



Winner: Special Archival Award from the National Society of Film Critics

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I AM CUBA: The 4K Restoration

Я - Куба (Ja Kuba) / Soy Cuba

Cuba/USSR. 1964. 141 minutes. Black & White.

In Spanish and English with Russian voice-over and English subtitles.

Produced and Directed by: Mikhail Kalatozov.

Screenplay: Yevgeny Yevtushenko and Enrique Pineda Barnet.

Camera: Sergei Urusevsky.

Camera Operators: Alexander Calzatti and B. Brozhovsky.

Production Managers: Simyon Maryachim and Miguel Mendoza.

First Assistant Director: Bella Friedman.

Assistant Camera Operators: M. Oropesa, K. Shipov, M. A. Ramírez.

Set Design: Yevgeny Svidetelev.

Music: Carlos Fariñas.

Artistic Consultation and Costumes: Rene Portocarrero.

Sound Producer: V. Sharun.

Assistant Sound Producer: R. Plaza.

Choreographer: A. Suez.

Editor: N. Glagoleva.

Montage Assistant: Lida Turina.

Orchestral Directors: E. Kachaturian and M. Duchesne.

Continuity: B. Trabkin and A. Vinokurov.

Makeup: V. Rudinoy and L. Cáceres.

Production Assistants: M. Volovich, O. Zernov, G. Tanner, L. García, R. Brutes, S. Miguel.

Second Unit Directors: J. Rouko, K. Ctenkin, T. Vargina.

Administrators: E. Ribero, R. Romay, M. Mora, R. Negrín.

Senior Translator: Pavel Grushko.

Lighting Crew: V. Mikhailob and G. Cantero.

Production Crew: A. Obregón, L. Carrillo, J. Cruz, J. Varona.

Still Photographer: R. Dovo.

Pyrotechnics: V. Pugachev, E. Fong, B. Sukharetzky.

Costumes and Props: K. García, E. Musteler, M. Trabas, M. Noah, F. Labrador.

Consultants: A. Fonseca and R. Fariñas.

Cast

Luz María Collazo (*Maria/Betty*)

José Gallardo (*Pedro*)

Sergio Corrieri (*Alberto*)

Alberto Morgan

Fausto Mirabal

Manuel Mora

Jesús del Monte

Mario González Broche (*Pablo*)

María de las Mercedes Díez (*girl chased in street*)

Salvador Wood (*Mariano*)

Raúl García (*Enrique*)

Jean Bouise (*Jim*)

Celia Rodríguez (*Gloria*)

Roberto García York (*American activist*)

Bárbara Domínguez

Luisa María Jiménez (*Teresa*)

Tony López

Héctor Castañeda

Rosando Lamadris

Roberto Vilar

Roberto Cabrera

Alfredo Ávila

José Espinosa

Isabel Moreno

Voice of Cuba: Raquel Revuelta. Russian Text Readers: N. Nikitina and G. Yepifantzev.

A joint production of the film studios Mosfilm (USSR) and ICAIC (Cuba)

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“The film studios Mosfilm and ICAIC thank the insurgent army, the people’s militia, the Cuban Ministry of Interior Affairs and Academy of Sciences, and also those who gave help in the creation of this film.”

The 2018 Restoration of I AM CUBA

It is always the case with Milestone that once a film has been restored, it is difficult to look back and years later, to restore it again. It's just usually too costly and the financial returns are rarely worthwhile. However, I AM CUBA remains a signature film for us. It was one of the first "major" releases of our company and in many ways, it put us on the map of important indie film distributors. It was also the first true release of the film ever – Cuba and Russia had barely screened it when it first came out in 1964 and it had shown mysteriously one in Japan in the 1970s. Back in 1995, Milestone purchased a 35mm interpositive fine grain and 35mm mag tracks for the film from Mosfilm and the Russian archive Gosfilmofond when we first acquired the rights. And despite numerous attempts at other restorations around the world, it still proved to be the finest material available for the film. However, all the copies of I AM CUBA that existed had flaws for 23 years that only a trained film archivist could see – the main flaw being a bad flicker throughout the film due to the original lab work. There were also some bad splices, photochemical blotches, scratches and various other problems typical of any film of that age.

There were no plans to create a new restoration, however, until Milestone received an email from the director Julian Temple. He was producing a new documentary HABANEROS on history of Havana. He had spent a small fortune for the rights to clips from I AM CUBA from a European distributor of the film and found to his great displeasure that the material he received were vastly inferior to the film that he had seen before. A deal was made that his company and Milestone would split the cost of a new 4K scan (to be done at Colorlab in Rockville, Maryland) for the right to use clips from Milestone's 35mm interpositive. Now that Milestone had this 4K transfer a decision had to be made. This summer, Milestone was in the midst of its biggest slate of restorations in its 28-year history. Twelve films were on the slate to be restored and each one had a deadline to meet.

However, Milestone's Amy Heller wrote to Kent Jones, Dennis Lim and Florence Almozini at the Film Society of Lincoln Center to see if perhaps the New York Film Festival was interested in premiering a new restoration of I AM CUBA. In 1995, the festival had turned down the film, but this time Milestone's proposal was met with great enthusiasm. So, the 4K transfer was sent to Metropolis Post in New York where Jack Rizzo's crew of Jason Crump (colorist) and Ian Bostick (restoration artist) spent hour after hour meticulously timing, cleaning, stabilizing and de-flickering the original scan. Unlike most films that have traditional sets and actors, the wildly moving camera made it impossible to use the standard computer "automatic" programs to clean up the scratches and dust from the original master. Most of it had to be done manually by Ian Bostick, which created many, many more hours of work to bring the film back to its original state when it opened in Havana and Moscow in 1964. Milestone came in near the end to approve and fine-tune the work. It is now the definitive restoration of the film.

I AM CUBA: The Film that Started a Revolution

"I Am Cuba has an all-encompassing obsessiveness that transcends its propaganda, serving as formalist cocaine for cinephiles and art aficionados."

— Chuck Bowen, Style Weekly, April 10, 2018

For many directors and cinematographers, the 1995 United States premiere of *I am Cuba* at Film Forum in New York changed the course of filmmaking as we know it today. There had been the moving camera shots established by D.W. Griffith and Lois Weber in the 1910s, the amazing moving camera created by the great

German directors of the 1920s such as F.W. Murnau (in *The Last Laugh* and *Sunrise*) and even the bravura opening of Orson Welles' opening scene in *Touch of Evil*, but *nothing* compared to the wave of experimentation after seeing *I am Cuba*. It was called visionary by many of the film critics.

“One of the most *deliriously beautiful* films ever made.” — Manohla Dargis

American Cinematographer magazine had a feature trying to figure out how those incredible, acrobatic shots were made. Cinematographers rushed to the theaters and then later to the video store when Milestone released it (first on VHS, then laserdisc, and then on DVD).

“*I Am Cuba is a cinephile's wet dream, a collage of Herculean feats of technical wizardry that would be easy to dismiss if it wasn't so humane... The film may or may not have changed the political face of the world, but in the way image and sound conspire to lay down the foundation for a new way of aesthetic thinking, it was at least geared to permanently change the way movies were made. Given its recent resurgence, its dream of a cinematic future may just come to true.*” — Ed Gonzalez, *Slant*

Cinematographers and directors were buying a dozen copies at a time to share with fellow cinematographers. For months, *I am Cuba* was the number one selling video on Amazon in the Los Angeles zip codes. Famous directors were bringing the assistant cinematographer of the film, Alexander Calzatti to hear for themselves how Urusevsky and he created many of those shots.

Martin Scorsese said it would have made his film career much easier if he had seen it when it first came out. *Casino* has an homage to the film. Paul Thomas Anderson created the famous pool scene in *Boogie Nights* as a direct tribute to the scene in *I am Cuba*.

“*They do all these technical things, but what you feel is the joy of them experimenting and inventing as they go along.*” — Paul Thomas Anderson, 2018

As recently as a couple years ago, the opening credits of *Bojack Horseman* copied the same scene and in 2016, Mark Cousins credited *I am Cuba* as a major influence on *I am Belfast* even down to its very title.

“*The first time I saw this film I was in shock, it was everything I had heard about and more. The madness of these Russian filmmakers—they had a totally free hand and created these extravagant shots, the film has 3-4 set pieces which every director knows. It's absolute film history.*”
—Paul Schrader, August 2018

Synopsis

It is dawn. From a helicopter, the camera travels down the coast of Cuba. Sunlight sparkles on ocean waves lapping against white beaches. The camera sweeps over eerie white palms and back out over the ocean. On the shore a huge white cross looms above the trees against a dark sky.

I am Cuba

Once Christopher Columbus landed here.

He wrote in his diary:

"This is the most beautiful land ever seen by human eyes."

Thank you Señor Columbus.

When you saw me for the first time,

I was singing and laughing.

I waved the fronds of my palms to greet your sails.

I thought your ships brought happiness.

I am Cuba.

Ships took my sugar and left me tears...

Strange thing — sugar, Señor Columbus.

It contains so many tears, but it is sweet...

A sinewy boatman poles a small skiff through a narrow channel flanked by small houses on stilts where children play in the water and villagers wash their clothes. The man crouches low as the boat glides under a low plank bridges that crosses the stream while a woman balancing a package on her head passes above...

Suddenly a rock-and-roll trio is blaring away on the rooftop of a high-rise building overlooking the beaches of Havana. As the musicians dance and play, a bevy of bathing beauties stroll by. An announcer calls on the crowd to applaud the contestants as the camera moves down the side of the building to reveal affluent sunbathers all clapping for the beautiful girls. In the same long continuous take, the camera roams among the sunbathers drinking cocktails and playing cards around the swimming pool. Still in the same uninterrupted shot, it follows a tall brunette in a bikini as she gets up from her chaise lounge and walks into the pool. The camera then dives below the surface to film the swimmers underwater.

In a smoky nightclub decorated with bamboo poles and giant wooden idols, a Latin crooner plaintively sings "Amor Loco" (Crazy Love). At a table, three Americans place their orders for drinks and companionship. Only Jim, the bearded man in a bow tie, drinking limeade, doesn't select one of the girls at the bar. The Americans ask for a happier song and a bevy of masked dancers appear and strut to a pounding drumbeat.

René the handsome fruit seller sings his song of oranges, pineapples and California plums as he pushes his cart through the sunny streets of Havana. Enrique and another young man approach the cart and René hands them "fruit" — a packet of papers. He sings to Maria and tells her that someday they will be married in the beautiful white cathedral. He offers to bring fruit to her at her job, if only she will tell him where she works. She just turns away. He gives her a tangerine and tells her he loves her. As she walks away, he calls to her, "Maria, Maria..."

Back in the nightclub, Maria enters, dressed in a chic black dress, her hair pulled back. One of the bar girls runs up to her, calling "Betty, Betty." The women join the Americans' table. One of the men makes

a joke about the tangerine that Betty holds in her hand and she puts it in her handbag. Jim is especially taken with the handsome crucifix she wears. When the men draw lots for the girls, Jim “wins” Betty and his friend remarks that he always has good luck with crosses. The music starts and the Americans and the girls take to the dance floor. When the dance music changes to a driving African rhythm, Betty seems overwhelmed, even frightened. Then she begins to move to the music. As she dances and gyrates to the furious beat, the others crowd around, gaping and applauding nightmarishly.

As they leave the club, Jim tells Betty that it would be “interesting” to see where she lives. They take a taxi to a neighborhood of broken-down shacks. In her tiny one-room hut, Betty removes a worn quilt from the bed. Jim tries to convince her to keep her crucifix on, but she insists on removing it ...

The next morning, Jim eats the tangerine as he dresses. He places money on the bed and offers to pay Betty for her cross. When she refuses, the American adds more money and then pockets the crucifix. As he stands to go, they hear singing. René walks in with an armful of fruit. Jim leaves, saying, “Good-bye, Betty.” René looks at the woman on the bed and repeats, “Betty?”

Outside, Jim tries to find his way through the maze of shacks and narrow alleys. Children mob him and beg for money. Everywhere he turns he sees the faces of young women, little children and worn-out old men. The camera rises above the rooftops to show us his progress through the crowded slum.

I am Cuba.

Why are you running away?

You came here to have fun.

Go ahead, have fun!

Isn't this a happy picture?

Don't avert your eyes. Look!

I am Cuba.

For you, I am the casino, the bar, hotels and brothels.

But the hands of these children and old people are also me.

I am Cuba.

As a rainstorm pounds outside his hut, Pedro, an old peasant, watches his sleeping children. He dreams of the past, and see scenes of his wedding to his lovely young bride, happy days with their first child and later himself and his two children at his wife's grave. He remembers the landowner convincing him to sign a lease for his land by putting his thumbprint on a document. As the rain and his memories subside, Pedro goes into the fields and tells the sugar cane to grow tall, for his children's sake.

Pedro and his teenage son and daughter are harvesting the tall sugar cane. Suddenly, they hear horses approaching and Pablo calls out to his father that it is Señor Acosta, the landowner. Flanked by two henchman (one with a rifle) Acosta announces that he has sold his lands to the United Fruit Company. When Pedro asks “What about my sugar cane?” the landowner says, “You raised it on *my* land.” Acosta tells the old man that his house is not his anymore. “Have you forgotten this little piece of paper?” he asks, “You can't forge a signature like that!” With the man's words ringing in his head, Pedro slashes furiously at the cane with his machete. He tells Pablo and Teresa (who have not overheard the news) that they can go to the village and gives them his last peso.

At the tiny village, Pablo and Teresa buy Coca Colas and put money in the jukebox. Teresa dances happily. Meanwhile, their father sets fire to the sugar cane and then torches his shack. He raises his

machete to kill his old horse, but cannot. The skies darken with smoke as the old man falls besides the pyre of his home.

I am Cuba.

Sometimes it seems to me that the trunks of my palm trees are full of blood.

*Sometimes it seems to me that the murmuring sounds around us are not the ocean,
but choked-back tears.*

Who answers for this blood?

Who is responsible for these tears?

In newsreel footage, General Fulgencio Batista receives an award and celebrates US-Cuban relations. As Cuban soldiers march to “Anchors Aweigh,” the camera pulls back to reveal that the film is being shown in on the screen of a drive-in movie. Suddenly, Enrique and his friends rush out from amidst the cars and fling Molotov cocktails. Batista’s face reappears as the screen erupts in flames. Enrique and his companions flee in a convertible down streets lined with signs for General Electric, Esso and other U.S. corporations. The car pulls up in front of a fashionable department store and the men go their separate ways. Nearby, a band of drunken U.S. sailors sing “Gobs on the Loose” and surround a frightened woman, Gloria. She escapes into the store doorway where Enrique is loitering. When the sailors follow her, Enrique stands up to them and after a brief confrontation, the men leave, singing loudly. As she goes off into the night, Gloria says, “Thank you, Enrique.”

Riding a bus the next day, Enrique hears a newspaper seller on a bicycle call out the news that Fidel Castro is dead. From the window of the moving bus, he buys a paper and reads the shocking headlines. At the university, Enrique joins friends who tell him that the story is a lie. The students argue whether they should work to spread the news that Castro is alive and raising an army in the Sierra Maestra or whether they should revenge the murders of their fellow students. Enrique says that they must kill the “fat murderer” of their comrades. Alberto, the group’s leader responds that the students must help Castro overthrow the system.

Outside a modern apartment building, Enrique listens to street singer’s song of love betrayed. On the rooftop, he takes a rifle that has been hidden there and looks through the telescopic sight at a building across the way. A fat man appears on a balcony and Enrique takes aim. As he watches, the man and his family sit down to a breakfast of fried eggs. As the street singer’s song echoes in his head, Enrique drops the gun and runs wildly to the street below where he is almost hit by a car. Alberto drives up and rescues Enrique from the irate motorist. Enrique tells Alberto that he couldn’t shoot the fat man, Alberto — angry that Enrique took matters into his own hands — demands if he had considered the consequences.

Police burst into a room at the university where students are printing leaflets in support of Castro. One student breaks away and runs to the window to scatter his papers and shout “Long live freedom!” A shot rings out. As the leaflets float above, the young man’s body spirals wildly to the plaza below. A crowd gathers ...

I am Cuba.

There are two paths for people when they are born.

The path of slavery — it crushes and decays.

And the path of the star — it illuminates but kills.

These are the words of José Martí.

You will choose the star.

Your path will be hard, and it will be marked by blood.

*But in the name of justice wherever a single person goes,
thousands more will rise up.
And when there will be no more people,
then the stones will rise up.
I am Cuba.*

As the police take the handcuffed students out of the building, a fat police officer — the very man that Enrique could not kill — takes aim and shoots one of the young activists in the back. The police cars speed down the street, sirens screaming.

Standing at the feet of the statue of Alma Mater, Enrique addresses the crowd that has gathered in the plaza. As a flock of birds circles above, a shot echoes and a white dove falls. Students sing the Cuban national anthem as Enrique holds the dead bird aloft and leads the crowd down the cascading stairway to the street below. There, the protesters are met by police with high-powered water hoses. Gloria spots Enrique and calls to him. Many marchers brave the water jets and overturn cars. Amid the burning cars and buffeting spray, Enrique picks up a rock and walks toward the fat cop. The policeman takes careful aim and shoots. Enrique falls ...

Alberto covers his dead friend's face with the Cuban flag and helps carry his body past the wreckage of the burning cars. To the sound of tolling bells, a funeral cortege follows Enrique's body through the streets of Havana. In a dazzling single shot, the camera rises from street level, travels up the side of a building, crosses the street, enters a window, moves through a room where workers are rolling cigars, then launches out into space and proceeds down the length of a street filled with mourners from a vantage point in the middle of the thoroughfare and above the rooftops.

At night, deep in the swamps, government troops capture three rebel soldiers. They shine a light in each man's face and ask "Where is Fidel?" Each answers, "I am Fidel."

An exhausted freedom fighter approaches a hut in the mountains where Amelia, a peasant woman is pounding corn. Her husband, Mariano invites him to sit down and offers him a plate of food. The peasant, noticing the rifle, says that he wants to live in peace and orders the soldier to go. After the rebel leaves, they hear the sound of bombs falling nearby. Terrified the parents gather up their children and desperately run for cover. Their home is demolished in a fiery explosion. When he searches for his young son, Mariano discovers only a blackened doll. After the bombing, Mariano is reunited with the rest of his family. He tells his wife that he has to go.

High in the Sierra Maestre Mountains, rebel troops are massing to the sounds of Insurgent Radio broadcasts. As men from all walks of life gather, the radio celebrates their struggle. The rebel soldier runs into Mariano and tells him, "I knew you would come." Mariano says that now he needs a rifle. The freedom fighter tells him that he has to capture a gun in battle, as they have all done.

*I am Cuba.
Your arms have gotten used to farming tools,
but now a rifle is in your hands.
You are not shooting to kill.
You are firing at the past.
You are firing to protect your future.*

The guerrillas battle the government troops as they sing the Cuban anthem. Mariano wins a rifle in hand-to-hand combat, as his comrades sing “Do not fear a glorious death; to die for your motherland is to live.” The triumphant rebel forces march to universal celebration and joy.

“VAMONOS PARA LA HABANA”

Music by Carlos Fariñas, lyrics by Enrique Pineda Barnet

*Vàmonos, ven guajira,
Vàmonos para La Habana.
Vàmonos, ven guajira,
Arranca pa la ciudad.
A mi me gusta el guateque
Y echarle a mi gallo ron,
La hamaca en el bajareque
Y tu cintura con son.
El vivèn de tu cintura*

*Tiene mejor el sabor
Tiene la pulpa madura
Y el golpe de tu pilòn.
Amàrrate la montura
Para montarte en el son.
Vàmonos, ven guajira,
Vàmonos para La Habana.
Vàmonos, ven guajira
Arranca pa la ciudad.*

The Production

On November 25, 1962, the *New York Times* carried a Reuters' wire service report from Havana:

Mikhail Kalatozov, the Soviet director whose film The Cranes are Flying won international acclaim, will begin work on a joint Soviet-Cuban production here in January ... The film, Soy Cuba will be based on a script by the Soviet poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko and the Cuban poet Enrique Barnet.

