

Dossier de presse trigon-film

SUITE HABANA

de Fernando Pérez

Cuba 2003

DISTRIBUTION

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SUISSE ROMANDE

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Fiche technique

Réalisation:	Fernando Pérez
Image:	Raúl Perez Ureta
Montage:	Julia Yip
Musique:	Edesio Alejandro et Ernesto Cisneros
Son:	Jorge Luis Chijona
Conception du son:	Edesio Alejandro et Fernando Pérez
Producteurs:	José María Morales et Camilo Vives
Production:	Wanda Vision, Espagne, et ICAIC, Cuba
Durée:	84 minutes
Format :	35 mm – 1:1.66 - Dolby Digital
Langue:	Espagnol/f/a

Les personnages

Francisquito, le jeune garçon
Norma Perez, la grand-mère
Waldo Morales, le professeur de marxisme
Ivan Carbonell, l'employé de l'hôpital
Raquel Nodal, l'ouvrière dans une fabrique de parfum
Heriberto Borroto, l'ouvrier des chemins de fer
Juan Carlos Roque, le médecin
Jorge Luis Roque, l'émigrant
Julio Castro, le cordonnier
Amanda Gautier, la vendeuse de noix

Festivals, Prix

San Sebastian, film d'ouverture, Prix Signis
Nomination par Cuba aux Oscars 2004
Festival de la Havane 2003:
meilleur film latino-américain, meilleur réalisateur, meilleure bande sonore, meilleure affiche, meilleure musique, prix de la Fédération de la presse cinématographique et de la Fédération ibéro-américaine des producteurs
Prix du Centre Martin Luther King Jr
Visions du réel, Nyon 2004, film d'ouverture

Synopsis

Avec «Suite Habana», film-poème, ode à la capitale cubaine, Fernando Pérez nous fait participer à la vie de sa ville natale un jour entier, de six heures du matin jusqu'à vingt-quatre heures plus tard. Il suit une dizaine de simples Cubains dans leurs allées et venues, leur quotidien, les met en scène en un montage vertigineux, et le soir, les laisse accomplir les transformations les plus surprenantes. Après le travail, s'installe un rythme très particulier. Certains personnages plongent dans la vie nocturne, où ils s'épanouissent vraiment. Le film nous parle dans le plus pur langage cinématographique. A partir d'observations, de sons, de musiques, de visages, de bruits, de gestes, de regards, de rythmes, Pérez compose sa suite visuelle et acoustique, une œuvre comme on en a rarement vu.

Fernando Pérez

Fernando Pérez est né en 1944 à La Havane. Pendant ses études de commerce et de russe, il commence à travailler, en 1962, comme assistant de production et traducteur à l'ICAIC. Il poursuit ensuite des études de langues et de littérature. De 1971 à 1974, il travaille comme assistant réalisateur. Après quoi, il tourne de nombreux documentaires et, dès 1987, des films de fiction dont, en 1998, *La vida es silbar*, qui a rencontré en Suisse un énorme succès.

Filmographie

Documentaires

- 1975 *Puerto Rico (85' – coréalisation)*
- 1975 *Crónica de la victoria (36' – coréalisation)*
- 1975 *Cascos blancos (21')*
- 1977 *Cabinda (30')*
- 1977 *La sexta parte del mundo (90' – Coréalisation)*
- 1978 *Siembro viento en mi ciudad (28')*
- 1978 *Sábado Rojo (10')*
- 1979 *Monimbó es Nicaragua (18')*
- 1980 *4000 niños (10')*
- 1981 *Mineros (12')*
- 1981 *Las armas invisibles (14')*
- 1982 *Camilo (24')*
- 1983 *Omara (26')*
- 1985 *La isla del tesoro azul (55' – coréalisation)*

Films de fiction

- 1988 *Clandestinos*
- 1990 *Hello Hemingway*
- 1994 *Madagascar*
- 1996 *Y si fuera cierto (série TV)*
- 1998 *La vida es silbar*
- 2003 *Suite Habana*

Interview de Fernando Pérez («Granma International»)

All about...*Suite Habana*

by Mireya Castañeda

Clandestinos, Hello Hemingway, Madagascar, La vida es silbar. Four films have been sufficient to catapult Fernando Pérez to the summit of Cuban cinema. He's received awards in Havana, Berlin, Cartagena, Madrid, San Juan, and New York. He began his cinematic career as assistant director, then made a successful move to documentary and the now disappeared *Noticiero ICAIC Latinoamericano*.

This year he has returned with a poignant movie that, from the very first moment, we know is going to pass into the annals of cinematic history. *Suite Habana* is certainly a documentary but one distinguished by sensitivity — the immense art of Fernando Pérez. After 80 minutes of watching a film where images and music are the only dialogue, the auditorium burst into applause. This might come as a surprise, but only to those who haven't seen the film. Furthermore, Cuban critics are in agreement over *Suite Habana's* aesthetic and ethical value. Analysis has been conceptual but undoubtedly emotional too, given that we are in the presence of an extremely moving film. Which is where, to some extent a strange coincidence, our dialogue begins.

How do you feel about such unanimous praise?

It's the first time it's happened to me. Definite unanimity seldom happens. It surprised me, firstly because when we were filming we knew it would be a risky project because of its language and for what it proposes. I said 'how are audiences going to react to this?' I always thought it would be for audiences who already had an interest. The first 15 minutes of the film are totally without drama, they were very dangerous in terms of spectators — would they stay in the cinema or not? I felt that this film had awakened very strong emotions of joy and surprise, and that's what the film had for everyone who worked on it and those who took part. But that's why one works in cinema. The audience's response is the most important thing to me and when it occurs then that's when the film is finished.

And the critics added their applause at the end of the film, something equally unusual.

It made me feel very embarrassed (*because in reality Fernando Perez is a discreet, modest, even singularly shy man*). On the opening night I took a cassette of the film to Ciego de Avila and Holguín to show and to see what happened in Havana. Afterwards news of the reaction reached me. A few Saturdays ago I went to watch it with a few friends. I entered the cinema and it was packed, the audience followed it attentively and at the end clapped, something unusual after 25 showings. And all that makes one emotional and also makes one think. The power to work out where the stimulus that provoked this reaction came from.

How did the project originate and how did it come to be filmed?

It was from an idea by a Spanish producer as part of a television series to be called *Ciudades invisibles*. This was in December 2001; he suggested I film a documentary in digital. I had my doubts because I have to confess I prefer fiction. I used to make documentaries, that's how I learnt, but I always felt that making a documentary was harder work than fiction. I feel more at home with fiction. I finally decided (yes) because it was Havana; making a film about the city attracted me and because it was using digital and I'd never worked in that before. How to do it came later. The first idea was to film on one day in Havana. At the beginning the idea was to use the city, the crowds, without individual faces. Little by little I began to realize that what I like is to tell stories and that there are many Havanas and people who live in Havana, their faces, their stories. So bit-by-bit the idea of different characters emerged. Some I knew; others were the result of research carried out by the assistant director (Gloria Maria Cossio). We saw many things in many Havanas and I finally decided to concentrate on what I think is the Havana of ordinary people, containing elements that any viewer can identify with, that form part of our reality. And above all the stories of these characters, stories that are very common but also very special. The idea not to use interviews also arose. It's not that I think interviews aren't a means of expression. I believe there are great documentaries with great interviews but

they've also become the norm. And for some time now I've been trying to make films where image and sound are the basic element of expression. In *Madagascar* there's eight minutes where nobody speaks; in *La vida es silbar* there's very little dialogue and I used this technique completely in *Suite Habana*.

A good screenplay makes all the difference.

I didn't really use a closed script because as we were working on a documentary we were looking for spontaneity, we weren't working with actors. If it did have a structure then it was first the day and then within that, each story had a script in order to follow the main thread and the moments we were going to use from each one. The script, the definitive structure, the interweaving of all these stories was done in the editing suite (by Julia Yip). We shot about 40 hours of images of Havana and stories all in one go.

How do you use screenplays in your fiction films, by sticking fiercely to them or using improvisation?

When I'm working in fiction I write a literary script. For me, its fundamental aspect is its dramatic structure. When I feel I have the story's dramatic structure, the dialogue and the situations, then that's when I have a script that feels like a film. And later on, when we've shot the pre-film locations, cast the actors, completed nearly all the elements, then the director of photography and I write a technical script describing the film step by step. This script is closed but I'm open to any on-set improvisation. But as part of something secure. I don't arrive and then decide what I'm going to do, that's one style. *Suite Habana* wasn't like that; it was completely the opposite. Which is why I say that during filming we felt we were taking a lot of risks.

***Suite Habana* was conceived as a documentary but later you added a touch of fiction.**

Yes, but it's because I believe that in contemporary cinema the many genres have disappeared, those borders are being lost. For example, making a documentary using real characters without inventing — everything's like real life but staging exists. As soon as you introduce a camera then it's staged. I had two paths: to make the film without lighting as if it was a reportage or to record a truly expressive staging. And that's the path we chose — to make a film dealing with stories that didn't have great conflicts in the traditional sense of the word, a film where hardly anything happens. The dramatic action takes place within each character. I said that the staging had to contribute to that, to present those situations, those atmospheres. So the staging was to appear to be filming fiction, but working with reality as it stands, everything mixed together.

How did you conceive the visual style?

Well, by starting off with a film that had no dialogue or interviews — knowing that the images and soundtrack were fundamental — along with the director of photography (Raúl Pérez Ureta) we searched for what could be a visual reference to achieve these atmospheres where you might be able to feel as if you were entering into the character. The most direct visual reference came from paintings by U.S. artist Edward Hopper. When I look at his work I feel I can sense what his characters are thinking. We worked with the aesthetic of seeking very closed shots that discovered — in situations, in reality — aspects that aren't sensed at first glance.

