

Variety Magazine Review

Posted: Thurs., Feb. 17, 2005, 5:37pm PT

Romantico

(Docu)

A Meteor Films Inc. production. Produced by Mark Becker. Co-producer, Nadine Maleh. Directed, edited by Mark Becker.

By DENNIS HARVEY

Unjustly overlooked at Sundance by both auds and jurors, Mark Becker's "Romantico" is a beautifully lensed -- on actual film -- docu about illegal Mexican immigrants. Pic, which lends the subjects' vivid verite life-drama a poetical dimension, should easily connect with fests. Spanish dialogue (with English subtitles) is the only limit to pic's broadcast potential.

Becker initially intended to make a short about Mariachi musicians in his San Francisco 'hood, finding the ideal subject in a self-exiled 57-year-old family man, Carmelo Muniz Sanchez. Latter roams the Mission District with best friend-cum-fellow-singer/guitarist Arturo, whose alcoholic binges occasionally derail their musical career. They live in a tiny, cramped apartment housing six other illegals. Carmelo is nonetheless able to send home profits that keep his wife, teenage daughter and diabetes-afflicted mother (who's already had both legs amputated) in relative comfort. When he decides to come home, his joy at a family reunion is qualified by fact that he can only make a fraction of his U.S. income in native Salvatierra, where women whose husbands leave or die are commonly forced into prostitution. Engrossing pic is impressively shot, edited and scored.

Camera (color, 16mm/Sony HD cam-to-35mm), Becker; music, Raz Mesinai. Reviewed at Sundance Film Festival (Documentary Competition), Jan. 23, 2005. Running time: 80 MIN.
(Spanish dialogue)