The announcement came just a year after the U.S.-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion and less than a month after the world had reached the brink of nuclear conflict in the Cuban missile crisis. Although the missile confrontation was a “victory” for the United States, there was still great international optimism and hope for Cuba’s future. At that time, Castro’s regime with Soviet support was devoting tremendous resources for schools, hospitals and literacy brigades and most of the Cuban people remained dedicated to their charismatic leader and his ideals.

Both the Cuban rebellion and the 1917 Russian revolution that inspired it were led by men — Castro and Lenin — who believed in the revolutionary power of film to educate and inspire and both supported filmmaking that transcended mere propaganda. *Potemkin*, *Storm over Asia*, *October*, *The End of St. Petersburg*, *Memories of Underdevelopment* — the list is endless — combined great artistry and groundbreaking techniques with political fervor.

Influenced by Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein, Mikhail Kalatozov wanted to create his own *Potemkin* for the people of Cuba. Just as Eisenstein’s *Potemkin* had celebrated the Russian people’s freedom from the Czars, *I am Cuba* would glorify that country’s liberation from Batista and his exploitive U.S.-backed dictatorship. Like Eisenstein, Kalatozov wanted to create a new cinematic language to express his political beliefs and personal vision — and he similarly risked (and faced) official censure when his films veered off from the official party line.

With *I am Cuba*, Mosfilm and ICAIC got far more than they bargained for — Kalatozov’s masterpiece is a wildly schizophrenic celebration of Communist kitsch, mixing Slavic solemnity with Latin sensuality. The plot, or rather plots, feverishly explore the seductive, decadent (and marvelously photogenic) world of Batista’s Cuba — deliriously juxtaposing images of rich Americans and bikini-clad beauties sipping cocktails with scenes of ramshackle slums filled with hungry children and old people. Using wide-angle lenses that distort and magnify and filters that transform palm trees into giant white feathers, Urusevsky’s acrobatic camera achieves wild, gravity-defying angles as it glides effortlessly through long *continuous* shots. But *I Am Cuba* is not just a catalog of bravura technique — it also succeeds in exploring the innermost feelings of the characters and their often-desperate situations.

Begun before the Cuban missile crisis, the preproduction on *I Am Cuba* took longer than most films — over a year — because Kalatozov fell in love with Cuba and went to great lengths to plan every aspect of the film’s script and look. Yevgeny Yevtushenko was a perfect choice to co-write the screenplay, despite (or perhaps *because* of) his inexperience as a scriptwriter. The world-famous poet had worked as a correspondent in Cuba for *Pravda* and was (at that time) a friend of Castro’s. Kalatozov was interested in working with Yevtushenko because of his “youthful innovative spirit.” For Yevtushenko’s Cuban counterpart, he chose Enrique Pineda Barnet, a well-known novelist. Kalatozov, Yevtushenko and cinematographer Sergei Urusevsky began

preproduction by traveling to Cuba to prepare the script. There they met with Pineda Barnet at the Balalaika nightclub — where all four discovered they shared a devotion for Hemingway, Mayakovski, Matisse and Picasso (and a dislike for that particular club). The three Soviets were also in Cuba to find a composer (ironically, they discovered Cuban Carlos Fariñas later in Moscow) and a painter for the production. For the latter, they chose Rene Portocarrero, Cuba’s greatest artist. Portocarrero also designed the beautiful poster for the Cuban release.

Pineda Barnet, Kalatozov, Yevtushenko and Urusevsky toured Cuba and studied Cuban folklore to gather background material for the script. The three Soviets were most interested in, as Pineda Barnet called it, “the moral fallout of Cuba’s colonial past.” They visited many of Havana’s nightclubs where they delighted in the joyous freedom of Cuban music. Kalatozov tape-recorded many interviews with those who took part in the revolution as preparation for the film — this preserved the ‘emotional temperature’ of being in Cuba. Later, while filming the student riots, people would approach them to describe how the scenes had actually occurred, offering reminiscences and advice. The filmmaking team also watched documentaries and features of past and present Cuba. A constant visitor to ICAIC’s screening rooms at the time was Fidel Castro, who spent many evenings watching films. Alexander Calzatti, an assistant cameraman on *I am Cuba*, remembers that many of Castro’s favorite films were from Hollywood. The men met with Haydee Santamaría, a veteran of the Moncada massacre and with Che Guevara, who spent the day reliving the *Granma* voyage, the battles in the Sierra Maestra and the final march to Havana. From that time on Guevara acted as an unofficial advisor to the film and often dropped by the set.

Castro told Pineda Barnet that the filmmakers had to visit the Sierra Maestra, “even if you have to go on a donkey.” There the men visited the scenes of the revolution and met Raúl Castro, who told them stories of those perilous days. Like his brother Fidel, Raúl loved the cinema and the men had long discussions about the art of film. When they returned to Havana, the four began work on the script. Along the way, Yevtushenko wrote several poems inspired by their journey and Urusevsky took many photos and filmed many locations with his small movie camera.

The first draft of the script was a scene-by-scene recreation of the Cuban revolution. But the writers felt burdened with too much historical material and decided instead to create a cinematic poem: “the main heroine would be the revolution — the hero would be the people.” Their goal was not to elevate any one individual (in the film, Castro is mentioned but never seen), but to show the “historic necessity” of the people’s break from Batista’s American-backed government. They decided to divide the screenplay into five stages:

- 1) colonialism, and its affects on the city,
- 2) the tragedy of the peasants,
- 3) the gestation of the workers/students’ struggle.
- 4) the struggle in the plains (the disastrous invasion on the Moncada army barracks)
- 5) the struggle in the mountains and the final triumph.

This breakdown became the basis for the completed script, although the fourth segment was never filmed. Pineda Barnet described the men’s working relationship:

We had group meetings: Kalatozov, Urusevsky, Yevgeny and me. We discussed subjects, ideas, characters, situations... Whenever we got to an agreement, we would separate to elaborate on it. Yevgeny locked himself in his room on the 17th floor of the Havana-Libre Hotel. I worked in my house near the waterfront. Kalatozov and Urusevsky listened to

music, wandered around the streets of Havana, shot scenes freely, and tried filters, natural light and locations. Every time any of us got results, we met to discuss the development. Sometimes Kalatozov gave us an idea to work on, sometimes Urusevsky did. Other times Yevgeny and I met alone to exchange impressions and I told him about personal experiences or some well-known anecdote, or I just supplied him with more information about the Cuban atmosphere. In the last meetings, we selected the best of all our efforts. When we presented the project to the meeting of the ICAIC, we had a beginning that was more or less worked out, and the rest was in the form of synopsis. It received some constructive criticism as well as some observations and advice from Che Guevara, [filmmaker Julio] García Espinosa, [filmmaker Tomás] Gutiérrez Alea. We had the project fully outlined — now we needed to fill in the details, which would take many months.

It was now January 1962. The three Soviets returned to Moscow to work on the script and Pineda Barnet followed the next month. When Pineda Barnet arrived in Moscow, he found a land covered in snow. Kalatozov and Yevtushenko, along with Urusevsky and his wife Belka, met him at the airport and gave him a tour of the city. To help them in their work on the script, Kalatozov encouraged Pineda Barnet and Yevtushenko to watch various edited and unedited versions of Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico*. Kalatozov later introduced them to Eisenstein's former assistant, Grigori Alexandrov. They also screened other Soviet productions (Pineda Barnet found some inspiring, others dreadful) and visited the set of Sergei Bondarchuk's *War and Peace*. Pineda Barnet wrote about Kalatozov's vision for the film:

Kalatozov told us about his idea of a script where dialogue would not need translation. In other words, to try to include the least possible amount of dialogue, including only the words strictly necessary and in that, they would be so expressive there would be no need for translation.

We were getting ready to start the work on the third part (the students-workers' struggle), for which we had already prepared a synopsis in Havana. We discussed the elements that were going to be more or less emphasized. We also agreed that the characters would not necessarily appear in all five subplots (back in Havana, we had originally wanted the same group of characters to interact in all five stories). Now we could treat subjects related to our main characters without having to give a biographical or narrative account of each one.

At this time the group met Carlos Fariñas, a highly regarded Cuban composer who had written the scores for several well-known ballets, who was presently studying at Moscow's Tchaikovsky Conservatory. Fariñas was a great help to Pineda Barnet — for the first time in Moscow, the writer was able to speak with a fellow Cuban artist who could make suggestions and critiques. (Fariñas, who studied with Aaron Copland at Tanglewood in 1956 and went on to score several more important Cuban films including *Portrait of Theresa* by Pastor Vega, died in Havana in 2002.) The third part of the story had become such a problem, that the group went on to start work on the fourth. It was Kalatozov — belying his “official” reputation as a filmmaker of style rather than content — who pushed the writers for more insight into the characters and urged them to go beyond stereotypes to discover the virtues and weaknesses of each man and woman in the film. At this time, an idea for a sixth story, of present-day Cuba, was proposed. After much discussion, the idea was abandoned.

By May Day, the team was now concerned that the script was too long and that some scenes lacked depth and strength. All agreed that the script needed major editing to make the film leaner and more powerful. Kalatozov made many of the cuts in the first and second stories — eliminating scenes that were unnecessary for the advancement of the plot — and the four men were happy with the final version. According to Pineda Barnet, every scene now seemed integral and irreplaceable. For the first time, he began to understand the dynamics of scriptwriting and the vision that Kalatozov had in mind. Pineda Barnet began to work with great enthusiasm on the third and fourth stories. Kalatozov further helped the young writer by suggesting that he write some scenes in the form of poems and then put them in terms of normal film description.

In Cuba, Kalatozov began to assemble his cast. They came from all walks of life, but always students to play students, peasants to play peasants, et cetera:

I am a food service worker. I was born 53 years ago — exactly the year of the Mexican Revolution. I work in an INIT restaurant in Boca de Jaruco, in Guanabo. In other words, I am not a peasant — even though Kalatozov thought that I have an amazing guajiro (peasant) look — but a restaurant worker. The restaurant is called “Pollo Pampero” since we serve the best Pampero chicken in all Guanabo. When my companions heard that I was going to work in the movies, they said that they had always known that I would be a good actor because I look like Spencer Tracy. That’s what they say. I can easily pretend to be a guajiro because I experienced the life of a peasant when I was responsible for “social distribution” at a hacienda (ranch). In the movie I play Pedro ... According to the screenplay, I have to die in my shack in the middle of the flames. I am very curious to see how they are planning to shoot this scene because the truth is that I’m not going to let them burn even my little finger. No way.

— José Gallardo (*Pedro*)

I am 15 years old and a student at the Academia de Arte Dramático. I had just arrived one morning and was getting some coffee when Kalatozov saw me and thought that I would be great as Pedro’s daughter in the movie. In the movie we are shooting now, I still don’t know why we’re doing what we’re doing and I don’t have a very clear idea about how things are going to look on screen.

— Luisa María Jiménez (*Teresa*)

I study acting at the Escuela Nacional de Arte. I have been interested in theater for many years. I put a group together, and directed some plays at Central Fe (now the Central José María Pérez), where my father works. Kalatozov chose me because he thought I looked perfect to play the role of a young Cuban guajiro.

— Mario González Broche (*Pablo*)

Many other actors had similar stories. Kalatozov said during the making of the film:

I have not chosen experienced actors — some have never acted before, while others are just getting started. I think that cinema does not really require professional actors, because what counts more than anything is the human presence. That is what creates a character on screen.

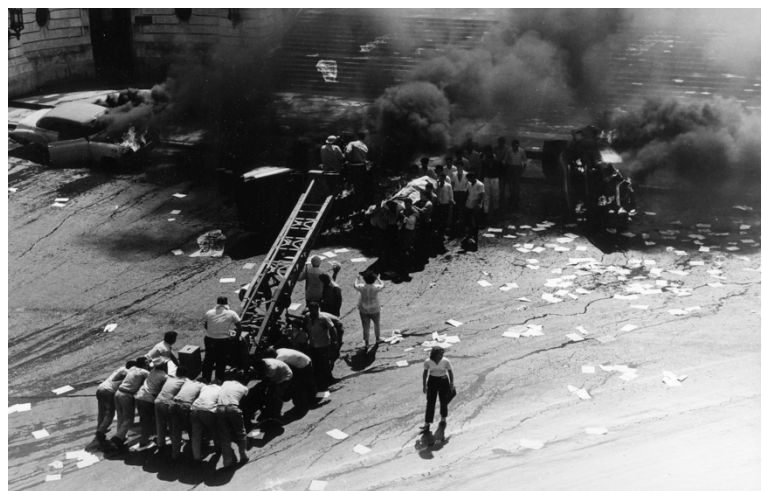
One of the more interesting additions to the cast was the black singer, Ignacio, in the bar scene at the beginning of the film. There have been many stories about him — one was that before the

revolution he lived in America and was famous as the falsetto lead of the pop group, The Platters. This rumor seems to be false but it might have started because the groups' work influenced Carlos Fariñas when he wrote the song. What IS true, however, is that the actor was dubbed and that the real person heard on the soundtrack was one of the singers of a Cuban quartet quite famous at that time, "Los Zafiros."

Once the cast was set, the momentous task of creating *I am Cuba* lay in the hands of Kalatozov, Urusevsky and the camera operator Alexander Calzatti. Although Urusevsky had great vision and enormous talent, he did not have the technical training that the very young cameraman had received in film school. There, Calzatti's professor was Eisenstein's legendary associate Eduard Tisse. Calzatti's father was also a well-known Soviet cinematographer who had also worked with Kalatozov. In fact, Calzatti's first professional film experience had been as an intern on *The Cranes are Flying*.

It was left to Calzatti devise the technical requirements for the many complicated and elaborate shots in *I am Cuba*. For the dreamlike opening of the film and for many of the shots throughout the film — where palm trees and sugar cane look like white feathers against the black sea or sky — Urusevsky and Calzatti were among the first to use infrared film stock (obtained at great effort from an East German film lab). The men also experimented with many filters. What made *I am Cuba* especially difficult to film was the fact that 97% of the film was shot hand-held. The camera of choice was an Eclair, an ultra-light French camera that held a five-minute roll of film. For the famous scene where in a long traveling shot, the camera descends from the rooftop of a building, down to a swinging scene overlooking Havana and finally, *into* the swimming pool, Calzatti had to make a watertight box out of sheets of Dupont plastic with three handles so the camera (using a 9.8mm lens) could be passed between Urusevsky and Calzatti at crucial moments. On the first take, the camera box refused to dive beneath the water surface, and Calzatti had to adapt the box with a hollow steel tube running through it so the air could escape the box, but no water would enter the camera.

For the crane shot where Pedro sets fire to his hut, the crew devised a closed-camera video system to view their work while shooting — twenty years before this technique was "invented" in Hollywood. For their monitor, Urusevsky took his own Russian-made television set from his home in Moscow and held it on the plane all the way to Cuba.



Crane used for shooting the beginning of Enrique's funeral

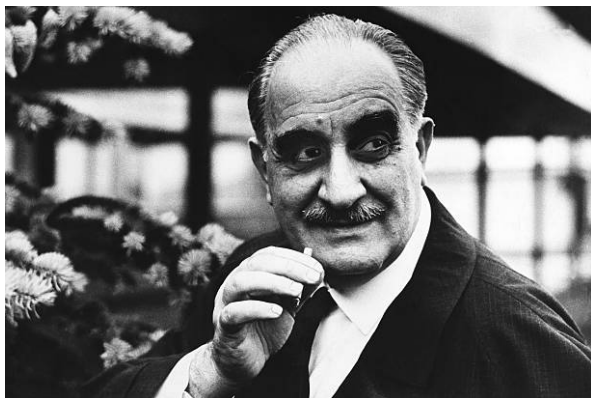
The eerie shot of Enrique’s death, where the camera swirls around and the image “dissolves” was difficult to conceive and easy to achieve. First, the filters in front of the lens were twisted to distort the image, oil was poured down on a plastic sheet in front of the lens and then in the laboratory, the image slowly faded into its negative image and was freeze-framed.

The planning and shooting of *I am Cuba* lasted almost two years and during that time an astonishing amount of footage was shot. Although brief mentions of the film appeared, the film was never shown outside of the Soviet Union and Cuba, and was effectively lost until for many years.

In 1992, Cuban novelist Guillermo Cabrera Infante along with festival directors Tom Luddy and Bill Pence presented a tribute to Mikhail Kalatozov at the Telluride Film Festival and screened *I am Cuba* (unsubtitled) for the first time in America. (The film had been purchased from Gosfilmofond thanks to the efforts of Edith Kramer and the Pacific Film Archive.) It had a great reception —filmmakers Bertrand Tavernier and the Quay Brothers among others became big fans of the film. But it was at the 1993 San Francisco International Film Festival where *I am Cuba* was shown to a sold-out audience who gave the film a standing ovation *during* the screening — twice — that Milestone heard about the film from programming friends Anita Monga and Eleanor Nichols who had attended that screening. It took another year of negotiations before Milestone could acquire the rights from Mosfilm and ICAIC. Fans of the film, Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola agreed to “present” the film in the United States by lending their names to all the publicity material. Milestone took great care to commission new subtitles and strike new 35mm subtitled prints along with a fine grain interpositive from the original negative. Going into substantial personal debt to release the film, Milestone was saved by rapturous reviews from the New York press and a three-month run at New York’s Film Forum premiering March 8, 1995. To celebrate the 10th anniversary of their release of *I am Cuba*, Milestone in 2005 re-released the MK2 French version with the Spanish-only soundtrack.

In 2005 a documentary about the making of *I Am Cuba* was released called *Soy Cuba: O Mamute Siberiano* or *I Am Cuba: the Siberian Mammoth* directed by a Brazilian, Vicente Ferraz. The film looks at the history of the making of the film, explains some of the technical feats of the film and there are interviews with many of the people who worked on it.

Mikhail Kalatozov
(December 28, 1903 - March 27, 1973)



Mikhail K. Kalatozov (Kä’ lä tô’ zov) was born in Tiflis (now Tbilisi), Georgia as Mikhail Konstantinovich Kalatozishvili. After leaving school at fourteen, he worked as a mechanic and driver while studying for his high school diploma. After graduation, Kalatozov attended business school to study economics until a job as a projectionist in a movie theater convinced him to enter into film. In 1925, he was admitted to the Tbilisi Film Studios where he acted in small roles and learned the arts of cinematography and

editing. First appearing as an actor in Ivan Perestiani's *Dyelo Tariel Mklavadze* (*The Case of the Murder of Tariel Mklavadze*), he soon was working as a cameraman under Lev Kuleshov on *Locomotive No. 1000b*. Kalatozov followed this work by shooting and co-writing several documentaries and science films including L. Push and Nikolai Shengelaya's *Giulli* and L. Push's *Tsiganskaya krov* (*Gypsy Blood*). His major influences included famed filmmakers Dziga Vertov (*The Man with a Movie Camera*, *Enthusiasm*, *Three Songs of Lenin*, et cetera) and Esther Shub (*The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*). Kalatozov was able to meet Shub in 1927 and the two became longtime friends.

