

The Dignity Of The Nobodies

It's hard to make a passionate film about average Joes that can cause viewers' pulses to race, but Fernando E. Solanas' exhilarating docu "The Dignity of the Nobodies" proves it can be done. Its narrative and human appeal should make it marginally more marketable than its predecessor.

By Deborah Young ▾



It's hard to make a passionate film about average Joes that can cause viewers' pulses to race, but Fernando E. Solanas' exhilarating docu "The Dignity of the Nobodies" proves it can be done. Designed as the second in a four film series after Solanas' 2004 "A Social Genocide," which analyzed the policies of power and the role globalization and neo-liberalism played in Argentina's economic disaster, "Dignity" is more anecdotal, celebrating individual and collective actions that show how a seemingly immovable reality can be changed. Its narrative and human appeal should make it marginally more marketable than its predecessor.

The veteran Argentine helmer noted for his social documentaries is clearly outraged by the injustice brought about by his country's economic collapse, but he chooses to concentrate not on how the poor are victimized, but how some of them have managed to win small but telling victories. An upbeat tone guides a wealth of intercut stories over a rather stretched two-hour running time, ending in a rousing final call to action and resistance.

Related Stories

Current docu is to be followed by "Latent Argentina" and "The Roused Land" in a sweeping fresco of the state of the country. "Dignity" takes up where "A Social Genocide" left off, with the 2001 demonstrations and the president's resignation.

In one key story, indebted farmers in the pampas are being forced out of their ancestors' land by foreclosure on their mortgages. Many farmers have committed suicide. The climate is one of helplessness, until one woman decides to do something. She and other women who are small farmers disrupt auctions where their farms are on the block by singing the national anthem. More than 1,000 auctions have been called off with simple tactics like this.

In the bleak town of Matanza, some 15 miles outside Buenos Aires, the unemployed are sometimes too poor to bury their dead. It takes them days to collect enough money to hold a funeral. They scrounge garbage, eat in self-organized soup kitchens, walk miles to an overflowing hospital and are unable to buy medicine once they're diagnosed with an illness. After the inhabitants began marching in demonstrations and picketing in Buenos Aires, the government agreed to hand out subsidies — although to only two out of seven jobless families.

Last tale describes how Patagonian factory workers who got laid off when the plant shut down organized themselves to return to work and run the factory themselves. Amazingly, they have been successful. Film quotes the statistic that workers have tried to reopen 160 of 2,000 factories that have closed.

Editor Juan Carlos Macias does a heroic job splicing together the multiple stories, which go back and forth, but there are times when the action sags under the weight of the pic's ambitions. Solanas, who did his own hand-held camerawork with a small DV cam, captures his subjects' spontaneity without losing a professional look. Though doc was shot over several years, it is updated with an April 2005 post-script that brings more encouraging news.

0 COMMENTS

The Dignity Of The Nobodies

Argentina-Brazil-Switzerland

Production: A Cinesur (Argentina)/Dezenove Som e Imagenes (Brazil)/Thelma Film/Swiss Romande TV (Switzerland) co-production. (International sales: Cinesur, Olivos, Argentina.) Produced, directed, written by Fernando E. Solanas.

Crew: Camera (color), Solanas; editors, Juan Carlos Macias, Solanas; music, Gerardo Gandini; sound (Dolby Digital), Marcos Dickinson, Abelardo Kuschnir; associate producers, Sara Silveira, Pierre-Alain Meier. Reviewed at Venice Film Festival (Horizons), Sept. 6, 2005. Running time: 122 MIN. (Spanish dialogue)

With:

Music By: