RTVE, ZDFE's 'ANA. all in' Exposes the Dark Side of Spain's Massive Gambling Industry

After years working in film and theater, celebrated Spanish author, screenwriter and filmmaker Roberto Santiago ("The Longest Penalty Shot In The World") has returned to TV to adapt his bestselling novel "Ana" for the small screen, starring Spanish star Maribel Verdú ("Y Tu Mamá También," "Pan's Labyrinth").

Angela Armero ("Velvet") co-wrote the series adaptation with Santiago, and award-winning film and TV vets Gracia Querejeta ("Cuando vuelvas a mi lado") and Salvador García Ruiz ("The Hunt. Monteperdido") direct. The six-hour series is produced by Spanish broadcaster RTVE in co-production with Tornasol and DeAPlaneta in association with German production-sales company ZDF Enterprises, part of public broadcaster ZDF.

"ANA. all in" turns on Ana, a small-time lawyer thrust into the underground world of illegal gambling when her brother is accused of killing the manager of the Gran Castilla Casino. After assembling a small but energetic team, this Spanish Erin Brockovich goes head-to-
head with the Goliath that is one of the world’s largest gambling industries.

**Spain’s Navarre Builds as Film-TV Hub**

The series shot over the summer in Madrid and Pamplona, adhering to Spain’s strict health and safety guidelines for audiovisual production during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Santiago spoke with *Variety* in the run-up to Mipcom, where the series is being featured by RTVE and ZDFE.

**This series doesn’t pull any punches in its critical portrayal of Spain’s gambling industry, which is among the biggest in the world. What made you want to pull back this curtain?**

The gaming industry is massive around the world, but especially in Spain, and it’s grown massively in recent years. Gambling also seemingly has impunity in advertising. A kid today can’t watch a soccer or basketball game without being inundated by gambling advertising. It’s amazing because it’s illegal to advertise alcohol or tobacco in these sports, but gambling is acceptable even though the WHO recognizes it as a source of mental illness. It seemed to me that this subject hadn’t been dealt with properly in fiction is Spain, only peripherally, and when I started to research I saw a lot of misery. I think it was time for Spanish fiction to address this.

**And where did you get your inside information from?**

I tried to impart my own experiences gained through research into Ana, a lawyer who knows nothing about the gambling world. She’s the viewer’s eyes. After she gets the call about her brother’s problems she starts to dig and finds many cases of people who are ruined and suffering depression and anxiety, like her brother. The series is not factual, but everything in it I saw with my own eyes, and it’s very well documented.

**You’ve worked extensively in film, theater, and this story was written as a novel, but it’s been years since you wrote for TV. Why did you choose to adapt it as a series?**
It is a very long novel, 900 pages, and when I was offered the chance to adapt it I knew that a film was not really a possibility. So, the serial format, six episodes here, always seemed perfect to me. When making an adaptation there are always changes, but the base of the story remains. This is Ana’s story, and it’s told from her point of view. But, there are so many other characters, and we could explore those other people in a series easier than in a film.

Can you talk a bit about working with your co-writer, Angela Armero? What was it like having someone else adapt your work with you?

Angela is a friend of mine and a great screenwriter with a lot of TV experience. From the beginning I wanted someone else with me working on the screenplays. I love Angela’s work and she liked the novel and was interested in writing about gambling. She has helped me make changes and eliminate things that I wouldn’t have done alone as the author of the book. Sometimes audiovisual requires major changes, and when making those changes in language and format, having an experienced person who is not the original author was a huge help.

Spanish TV is seeing a major immigration of award-winning film talent: Álex de la Iglesia did “30 Coins” for HBO, Rodrigo Sorogoyen did “Riot Police” for Movistar Plus who are now working with Alejandro Amenábar on “La Fortuna.” Is Spain entering a new era in TV production? Could this series have been made five or 10 years ago?

I think 5-10 years ago it would have been very difficult. But I think 20-25 years ago it could have. It’s interesting because in the years before the platforms arrived, TV channels wanted to make series that appealed to everyone, children, adults, the elderly. That was the status quo for years, and it’s a shame because people weren’t making
interesting auteur-driven series. In the old days though, 25 years ago, that wasn't the case. When private channels didn't exist, TVE made series like “Turno de oficio,” (Duty Shift) about a group of lawyers in the 1980s which was great. Those kinds of series disappeared. Now, with the arrival of the global platforms, Spanish broadcasters are brave enough to make challenging series again. Spain certainly has the talent to tell real, personal stories on TV.

The book and series are very Spanish, but you have a German co-producer. What do you think the scope of this series is outside of Spain?

I sincerely believe that it is a very international story. ZDF joined the production because they saw its global appeal and wanted to help tell Ana’s story. She’s a normal person in the worst moment of her life and has to take on a giant industry. I think that’s something anyone in the world can connect to. As soon as they finished the book, ZDFE joined up and has been involved since development of the script, providing notes with a unique point of view.