In 1928, Kalatozov and co-director Nutsa Gogoberidze employed Shub's style of historical compilation film to make a documentary about Georgia from 1918 to 1928, naturally called *18-28*, concerning the counter-revolutionary activities of the Mensheviks and *Ikh tsartsvo* (*Their Kingdom*). In 1930, he partnered with famed writer and critic Sergei Tretyakov (a colleague of Vertov's and a member of his Kino-Eye group) for a film entitled *Slepaya* (*Blind*). The same pair went on to make one of the great documentaries in Soviet cinema, *Sol Dia Svanetia* (*Salt for Svanetia*, 1930). The film explores Svanetia, a valley in the Caucasus Mountains of Georgia, 6,000 feet above sea level, where life remained almost unchanged from the Middle Ages. Jay Leyda in his book *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, quotes a description of the film from a Soviet sales catalog:

Life is patriarchal, primitive; the struggle for existence among the snow-capped mountains entails such constant want and hunger, and particularly, the tormenting hunger for salt, that each new birth is regarded as a terrible curse, while death becomes a solemn feast. Bloody offerings were made at the graves of the dead; horses and beeves were slaughtered in honor of their pagan gods, Salema and Dala.

Leyda first saw the film in 1934 and wrote to a friend in the U.S., "It is absolutely the most powerful documentary film I've ever seen ... it would absolutely stun any private film society that had the opportunity to see it." But like many of his brethren in the Soviet film world, Kalatozov fell under suspicion. Critics of *Salt for Svanetia* charged that the film showed ancient traditions and superstitions that no longer existed in the new Soviet world — although the film showed that new roads built by the Communist would forever change Svanetia for the better. Nonetheless, officials attached the dreaded charges of "formalism" and "naturalism" to the film.

With his next film, *Gvozd v sapoge* (*Nail in the Boot*, 1932), Kalatozov completely lost official favor and this depiction of the Soviet Army was forever banned. The film put a nail in Kalatozov's own career. Unable to make films, he finished post-graduate work at the Leningrad Academy of Art and then went to work as the head of the Tbilisi and Lenfilm studios. It took seven long years before he could make another film, *Mut* (*Manhood*) —a slight film of foreign espionage and aviation.

Kalatozov's *Valeri Chkalov* (*Wings of Victory*, 1941) was a biography of great Russian aviator, Valeri Chkalov, the first man to fly from the USSR over the North Pole to the U.S. The film, which chronicled the flier's trials as well as his triumphs, was extremely popular and successful. Leyda wrote: "The finished film conveys Kalatozov's excitement in the 'mere act of flying,' plus his sympathy with a hero whose temperament often got him into trouble." In 1942, Kalatozov became chief administrator of feature film production and directed *Kinokontsert k 25-letiyu Krasnoy Armii* (*The Cine-concert for the 25th Anniversary of the Red Army*, co-directed with Sergei Gerasimov

and Efim Dzigan). During the war, he made only one more film, in collaboration with Sergei Gerasimov, *Nepobedimye* (*The Invincible*, 1943), which chronicled the defense of Stalingrad.

Part of the reason, strangely enough, was that during the summer of 1943 the Soviet government chose Kalatozov to serve as a Russian consul in Los Angeles, where he reportedly worked to strengthen ties between Soviet and American filmmakers and to establish an exchange of films between the two countries. In a June 12, 1944 feature article, *Time* magazine described him in somewhat stereotypical terms of the day:

Kalatozov, an enigmatic, uncommunicative Soviet official, went about his business with mysterious and solemn placidity, abetted by the fact that he spoke no English when he arrived. He can now discuss the weather with some facility.

Last week Movieman Kalatozov was still politely uncommunicative but a two-hour grilling through an interpreter had elicited this information:

In ten months Kalatozov has seen some 120 movies, has shipped nine to Russia. The nine: Young Tom Edison, Bambi, The Little Foxes, Hurricane, The North Star, Der Fuehrer's Face, Saludos Amigos, Mission to Moscow, Sun Valley Serenade.

The five U.S. films most popular in Russia, according to Kalatozov, were In Old Chicago, 100 Men and a Girl, Great Waltz, Lady Hamilton, Mission to Moscow.

Kalatozov also said that Russia's favorite cinemactors are: Bette Davis, Charlie Chaplin, Spencer Tracy, Deanna Durbin, and Mickey Mouse.

The director later wrote about his experiences in California (living at 4744 Los Feliz Boulevard) in his book *Lico Gollivuda* (*Hollywood's Face*, 1949). Kalatozov and his connections in Hollywood came up in the 1947 HUAC hearings, though in their findings, his dealings seemed strictly about business. Some still suspect he was here as a spy though the worst HUAC could come up with was a mention in a Communist paper of a party for him at the restaurant Mocambo and that his house was "located close to the Soviet consulate and near the homes of some of Hollywood's best-known stars." Appeals to the Freedom of Information Act for anything on Kalatozov's stay here proved negative.

Kalatozov returned to the USSR in 1944 and two years later became Deputy Minister of Cinematography, a post he kept until 1949. He finally returned to filmmaking the next year with *Zagovor obrechyonnikh* (*Conspiracy of the Doomed*, 1950). A film that was definitely part of the Soviet Union's popular post-war, Anti-American genre deals with an imperialist conspiracy involving the Vatican and American intelligence operatives in an unnamed Eastern European communist country. According to historians Mira Liehm and Antonin J. Liehm, the plot was dictated by party resolutions and was "so blatant that it encountered opposition even among the governing circles in Eastern Europe."

Kalatozov followed with a modern satire, *Vernye druz'ja* (*Faithful Friends*, 1954) about three friends who band together to bypass the arcane Soviet bureaucracy (a film that could only appear in Soviet theaters a year after Stalin's death); *Vichri Vrazdebnye* (*Waves of Rancor*, 1953) on the life of Felix Edmundovich Dzerhinsky (a Russian Bolshevik leader and first chairman of the

Cheka); and *Pervyj eselon* (*The First Echelon*, 1956), a film about young settlers trying to work uncultivated lands.

It was on *The First Echelon* that Kalatozov first met one of his most valuable allies, cinematographer Sergei Urusevsky. Their first film together (with actress Tatiana Samoilova) *Letyat zhuravli* (*The Cranes are Flying*, 1957) was based on a play by Victor Rosov and became one of the most popular and influential Soviet films since the 1930s. This lyrical and passionate story of an affair between young lovers during wartime astonished film critics around the world. The film's bold camerawork and freedom of expression (including depictions of black marketers and draft dodgers in the USSR during World War II) marked a brief but splendid period in Soviet cinema. *The Cranes are Flying* went on to win the *Palme D'Or* as best film at the 1958 Cannes Film Festival.

Kalatozov, Urusevsky and Samoilova combined forces again in 1960 to make *Neotpravlennoe pis'mo* (*The Letter Never Sent*), a story of four young geologists searching for diamonds in the taiga of Siberia. Its lunar-like landscapes, eerie foreboding light and sense of solitude and isolation anticipated (and perhaps influenced) the work of Andrei Tarkovsky. The Soviet hierarchy who had been hoping for another international success attacked Kalatozov. In an October 1962 conference in Italy, Mikhail Romm, the head of Kalatozov's production unit at Mosfilm (also known as the Art Council), stated his complaint against *The Letter Never Sent*. It should be noted that Romm's speech was also a defense against charges that the Art Council's sole purpose was the pre-censorship of its filmmakers. This is an important statement, because the attitude Romm expressed became the "official" dogma espoused by Soviet film historians and critics on all of Kalatozov's work.

Kalatozov himself often asks the Council for a general discussion, and not only for discussion but for us to see the rushes before the film is finished ... I would like to mention here what happened in the Art Council's discussion on Kalatozov's film The Letter Never Sent. The Council criticized this film quite severely ... We said to Kalatozov that in this search for new approaches he had destroyed and suffocated the dramatic development of his characters. It seemed, in the last analysis, that he had cut man, with all his features, out of this film. Man, the characters, had a subordinate position; he had been superseded by the direction and the photography. We suggested to Kalatozov — and it is just this that the Art Council exists for — that he should correct this situation ... Kalatozov did not agree with the Art Council and did not think we were right.

This vein of criticism persisted for decades — until the Telluride Film Festival's 1992 tribute to Kalatozov and later showings of *I am Cuba* at the 1993 San Francisco Film Festival. With the passing of time, Kalatozov's films are now seen as more modern in tone and technique than those of many of his contemporaries in world cinema. *The Letter Never Sent* was an important influence on Francis Ford Coppola's work, especially in the filming of *Apocalypse Now*.

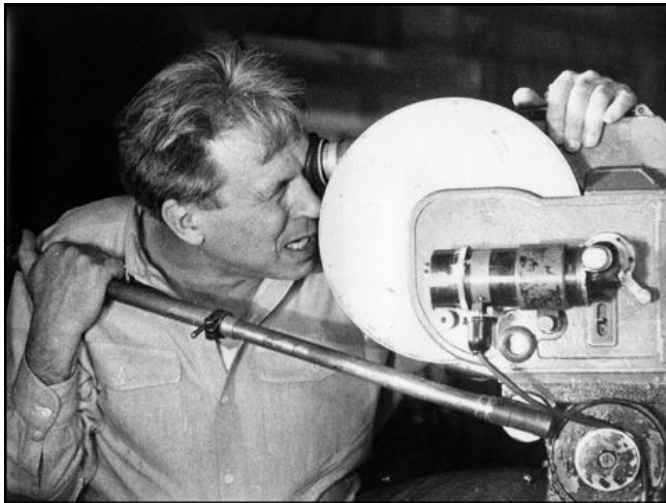
At the time of *Ja Kuba/Soy Cuba* (*I am Cuba*, 1964), Kalatozov was sixty-one years old. His appearance was a cross between that of a Soviet politburo official and a distinguished Italian actor nearing the end of his career. Well dressed, with a strong Romanesque nose, he looked like a successful businessman who was comfortably in control — not at all like a creative artist known for his whirling, feverish camera movement and esthetic unpredictability. *Soviet Film* (1968, volume 8), described him in admiring terms:

In this rather taciturn man, who never raises his voice and sometimes seems rather phlegmatic, there is an unbelievable charge of emotion. It only takes a brief contact between the artist and his material, just a faint spark, for this charge to explode into a mighty blast ... He has a record of forty years work in films, yet he still keeps his colleagues and cinema audiences guessing.

After *I am Cuba*, he spent several years in the preparation and shooting of *Krasnaya palatka (La Tenda Rosa /The Red Tent*, 1970). Distributed in the United States by Paramount, *The Red Tent* was an Italian-Soviet production starring Sean Connery as Roald Amundsen and Peter Finch as Umberto Nobile in a re-creation of an ill-fated 1928 Arctic expedition — on a flight to the North Pole, Nobile and his exploration party's airship *Italia* crashed in extremely hostile weather conditions. They were eventually rescued by a Russian team.

Kalatozov died in Moscow on March 27, 1973 at the age of sixty-nine after a long illness. He was the father of the director Giorgi Kalatozishvili, and grandfather of film director Mikheil Kalatozishvili.

Sergei Pavlovich Urusevsky (December 23, 1908 – November 12, 1974)



Sergei Urusevsky started as a painter and photographer studying under the great graphic artist Vladimir Favorsky at the Institute of Fine Art in Moscow. Bringing a pictorial tradition to cinema, Urusevsky started his career with Mark Donskoi on *Selskaya uchitelnitsa (The Village Schoolteacher*, 1947), Vsevolod Pudovkin on *The Return of Vasili Bortnikov* (1953), and Grigori Chukhari on *Sorok pervyi (The Forty-First*. 1956). Urusevsky also served during World War II as a cameraman on the front lines.

With *The First Echelon* he combined his marvelous visual sense with Kalatozov's breathtaking technical skills — a partnership that made *The Cranes are Flying*, *The Letter Never Sent* and *I am Cuba* landmarks in the history of cinematography. It was with *Cranes* where their use of the hand-held camera really started, especially with the scene of Veronica running through the streets where the camera finally and miraculously leaps into the air with an overhead shot. It was Urusevsky and Yuri Ilyenko (cinematographer of *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*) who had profound influence throughout the Soviet film industry — not since the 1920s had Soviet film style been acclaimed throughout the world. Urusevsky's poetic camerawork, no matter how daring, was *always* an organic search into the emotional possibilities of the script. In 1969 Urusevsky directed *The Ambler's Race*, adapted from the Kirghiz writer Chinghiz Aitmatov's short novel. Urusevsky followed this up with *Sing Your Song, Poet* (1971) based on the poems of Sergei Yesenin.

Urusevsky's other cinematography credits include *The Land of the Blue Mountains*, *Alitet Leaves for the Hills*, *Cavalier of the Golden Star*, and *Lesson of Life*.

Sergei Urusevsky, “On Form”
from *Iskusstvo kino* Magazine, 1965
translated by Nadia Kizenko, State University of New York at Albany

Cuba stunned us. This is an overwhelming revolution, an overwhelming country and people. We had to establish the genre and the form of our film accordingly...

Say we, as foreigners, arrive in a country where we have never been and start trying to make a psychological drama or a novelistic treatment. We probably would not be able to do it. No foreigner could do it, because in order to make that kind of a film you need to really know all of your material in detail — the people, the way of life, their particular national qualities, and so on and so forth.

We saw the film as a kind of poem, as a poetic narrative. I am not saying that this is how it actually turned out! It is up to you to determine whether we were able to do it. but it did seem to us that with this genre we could solve the artistic task before us ... This kind of form does not require much detail of everyday life or exhaustive psychological description. But what did seem absolutely necessary to us was the creation of an image — to the point of hyperbole.

In the process of making the film there were these new laws that kept coming up, laws that are apparently inherent in this kind of narrative ... We tried to get to the point where the viewer would not be just a passive observer of events happening on the screen but would experience them with the actor — we wanted the viewers to be active participants in the events. And I, as a cameraman, always wanted to do more than simply fixate what was happening in front of the camera. I am interested in getting the basic theme of the scene: love, loathing, misery, joy, despair...

Rhythm is key. Obviously when the cameraman is running alongside the heroes, first close to them, then approaching them again — peering into the face of one, then another, stumbling into trees, falling down — the panorama cannot be and ought not to be even. This technical ‘failing’ is in fact an artistic virtue. I should add that whatever episode we film, whatever camera we use, the vital condition is an inner agitation, a creative emotion during the filming — I even dare say inspiration.

Using a hand-held camera gives you the opportunity of making free, complicated panoramic pans which are impossible with a stationary camera with the usual cart on its tracks. This is not to say that I am agitating for every film to be shot with a manual camera. But when we tried shooting *I am Cuba* with a stationary camera and a tripod, it just didn’t work — it was as if our hands dropped down by our sides ... it seems to me that if I move forward a bit, holding the camera in my hands, or back a bit, or shake the camera from side to side, the image becomes more expressive and more alive. We could not do without it.

It seems to us that you do not have to show the viewer literally everything on the screen. Not at all. There is always something that ought to be left unspoken. You have to give the viewer the chance to be more active, to figure out something for himself, to connect the dots...

There is one more circumstance, which seems very important to me. In *I am Cuba* we decided to solve the social issue by way of association. Take the beginning of the film: before the subtitles you already have the long pan along the shore, over the palm trees. We wanted to show the long island which we are approaching more and more slowly ... After the titles there is a pan over a poverty-stricken village. Black sky, white palms. The whole pan was shot from a boat. In the foreground you have a black boatman. The whole pan is shot around him — you see first his back, then his legs. (By the way, this pan is shot using a 9.8mm lens. The possibility of this lens still amazes me...) I am convinced that the impression of poverty is not created so much by the poor village itself that we are passing by as by this boatman, whose bare back and legs we constantly see off to the side. At the end, the camera comes to a black woman with naked children crossing

the river. They are the culmination of the pan. In the next sequence, taking the camera into the pool is justified because water is the visual link between the two scenes.

Yevgeny Aleksandrovich Yevtushenko
(July 18, 1933 — April 1, 2017)



Born in Zima in Irkutsk as a fourth-generation Ukrainian exiled to Siberia, famed poet Yevgeny Aleksandrovich Yevtushenko moved to Moscow at a young age where he attended the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute. He was first published in 1952 and soon became known as the most popular spokesman for a young generation of poets who refused to follow the dictates of the Stalinist era and its doctrine of social realism. In 1956, he published “Zima Junction,” an autobiographical work. He gained international fame in 1961 with a series of poems which were to become milestones

in his career including “The Heirs of Stalin,” “Talk,” — both indictments of Soviet hypocrisy — and “Babi Yar,” protesting Soviet anti-Semitism and the horrors of the holocaust. It was a daring break from Soviet policy — the first “popular” recognition that Jews had been singled out for persecution. Published clandestinely (*samizdat*), it did not have an official Russian release until 1984.

*"But those with unclean hands
have often made a jingle of your purest name.
I know the goodness of my land.
How vile these anti-Semites - without a qualm
they pompously called themselves
the Union of the Russian People."*

Although always at odds with the Soviet government, it was the publication in Paris of his *Precocious Autobiography* (1963) that drew severe official censure. However, Yevtushenko’s enormous international popularity allowed him relative freedom to continue his work and travel abroad. In 1984 Yevtushenko began his second career, that of film director. His first film, *Kindergarten*, opened at Film Forum in New York City and his second, *Stalin’s Funeral*, premiered in 1993 at the Museum of Modern Art. Yevtushenko spent the last years of his life residing in the United States; teaching at the University of Tulsa and City University of New York’s Queens College. Married four times and having five sons, Yevtushenko died peacefully in his sleep on the morning of April 1, 2017 at the Hillcrest Medical Center in Tulsa.

An overview of Yevtushenko’s work, *Collected Poems: 1952–1990* was published by Henry Holt. In 1995, he published his first novel, *Don’t Die Before You’re Dead* (Random House).

Film Credits: *I am Cuba* (1964, scriptwriter), *Take Off* (1973, actor), *Kindergarten* (1984, scriptwriter, director, actor), *Stalin’s Funeral* (1991, scriptwriter, director, actor), *Donna Quixote* (1995, work in progress for the BBC with Vanessa Redgrave).

Enrique Pineda Barnet (October 28, 1933-)



Born in Havana, Enrique Pineda Barnet started his career as an actor in radio and theater. In 1953, he published his first novel, *Y más allá de la brisa* (*Beyond the Breeze*) which won the Hernández Catá National Literary Award. At the same time, he started writing for television and began to work in advertising (he found the latter to be a great way to get professional training). With the publication of his book *Siete cuentos para antes de un suicidio* (*Seven Stories for Before a Suicide*), Pineda Barnet met a group of young film buffs interested in adapting his novel to the screen. Among them was director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea.

Pineda Barnet returned to the theater with the Nuestro Tiempo Group and later the Studio Theater Group. In the theater, he developed his writing and directing skills. Even after the founding of ICAIC (the Cuban Film Institute) in 1959, Pineda Barnet chose not to join his film friends (including Gutiérrez Alea) but decided to stay in theater as a teacher for several years.

It was only in 1963 at the urging of Alfredo Guevara that Pineda Barnet joined ICAIC. At the same time that he was co-writing *I am Cuba*, Pineda Barnet started to direct some experimental short films and several documentaries. His first feature, *Giselle*, starring Alicia Alonso was an enormous success and is still in distribution in the U.S. through New Yorker Films. Pineda Barnet's 1989 feature, *La bella del Alhambra*, won a Goya Prize from the Spanish Cinema Arts Academy. Today, Pineda Barnet is one of the most respected authors and directors in Cuba.

