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Amazon Exec Says True Crime Is a “Home Run” in Latin America, Comedies Prove Difficult to Navigate

At Conecta Fiction & Entertainment in Toledo, Spain, Javiera Balmaceda, head of local originals for Latin America at Amazon, discussed what Hispanic audiences are craving.

BY LILY FORD | JUNE 19, 2024 5:23AM



Peter Lanzani and Ricardo Darin in Argentina, 1985. VENICE FILM FESTIVAL

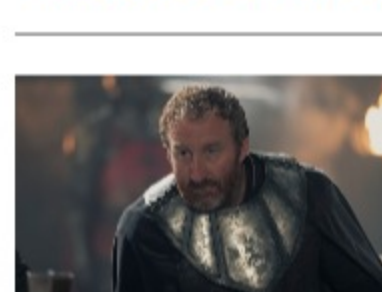
Amazon's Latin America branch is going full steam ahead with its true crime projects.

Head of local originals for Latin America, Australia, and Canada Javiera Balmaceda spoke to *The Hollywood Reporter* during her keynote speech at the international market and networking event Conecta Fiction & Entertainment in Toledo, Spain, on Wednesday.

Balmaceda's work in recent years speaks for itself. Historical drama *Argentina, 1985*, which followed the real case of prosecutor Julio César Strassera and his team in the famous Trial of the Juntas, was critically acclaimed and landed a Golden Globe, as well as being the only Latin American Oscar nominee in 2023. She was also part of the successful *LOL: Last One Laughing*, adapted from Japan's *Documental*, a Mexican reality series where 10 popular comedians compete to see who can stay serious and at the same time make their opponents laugh through a period of six hours. And before her tenure at Amazon, Balmaceda was director of programming at HBO Latin America. She also happens to be the sister of *The Last of Us* and *The Mandalorian* star Pedro Pascal – talk about family talent.

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Amazon's market all over Latin America is growing, but in one genre particularly, top execs have spotted ripe material, she highlights. "Our biggest film to date is a true crime film in *Argentina 1985*," Balmaceda tells *THR*. "And we just also launched the final season of *Dom in Brazil* (another crime-focused story woven into familial drama), one of the most viewed series to date in Brazil. Especially in Latin America, we're really finding – and I think this is no surprise to anybody – true crime continues to be a home run."

Balmaceda beams with pride while discussing Amazon's upcoming Brazilian film *Maniaco do Parque*, which her team hopes will quench the true crime thirst of its viewers. The story follows the real-life tale of motorcycle courier Francisco de Assis Pereira, who was convicted of attacking 21 women and murdering 10 in São Paulo in the late 1990s. "It's a fascinating story, and the team was very careful to make sure that we did this with a point of view of [a] woman. And I think that's a really, really careful storytelling, and not trying to make a hero of a serial killer, right?"

She explains that Amazon is trying to find the balance of commerciality and prestige. "Not lowering that production value, that quality bar, but making sure you're telling those stories that are mostly going to connect with people."

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Balmaceda's beat is huge and spans around 656 million people. Just how different are those national audiences and what works in Mexico compared to Argentina or Chile, for example? "It's different," she replies. "Local audiences really like their local stories. And I think, thanks to the internet and thanks to accessibility, people are getting much more accustomed to seeing and watching stories from other places."

"I think what we're still struggling with in Latin America is the accents. I'm from Chile. Everyone hates the way we speak in Spanish [laughs]. They were constantly being dubbed... In Latin America, comedies are the most difficult. Every country has their own unique sense of humor, [there is] different things that they laugh at. An Argentine comedy is going to have a really hard time working in Mexico."

