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No one expects Javier Bardem

The Spanish actor is in demand **BY MICHAEL GILTZ**

Can an actor who's already been nominated for an Oscar have a breakout year? Sure, if you're Javier Bardem.

Bardem — who was nominated for an Oscar for 2000's "Before Night Falls" — has just started filming a Woody Allen comedy in Spain. At the Cannes Film Festival in May, he enjoyed more Oscar buzz for his turn as a frighteningly detached killer in the Coen brothers drama "No Country for Old Men" (due out in November).

And he's currently in director Milos Forman's ("One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," "Amadeus") drama about the Spanish Inquisition, "Goya's Ghosts."

Despite his filmography, and coming from an acting family that's akin to the Spanish Barrymores, the 38-year-old still professes delighted surprise when top directors want to work with him.

"I think it's what keeps me alive," says Bardem, who has also triumphed in 2004's Oscar winner "The Sea Inside." "I never forget I'm a Spanish actor that was at one time working as an extra.

"And because of the background of my family, I've seen the dark side and the bright side. In a way, I don't buy either of them. The only thing I can relate to is respect. And when people I truly admire and respect respect me enough to say, 'I think we could work together,' that lights something in me."

Bardem seems to delight in physical and external ways

of getting into character. In "No Country for Old Men," his hair is styled in an Andy Warhol droop that is so absurd it's scary, made even more creepy since Bardem's character is a killer without remorse.

In "Goya's Ghosts," Bardem adopts a whispery, meandering voice as Brother Lorenzo, a true believer at the heart of the Inquisition who conveniently becomes a true believer in revolution when Napoleon takes over Spain.

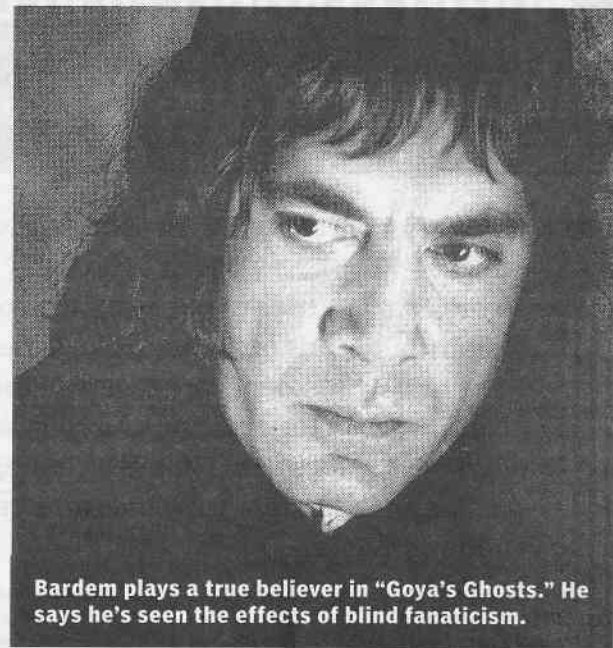
"That [voice] was a risk that we took," says Bardem. "We wanted to make him a snaky figure. I wasn't there in ancient times but I was raised by the Catholic Church and sometimes I saw right in front of my eyes that the tone was one way but the action was another."

Like Forman, who left his native Czechoslovakia just prior to the Soviet crackdown of 1968, Bardem has seen fanaticism up close: His uncle won a major directing award at Cannes only to be jailed by General Francisco Franco's forces as soon as he returned home.

"I was raised [Catholic] by my grandmother," says Bardem. "Then, little by little, I started to make some questions about it. I realized I respect people's beliefs but I started to really freak out about the manipulation of people's beliefs in order to gather fear. ... we have different [beliefs] but in the end it's the same, no?"

Originally, Bardem was to play Goya, a figure who looms over Spain. But as Forman and Jean-Claude Carriere wrote the script, and Brother Lorenzo became the cen-

Bardem's new drama is about the Inquisition.



Bardem plays a true believer in "Goya's Ghosts." He says he's seen the effects of blind fanaticism.

tral character, Bardem was asked to switch parts. Besides, he has already spent a lot of time with Goya, thanks to winning four Goyas, the Spanish equivalent of the Oscar. Obviously, it hasn't gone to his head.

"The Goya is a beautiful award," says Bardem. "It's Goya's head done in bronze. It has a look, a furious look. It's a head, but it has fury in it." ♦