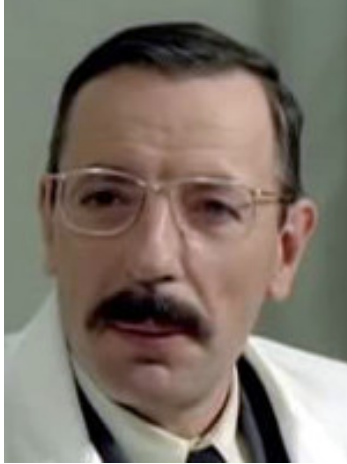
Filmography: *Fuenteovejuna* (1963), *Cosmorama* (1964), *Giselle* (1964), *La Gran Piedra* (1965), *Aire frío* (1965), *David* (1967), *Rodeo* (1972), *Versos sencillos* (1972), *Nicolás Guillén n°2* (1972), *Mella* (1975), *Rostros del Báltico* (1977), *Aquella larga noche* (1979), *Tiempo de amar* (1983), *Ensayo romántico* (1985), *La bella del Alhambra* (1989).

Sergio Corrieri (March 2, 1939 – February 29, 2008)



Sergio Corrieri (*Alberto*) was one of Cuba's most renowned actors, having also starred in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's acclaimed *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968) and Manuel Pérez's *El Hombre de Maisinicú* (1973). Corrieri became an actor when he was at the University of Havana and has had a successful career in film and television. Committed to the Cuban revolution, in 1968 he founded el Grupo Teatro Escambray where he produced and starred in plays that appeared around the world. He was most recognized in Cuba for appearing in the extremely popular serial *En silencio ha tenido que ser*. Having last appeared on Cuban television almost twenty years ago, Corrieri founded an avant-garde theater company, *Escambray*, up in the mountains. In 1990 he was named president of the Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos (Cuban Institute of Friendship with the People), which he remained in that position up until the time of his death in 2008.

Jean Bouise
(June 3, 1929 – July 6, 1989)



Jean Bouise (*Jim, the man with the crucifix fetish*) was one of the founders and stars of the Theatre de la Cite in the 1950s and became one of France's most admired actors. Like many Europeans enamored of the country and the revolution, Bouise was on vacation in Cuba in 1963 during the making of the film. It was Kalatozov who convinced him to play the important role of the American at the bar who picks up "Betty." Bouise starred in many great movies France during the 1960s, famous for his roles in Alain Resnais' *La Guerre est Finie*, Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist*, and Constantin Costa-Gavras' *Z*. Since then, he has appeared in other noteworthy French films such as *Mr. Klein*, *Le Dernier Combat*, *Subway*, *The Big Blue* and his last film released after his death, *Le Femme Nikita*.

Luz Maria Collazo (Reyes)



Luz Maria Collazo (Maria/Betty) was already a dancer and a model when asked by Kalatozov to appear in *I am Cuba*. She is known today as a prima ballerina and choreographer as well as one of the co-founders (along with Isidro Rolando and Eduardo Arrocha) of Danza Contemporánea de Cuba. In 2001, she appeared in the film *Roots of My Heart*. (See interview at the end of the press kit.)

Salvador Wood
(November 24, 1928)



Salvador Wood (Mariano, the farmer) was born in Santiago de Cuba in 1928, where he first decided to become an actor. In 1946, he travelled to Havana for greater opportunity. His first television performance was in 1952 where he played a peasant farmer. It was a role he would become all too familiar with as he would play a farmer 18 more times in his career. His first cinema role was in 1960 in a documentary by Humberto Arenal titled *Chinchin* where he played a farmer once again. After *Soy Cuba*, he played another revolutionary, this time as José Martí in a 1968 film

on the 100th anniversary of the War of 1868. He had a steady career over the years and in 2006 he was in the film *Ready for the Island*. This year, the Cuban Book Institute honored him with a volume, "Salvador Wood: A Life Full of Memories" by Rolando Alvarez Estevez and Marta Guzman Pascual.

H. Upmann Factory (1844 –)



Founded in 1844 by Hermann and August Hupmann from Bremen, Germany, H. Upmann is one of the oldest and largest cigar manufacturers in Havana. Around their 100th anniversary, they moved to 407 Amistad (between Dragones and Barcelona) in the building that once housed the Carvajal cigar factory. Though known as the José Martí Company since the revolution, the famed H. Upmann: Fabrica de Tabacos sign still hangs outside the front door. Interestingly enough, cigar manufacturers highly prized the education of their workers and so special “readers”

became valued employees. In the morning, the daily newspapers were read to everybody and then discussed. In the afternoon, it was usually a novel that continued day by day. For this reason, the workers at the factories were usually progressive in their politics, early members of unions, and later, in favor of the revolution. (It was the cigar rollers who played a big part in funding José Martí’s battle for independence at the turn of the 20th century.)

It was here on the third floor of the H. Upmann cigar factory that the famous scene where the camera goes through the building past the cigar rollers during Enrique’s funeral. A special elevator was built that took Urusevsky up the three flights of the building across the street. From there, he took the hand-held camera (specially rigged with three handles) across some planks connecting the two buildings across the street, to the window of the H. Upmann building where a second cameraman (Sasha Calzatti) took it through the factory. The elevator meanwhile, was pushed down the street so when the Calzatti came to the window, he could hand it back to the Urusevsky. To make sure that the camera moving down the street was smooth, the production team built two cables attached to the building going down the street. The camera was placed below these aerial rails as the elevated platform went down the street. Recently, H. Upmann was moved to the old Partagás Cigar Factory building.

A Brief History of the Cuban Revolution

On Sunday October 28, 1492, Christopher Columbus landed in Cuba and called it “the most beautiful land human eyes have ever seen.” Still known as the “Pearl of the Antilles,” Cuba was then populated by several different Amerindian groups. The Spanish conquest of Cuba started in 1511 under the leadership of Diego de Velázquez. As a major staging area for Spanish exploration of the Americas, Cuba was also a target for French and British pirates. The indigenous population of the island was quickly destroyed by disease and Spanish repression and the native American workforce was soon replaced by African slaves. The influx of the slaves, reaching its peak in 1817, had enormous impact on Cuba’s cultural evolution.

The Cuban independence movement began in 1810 and erupted in 1868 as the fierce Ten Years War. Spain negotiated a peace with the islanders but none of the brokered reforms was carried out (although slavery was abolished in 1886). In 1895, a second revolution was launched, this time by the great writer and poet, José Martí. There was a strong support in the United States for Cuban independence (mostly because of the economic advantages a “free” Cuba would offer) and with the February 15, 1898 sinking of the U.S. battleship *Maine* in Havana harbor, the Spanish American War began. Spain capitulated on December 10, 1898 and the peace treaty established Cuban independence. But the U.S. Congress forced the Platt Amendment on the new country — keeping the island under U.S. “protection” and giving the government the right to “intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence.”

American corporations quickly moved into Cuba and bought up many of the country’s plantations, refineries, railroads and factories. A revolt in 1905 headed by José Miquel Gómez led to U.S. military occupation from 1906 to 1909 (future president William Howard Taft was one of the provisional governors during this period). The U.S. military evacuated the island in 1909 but returned in 1912 to assist in the suppression of black Cubans’ protests against discrimination. During World War I, the destruction of European crops created a boom industry for sugar cane and Cuba reaped unexpected prosperity.

However this wartime boom was soon followed by a crash and poverty again swept the island. Fraudulent elections and corrupt politicians were the order of the day. Gerardo Machado, president of Cuba from 1925 to 1933 began to make major changes and instituted projects for the poor. However, the early promise of his administration remained unfulfilled as Machado turned his energies to the suppression of his opponents — earning him the nickname, “The Butcher.” Machado was overthrown in 1933 by a military and student junta led by a former army sergeant, Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar (1901-1973).

The election in the U.S. of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932, inaugurated a new era in U.S.-Cuban diplomacy. Sumner Welles was brought in as ambassador to Cuba, the Platt Amendment was overturned, the sugar quota was revised and tariffs to the United States were changed to favor Cuba. Still, Batista was referred to as “the second most important man in Cuba, behind the American ambassador,” as U.S. ownership of much of Cuba and the island’s dire poverty persisted. In 1944 a sight seldom witnessed in Latin American politics of the time occurred: Batista lost the presidential election to a democratically elected rival and stepped down peacefully. He left shortly for the U.S. and stayed there for the next five years. There was a brief surge of relative political freedom and economic prosperity (the latter caused by the sugar cane boom after World War II).

Then on March 10, 1952, shortly before new elections were scheduled, Batista seized power through a military coup.

Batista's reign this time was marked by brutal repression, increasing investment by the American Mafia in Havana casinos, and the influx of fun-seeking foreign businessmen. One hundred and thirty-four Cuban liberals soon fomented a revolt against the military dictatorship. On July 26, 1953, an attack led by the 25-year-old lawyer, Fidel Castro, on the Moncada army barracks in Santiago de Cuba ended in disaster. Some of the rebels were killed in the attack; others were captured, horribly tortured and murdered. Castro was pursued by Batista's army and was discovered asleep in a shack in the nearby foothills by Lieutenant Pedro Sarría — luckily, an acquaintance from college. Castro's life was spared and he was sentenced to prison for two years. But the stories of the brutal murders of the rebels could not be suppressed. The anger of the people had been aroused and Castro's fame began to grow.

On his release, Castro left Cuba for Mexico where he rallied his forces and created the 26th of July Movement. In December 1956, Castro and 11 of his revolutionary comrades (including his brother Raúl Castro and Ernesto “Che” Guevara), landed in Cuba by boat. They survived a disastrous initial military encounter and took up positions in the Sierra Maestra — rugged mountains in the easternmost province of Oriente that Castro knew well since his childhood. The United States withdrew military aid in 1958 forcing Batista to flee the country for the Dominican Republic. On January 1, 1959, Castro and his forces came down from the mountains and marched the next day into Havana to take control.

Brilliant, charismatic and sometimes ruthless, Castro attempted many reforms to aid Cuba's poor. In 1961, the expropriation of U.S. land holdings in Cuba led to the end of diplomatic relations between the two countries and later that year, Castro declared allegiance to the Eastern bloc (and to Marxist-Leninism). Opposition to this Communist alignment led the U.S. to impose a trade embargo and to attempt an invasion at the Bay of Pigs (Baia de Cochinos) — a total military failure. In a dramatic October 1962 confrontation, the United States forced a showdown with the Soviet Union over the deployment Soviet ballistic missiles in Cuba. The United States imposed a naval blockade of the island and on October 24, Russian ships carrying missiles were turned back by the U.S. Navy. The Cuban missile crisis lasted from October 22 to October 28 when Nikita Khrushchev agreed to withdraw the missiles. The blockade ended on November 20. Only a month after the blockade was lifted, the shooting of *I am Cuba* was begun.

Political and social repression remained (and still remain) in varying degrees after Castro's takeover in 1959. However, with Soviet financial assistance, many social programs including health and education benefits were adopted. Unfortunately, the comparisons that can be drawn between *I am Cuba* and Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* can also be made between the Soviet and Cuban revolutions. In fact, the optimism Sergei Eisenstein felt in 1925 about the end of czarist rule was matched by the emotions that Kalatozov and his crew felt in 1964 about the overthrow of Batista. With the “liberalization” of the Soviet hierarchy in the late 1980s and then its final collapse, great hardships again faced the Cuban populace.

From “The Soviet Film Today” by Steven P. Hill
Film Quarterly, Summer 1967

It will not be easy to surpass what strikes me as the most brilliant Soviet film since the 1920's: Mikhail Kalatozov's artistically incredible, thematically controversial, financially disastrous *I Am Cuba*, a 1964 co-production made in Cuba, co-written by Yevtushenko, photographed by Urusevsky. In this picture Kalatozov and Urusevsky have far surpassed their epoch-making camera innovations of *Cranes are Flying* and *The Letter Never Sent*, and have realized Eisenstein's dream, which he was trying for in his abortive Mexican film — to give an extremely dynamic, emotional, epic picture of the revolutionary struggle of oppressed Latin American masses, using visual images and no dialogue ... A year before Yutkevich's more publicized experiment with narrated dialogue in *Lenin in Poland*, Kalatozov and Yevtushenko made *I Am Cuba* virtually silent, with dramatic music, natural sound, and bits of Yevtushenko's impressionistic poetry introducing each episode and connecting them together. The film also harks back to Eisenstein's silent classics like *Potemkin* and *Strike* and to Kalatozov's own 1930 ethnographic masterpiece *Salt for Svanetia*, in showing a generalized, impersonal mass hero consisting of nonactor types rather than individual characters, in the stylized sort of persuasive, emotional, epic melodrama once known as “agitprop” — before it was rejected by Stalin in favor of prosaic, sentimental, conformist “social realism” in the middle 1930s.

Kalatozov and Urusevsky have applied their technique of the “emotional camera” to an extent which has to be seen to be believed, with moving camera and handheld camera (Urusevsky ends one unforgettable scene swimming underwater), wide-angle (9.8mm) lenses, oddly tilted angles which distort the characters' images and give the whole picture a very distinctive form, and some elaborate crane shots — especially one traveling up inside a skyscraper across the roof and then flying out over the street below — which in engineering complexity probably equal anything done by the Germans in the 1920's ...

From the standpoint of content, the film met a rather cold reception in Cuba and Eastern Europe because of an obvious emphasis on art for art's sake, and because it concentrates with barely concealed fascination on the miseries of poor Cubans under Batista. But, after all, such topics as crime, suffering, police brutality, perversions, student demonstrations, a burning field of sugar cane, and violent death under a bourgeois regime can be stimulating — a cinematic — for a filmmaker, more so perhaps than the regimented society and dull life to be found under some other government systems ... Because of two anti-American elements, this film may not find American distribution.

Statement on *I am Cuba* by David E. Nachman
Attorney in New York and consultant to Human Rights Watch/Americas

All films are products of their times. Some, though, manage to transcend their origins and speak to future generations with immediacy and undiminished relevance, while others remain captive to the particular outlook of their creators, and can be seen today only as artifacts of conditions as they existed at the moment of their making. On the aesthetic and psychological levels, “Soy Cuba” (*I am Cuba*), this extraordinary joint Soviet-Cuban homage to the Cuban Revolution produced in 1964, belongs firmly in the transcendent camp. Through a series of urban and rural scenes shot in high-contrast black and white, with close, off-angle camera attention to the protagonists of its story, and aided by an excellent score drawn from the diverse Cuban musical lexicon of the day,

“Soy Cuba” creates an enduring sensory impression of the outer topography of Cuba and the inner geography of the island’s people — from the sophistication of nightlife Habaneros, to the honest industriousness of the city’s artisan class, to the grace and determination with which Cuban peasants have traditionally confronted a life dominated by the hardships of growing and cutting cane.

The passage of time has been less kind, however, to the message of revolutionary enthusiasm that “Soy Cuba” proclaims with all the subtlety of a sledgehammer. There is no denying, of course, the reality of the injustices and excesses of the Batista regime that are depicted here — farmers *were* subject to the whim of their not-always-benevolent absentee landlords, peaceful student and worker protest *was* met with indiscriminate fire by a repressive and increasingly corrupt police force, the Cuban army *did* respond to Castro’s forces’ gains in the countryside by bombing villages that posed no military threat, and the resources of the country (including its land and countless women) *were* placed at the service of foreign interests, personified in this film by the U.S. Sugar Corporation, American sailors, and caricatured Jewish businessmen/gangsters. Indeed, many of the abuses chronicled in “Soy Cuba” were equally the mark of a number of Latin American countries during the past decades, and they provided the impetus for a regional rebel movement that looked to the Cuban revolution for inspiration.

What ultimately makes “Soy Cuba” a political and historical relic, however, is the failed promise of the revolution it so unabashedly celebrates. The prospect of mass political empowerment suggested by the film has been replaced by a regime that demands unquestioning popular support but is ever less able to obtain it; the hope of material advancement has been dashed on the rocks of a centrally planned economy which, shorn of its Soviet support, is incapable of providing the most basic needs of the Cuban population; and the film’s vision of an autonomous insular culture free of foreign domination has been substantially eroded as the Cuban government, starved for foreign currency, freely encourages tourism and foreign investment and openly tolerates their less attractive by-products, including even child prostitution. Watching this film is a sad lesson in irony. At various points, revolutionary fighters are heard to say “Liberty or Death.” Today, those words would serve as a rallying cry only for those Cuban “balseros” who, to escape the lack of democratic and economic freedoms at home, choose to risk death at sea.

“Soy Cuba” simply could not be made today — the energy is gone, and so too are the great hopes of the revolution. As a window onto another, more optimistic time, however, “Soy Cuba” provides a beautiful and bittersweet experience.

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Milestone celebrates 28 years in business with a reputation for releasing classic cinema masterpieces, new foreign films, groundbreaking documentaries and American independent features. Thanks to the company's work in rediscovering and releasing important films such as Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep*, Kent Mackenzie's, *The Exiles*, Mikhail Kalatozov's *I Am Cuba*, Marcel Ophuls' *The Sorrow and the Pity*, the Mariposa Film Group's *Word is Out* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*, Milestone has long occupied a position as one of the country's most influential independent distributors.

In November 2007, Milestone was awarded the Fort Lee Film Commission's first Lewis Selznick Award for contributions to film history. In January 2008, the Los Angeles Film Critics Association chose to give its first Legacy of Cinema Award “to Dennis Doros and Amy Heller of Milestone Film & Video for their tireless efforts on behalf of film restoration and preservation.” And in March 2008, Milestone became an Anthology Film Archive's Film Preservation honoree.

In 1995, Milestone received the first Special Archival Award from the National Society of Film Critics for its restoration and release of *I Am Cuba*. Manohla Dargis, then at the *LA Weekly*, chose Milestone as the 1999 “Indie Distributor of the Year.” In 2004, the National Society of Film Critics again awarded Milestone with a Film Heritage award. That same year the International Film Seminars presented the company its prestigious Leo Award *and* the New York Film Critics Circle voted a Special Award “in honor of 15 years of restoring classic films.” In November 2007, Milestone was awarded the Fort Lee Film Commission's first Lewis Selznick Award for contributions to film history. Milestone/Milliarium won Best Rediscovery from the Il Cinema Ritrovato DVD Awards for its release of *Winter Soldier* in 2006 and again in 2010 for *The Exiles*. In 2015, the Il Cinema Ritrovato again awarded Milestone, this time for Best Blu-ray, for their series, *Project Shirley* (Clarke).

In January 2008, the Los Angeles Film Critics Association chose to give its first Legacy of Cinema Award to Doros and Heller of Milestone Film & Video “for their tireless efforts on behalf of film restoration and preservation.” And in March 2008, Milestone became an Anthology Film Archive's Film Preservation honoree. In 2009, Dennis Doros was elected as one of the Directors of the Board of the Association of the Moving Image Archivists and established the organization's press office in 2010. He is currently serving his third term. In 2011, Milestone was the first distributor ever chosen for two Film Heritage Awards in the same year by the National Society of Film Critics for the release

of *On the Bowery* and *Word is Out*. The American Library Association also selected *Word is Out* for its Notable Videos for Adult, the first classic film ever so chosen.

In December 2012, Milestone became the first-ever two-time winner of the prestigious New York Film Critics' Circle's Special Award as well as another National Society of Film Critics Film Heritage Award, this time for its work in restoring, preserving and distributing the films of iconoclast director Shirley Clarke. Important contemporary artists who have co-presented Milestone restorations include Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Barbara Kopple, Woody Allen, Steven Soderbergh, Thelma Schoonmaker, Jonathan Demme, Dustin Hoffman, Charles Burnett and Sherman Alexie.