And the soundtrack?

I'm used to working with Edesio Alejandro on the music in my films. He's a composer with ability and extraordinary talent and when I showed him the first cut he told me it would be the hardest thing we would ever do. We spent about a week viewing (the film), experimenting, until little by little we found the line for each of the sequences. The work took over a month; it was very intense, very stimulating.

Let's talk about the characters.

When we first spoke to them they didn't ask us anything, they told us about their lives, trusted us. They didn't ask what it was going to be like, what they were going to do, what they had to say; they had absolute trust and commitment. I think that helped a great deal in creating the atmosphere during filming and gave them spontaneity. I really didn't have any problems, sometimes I didn't even have to direct; it was like telling them, 'do what you

do every day' and they really managed it. Of course I didn't want to show them any rushes until the film was finished, we didn't even know how it was going to turn out ourselves. But before the film was premiered we showed it to them in the Chaplin and many of them became emotional and identified with what was happening on screen. But what most caught my attention was how they got emotional over the other stories, not their own ones, which showed me the dimension of their ability to watch cinema and not just reduce it to an aspect of their own story. I think that the film has meant a lot to them, not because their lives may have changed but because I think they feel that due to the way the film communicates with audiences, their lives are interesting and they're loved. I feel that as a life experience it's made them more complete.

What are the objectives in your films?

I don't think that cinema is there to teach; it's an art and of course all artistic work teaches, but I don't believe that that is its objective. I don't like moralistic cinema. What I look for in my films is expressing the complexity of the reality surrounding me, or the subject I'm trying to deal with. Firstly I try to communicate an emotion to the audience in a way that this emotion makes them think. I believe artistic work has to be moving, if it doesn't move you then the relation is much colder. It can happen: there are films that accomplish their objective by being cold and reflexive and they're important artistic work. I prefer making emotive cinema that makes the watcher think but tries to make the subject or the reality it deals with more complex. So that there's not just one reading, it doesn't say it's like this and there's no other way. I don't feel that I own the absolute truth, what I'm trying to do is express how I feel, how I see it, and that this causes emotion and reflection.

What do you think about the words diversity or risk?

I believe that the destiny of art, of culture in general, truly lies in diversity, different points of view, focusing on reality following on from the complexity that this creates. And when art is complex then it can't take a reductive view. I think that when there are diverse views then enrichment follows, and I don't like to make preconceived, schematic films. Risks, well every time I begin a film I feel insecure. Of course there are laws and experiences that one accumulates but these laws for constructing a language can never become a formula, something routine. You have to take risks and that's what attracts me to all of my films. For example, *Suite Habana* is risky; I think it could have taken other paths, it could have been a failure, not have the results it has. I don't know what the results will be until I've finished a film and this process stimulates me because I know I'm not taking the usual route. *Suite Habana* could have been made with interviews and filmed in two weeks; maybe the testimonies would have been interesting but I wouldn't have felt the same satisfaction.

And the words commercial and communication?

I've erased the word commercial from my mind. The majority of Cuban filmmakers have never made films in order to make money. Of course we earn a salary but that's not the objective. I've always made the films I've wanted and it's something I'm thankful for, I can feel easy. And as for communication, it's an objective. When you make a film then it's exercising communication and for me the audience is very important. When one makes a film then one thinks about the audience that it's targeting. I don't think that audiences are abstract. They're very diverse. I think about the audience I'm aiming at but without trying to please them because you have to stop thinking about yourself in order to think with the mind of someone else.

Have you ever thought about making a comedy?

I'd like to try all film genres. But I have to be motivated. But there's never the money or time to make all the films one would like. My cycle is to make about one film every four years due to reasons we're all familiar with. There's not enough time but I'd love to make a thriller or a musical comedy. Now if I were faced with that situation I'd try to find paths that weren't traditional, not for the sake of originality, but to experiment, to see what can happen.

You've spoken about the *Amorosa Gilda (Amorous Gilda)* project?

After *La vida es silbar* I was offered the chance of making *Amorosa Gilda*, a story based on the autobiography of Italian Anna Senza, which takes place in Sicily. She gave me full rights and we wrote the script together. We completed the location search, casting and

even the technical script. We thought we were going to begin filming in 2001 but at the last minute an important part of the financing failed to come through from Italy. Finance didn't come in the next two years and we're still waiting. During that time I wrote *Madrigal*, another script to be filmed here in Havana and I'm also hoping this will receive finance. *Amorosa Gilda* is a film with more traditional language, it's a story of a life using more classic narration, which is why I'm interested in making it at this moment. *Madrigal* is the complete opposite: it's two stories and one is science fiction. It has a view of Havana that's totally different from that of *Suite Habana* recreating reality in a very theatrical, very artificial way. It's a film with an extremely risky structure, I don't know how it will turn out — it could be a huge disaster or, if I can film what's in my head, then it could be very interesting.

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