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San Sebastian

Suso's Tower

La Torre de Suso (Spain)

By [JONATHAN HOLLAND](#)

A [Mediapro](#) production, with the participation of TVE, TV3. (International sales: TFI Intl., Issy-les-Moulineaux). Produced by [Jaume Roures](#). Executive producers, [Javier Mendez](#), [Lola Salvador](#). Directed, written by Tom Fernandez.

With: [Javier Camara](#), Gonzalo de Castro, [Cesar Vea](#), [Jose Luis](#) Alcobendas, [Malena Alterio](#), [Mariana Cordero](#), Fanny Gautier, [Emilio Gutierrez](#) Caba.

The right balance of wit and warmth makes tube scripter Tom Fernandez's attractively understated feature debut "Suso's Tower" that rare thing in Spanish cinema -- an authentically enjoyable comedy. Propelled by a charming central performance by the reliable Javier Camara, the pic is basically rule-book fare and its first half-hour is flawed, but its lack of pretension comes through over the long haul, due to its array of winsome, well-played characters. Despite the lack of any obvious sales hook, the pic should reap rewards in Spanish-language territories, with a chance of its charm extending offshore.

Things start off with a cliché voiceover by a dead man, Suso, from whom we thankfully hear little later on. Suso has died of an overdose; Cundo (Camara) has returned to their Asturian village after 10 years in Argentina for the funeral, and to meet up with the other members of their formerly hard-living gang -- Fernando (Gonzalo de Castro), now married to Cundo's ex g.f. Rosa (Fanny Gautier); and Pablo ([Jose Luis Alcobendas](#)), a farmer who dates a prostitute whose services are regularly employed by Mote (Cesar Vea). There is also Marta (Malena Alterio), whose virginity Cundo does not remember taking; and his parents, Tino (Emilio Gutierrez Caba) and Mercedes (Mariana Cordero).

Cundo finds a series of drawings left by Suso that, Rosa explains, depict towers. Cundo takes this to mean they should build a mining tower in their dead friend's memory on the land in front of Suso's house -- a crazy idea of which he has difficulties convincing the others. When they come around, the lovable idiot friends use the building of the tower as an opportunity to grow up -- with the suggestion that this has been engineered by the dead Suso.

Threaded through pic are the unresolved issues Cundo's return has brought to the surface -- particularly Fernando's jealousy of him, Rosa's attraction to him, and his parents' almost nonexistent relationship.

Early gags aren't very funny, but when the various relationships are given time to percolate, the humor takes root. Character development is well handled, giving all thesps the opportunity to shine. Perfs are good across the board, with Camara mining to terrific comic effect the same vein of troubled innocence he did in [Pedro Almodovar's "Talk to Her,"](#) and suggesting all Cundo's wrongdoings are matters beyond his control. Other standouts are Alterio, handed an enjoyably quirky peach of a role, and vet Gutierrez Caba.

The lush Asturian landscapes surrounding the former mining village where the pic is set is not exploited until the last few frames, tying in with a theme about the need to take the larger view. The simple and lovely Celtic-inflected guitar and pipes score, suggestive of the region's folk music, is crucial to the pic's more moving moments.

Camera (color), [Carlos Suarez](#); editor, Angel Hernandez-Zoido; music, [Jose Manuel](#) Tejedor, Javier Tejedor; art director, [Soledad Sesena](#); sound ([Dolby Digital](#)), [Wildtrack](#). Reviewed at San Sebastian Film Festival (Zabaltegi New Directors), Sept. 26, 2007. Running time: 100 MIN.