From 2008 to 2014, Dennis Doros was elected three times as one of the Directors of the Board of the Association of the Moving Image Archivists and established the organization's press office in 2010. In 2016, AMIA awarded Doros the William O'Farrell Award for his career volunteer work and his contribution to the field. In 2017, Doros was elected President of AMIA and is currently serving his first term. Heller and Doros travel the world to lecture and present films from the Milestone collection, hoping to express the importance of preservation and presentation — as well as the pure joy of cinema.

More recently, Milestone premiered Lois Weber's *Shoes* and *The Dumb Girl of Portici*, Ross Lipman's *Notfilm*, Kathleen Collins' *Losing Ground* and George Nierenberg's *No Maps on My Taps*. They are currently restoring twelve films including the great documentary films of Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman — with the Oscar®-winner *Common Threads* as the touchstone of a Epstein-Friedman series scheduled for a 2019 worldwide release.

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Cine Cubano

Volume 2, Number 8

THE PATENT-LEATHER CADILLAC by Enrique Pineda Barnet

The wheels of the big Cadillac started rolling almost a year ago, and they haven't stopped yet. The car must have been owned by a do-nothing bureaucrat, because only big shots used to drive tail-fin Caddies.

The wheels of the big car assigned to ICAIC's foreign guests kept rolling and rolling ... Kalatozov had just arrived in Havana. He hadn't started to let his mustache grow — not yet. That would come later — when he had “gone native.”

And Urusevsky hadn't unveiled his camera — that historic camera with the visor. He was always quiet, absorbing everything like a sponge. Then one day he ordered in Spanish — his first half *toronja* (light-green grapefruit). That was the beginning of his *toronja* addiction.

Yevtushenko had just started wearing colorful shirts for the first time. From the very first day, the sun left its mark on him — even underlining the edge of his smile.

The wheels kept rolling and rolling ... I tried to communicate with Kalatozov in my terrible English. I folded my legs to one side in the back seat of the big car because Yevgeny had very long legs, and Urusevsky looked *so* tired. I folded my legs to make them more comfortable.

They already had the idea of making a film about Cuba and the revolution when they arrived. Among them, only Yevgeny knew our land, because he had spent a few months here as a correspondent for *Pravda* — just enough time to be able to recite a humorous poem he improvised in broken Spanish:

*I am illiterate in love,
Lady help me, please.*

Kalatozov said that they were eager to start writing a script about Cuba for our Cuban-Soviet coproduction. ICAIC had hired me to work with them as a kind of multi-purpose artistic/historical guide. At the same time, they were looking for a Cuban co-author for the script, as well as a musician and a painter for the production.

The wheels kept rolling and rolling down the streets of the Old Havana, while we got to know each other. I was thrilled about working with Kalatozov and Urusevsky, who has made films such as *The Cranes are Flying* and *The Letter Never Sent*. The men needed to learn about our peasants — which fit perfectly with my own experience as a teacher in Sierra Maestra. They also needed to know more about our basic industry and its workers — including their past and current living conditions. Fortunately, I had worked as administrator of a sugar plant after the nationalization of the industry. Finally, they needed insights into Cuba from the political and artistic point of view. As I had experience in the diplomatic and artistic fields, I could offer them some useful background information. The project was the perfect culmination of all my previous experience. Through ICAIC, the revolution gave me the opportunity to bring all

my knowledge and insights to an important artistic endeavor being attempted by one of the most interesting group of innovators working anywhere— vanguard Soviet filmmakers.

And so the black Cadillac rolled happily along — which is not to say that we spent our life locked in that funerary car. Kalatozov told us about his years working with Urusevsky and the wonderful results of their collaboration. He told us that he had chosen Yevtushenko from among all the Soviet writers because of his qualities as a poet and his youthful innovative spirit. And he chose Yevgeny despite his almost complete lack of experience as a playwright, and his complete inexperience as a film writer.

They had all arrived with ideas about what they wanted to film. At least they already had the general tone — a poetic movie about the Cuban revolution. Almost all foreign artists come to our country with some preconceptions. I am talking about artists who have heard about our revolution and its main events — artists who want to express something about Cuba. Some transform their original ideas completely. Others keep their prejudices, even though they try to remain open to adventure and surprise. And some come to reaffirm their ideas by finding specific confirming details.

In our case, I think that a little bit of the three things happened. First there was an initial idea that became completely transformed. After that, there was a search for adventure and finally a new idea was conceived. Later there was a search for confirming elements.

The automobile first stopped in the Palace of Fine Arts where Saul Yelín was waiting for us. We met a group of young pioneers who had just seen the Cuban painting room. During the trip back, I took notes in the car. The men showed interest in the paintings of Victor Manuel, Amelia Peláez, Carlos Enriquez, Cundo Bermúdez, Portocarrero, Diago, Milián, Servando Cabrera. Yevtushenko specially admired Hugo Consuegra and Fayad Jamis.

At night the city lights attracted people to Havana's nocturnal life. We wanted to visit the “Balalaika” nightclub so that our friends could confirm its genuine Russian atmosphere. Disappointment! “Balalaika” was as authentically Russian as castanets are Cuban — which I confirmed myself later. We discovered something else there — our three friends' devotion for Hemingway, Mayakovsky, and the paintings of Matisse and Picasso.

The Cadillac's wheels kept rolling around the city — from the unavoidable Cathedral Square to the unexplored area near the Acosta street arch.

We were already organizing the necessary interviews for their work. An interview with Carlos Rafael Rodríguez provided the most substantial and objective historical summary that I have ever heard. We also took a look at Cuban folklore and at our nation's religious mixture of Catholicism and voodoo. We started

by screening a very informative documentary by Massip called *Suite Your*. We visited the rites of the “congos” groups in Guanabacoa, as well as folklore shows that were around organized by the TNC and other organizations, such as the Ramiro Guerra dance group and the “carabalies” groups (groups of people who celebrate *santería* ceremonies that include both Catholic and African religious elements).

Naturally, they were anxious to meet Fidel. The first time they shook hands with Fidel he gave them warmest greetings for the Soviet people and Soviet artists. Fidel concluded by saying: “We are already very good friends with De Karmen, and I hope that we will also be great friends with you.”

The next step was to seek out the moral fallout of Cuba's colonial past and at the same time enjoy the delights of the Havana night. The car's carburetor overheated outside the door of the “Las Catacumbas” club. From the “Cabaret Nacional” came the sound of rock-and-roll guitar. And we could hear other musical numbers too — the deafening roar from the “Chori,” the dance rhythm of the “Niche” conga, the hysterical dramatics of La Lupe at the “Le Mans,” lively music from the “Tropicana,” La Burke's powerful performance at the “Sherezada.” Music in Cuba had evolved from the decadent pleasure of a privileged few into the pure joy of a people's celebration.

The film was being born while the wheels of the car rolled along. At Marianao Beach, Lázaro, our driver, slept in the back seat, his olive-green beret pulled down to his nose, while he waited for us across the road from dog races. “The races,” he said, “bored him to death.” One day we went to the Hippodrome where Kalatozov made a bet and won. But I guess he knew what he was doing, since he never placed another bet. An elderly man with diamond rings on his fingers approached us. He said to Kalatozov: “Since you are Russian, talk to Fidel and tell them not to take away the horses.” We didn't answer, except maybe with a smile.

We watched newsreels from the Machado period to the present. Then we watched ICAIC documentaries — the onerous past versus the present that it is being built.

Yevgeny got inspired and wrote a poem.

The car kept going up and down — interviews, visits, notes. One morning, Marta Jiménez took us to the newspaper *Combate* (Combat). We had a long talk there with men who were old militants of the “Directorio 13 de Marzo” (Directorio 13 of March) — young commandants full of memories. The student struggle unfolded in front of our eyes.

One afternoon I saw Kalatozov and Urusevsky deeply moved by the presence of Haydee Santamaría. The Moncada and all the events of July 26 unfolded in front of us. The hands of the Director of the Casa de las Américas were kissed with respect and admiration. We relived

that afternoon many times later on during our work sessions in Moscow.

We met Fidel again for the closing of the Medical Congress. Our Soviet friends said: "After this, none of us can ever leave — it would mean abandoning any sense of humanity." In spite of that, some left, abandoning any sense of humanity.

Finally, the black car entered Las Yaguas. It was probably the first time that a Cadillac ever rumbled through the potholed streets of this depressing Havana slum. The people that were left in Las Yaguas told us how a similar neighborhood in Santiago de Cuba, *La Manzana de Gómez* had been torn down, and how a new neighborhood with comfortable housing for those still left at Las Yaguas, was almost finished. Urusevsky was very moved; he took his camera and shot some scenes of what was left of a past of misery and shame.

The car went to public markets, shopping districts and to the same Havana pier where on October 28 the Camilo's flowers were thrown in the sea. They also threw flowers to the memory of our lost young commandant.

Finally, the technical interviews. Alejo Carpentier summarized the cultural landscape of Cuba — the writers, musicians and painters. Many names, styles and subjects came up while we were eating Cuban shellfish, surrounded by a "1830" atmosphere. Later we had direct contact with the writers in the *Unión de Escritores* (Writers Union). Afterwards came readings and musical concerts by all the musicians. A visit to the musician Juan Blanco widened the scope of our musical landscape. A visit to the painter Portocarrero was a source of color and enthusiasm. Later on, they met the new generation — young playwrights who are studying at the school of the National Theater.

Che Guevara received us one evening at 10 pm — 10 o'clock *exactly*, not before or after, as if trying to refute the theory of national tardiness (the perennial tardiness of the Creole). The *Granma* voyage, the battles in the Sierra Maestra and the final victory all appeared before them.

The script was coming together.

One night Fidel himself told me: "You have to take them to the Sierra — even if you go on a donkey — but they must see the Sierra." Their excitement kept on growing.

The Cadillac wore roller skates to move *faster*. The shape of the island, emerged, swaying softly on the ocean. We started at Pinar del Río. Back in Moscow, Urusevsky still sighs: "Pinar del Río!, Enrique ... Pinar del Río!" We visited all the modern INIT centers, parks, pine woods, cooperatives, Viñales, the old capital, the Matahambre mines. A bearded mine worker told us how the labor movement developed during long hard years of clandestine activity. He told us about his imprisonment in Isla de Pinos; his studies and progress while in jail; his revolutionary preparation.

After that we went to Matanzas, which has an incredibly blue marina. Las Villas, and its colonial neighborhood, Trinidad is full of poetry. Hand-crafted masks from Trinidad now decorate the Moscow homes of our three friends. Later on we went to Camagüey, where the Provincial Congress of Culture is held. And finally... *Oriente!* Full of dust, the Cadillac took off its hat.

In Holguín, there was a celebration for having achieved the end of illiteracy. From there we went to Bayamo, Manzanillo. On a terrace by the sea we listened to a popular song "I am going to Manzanillo Bay to fish for the moon in the sea." We took a new route south. We were surprised by the new roads in areas where new INIT constructions had just been built; fishing cooperatives... Then we arrived at Playa Colorada. — the yacht *Granma*.

The Cadillac made a respectful silence. We walked down the bumpy path to the shore, to the same exact spot where they landed. The sun was strong as we struggled in the swamp. Kalatozov kept repeating: "It seems impossible that they could have done it." In the meantime, we stared at the *Granma* while chatting with the young militiaman on duty. We were remembering the historical landing while measuring its incredible heroic dimension.

Later during the day, we reached Santiago de Cuba. We enjoyed its musical flavor, colonial buildings and baroque churches. We talked with many people. On the hotel terrace, I made a summary for our companions about the lives of our peasants; the lives of the sugar cane workers; the history of the distribution of the land... From the swimming pool of the modern Motel Versailles, the lights of Santiago were twinkling.

We went to visit Vilma Espín and Raúl Castro. She told us about the clandestine struggle in Santiago, and about Frank País's courageous youth. We found in those stories the poetry, tenderness and love that gave birth to the revolution, as well as the strength that made it victorious. The next day, a little old lady — a neighbor of *el Callejón del Muro* — told us how she saw País fall, sprinkling the white walls with his blood. Vilma Espín told us about País — the man, the musician, the friend and the revolutionary full of willpower and resolution. Raúl Castro told us about the mountains, about the combatants' morale, their organization and discipline, as well as about the organization of the social system created in the mountains. He told us about the war. Raúl told us about cinema, about his love for cinema and his concern about the development of our art in Cuba. He gave us encouragement.

We approached Sierra Maestra. The Cadillac could go no further than *Las Mercedes*. We stayed one night in Ciudad Escolar Camilo Cienfuegos, where we were amazed to see the city's growth and the development of those peasant children. We had long conversations with Commandant Acosta, and with a group of freedom fighters that work in the area. We heard more and more anecdotes about the battles in the mountains.

We changed the Cadillac for a jeep and we reached the edges of the tallest mountains. The local peasants added to our data. The women of the Mariana Grajales battalion — who were camped there — told us more anecdotes. They told us what love was like in the mountains; how was discipline and a strict morale code was maintained; how a commandant had to ask all their companions for his girlfriend's hand in marriage; how heroic and equal woman in battle were.

Afterwards, the Cadillac rounded Guantánamo, and headed for Baracoa. We found a new and different landscape in Baracoa. Urusevsky was restless and took his camera and got shots of some peasants. We felt the strength of the primitive there.

The Cadillac went back across the Nicaro Mines, where we talked with the miners who participated in the struggle to nationalize the mines. The Cadillac could head back to Havana — we had a general view of things. But we could not go back without going to Playa Girón, which was full of new construction but still bore the imprint of the house destroyed by Yankee planes during the invasion (it is today a monument to its martyrs).

On our way back to Havana, we visited theaters to get some ideas about actors — our creative restlessness was growing.

When we came back from the trip, we all hugged. We knew each other and identified with one another. We were all moved by the same things. I think that is why Kalatozov asked me to be the Cuban co-author of the screenplay for *I am Cuba*. At least, those were the reasons that made me say "yes," with enthusiasm.

A new stage of the work was beginning. We had long passionate meetings. Yevgeny read us his poems that were inspired by our trip; he gestured and recited with great fervor.

We got the idea in Playa Girón of beginning with the gestation of the revolutionary struggle, and finishing with the crush of the mercenary invasion after the triumph of the revolution. But it was just too to handle. Burdened with too many subjects and too much material, we had to edit. Our conclusion was to make a poetic film about the revolutionary struggle of the Cuban people against the Batista's regime and colonialism. The main heroine would be the revolution — the hero would be the people.

We promised ourselves to show both the misery of the people who are deprived of their rights and the North Americans who not only saw Cuba as their colony — although not officially — but as a place where they could do exactly as they pleased. We wanted to show the revolution as a historic necessity that was understood by peasants as well as workers and the best sector of our intellectuals. We wanted to show not only Cuba, but the strength of the great wind of the twentieth century against colonialism in all countries. The main idea of the film would be that blood shed for the revolution is never in vain, and that men who die heroically remain alive in the heart of the people. For every man who falls for the cause of justice, many others will rise to take his torch — to keep struggling.

We had to look for a provisional title for the film. *I Am Cuba* sounded great in Russian. We would divide the script — at least for us — in five stages: 1) colonialism, and its effects on the city; 2) the tragedy of the peasants; 3) the gestation of the workers/students struggle; 4) the struggle in the plains and 5) the struggle in the mountains and the triumph. We started working on paper.

The car's engine was idling — ours was just getting warmed up. We had group meetings: Kalatozov, Urusevsky, Yevgeny and me. We discussed subjects, ideas, characters, situations... Whenever we got to an agreement, we would separate to elaborate on it. Yevgeny locked himself in his room on the 17th floor of the Habana-Libre Hotel. I worked in my house near the waterfront. Kalatozov and Urusevsky listened to music, wandered around the streets of Havana, shot scenes freely, and tried filters, natural light and locations. Every time any of us got results, we met to discuss the development. Sometimes Kalatozov gave us an idea to work

on, sometimes Urusevsky did. Other times Yevgeny and I met alone to exchange impressions and I told him about personal experiences or some well-known anecdote, or I just supplied him with more information about the Cuban atmosphere. In the last meetings, we selected the best of all our efforts. When we presented the project to the meeting of the ICAIC, we had a beginning that was more or

less worked out, and the rest was in the form of synopsis. It received some constructive criticism, as well as some observations and advice from Che Guevara, García Espinosa, Gutiérrez Alea. We had the project fully outlined — now we needed to fill in the details, which would take many months. Our companions had to leave to Moscow.

I had also to leave my friends behind ... to get the work done. They left in January. I would leave in February. The black Cadillac said good-bye to me in *Rancho Boyeros* — it blinked its headlights in farewell.

I was leaving to Moscow, but the wheels would keep on rolling.

Cine Cubano Volume 3, No. 9

AFTER CROSSING A HERRING-POND

by Enrique Pineda Barnet

*notes from the translator

We left to Moscow. We still have to place in our airport the giant sign saying: "Cuba, land free of illiteracy." A soviet friend remind us ... "Bring apples from my home's garden." Greeting for Tech, French, Soviet, and progressive North-American friend filmmakers who live in the USSR. A mothers says good-bye to her son; he goes to Prague with a scholarship. She kisses him with her lips stick to the glass of the documents checking room.

I sweat on the plain. I see the palm trees, Helen Arnal, Joris Ivens's editor, is next to me. She is going to France to pick up her son to come back to Cuba. The German director Kurt Stern goes back to the RDA; he was in Spain with the International Brigades. He is doing something interesting with his archival materials as well as with Ivens's and Hemingway's materials. Helen and Kurt also love Cuba.

The luxurious Aeroflot soviet plain starts going down. I believe to be listening to Maiacovski.

"Looking at Russia from above, you can see it blue because of its many rivers, as if it had been crossed by strips, as if it had been lashed by a thousand cracks."

But I looked through the window, and I could not see any of that. Only a carbon paper drawing. Everything is snow-white, and marked by the strong and black traits of dry trees and country houses. The blue of the rivers is covered by the snow; the strips of land have disappeared; the lash cracks have been licked and heeled by some tender and solicitous tongue while refreshing itself with white snowflakes. The temperature... I do not know how many "thousands" of degrees below zero.

Kalatosov, Urusievski, his wife Belka, Eugenie Evtuchenko, the producer Mariagin, the young Spanish man who was going to be my interpreter, Segis, and the Cuban Juan Arcocha, correspondent in Moscow for the newspaper "Revolución" were waiting for us at the Moscow International Airport. They received with open arms, the "ushanka" for my head, and effusive (warm) embraces (hugs).

I was taken directly to the Hotel Moscow, very close to the impressive Red Square. I had flowers in my room in spite of the winter. I was received with warm affection in spite of the snow.

I was first taken to a tour of Moscow; Gorki Street, Maiacovski Square, Pushkin Square...

"We are use to see him standing in the Tverskoy boulevard.
Let us see; I will take you up on the pedestal.
A monument should be made on my honor while I am alive,
because of my life and my rank (degree).
I would dynamite it.
I would make it into pieces!
I hate all dying things!
I worship all that is vital!"

Maiacovski was right about the Pushkin monument, except that the pedestal (stand) for his monument was full of flowers; flowers that had been placed over the snow by the people's hands, on the anniversary of the father of Russian poetry.

Eugenio Evtuchenko drives with his car to the house of the writers. There is a ceremony for Cuba. The room is full of intellectual friends of our island, and Cuban students that hold scholarships in Moscow. Evtuchenko reads his poems dedicated to Cuba. Each of them talks, and throws their love, and their raving enthusiasm for our Fatherland and our Revolution. I speak too; I still kept in my

mind the Second Declaration of Havana made very recently by our leader. It seem that there, everybody were guided by Maiacovski's voice and raise their ode to the Revolution:

"To you,
that has been whistled,
mocked,
gun shot,
to you,
pierced with holes by bayonets strikes,
I solemnly raise this ode in ecstasy,
over a tide of insults."

