At first glance, it’s tempting to refer to THE NEW DAUGHTER (arriving on DVD and Blu-ray May 18) as young actress Ivana Baquero’s English-language debut, but such is hardly the case. Although she has spent nearly half of her 15 years before the cameras in her native Spain—often in fright fare—a significant percentage of the bilingual Baquero’s credits have seen her speaking English. THE NEW DAUGHTER does mark her first time in an U.S. production—albeit one directed by a fellow countryman, [REC] co-scripter Luis Berdejo, making his own American debut.

Baquero, who previously appeared in the Berdejo-scripted A CHRISTMAS TALE installment of 6 FILMS TO KEEP YOU AWAKE, co-stars in THE NEW DAUGHTER as Louisa, who moves with her recently divorced father John (Kevin Costner) and younger brother Sam (Gattlin Griffith) to a small Southern town. Already a troubled teen, Louisa starts acting worse, and in more frightening ways, thanks to the influence of a strange mound in the back of their house’s property. Is she becoming possessed? And what are those strange figures creeping around the edges of the frame in certain nighttime shots?

For Baquero, who broke out as the tormented but brave Ofelia of Guillermo del Toro’s modern classic PAN’S LABYRINTH, THE NEW DAUGHTER offered “a complex character, because I had to show that although she has gone through a traumatic divorce when the movie starts out, she’s a normal girl,” she says. “Over the course of the movie, she develops and changes both emotionally and physically, and that was very important to show on screen. And Luis was always there to help me. We constantly jotted down ideas, and he really gave me liberty to develop the character. It was a tough role, but at the same time those are the roles I like

playing, because they’re the most challenging.”

She got additional assistance from Costner: “Being able to share things with an actor of that magnitude is always a pleasure,” she says. “Also, he’s really generous, and he’d always stay with Gattlin and me to give tips and advice. It’s really nice when you have someone who you know is so professional there to help you.”

After PAN’S LABYRINTH significantly raised her profile with Stateside audiences and filmmakers, Baquero was seeking a project that would demonstrate her facility with English, and sparked to the NEW DAUGHTER script (by John Travis, based on a short story by John Connolly). Her experience on the South Carolina shoot also revealed the distinctions between making movies for Hollywood companies and at home. “It was definitely different from filming in Spain,” she recalls. “The way of making cinema, the regulations…in Spain, you have different working hours for minors. In the States, everything is way more regulated—underage kids can work up to six hours, then have to study for three hours. In Spain, of course, there are also regulations, but I work more on the weekends, and during weekdays I can go up to 12 hours.” On the other hand, there was little culture shock, “because I’ve been going to an American school in Spain since I was 3 years old. I was excited to finally be able to go out to the States and live there for four months. It was very pleasant.”

The aforementioned education, surprisingly, didn’t involve any acting training, and Baquero reveals that she got her first role—in Paco Plaza’s ROMASANTA, a.k.a. WEREWOLF HUNTER, produced by the Filmax company—as a fluke. “I was 8 years old, and before that, I never really thought about becoming an actress,” she remembers. “But one day, all of my friends went out to an audition, and they asked me to join them. So I asked my parents because I was curious, not because I wanted to actually be chosen for the role. I didn’t expect it at all. I went to the audition, which was ROMASANTA, and I got picked, and that’s how I got started. It was really curious.

“That was when I decided that being an actress was what I wanted to do,” she continues. “I had no previous experience; I’d never gone to any acting school, so it was basically all natural. I have taken some classes since, but I want to do more. I haven’t really had the chance, but I really want to develop my skills. That’s something I’m looking forward to.”

Baquero was indeed busy following ROMASANTA, becoming a regular in Filmax projects like Brian Yuzna’s ROTTWEILER, Jaume Balagueró’s FRAGILE and Plaza’s A CHRISTMAS TALE.

(Despite having done roles for the two latter directors, the actress says she was never up for their hit collaboration [REC], noting, “I don’t think there was a role for me.”) Then she became immersed in the world of PAN’S LABYRINTH. “I have no words for that,” she says. “It was like an acting school, because Guillermo has a lot of experience and this great imagination. He knows exactly what he wants, which is great because he knows how to direct you and how to get the best out of you.”

Baquero shared many of her LABYRINTH scenes with actor Doug Jones, who was hidden behind Oscar-winning makeup as a couple of key creatures. “When I acted with monsters like Pan or the Pale Man,” she recalls, “it became really funny, because that’s a very different performing experience. Doug was great. I remember every single afternoon or morning, when we came back from filming or before filming, we would always practice. And he actually played his whole role in Spanish, so that was a great challenge for him, and he also had to be in those suits for hours and hours. He worked really hard, and he was just so nice and hilarious all the time.”

Throughout it all, Baquero says that her parents have never held her back from taking part in the dark side of cinema. “They’ve always supported me, and have always said as long as my grades are good, I can do whatever I enjoy.” Nor has she felt genuine fear on any of her shoots: “When you’re filming it, it’s completely different form the final result on the screen. You basically do the scene with the whole effects team around you, so you don’t really feel the scare experience *per se*.” However, while her parents have never restricted her from seeing her own fright films—from the premiere of ROMASANTA onward—she admits that when it comes to horror movies in general, “I do watch them, but when they get too scary, sometimes I’d rather not. They give me nightmares!”

Currently set to co-star in the family sports film KEEPER OF THE PINSTRIPES (opposite another BULL DURHAM veteran, Tim Robbins), Baquero is looking forward to branching out. “I have the option to choose many kinds of roles, and my [PINSTRIPES] character is completely

different from what I’ve played before. She’s a very sweet girl. I feel comfortable in all the genres, whether it’s drama or fantasy. Horror is something I like—it’s my ‘roots’—but I also want to do comedy, or a thriller. I’m looking forward for doing other kinds of projects. I’m still in the learning stage.”

{jcomments on}