauren Films release of an Els Films de la Rambla production, in association with Canal Plus, TVE, TVC. (International sales: Kevin Williams Associates, Madrid.)

Produced, directed by Ventura Pons. Screenplay, Pons, Lluís-Anton Baulenas, based on the novel "Bones obres" by Baulenas. Camera (color), Mario Montero; editor, Pere Abadal; music, Carles Cases; production designer, Bello Torres; sound (Dolby Digital), Boris Zapata. Reviewed at Cine Imperial, Madrid, Jan. 23, 2001. (In Berlin Film Festival — Panorama.) Running time: 89 MIN.

Anita Rosa Maria Sarda
Antonio Jose Coronado
Natalia Maria Barranco
Lleyva Jordi Dauder
Foreman Albert Forner
(Catalan dialogue)

By JONATHAN HOLLAND

Ventura Pons consolidates his reputation as Catalonia's flagship helmer with the small, well-made "Anita Takes a Chance," an agreeable if uncommonly mainstream item, given his recent flirtations with thematic and formal risk. Though unoriginal in showing how a love of the movies can be both a help and a hindrance in real life, this wry, elegantly crafted comedy about the powers of imagination and optimism in overcoming solitude also has a darker and more challenging side, which only intermittently emerges as winsome thesp Rosa Maria Sarda displays her striking talent for comedy. Apart from inevitable fest runs, the accessible "Anita" may take a chance in new territories, beyond Pons-friendly countries like France.

Fifty-year-old widow Anita (the vivacious Sarda) has worked for 34 years in the ticket booth of a neighborhood cinema: She reckons she's seen 2,424 movies. When her boss, Lleyva (Jordi Dauder), gives her extra pay and two weeks off, she is rightly suspicious. When she comes back she finds the cinema demolished to make way for a multiplex. She's out of a job.

The depressed Anita — who devours cockles to combat misery — nostalgically starts visiting the construction site.

Strong, silent type Antonio (Jose Coronado) falls for Anita. "The man with the digger," she proclaims, "has just entered my life." He tells her he's married, but this does not stop Anita from taking her chance and meeting him for some latenight romance in the workman's hut. They have nothing in common, which makes conversation

redundant: Their silent but highly charged meetings are an effective combination of comedy and intensity.

Pic's strongest moments are when it moves into more daring terrain, such as bleached-out flashbacks of Anita as a star-struck child, a beautifully rendered animated dream sequence and, most strikingly, an all-too-brief digital re-creation of a scene from "Queen Christina," featuring Sarda as Garbo. Such stylistic daring, typical of Pons' recent output, is otherwise lacking, and highlights a flatness of tone in the main narrative.

The dependable Sarda, featured in Oscar-winning "All About My Mother" as Penelope Cruz's mother, has worked repeatedly with Pons, and it shows in her alertness to every nuance of the script. But although she is totally at ease with the film's comedy, Sarda slightly exaggerates Anita's suffering.

Coronado, who learned Catalan for the role, has little to do other than brood, but he broods well. Minor characters are deftly drawn and played by a range of Catalan thespas, particularly Albert Forner as the perpetually grinning building site foreman.

Carles Cases' perky, neo-baroque orchestral score is in keeping with the project's sense of tight control.



CHANCE MEETING: Jose Coronado and Rosa Maria Sarda star in "Anita Takes a Chance," in the Panorama section at the Berlin fest.