After our excited slogans and our cheers to Cuba, we had the first toasts to Moscow; vodka, champagne, and vertigo. The House of the Writers welcomes me rocking me slowly, with constantly embracing me and shaking my hands.

I did not know for how long I was going to be in Moscow, but we were aware of the long and difficult work that was waiting for us. We were going to develop the script for the Cuban-Soviet coproduction-production, in collaboration with the poet Evgueni Evtuchenko.

The first week was full of walks and clues so that I could be situated.

The impressive and magnificent Kremlin, with its chapels containing icons fro XII through XV century. The excellent Rublov's paintings -Matisse himself admitted to have taken from. Lenin's Mausoleum, guarded in a beautiful symbolic way; it contains Lenin, and only Lenin.

"Lenin, today, is more alive than all the living (s)."

I also saw the Library and the Lenin Museum, the huge Lomonosov University, the national airport where the famous astronauts where received. It is almost a cinematographic city; Mosfilm

is across the homes of Nikita Jruschov, Mikoyan and across the wonderful balcony bridge from where Moscow in seen through fog and snow. The modern stadium, the paths to slide down on skies, the frozen Moscova river can also be seen. Ahead, there is an incredible pool where people swim in their bikinis in the open air in the center of the snow-covered city.

In the suburbs of the city, people sky next to the road. Huge buildings grow constantly; Moscow will be three times bigger in the next years, accomplishing therefore the housing problem.

About theater, we had an unforgettable meeting with the students of the experimental theater at the University. The museums, the Tretiakov Gallery; the magnificent Rublov again, Vrúbel's shapes, Riepin's human expressions, Levitán's landscapes, portraits by Serov, the contemporary painters like the Armenian Sarián, or Moscow, Konchalovski, or the interesting Madonna by Petrov-Vodkin. It was the first time I was exposed to Soviet painting. I took note of the most interesting ones, and of those whose talents saved them from the period of dogmatic cliché (stereotype), from the period of tribute and worship. Later on, I found in the Maiacovski Museum Malevich's originals, and Rodchenko's drawings. They were excellent. I also saw there the paintings of the set designer Tishler's. His paintings sometimes reminded me of the rich expressive and poetic world of Chagall.

Kalatosov, the director of our future film, urged us to work; his was a good stimulus. He wanted Evtuchenko and I to see some films. That is how we had the chance to see Eisenstein's "Mexico," which script was written by Alexandrov. It was finished after the great director's death, but the editing was terrible. We saw therefore the extraordinary takes by Eisenstein which had an invaluable artistic expressiveness; takes that are in constant search for all that is Mexican. They go from the pyramids to the profile of a man's; starting he old traditions, they go into the present struggle of the people for their independence. The movie has actually two endings, the first one is tragic; it seems to be the legitimate one. The second one is a concession. The subtitles are in French. Some days later, Alexandrov himself told us about the possibility of a new rework of this Eisenstein material. We also saw other takes of the same film; a movie that was edited in the United States following a documentary style and narrated in English. It had a ridiculous music, and it was tasteless in all aspects. In spite of that, it does not get to destroy the beauty and expressiveness of Eisenstein's work.

We also so a film that was the second part of the Tolstoi's novel "Resurrection," that had been turn into a terrible melodrama, equally badly done by the director Shviezer.

We attended some shootings, among them; the Italian-Soviet coproduction that included Technicolor scenes with Moiseiev's group; part of "War and Peace" directed by Bondarchuk; and part of another production that Naumov is preparing.

Our first exchange of impressions was in Kalatosov's house. We already wrote in Havana the beginning of the scripts. Initially, we had decided to divided in five parts; colonialism, the tragedy of the peasants, the students-workers struggle, a symbol for the Moncada attack, and the fight and triumph in Sierra Maestra. The first two parts were almost ready.

Our first meeting in Kalatosov's home was not very animated. We just agreed neither in doing anything that could be recognized as historical, nor creating any character that could exactly be a real-life hero. We would work with symbols that would represent a condensation of reality. Sometimes, we would melt together two historical events, or two heroes integrated in only one character, etc. Also then, Kalatosov told us about his idea of a script which dialogues would not need a translation. In other words, to try to include the least possible amount of dialogues, including only the ones strictly necessary that would be at the same time expressive by themselves with no need to be translated. We were getting ready to start the work of the third part (the students-workers struggle), which we already had a synopsis prepared in Havana. We discussed the elements that were going to be more or less emphasized. We also agreed that the characters would not necessarily follow all the plot of the five parts (that was an idea that initially existed in Havana; we then wanted that the same characters would mix in the five stories). In this way we would treat subjects related to our main characters without having to go to a biographical or narrative account of each one. In spite of that, they would be given (*shown) in a simple way, just like life itself leads their lives. Finally, we agreed in using as much plasticity and imagination as possible. Evtuchenko and I would work separately, and then, together, we would go again over each aspect.

Some days later, we met again at Kalatosov's, this time in the evening. After a demonstration of his excellent stereophonic music equipment; from Tchaicovski, to Gershwin, going to the Cuban popular music of Benny Moré. Pictures of Kalatosov with Chaplin, Jean

Gabin, Renoir ... are hanging on the walls. I read for Kalatosov my version of the third story.

I had started realizing our professional difficulties. I started understanding how hard the task really was. In Cuba, before the Revolution, writing was for us something secret, forbidden (*prohibited); a luxury that was done after hours, stealing time for sleep. Now it became hard to write with the availability all kinds of advantages to do so, but lacking a method of working, without a strong discipline to type at the desk. Sometimes I thought of Cuba, the students struggle in the steps of the stairs, and I reached points when I would have the false vision of our students wearing big coats that were covered by the snow. The first version of the third story was stiffed, forced (?), denaturalized, and far from the reality.

As a parenthesis to our work, we visited Serguei Urusievski on the next day. The cinematographer of "When the Cranes are Flying," has a house that reflects his personality. A big collection of popular craftsmanship, masks, original Pablo Picasso's vases, and a great mosaic by the same Picasso. Urusievski shows to us his dish on which Picasso made some brushes, while he tells us an anecdote. While visiting Picasso at his home, the painter offered Urusievski a cup of tea, but Urusievski asked him that he wanted to drink from the cup that had those brush strokes. Picasso laughed while giving him the cap, and said: "You are a formalist; you are not interested in the content but in the form." Urusievski also laughed, and even more when the painter delicately slipped the cup into his pocket as a souvenir. Serguei narrated this while he was showing to us a very casual and short film that he made right at Picasso's house, where close details of the life of the painter are wonderfully revealed.

To go over Urusievski's house with your sight and your hands is to love him. Paintings by Tishler, as well as his incredible wood sculptures are there; there are also a Petrov-Vodkin painting, the pastoral prints (engravings?) by Favorski, who was Urusievski's teacher. And then something unexpected happened. We look at many paintings that are aside facing the walls. Urusievski blushes a little bit, and with some gravity starts explaining. He studied painting with Favorski, and stopped painting during seventeen years. Belka, his wife, helps him to explain. He started his work in the movies, and one day she bought him brushed, paints and canvases ... and he started painting again. After some explanations, justifications and modest shyness, the ritual started. Urusievski becomes a happy boy; he seems to be frisking about turning each canvas with a naughty manner. Finally the little room is

full of paintings all over; paintings that are actually placed with a certain special sense. One after the other, the paintings are turned and face us; the room gets full of colors and shapes. That is how we discover Urusievski the painter. I expect not to be revealing a secret. Still lives, an impressive use of color and shapes. Ninety percents of them have not left the corner of this room. Shiny greens, deep blues, explosions of reds, big bottles, lemons, his most beloved objects... After that, the nudes start, they somehow remind Matisse's brush, but they are Urusievski's; his tenderness and strength, with his smile of big boy who jumps around the room following his own ritual. Afterwards, Belka's portraits; Belka painted with love; Belka meditating; Belka in repose; Belka here and there... There are also some landscapes, and some studies on human expressions. These last ones are perhaps more conservative, but equally beautiful. The fact of the matter (?) is that Urusievski is also a painter who plays hide-and-seek with his canvases; who provides great joy for the ones who discover it.

He paint between films. These are the painting made before "When Cranes ...;" these were made after that; these other paintings were made after "The Letter that was not Sent," and now, those others ... before "I Am Cuba" -which is the provisional titles for our film; a title that we do not like very much.

Without having yet the final results for our third story, we attend to the screening of "The 9 Days Of a Year" ("Los 9 dias de un Año"), excellent film by Romm, that later will win the "Globo de Cristal" of Karlovy Vary. We enjoyed this film a lot. We keep working in our third story, but new difficulties arise. There is something that does not quite work, but we do not know what is it.

That is how Urusievski takes me to the Pushkin Museum. The room for Egyptian art is incredible! The room for French painting where I find Matisse's and Picasso's works (I see the kiss of the meeting of the two lovers in their bedroom, which I had never seen before in a reproduction before), Gauguin, Van Gogh, Rouault, even Rodin's sculptures and Leger's ceramics. Later on, I see Goya's prints (engravings?) in another room.

Homesickness starts affecting me. The snow, the distance, the constant preoccupation for the events in Cuba. I finally received a phone call from Havana.

"The doors creak, as if the hotel's teeth were grinding."

My mother's voice seems to be coming from far away, from a tunnel. I get news

from the ICAIC, and the conventional questions. "Is it cold? No, do not worry; there is more snow that cold." Anxiety. "How are things there? As usually, always alert in case we have to fight again. Write me. I am very well..."

"-Hello!

Who's talking?

-Mom!

Your son is wonderfully sick.

-Mom!

He has a fire in his heart."

Before our meeting about the third story, which is already finished, Kalatosov and Ururieviski take me to see an extraordinary Rodchenko exhibition which includes lots of Maiaevski's print works. It is amazing the strength in which the revolutionary art of the first stages arises! The young contemporary youth that keeps struggling has a big support on this art; this youth struggles to exterminate the reminiscence of dogmatism, after the XXII Congress.

Finally we sit down to discuss our third story. We are in a center for writers relaxation, in the suburbs of Moscow. Poets skate on a frozen lake. Snow, abets, long birch's trunks, houses built in a thousand different shapes The snow keeps falling and falling across bridges and roads.

Kalatosov, Urusievski, Belka, Evtuchenko and I meet, each of us with our own written versions. In summary, none of the two of them works out well. Both stories have an excess of retrospection and symbolic images that played the role of certain poetic elements. In conclusion, we had to start all over. We had also shifted to documentary, and collected an excess of data and events.

Taking a break in our work, we go to see the Moiseiev, which has the great show "Viva Cuba." A non pretentious show that with simplicity and art succeeds in tactfully expressing "the Cuban spirit." Among the audience, Kim Novak claps enthusiastically the pro Cuba show. The feverish audience, standing, yells "bis" as well as the slogans of our revolution.

I am building a method of work. Every day, I sit on my desk to write with the typewriter, and I write. I have to solve problems of lack of unity, lack of interest, excessive documentalism of facts and excessive length.

Leo Eisenstein and Romm; I change everything that I have done. I am going to plan again the third story!

Moscow is covered by snow. It is already spring in Georgia.

I speak long and with difficulty with the North-American filmmaker John Howard Lawson. He expresses his love and affection towards Cuba, and our young cinema. He is going to publish a book about film that will come out in 1963. "Pravda" and "Ogoños" publish my articles.

The modern ballet Je Bela Bartok is playing "La Ciudad Nocturna" ("The Nocturnal Town?") at the Bolshoi theater; it has an excellent cast and "mise en scene."

Kalatosov has decided who is going to be the composer for our film. Carlos Fariñas, a Cuban musician who is the author of our ballet "Despertar" ("Awakening"), and many other well-known works. He has a scholarship in the Tchaicovski Conservatory of Moscow.

I finally have someone to discuss in Spanish about our script. Fariñas criticizes, makes suggestions, cooperates... We get along very well, and he starts getting into feverish passion of making our movie.

Again, another discussion about the new version of the third story. There is still too much chronicles (*accounts). Kalatosov talks about giving the characters a more psychological complexity. He also talks about small aesthetics obstacles.

We start working on our fourth story with the intention of going back to review the third one later. Finally, working on the fourth one, better elements seem to arise. Kalatosov is more satisfied with the work develop for the fourth one. But again raises the problem of giving the characters a more psychological angle, so that we take them in their complexities and vital richness. To look for the man, with his virtues and weaknesses; to look for the dialectics of the human nature to escape from the stereotypes of perfect men and "bad" men.

After that, we attend the screening of the new film "The Childhood of Ivan," made by the youngest soviet director, Tarkovski, made with the cinematographer Yusov. It is possibly the best film of the new promotion. Besides its poetic values, and its technical and stylistic virtues, as well as its expressive accomplishments, the psychological richness of its characters is present. We were very moved by the film as well as enthusiastic about it, specially because we know the very special circumstances that surrounded its shooting. This proved to us that the soviet cinema, together with poetry, some theater and prose, are the vanguard of the new artistic movement at the USSR. There is the struggle for an art in constant development, where the revolutionary truth tears down the bad-intentioned revisionism, as well as the

simplistic dogmatism that fortunately has already been opposed.

That is how the House of the Cinema has its exhibition room open even for the young vanguard painters, in spite of the conservative posture of the Union of Painters.

I proudly carried my House of the Cinema ID, part of the Union of Soviet Filmmakers.

A new idea raises; to create a sixth story about Cuba today, maybe dividing the film in two series. The idea is discussed. Finally, we stay with our original objective. We have already seen the troubles of putting totally aside the dialog to avoid translations in the titles. Kalatosov tell us about including all the necessary dialog now, even though it may later be substituted by an expressive image, eliminated or condensed in one idea. There is a new perspective.

It is necessary to keep updated and in touch with Cuba, with the element that play a role in the preparation of our film. Hay review every night Castro's self-defense speech during the Moncada trial, the narration by Haydé Santamaría, Frank País's letters, the diaries of the survivors of "Granma," diaries of the fight in the mountains by Raúl Castro, the narration by Faure Chaumon about the murders of the young men of the building Humboldt 7, notes of historical conversations with Carlos Rafael Rodríguez ... In summary, I review all the material (notes, press clips, files, archival material and photographs of that period) that can revive the heat of the developments of the Cuban Revolution while I am in the room of the Hotel Moscow, with the windows mist by the snow.

And Maiacovski was always repeated, like something that would fit any reality: "I say:

barricades of the soul and the heart.

I say:

only the one that burns the retreat bridges is a true communist.

It is not much to march, fellow-futurists we have to jump to the future.

It is not much to build a train

(I just adjust the wheel, and it is ready)."

"Enough of cheap truths!

pull out your heart anything that is old!

The streets are our brushes,

the squares our palettes.

The one thousand pages of the revolution have not been sung yet in the book of the time.

To the streets fellow-futurists, drums,

and poets!"

In the meantime, Kalatosov was going through the same. So, one evening told us: "One goes through an amazing process while trying to create this film.

The more one gets into it, the more the idea and the process sink into themselves. It reminds an alcoholic who, lacking willingness, the more he drinks the more he needs to drink. It is a natural process, since the more one knows the world of the Cuban people, the more one loves it; it opens in front of one's eyes, and it becomes more interesting. But, of course, at one point one has to stop so that the movie starts. But everything will come when it is time for it. Now we are in the process of the artistic creation; new horizons open each time. We want the movie to be very attractive, and at the same time we do not want to make a traditional movie (*a, so to speak, traditional movie). In the same way that the Cuban Revolution does not resemble anything, we want our movie to be in the same way through its artistic creation. It is interesting when I look now at the Cuban press and magazine materials of the time of the insurrection, the same materials that I reviewed when I arrived at Cuba. I found them interesting them, but just as much as any other material about the Revolution. When I study them again now, I see the same but through different eyes. That is how many things find its artistic expression. It is already behind the archival photographs that a new life is opened. That life contains for us another story, and we get into that story in a different way."

Kalatosov, loyal to his Georgia origins, finally gets excited talking about all this. His face lights up:

"Of course that it is difficult to do all this about a country that we not only do not know very well, but which language we do not know. But one discovers new pages for the film with every word that one learns in the process of learning the language."

Kalatosov and all the crew that is coming to Cuba for the shooting are learning our language. By then, he already understood with some trouble what we told him. Belka, the second director of our film, spoke it almost completely.

Kalatosov kept saying:

"On one hand, we want to get into the soul (*spirit) of the Cuban people, and on the other hand we want to prepare our crew in a way that we can select the companions that can be more useful to the Cuban filmmakers, with their experiences and technical knowledge."

Making a reference to our new companion in the group Carlos Fariñas, he said:

"We are preparing the technical teams. On the other hand, our group grows between Cuban and Soviet people. With the presence of our Cuban companions, there will be less chances to make mistakes when showing the Cuban

Revolution, and when revealing the traits and spirit (*soul) of the Cuban people."

We were talking with him while enjoying the delicious Georgian wine, and listening to his stereophonic equipment. We kept asking him about what resources was he using on his own for the artistic preparation of the work for our film.

"Actually, the day does not work out well for me if I do not listen to music. I listen to the music, which gives life a certain tone. People need music like oxygen. I now see everything in life under the prism of the movie, and everything that I do is dedicated to the creation of the film. When I hear the Tchaicovski contest, when I walk down the streets and see the first and great days of the Spring in Moscow. Even my own personal troubles and happiness, I see under the prism of the film. The image of the film is built on our minds step by step, one brick at a time (*? or similar expression). While looking at Sárián's paintings, and the landscapes of Armenia, I realized in a recent trip there that I was comparing with the impressions in Cuba. Maybe all this is sick, but I am not going to get cured of this sickness until we make the film."

We tried to talk about the subject as if it was something foreign to us, in order to as more and more about what special problems Cuba presented from an aesthetic perspective. Kalatosov kept talking:

"The main thing is to be able to find an expressive image that can be equivalent to the soul and beauty of the Cuban people. On the other hand, the issue of actors. It is very important to fill with enthusiasm the Cuban actors that are going to work in the film."

Finally, thinking about ICAIC, we ask him his opinion about the coproduction. He frankly replies:

"Independently from the diplomatic and commercial relationship, we wanted to make a movie about Cuba on our own. But this was impossible for economic and technical reason. Only with the participation of the Cubans, and the spiritual and intellectual exchange, we could expect positive results. The knowledge of the Cuban culture-which has great values and traditions-is going to offer great possibilities in that sense. On the other hanks, the Cuban companions are going to see and know many things about the Soviet culture. It is a job based on the socialist principles."

During those days, we had already started writing a synopsis of the fifth story. At the beginning, Kalatosov agreed although he thought convenient to add some characters whom we had different points of view about.

Evtuchenko and I got finally together. He was writing his fifth story. I read to Eugenio everything I have written in order to contribute with some data.

Eugenio writes with dynamism. He has to go to England for some days, and he wants to let the work finished.

That day Eugenio read for us his poem "Stalin's heirs," which he later read during some Moscow recitals, and which were recently published by "Pravda" in Moscow, and "Revolución" in Havana. In spite of the difficulties of translation, the poem filled me with enthusiasm. We said good-bye to each other going to Maiačovski house-museum for a while, to see an exhibition of paintings by Malevich. Maiačovski's House was packed, full of men of all ages who were eager to know the poet deeper.

"-Violin, do you know something? We are terribly similar. I also scream, and I do not know how to prove anything."

Eugenio leaves to England. The versions of our stories are translated to make a revision of the work.

We see in Mosfilm the private projection of "The Boy in Search for the Sun" (*"El Niño en Busca del Sol"*), by another young director, Kalik de Moldavia. It is a color film, with a simple story full of poetic and human beauty. The film has character, although it is influenced by "The Red Balloon" (*"El Globo Rojo"*), a movie which Kalik admits to admire. It is a film with great optimism, and with great love for live and men.