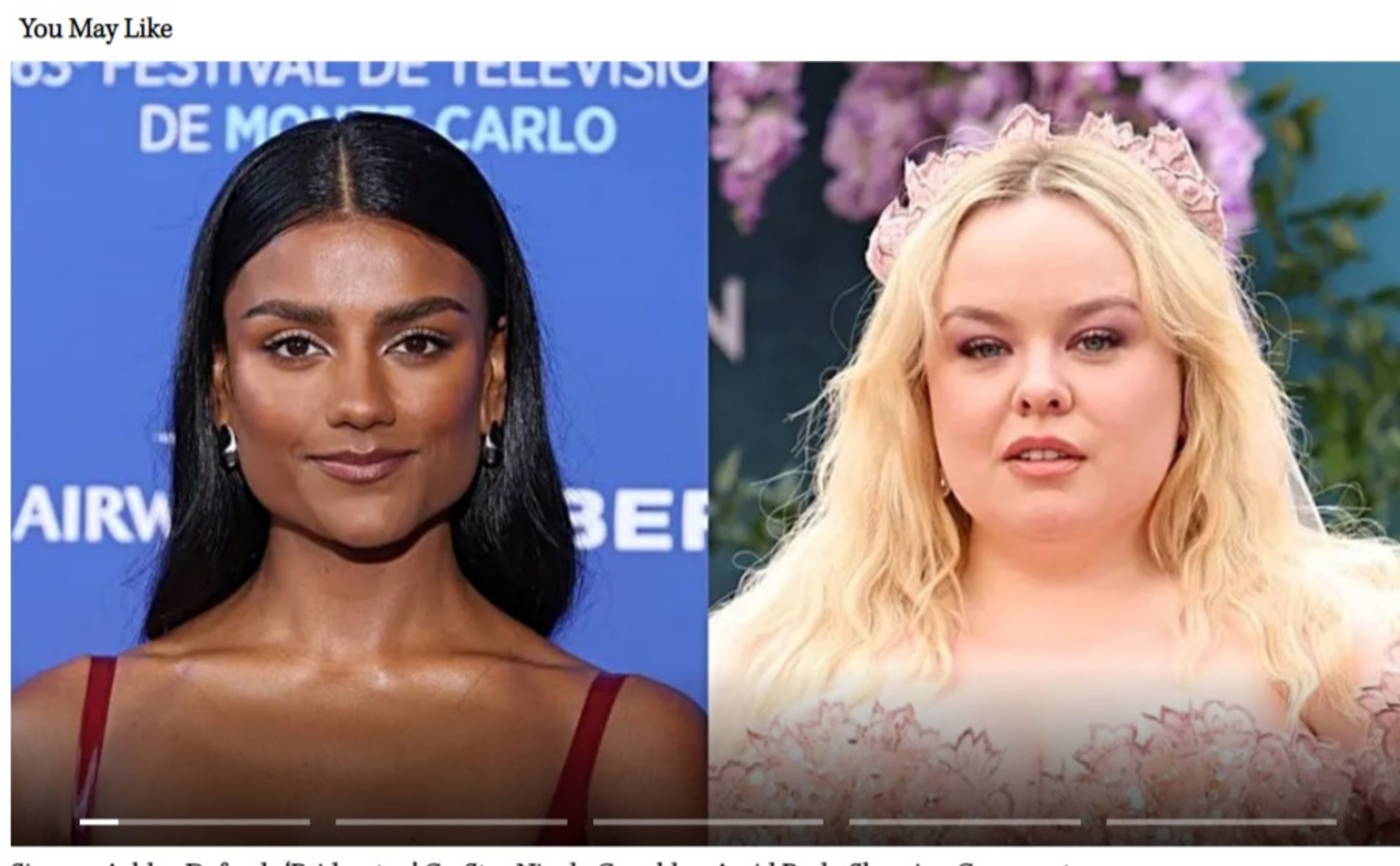
She touches on how political stories can be used to empower people and connect with Hispanic audiences. "I think we're really well known for political drama in Latin America," says Balmaceda. "*Argentina, 1985* was such a huge success for us, but it did come with its backlash from radicalized people in Argentina. But we don't shy away from telling political stories. I think that's the essence of today and how we're relating. When we received the pitch of *Argentina 1985*, we were really intent in feeling that it was going to resonate with today and what was happening with the presidency of Trump, how people are distorting history and truth. And I think that's why we did so well."

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The Amazon boss also took a moment to calm concerns that global production is slowing down. "I think it might feel like a slowdown because we were greenlighting everything and needed to catch our breath, but we have so much more to come. We have five productions going on in Mexico. We just greenlit two more shows in Brazil. We're wrapping a documentary in Colombia. So we're full speed ahead." [Watch](#)

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