Spring is coming to Moscow. I am worried about what have written of the script. I feel that in some parts it lacks a lot of depth and strength. It relieves me to know that we are going to meet to make big cuts, and to review carefully once more each story.

Finally, the awaited May 1st arrives. I have an invitation for the grandstand (*stand?) across the Red Square.

"Go out on May First,
the first of all Mays!
Let us welcome it, comrades,
with our voice entwined (*interlaced?)
with songs.

Spring of mine,
melt the snow!
I am a worker,
this May is mine!
I am a peasant,
this May is mine!

It is difficult to move forward in the streets to get to the Square. All over the place is full of human cordons; everything is tidy, measured, but spontaneity crowds together and jumps over. The proud father that carries his son on his shoulder like a banner. The young woman wearing a red handkerchief, whose cheeks are as aflame as the handkerchief. The Square overflows. All

the nations and generations are on the grandstands (*stands?).

The Armed Forces parade starts, with the elegance of the military salutes. The Italian friends in front of me get excited by the beauty. An elderly man with white beard hugs me; are you Cuban? I tell him that I am, and he replies: "I am an old Bolshevik," and he puts a Lenin pin on my coat's lapel, deeply moved.

"Glory to the fertile men!
Overflow during this spring!
Green fields, sing!
Play sirens and whistles!
I am made out of iron,
this May is mine!
I am the earth,
this May is mine."

Huge balloons, garlands and flags arise like an aureole of strong rocketry paradoxically protective of the peace in the world. One, two, many banners with slogans and salutes for Cuba arise from the crowds of workers that parade. I dare to salute with my small little Cuban flag... and from that moment I cannot put it down, because from the crowd, during all the parade, there is a cry that continues persistently: "Cuba, Cuba... Viva Cuba, Vi-va Cu-ba." Afterwards, the frozen rain starts and we drink the red and hot wine... after the great parade, poured by the drizzle. Squares and streets keep burning with accordions, guitars and violins, vodka, hugs, love and purity rolling over Moscow, to celebrate its May 1st, where one can only repeat "Glory to the fertile men!."

To my satisfaction, Kalatosov announced me that he had made important cuts in the first and second stories, cuts on things that where really unnecessary. In Kalatosov's head, new ideas for the third story had started to arise. That is how new scenes arose, as well as new structure of sequences. It was difficult to grab from him an idea that he had just conceived. I felt a little bit lost. It was necessary to sit down and think, to think those ideas out to make them of my own and to start experimenting. For me there was a principal obstacle: our style differences. I had to forget a little what I had done, and to advance some work for Evtuchenko's return from England so that I could confront with him all these ideas.

A new project of the fourth story was finished. Once more, Kalatosov contributes with his criticism. Now he asks for more concrete scenes; I am satisfied because he does not like any more dreams or retrospection. Kalatosov is more severely demanding; I foresee positive results. Now every scene will be something principal and irreplaceable. Each of them will have its own thematic development. We will forget all logic links among sequences. I start writing with great enthusiasm. I feel I have gotten

rid of the conventional logic, as well as the ties from the time. It maybe is a more real time, more cinematic; the time that jumps ahead men.

We exchange ideas with Fariñas about the working method, about the problems of the will of creation, and about the coldness of the working method if it does not constitute a second nature of the creator.

We work non-stop on the third and fourth stories, following what we have discussed with Kalatosov, and we completely throw out the fifth story that had been done.

I read for Kalatosov the new third story. Now he asks me to develop since I have made it too concrete (*I have now reduce too much to essentials). He also asks me for dialogues -whose number we agreed, at the beginning, to reduce at minimum. Once more I write, and elaborate; the dialogues arise.

As days go by, Kalatosov changes his mind about the fourth story; he is not thrilled any more about the new plan. We agree on doing something more concise, with less details. I realize that it was one of his strategies to lead us to the development of the essential (*indispensable), to enrich it later, and to condense it again once we had a more enriched material.

A new method. Kalatosov asks me to write scenes in the format of poems to gain concision, expressive strength, rhythm... afterwards, I put (*transform) that same material in the regular form of the description of a scene. The method gives results.

Nights and days writing in the room. The temptation of a thousand unknown beauties is outside. A film script seems so easy at the beginning! And how difficult it really is, not only by itself, but also because there are involved collaboration factors to get aesthetic and style affinities as well as affinities to understand mutual ideas. All this besides the language difference, the traditions, the cultural formation... and even the time that the meridians mark. Even though we love and share the deepest ideas.

"The night stretches out in my room,
and it cannot stretch out any more in front of my delirious eyes."

Halt!! We go to the theater to see a great *mise en escene* of "Mother Courage and her Children" (*?) (*"Madre Coraje y sus Hijos"*) by Brecht.

Halt!! We see the new films by Yutkevich "The Bath," about Maiačovski's work. It has plenty of technical and expressive success; it is a great critique to the cult of personality, to dogmatism and to bureaucracy. It is a color film, with

cartoons (*animation), flat dolls, chronicles, trick effects, *iconografias* (*I could not find this word in the dictionary, and I do not know what it means), and living human elements -which from our point of view are not need it-, and even Picasso's drawings. We say hello to Yutkevich. Bondarchuk tells us words of enthusiasm about the film. We leave having been enriched by a new experience in the use of animation, as well as by the other elements that have been combined and used with a critical and philosophical sense.

Later on, we went back to the mausoleum. Lenin has his countenance reddish by the light. Past generations are reflected on the black marbles. The hand of an elderly woman presses looking for support while going down the steps, as if she were pressing on top of millions of other support imprints (*I know, it does not make much sense - same thing in Spanish). Lenin is there; his face, a small ear; two small lines on his eyebrows, one of them a little lift; thin lips; and the right fist is lightly tight. And always Maiaevski's voice:

"I am afraid of that the processions,
the mausoleum,
the homage,
will take the place of Lenin's simplicity.
I tremble for him,
and for my own pupils,
so that his beauty is not desecrated
(*profaned?),
by candy store's images.
My heart votes today.
I must write
by order of duty.
All Moscow,
frosted land,
trembles shivering.
Over the burning bonfires
there is the frozen night."

Evtuchenko comes back from England; we have to update him about everything that is new. Long days. For Eugenio starts hard and continuous work on the third, fourth, and fifth stories, closed with Kalatosov in an isolated place. In the meantime, I take a brake to go to Voronish.

Voronish is a small town some hours away from Moscow which was destroyed by the Nazis during the last war. Voronish has been completely rebuilt again. We went there with Juan Arcocha -Cuban writer and journalist- and his interpreter, Inga. She is a very friendly young woman who looks Latin because of his dark look and his personality. We went as counselors -specially Arcocha- for the premiere of an opera about the subject of the Cuban Revolution. The last rehearsals of the opera "Daughter of Cuba" ("*Hija de Cuba*") were taking place; the music is by Konstantin Listov, and the libretto by Medovi and Poliakov.

We were worried about the *montage* of the opera because we had a preceding production about Cuba. It was the play "Teresa's Birthday," which in spite of its good intentions towards Cuba, ended up being a whole bunch of mistakes about the Cuban reality, full of subjective distortion, picturesque mannerisms, and bad taste.

We found a different situation in Voronish. The opera is not really anything great, the libretto had anemia, and had a good dose of falseness. But all that was solved thanks to the director Shtein, who focused the job with a researcher's wittiness, and the steady hand of a conscious artist's. On the same fashion, Nosirev's musical direction, as well as the performances of actors, singers, choreographers, and the director of chorus succeeded in expressing the Cuban spirit through the deep and serious study of our culture. All that led them to achieve a worthy (*dignified/proper/appropriate) artistic level. The final result of "Daughter of Cuba" in Voronish was good. Everything was good, and specially because of the Voronish's people. Voronish will be unforgettable, and we will have to say much more about Voronish! Maiaevski also said:

"There must be richer, more beautiful, more intelligent countries,
but I have never seen land bearing greater pain.
It is not possible to erase all the blows received on a face."

We would add: Neither all the blows are enough to crush the greatness of a beautiful country. The blows have actually stimulated even more whatever love, purity, and human fertility are to be found there.

A new collaborator joins our group, a young poet that has devoted most of his time to carefully translate Spanish and Latin-American poetry. His name is Pavel Grushkó. Grushkó will be our mutual translator specially for our creative work. He is a real asset to improve the communication among all of us.

Finally, equally to what had happened in Voronish, all the team hold a meeting to critically analyze the script. It was there when the idea of showing the post-revolutionary Cuba in the film appeared. Some of the characters of the film were criticize for being considered too schematic. It was very stimulating to talk about the current situation of Cuba, and what is Cuba expecting from this film. We decided to cut out some details. We discuss some matters related to taste. Elements (*materials) that are not necessary dramatically disappeared. Kalatosov talks about his needs as a

creator; while he works directly with the authors, he talks about the ideas he had concerning the making of a film about Cuba, as well as the previous events that led him to wanting to make that film. Urusievski talks about his concern about the historical truth, and about being very careful not to make the same mistake that the Yankees do when they make movies about other countries. In conclusion, the meeting ends with the decision of reworking a lot of the work that has already been done, and we start all over from the third story.

Then it seem that we were starting running short of time. Finally, one afternoon Kalatosov considered that we already had the necessary material. There was the possibility of getting rid of the fifth story -the Sierra Maestra part-, and to leave it only as a symbolic touch at the end. This was the most difficult moment since it was necessary to be critical to something that was too near our skin, something that we had been handling for too long (*that we had overworked). There were different points of view about; to make or to make not the fifth part; the characters; scenes; aesthetic matters; matters about getting into depth about the Cuban culture. It was at this point when we had a new meeting, this time other companions who had a high artistic prestige also participated; the writer Simonov and the Mosfilm director Raisman among them.

Simonov ended saying more or less: "It is a tragic poet. From an international political point of view, this slice of the Revolution that is shown through a poetic eye is very meaningful for the Latin American countries. They are going to feel portrait and identified. This genre is very beneficial for cinema as an art. A great novel can be only made by one Cuban person. Now, two poets -one from Russia and another one from Cuba- have been able to make the poem. I do not know any other way of making a coproduction movie. But some questions raise. Anything that you want to say has to be said and shown here."

Simonov added some commentaries and suggestions to remove scenes that he considered not necessary, which only make the movie longer, as well as scenes that can diminish (decrease) strength at the ending. He also gave suggestions about details concerning aesthetic taste, logic and matters of historical reality. He compliments poetic elements, as well as the psychological profile of some characters and situations. He ended by saying: "There are things that should be add and others that should be left out. It is necessary not to get lost among different genres. A poetic film is being done, and therefore you have to underline anything that is poetically (?) good (*or anything that is good from a poetic perspective)."

Urusevski stressed the need of making a story about Sierra Maestra; he considered it essential to truly and deeply express the Cuban Revolution. We all discuss; there are suggestions of cuts, additions, and changes of the way some things are expressed.

During the next days, we shaped the work. We get rid of thing that are not necessary. Finally, the final of the fourth story is merged with a of the Sierra Maestra part, without creating a fifth story. Some matters are still to be discussed, but we have something more precise (specific) that before. The reading by the ICAIC people will give the final result.

We start the long and careful translations that show the value of each word. Long days and nights.

The Worldwide (*"International") Congress for Peace and Disarmament starts. Moscow gets full of extraordinary costumes from all over the world. The peace men meet in Moscow, and they greet each others in all the languages.

"The Universe sleeps,
while putting its pow
among the stars
under its huge ear."

Finally, the satisfaction of seeing in *Isvestia*, on first page, a headline about the closing of the Peace Congress, and

my poem for peace "When in the World..." placed next to the news about a Yankee war/warlike explosion in Nevada (*I guess this is in reference to the nuclear tests).

The ICAIC delegation arrived finally at Moscow. Julio García Espinosa was the head, and he just came back for the Karlovy Vary Festival where he got the Young Director Prize for his film "Pedro goes to the *Sierra*" -The Young Rebel-. The film critic Mario Rodríguez Alemán and the companion Raúl Taladrid, who is director of economic affairs at the Cuban Institute of Film Art and Industry come with him.

We continued the work immediately, at full speed. We held interviews with Soviet directors, artists and writers: Romm, Yutkevich, Danelia, Talankin, Tarcovski, Kalik, Bondarchuk, Chujrai, etc. Later on we went to Leningrad; the wonderful Leningrad of bridges and poems. Leningrad is something special.

Finally, one night, at Urusievski's home, Tatiana appeared, the Tatiana Samoilova from "The Cranes." Tatiana was amazed at the way that she was known and admired in Cuba.

"-María!,
the poet sang sonnets for
Tatiana."

And Tatiana learned fast the rhythm of the Cuban music. Her tears appeared

(*began to show) when making a toast for Cuba; she sent with us her heart for our people and for the Cuban Revolution.

The last work meetings with García Espinosa and all the Soviet team were very productive. We finished polishing details from the first and second story. We agreed on making some cuts, and the third story was better shaped. We finally agreed on taking the best from the fourth story, and going back to Cuba, where we could only achieve the essential ending of Sierra Maestra since we would be surrounded by the strength of what is alive; with the Revolution in front of our eyes.

We departure direction to Cuba. We would spend ten days in Prague. We had to say good-bye. To say good-bye to people we love, to our companions. To say good-bye to Moscow; it was like saying good-bye to one life. Greetings for Serguei Majail Konstantin, Belka, Evtuchenko who are heading direction the Helsinki Festival! Greetings for Pasha, Segis, María, Simeón Mijailovich! Greetings for Regina! Greetings to the Cuban students Carlos, Concha... you stay, so please embrace Moscow every morning in our name!

"If you win,
never stop
after crossing a herring-pond.
Socialism was the objective."

Now Cuba waits for us.

Cine Cubano

Volume 3, No. 12

The Big Fire

Through the windows of the photographer's car, the wide green landscape of Pinar del Río suddenly appears. The sea comes into view and we glimpse it through the vertical lines of the palms. We take a detour to get to the motel which overlooks the Bay of Cabañas. The sea shines in such way that the small islands seem to float on glitter instead of emerging from the water. We are told that the *I am Cuba* crew is working on ahead, but that we shouldn't bother trying to reach them today because they are just finishing up the day's shooting. The reporter and photographer decide to stay in the motel, have lunch and watch the bay from their rooms or maybe just read the newspaper. As the reporter goes to the coffee shop to get a

guava ice cream he hears the big engines of the ICAIC trucks announcing the arrival of the *I am Cuba* crew.

The motel suddenly fills with people dressed in working clothes — pants, thick boots, and sweaty shirts. The photographer snaps photos of the scene and the reporter takes out his pad and gets ready to take note of something — *what* he still isn't sure. A peasant sits down beside him. Actually he isn't just a peasant, he's more like a rural outcast — small, thin and sinewy, he wears clothes that are dirty and torn. His hair and face are tobacco colored, his beard is yellowish and he sports an old straw hat. The peasant offers to buy the reporter a coffee. He accepts, even though he can't

imagine what the man is doing there. Then, as they talk, the reporter starts to recognize film jargon and the names Kalatozov and Urusevsky. The reporter realizes that even though it doesn't seem possible, he isn't a real peasant.

José Gallardo: "I am a food service worker. I was born 53 years ago — exactly the year of the Mexican Revolution. I work in an INIT restaurant in Boca de Jaruco, in Guanabo. In other words, I am *not* a peasant — even though Kalatozov thought that I have an amazing *guajiro* (peasant) look — but a restaurant worker. The restaurant is called "Pollo Pampero" since we serve the best Pampero chicken in all Guanabo. When my companions heard that I was going to

work in the movies, they said that they had always known that I would be a good actor because I look like Spencer Tracy. That's what they say. I can easily pretend to be a *guajiro* because I experienced the life of a peasant when I was responsible for "social distribution" at a *hacienda* (ranch). In the movie I play Pedro, a *guajiro* who has a small plot of sugarcane. One day, the rich owner of the *hacienda* tells him that he has sold the land to the *yanquis* (Americans). But Pedro has such strong principles that before the land and the sugarcane can be taken away from him, he prefers to set fire to it all. We are going to shoot the fire in the next few days. According to the screenplay, I have to die in my shack in the middle of the flames. I am very curious to see how they are planning to shoot this scene because the truth is that I'm not going to let them burn even my little finger. No way. A few days ago, my companions at the "Pollo Pampero" sent me a letter — take a look ..."

José Gallardo takes a wrinkled envelope from his pocket and removes a letter written on ruled paper. Somebody who signs his name as Paco tells José about how much they all miss him, how the fishing is, how their soccer games are going, etc. At the end of the letter there is a short poem that Paul Valéry might not have liked, but the reporter thinks it's very nice and decides to copy it in his humble notebook. Here it is:

*Hi, friend and companion,
from the day that you left
a sad shadow covers all the
Pampero.*

There is a smile of pride on José's wrinkled, tobacco-colored face as he closes his eyes and knows that his friends miss him.

The rest of the crew have gone to the beach to play soccer, while the young women swim in the sea, or pretend to swim. One of the actresses from the film is among them. The reporter invites her to chat with him under a big beach umbrella. The reporter looks for the photographer and finds him playing soccer. The actress is a thin young woman, with lively gestures and intelligent eyes. She answers his questions while still dripping with sea water.

Luisa María Jiménez: "I am 15 years old and a student at the "Academia de Arte Dramático." I had just arrived one morning and was getting some coffee when Kalatozov saw me and thought that I would be great as Pedro's daughter in the movie. Pedro has two children — a young man and a young woman, Teresa, whom I play. In the film, the two children don't realize what is happening to Pedro. We go to the village to have some fun ... I do not like cinema very much, I prefer

theater because film doesn't allow you to connect with the audience or to focus on the character. I really liked "Lady Macbeth in Siberia." Those are the kind of characters that I'd like to play because sometimes she is really a wonderful woman, and other times she is a monster. What I dislike about movies is that they are always talking. In the movie we are shooting now, I still don't know why we're doing what we're doing and I don't have a very clear idea about how things are going to look on screen.

The reporter sees that Luisa María has a real calling for the theater — he thinks that she already seems to suffer from some professional prejudices. The reporter says to himself philosophically that it must be a question of temperament. Luisa María is back in the water where she is romping with her movie companions.

NIGHT IN CABAÑAS BAY

The reporter tried to interview Kalatozov and Urusevsky, but his attempts were useless. They had retired to their rooms after an intense day of shooting. As the sun set, the bay turned red, then violet, and later the sun disappeared to make room for the night. The islands look like big ink stains on a steel-blue page. Somebody must be burning sugarcane because a light orange smoke spreads over the palms.

The production crew has taken all the rooms in the motel. They chat in their bedrooms, where additional beds have been installed (some of them are bunk beds, like those in ships). Others chat outdoors, enjoying the general calm. Around a metal table surrounded by bushes, Luisa María Jiménez is talking with another young woman (a Spanish young woman educated in Moscow who is the crew's interpreter), and a young man a little older than they are.

Mario González Broche: "I study acting at the *Escuela Nacional de Arte*. I have been interested in theater for many years. I put a group together, and directed some plays at *Central Fe* (now the Central José María Pérez), where my father works. Kalatozov chose me because he thought I looked perfect to play the role of a young Cuban *guajiro*. I think that theater is richer than film because a new creative element can be introduced every time a play is staged. Another advantage is that theater gives you a chance to correct your mistakes by observing the audience's reactions. However, while you are shooting there is no audience — only a machine in front of you and a tremendous number of technicians who are constantly moving around and prevent you from getting into your role. I play Pablo, who is Pedro's son and Teresa's brother."

After dinner, the Cuban and Soviet technicians gather in groups outside and talk as they sit on the white metal swings overlooking the wide Cabañas Bay. The sound of the crickets lulls them to sleep and soon they will all turn in, ready to start the shooting again tomorrow. The reporter talks with "El Chino," (The Chinese Man). He is a bearded militiaman with sparkling almond-shaped eyes and a ruddy face. "El Chino" fought in the Sierra Maestra and now works for ICAIC as an *I Am Cuba* pyrotechnics coordinator. He tells the reporter about his experiences in the struggle against the Batista army. Later the conversation lags as fatigue closes our eyes ...

THE SHOOTING

A new day — reporter and photographer drive back to the main road. Once in a while they stop to ask directions to the place "where the film is being made." They ask some kids or they question the men who are weighing the sugarcane. We dive down a wagon track full of bumps, through a beautiful landscape of soft low rolling hills and stands of palm trees. After taking some wrong paths, getting lost a few times, and getting stuck in a deep ditch, the reporter and the photographer spy the big film trucks in the distance. The trucks are parked next to a shack with only three walls. The technicians, script girl, young translator, and Kalatozov stand under its shade. The director of the film is a big man — his eyes are half closed, and his face is serious and reserved. He is wearing a straw hat that gives him the look of the British settlers in Joseph Conrad's novels that live indolent lives on Polynesian islands who act as liaisons between the natives and the British. He is a quiet man whose faces already shows marks of maturity and concentration. You can tell that he is completely into his work, that he is deep inside himself. The reporter senses that the conversation must be brief, because Kalatozov is obviously focused solely on his work.

Mikhail Kalatozov : "We are now shooting the last scenes of the third story of *I Am Cuba*. Pedro — the old peasant — has been struggling year after year for the sugarcane and his children. When he is told that his small plantation has been sold to the United Fruit Company, he understands that the only solution is to burn the sugarcane. He does so as a supreme form of protest. If you stay until the day after tomorrow, you will see the scene of the big fire. We are going to shoot it with a huge crane that is being set up right now. It is operated from its base through a closed-circuit television ...

"I have not chosen experienced actors — some have never acted before, while others are just getting started. I think that

cinema does not really require professional actors, because what counts more than anything is the human presence. That is what creates a character on screen. The audience will feel that they *are* watching a peasant — a man who carries the signs of his struggle with the soil and the elements. Therefore, our José does not need to act...”

(It is enough to examine the hands of José Gallardo, who plays the old *guajiro* Pedro. This is the way the script describes them: “Hands that have deep wrinkles, deep as an abyss. The soil remains forever under these nails.”)

Kalatozov: “The story refers to the real situation of the peasant class in Cuba. We are not going to film it in a naturalistic way, but in a symbolic and poetic form. That is because Pedro represents both a particular character as well as a symbol of all the Cuban *guajiros* whose lives were marked by sorrow and exploitation. We want to give audiences outside Cuba — and especially audiences in the socialist countries — an image that reunites the Cuban peasant with peasants from all over the world. That is why Pedro has many traits that peasants from any country have, plus the particular Cuban traits ...”

(This quiet man is the director of *The Cranes are Flying*. He is the man who turned Tatiana’s face into the very image of loving anticipation — capturing a young Soviet woman’s wait for her boyfriend from the front. He is the man who made the camera turn upside-down as it looked towards the treetops — mirroring the tragic intoxication of a dying soldier. The man who broke the icebound Soviet film with a lyric work full of fascinating images honoring lovers separated by war — a terrible war that left a stamp on the surface and on the soul of the country.)

Near another shack hidden deeper among the sugarcane, a group of people are working. They are the anonymous members of a film crew — the ones that put together all the complicated processes that allow the artist to create his/her work. You can see them busy with their cables, sun reflectors, sound and photography equipment, etc. The make-up woman goes around touching up a face or “making a mess” of José’s beard. José is sitting silently in the shack’s shade with his eyes closed while Yevgeny Svidetelev sculpts his rough-hewn features in putty on the head of the mannequin which will double for the *guajiro* Pedro as he lies fallen next to the burning sugarcane. Some kid tells José saying that they should burn him. José laughs, very briefly, in order not to destroy the serious face of his fictitious corpse.

In the meantime, the crew has set up the camera. Urusevsky — who also worked with Kalatozov on *The Cranes are Flying* — is a tall thin man, who frowns and knits his brow. He is framing the landscape, silently going up and down making gestures that the assistants understand perfectly. José is called for the lighting test. He places himself in front of the camera, stoically putting up with the reflections from the foil reflectors that are pointed at him. José returns to pose for the sculpting of the corpse when they call him to the set. They shoot for a few seconds, and he goes back to posing. Now the camera has to be moved to another spot, a dirt ramp behind the shack next to a row of sugarcane. Under the blinding sun everybody hurries to relocate all the equipment. Three men riding horses appear. One is dressed like a *capataz* (overseer); another wears a big hat, white ironed shirt, and riding pants; the third is dressed as a rural guard, wearing the American “ranger” uniform that the *guajiros* so feared and hated. Kalatozov talks with the actors through a translator. The riders disappear behind the hill. They call “action!” and they riders gallop up.

They suddenly slow down almost on top of the camera. The scene is repeated several times because the horses are not very careful about their photogenic angles, and they don’t position themselves in front of the camera as Urusevsky wishes. Finally, one take seems to satisfy the director of photography.

The camera moves several yards to frame the small hill with a trio of palms against a sky of heavy white clouds. The translator conveys Kalatozov’s words to José — he must hit this mark, do such and such, etc. The riders are on top of the hill looking down omnipotently at Pedro. Pedro looks up at them. He is sweaty, wears a rough fabric cape over his shoulders, and clutches a large machete in his hand. The big screen is going to capture the entire scene. The confrontation between the *guajiro* and his opponents. Their proud and indifferent look towards Pedro from top of the hill. They are going to tell him to stop working the sugarcane because it is useless; the land has been sold to United Fruit. On Pedro’s impassive face, the birth of a secret decision is reflected...

Silence is required. A horse neighs. “Action!” is called, and the scene begins. It will be repeated time after time, with a patience and persistence that will be invisible when the completed film appears on the screen.

The reporter and the photographer start back to Havana. The production people from *I Am Cuba* have invited them to stay for another day or two so that they can watch the fire and the crane that shoots with the help of television. A Soviet man spoke with enthusiasm about the big fire, in the same way one would speak about a sacred Indian ceremony. But they have to go back to Havana. The reporter and the photographer will see the big fire in the movies.

More on Luz Maria Collazo Reyes (Maria/Betty)

[Havana Times, April 14, 2010](#)

[By Yusim í Rodríguez](#)

HAVANA TIMES, April 14 – A friend told me about her more than three months ago. “She was the first black model in Cuba,” she explained, and over that entire period I kept pestering her so she’d help me get in touch with the woman. She was referring to Luz Maria Collazo Reyes, and after the first five minutes of talking with her, I realized that her achievements went a great deal further than having been the first black woman of our runways. But let’s start from the beginning:

How did you get into world of fashion?

“I don’t remember if it was Korda or Rafael de León who let me know they were looking for a model in the Salón de Embajadores of the Hotel Havana Libre. All the models from the upscale pre-revolutionary El Encanto department store were there: Norka Mendez, Adelfa... but there was not a single black woman. I received my first lessons from Norma Martinez just two hours before going out onto the catwalk. I was only 21.”

This happened in 1964. *“It was a time when they were trying to integrate blacks into the Revolution and into all spheres of culture. Before that everything was separate: parks, clubs, beaches... There had even been divisions between blacks and mulattos. Cuba was possibly the most racist country in Latin America,”* she told me.

Yet Luz Maria recalls other important events in her life that year: *“I danced in the role of Eurídice in Orfeo Antillano, by Ramiro Guerra; I was a soloist in the play Octeto Amoroso, which was choreographed by Manuel Iran...”*

Luz Maria Collazo Reyes was also a soloist with the Conjunto Nacional de Danza Moderna (now the Danza Contemporánea de Cuba company), founded by Ramiro Guerra in 1959.

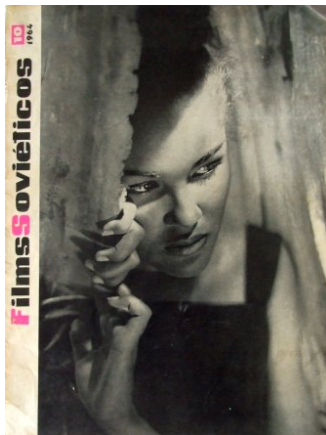
So what you really wanted to be was a dancer?

“What I wanted was to be an actress. I went to the Teatro Nacional to try and study dramatic art, but they were already closed.”

Someone told her about tryouts to study dance, so she returned the next day for an audition.

“That was a time when there were few trained dancers, so Ramiro Guerra searched for them in the street, among ordinary people.”

In 1961, after months of effort in the company’s night school, Luz Maria debuted in “Suite Yoruba, one of Guerra’s most famous choreographies and a winner of international awards. Today it is no longer in the company’s repertoire.



“But in 1964 I was also on my first cover. The magazine was Soviet Cinema...”

Luz Maria from “Soy Cuba” on the cover of the Soviet magazine Films
So it turned out that I was seated in front of the face featured on posters for the first Cuban-Soviet co-production: the movie “Soy Cuba,” directed by Mikhail Kalatozov. This movie was included among the ten best films in the history of cinema thanks to US directors Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese, who discovered it in the United States after decades of being shelved. They were impressed by the photography of Urusheski. Luz Maria was the lead role in the first story in this movie.

How did you get that role?

“Well, by chance. It was in the 1962 or ‘63. I had gone to the Havana Libre Hotel to get my hair oiled. I was talking to someone in the restaurant—with the treatment still on—when a woman came up to me with a translator and asked me if I wanted to be in a movie. I told her yes, of course. The woman was the wife of Urusheski, the photographer.”

Before the end of the 1960s, Luz Maria was a soloist in several choreographies by Ramiro Guerra and by other company choreographers. She also participated in her first international tour of five socialist countries and appeared on the front and back covers of the magazine “Cuba.” In that periodical, in the section “La Ninfa Constante,” they reported on her as being a dancer. The photos were by Chino Lope, who photographed her dressed all in white, like someone going through the santería initiation of Yabo.

“The theme of religion was taboo in those days, and after the magazine came out, the Ministry of Culture called me asking if I were a practitioner of the santería religion and questioning why they had photographed me like that.”

At that time Luz Maria didn’t have an answer, she didn’t practice any religion. In fact, it was only a short time ago that she ran into that same photographer again, who she hadn’t seen in many years. He explained to her that he had photographed her like that as a way of paying homage to his grandmother, who had indeed practiced the Yoruba religion.

In 1967 she was invited to Moscow’s 5th Festival of Cinema and subsequently traveled to Montreal, Canada, for Expo ‘67. *“It was the first Cuban exhibition outside the country. There they received me with a great deal admiration and I even modeled clothes by designers from other countries.”* In 1970 she was a dance teacher at the National Theater’s night school and began working as a fashion model in exhibitions for the Ministry of Light Industry. However, the following year there occurred one of the most important moments in her life like dancer. The company put on “Súlkary,” with a dance routine by Eduardo Rivero, which would become one of the classics of Danza Contemporánea de Cuba.



Luz Maria modeling with Alberto Korda. Photo: Alberto Korda

“I entered the hall in which there would be two casts. But once inside, choreographer Eduardo Rivero said he wanted only one, so I ended up observing from a corner, and from there I memorized the whole dance routine. A week before the premiere, one of the dancers got sick and I had to substitute for her. The night of the premiere in the Grand Theater, I was really on edge, but I premiered for the first time and because of that it marked my life. The last time I danced that choreograph was in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1994.”

At that time, Luz Maria was then 50 years old. The company no longer dances that piece.

It caught my attention that during this whole time you alternated your work as a model and a dancer. Didn't that create conflicts?

“Lots. Ramiro was always getting upset with me. He argued with me because I was going out to work with the photographers and fashion designers. At the Prague Expo I left without his permission. He asked me why I wanted to dance if I was so beautiful. One of the directors of “Soy Cuba” told me he didn't understand why they'd chosen me if I wasn't an actress. But now we're great friends and I feel I owe him a lot. He encouraged us to go to exhibitions, the cinema, to read...”

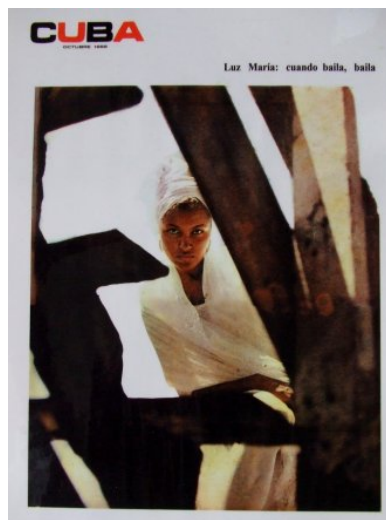
Which of the two professions did you prefer?

Luz Maria responded to me without having to think, and also with a certain degree of nostalgia: *“Dancing. It always interested me a lot.”*

I've also observed that in a couple of pictures of your movements on the runway, these were sometimes more characteristic of dance.

“Yes. Those must have been photos from Expo '67. The artisans of the Fondo de Bienes Culturales liked us moving in a more artistic manner... that we perform elements of dance, techniques that came from classical modeling. However, in most professional runways—in Havana's La Maison, for example—such things were criticized by the fashion designers. The truth is that I always felt a little like a dancer-model or a model-dancer.”

Another choreographic routine that Luz Maria remembers with great affection from her career as a dancer was “Dúo a Lam” —a tribute to Cuban painter Wifredo Lam— which she danced along with its own choreographer, Eduardo Rivero. When he saw it he was moved; he had never created a dance inspired by Lam's work. In Luz Maria's house is a drawing of her profile by the painter. *“He said I reminded him of his childhood.”* Nevertheless, that work is not presently in the company's repertoire either.



Luz Maria on the cover of Cuba Magazine in 1966

In 1977, she traveled to several countries with the company and danced in Paris at the International Festival of Dance at the Champs Elysees Theater and in Saint Etienne. At that time the “Le Humanité” newspaper compared her to the turn-of-the-century-dancer Loie Fuller for her performance in “Okantomi,” another piece choreographed by Rivero.

During my second conversation with Luz Maria we were at the entrance of the Bertolt Brecht Theater, after she had just finished working with the El Círculo theater group, where she coaches actors in how to move. *“I was an unconditional dancer; I didn’t have great extension or flexibility; I began at 18 with a tough body. What happened was that I worked a lot, I worked to project myself. I’m telling you this so you’ll know that I never thought of myself as great. I was always aware of my limitations.”*

She recounted this to me with the greatest humility. Minutes before, someone had greeted her and presented her to other people as the primer ballerina of the Danza Contemporánea de Cuba company. During her career she danced more than thirty works and participated along with the company in several international tours and festivals, including the Havana Ballet Festival. In 1978 she received a certificate for her 17 years of uninterrupted work in the field of culture and in 1979 was awarded recognition from distinguished musician Sergio Vitier and a diploma for being a member of the first dance group born after the Revolution.

Throughout those decades Luz Maria Collazo was also one of the most photographed faces in our country. It was difficult for the photographer and for me to select photos from her file to accompany this interview, since there were so many – and all were gorgeous.



Luz Maria and Eduardo Rivero performing Duo to Lam, for Cuban painter Wilfredo Lam

In 1970 she posed for posters and ads for Havana Club rum exports; the company won awards in Rumania. Her image appeared on covers of albums and on magazines such as “Bohemia” and “Mujeres,” where she was photographed by the renowned Osvaldo Salas, the photographer who won

an award for pictures of her as the “Novia de Orfeo.” Luz Maria was also a model for acclaimed Cuban photographer Alberto Korda.

In 1980 she was the sole Cuban model in a fashion show of the Socialist Camp (CAME), in Prague, where stylists from East Germany and the Soviet Union requested her services as a model. In 1983 she participated in the International Tourism Fair in Madrid and then traveled to another fair in Paris, where she modeled for various fashion houses, including the Ives Saint Laurent.

In 1992, at the age of 49, she participated in the Annual Padova Fair in Italy, where she modeled the fashions of that country’s designers. But what most moved her was wearing of two wedding gowns, including one specially designed for her with the colors of the Cuban flag. This was because a black model had never before exhibited a wedding gown in Havana’s La Maison fashion house, at least not to her memory or that of any other models interviewed.



Luz Maria has been part of the Mendive Performance Ballet of Cuban painter Manuel Mendive.

Though the call had gone out from the country’s leadership starting in 1959 for the integration of blacks into all spheres of culture, still by the middle of the 1990s a black woman had never paraded a wedding gown in the most important house of fashion in Cuba.

What do you think of the work of models today?

I believe the models of before were more exalted...they had more class. These aggressive steps they take on the catwalk these days do not excite me.

You’ve also made incursions as a choreographer...

In '95 I stopped dancing and became a rehearsal director with Danza Contemporánea. I also gave classes at Cubadanza. I put on my first choreography in 96, titled "Enjambre." But it only ran three times in the Garcia Lorca Theater and was then shelved; no one ever explained to me why. Nor did I receive much help. I then began staging "Las Concubinas de Changó, but the things I needed didn't appear; the scenery wasn't what I wanted. I didn't like the way things were going so I never finished it. Perhaps I didn't push hard enough... The times when I was a dancer were different from how it is today; we danced in another style, with more soul. What I see now moves me emotionally, but I don't master it.



Luz Maria exhibits a wedding gown with the colors of the Cuban flag.

In any case, in 2000 she put on the choreography for a play titled "Bailando con Elvis." Also that year, a fashion exhibit was organized in Saint Etienne, France, with designs by Mercy Nodarse. "But there were only young women, and it was necessary to exhibit men's clothes, so I went to work and made myself up as a male-like model. I looked like Benny Moré, I even had a cane." That show won an award for both its choreography and its designs.

Luz Maria has taught several dance courses abroad and in Cuba. Since 1998 she has given modern dance classes with the Teatro Buendía theater group and is currently collaborating with the El Circulo troupe.

You told me on the telephone that you enjoy working with actors a lot...

Yes. It's a job that forces me to be very connected to the work they're doing. The actors sometimes get excited over a movement I show them, but the next day perhaps they won't remember it or they've change it. It requires a lot of patience. I don't teach them modern dance, but movements that have to do with dance.

Her husband, present during the interview, added something she didn't tell me, perhaps out of modesty:

"I think she expands the possibilities of actors by showing them how to use their bodies."



Luz Maria marking a movement with the actors of the El Circulo theater group.

In this interview I've been able to reflect barely a part of the career of Luz Maria Collazo as a model and dancer. As for her involvement in theater, I'll only mention "Yerma" and "La canción de Rachel," directed by Roberto Blanco; and "La piedra de Elliot" and "La Celestina," with the Rita Montaner company.

On the night of January 6, 2010, there took place in the La Maison house of fashions a show in which many retired models of different generations participated. Luz Maria Collazo was one of the models who could have participated in the event, but she decided not to. Instead she observed from the audience.

At the end of the show, the host mentioned a group of models who had worked at La Maison, but they failed to cite the name Luz Maria Collazo.

It's difficult to know whether this was due to disorganization or simple ignorance.

The public left without knowing that among them was someone who could be considered Cuba's first black model, in addition to being the face for the film "Soy Cuba," a soloist with Danza Contemporánea — which was the very founder of La Maison— and even a teacher of models. That's why it's necessary that we refresh our memories every so often, so that the work of those who preceded us doesn't pass into oblivion.

