



Presents:



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DVD EXTRAS:

- Deleted / Alternate Scenes
- Trailers
- Photo Gallery
- Closed Captions
- 5.1 Audio

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33% of transgender youth have attempted suicide

55% of transgender youth report being physically attacked

74% of transgender youth reported being sexually harassed at school,

90% of transgender youth reported feeling unsafe at school because of their gender expression

78% reported having been verbally harassed

48% reported having been victims of assault, including assault with a weapon, sexual assault or rape –

See more at: <http://dragitout.org/2011/12/transgender-youth-statistics.html#sthash.Lfs20wfJ.dpuf>

ABOUT THE FILM

Short Synopsis

In Chicago's Humboldt Park neighborhood, the Vida/SIDA Cacica Pageant brings together members of the Puerto Rican community to celebrate its transgender participants. *I Am The Queen* follows Bianca, Julissa and Jolizza as they prepare for the pageant under the guidance of Ginger Valdez, an experienced transgender mentor from the neighborhood.

Medium Synopsis

In Chicago's Humboldt Park neighborhood, the Vida/SIDA Cacica Pageant brings together members of the Puerto Rican community to celebrate its transgender participants.

I Am The Queen follows Bianca, Julissa and Jolizza as they prepare for the pageant under the guidance of Ginger Valdez, an experienced transgender mentor from the neighborhood. These trans women share stories of their transition, their relatives' varying reactions, and how they find support from within the community.

Family dynamics, cultural heritage, and personal identity all play a part in how the contestants face the daily struggle that comes from being true to themselves.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Josue and I were working at the same department at University of Illinois at Chicago when we decided to make a short movie together. Joseu knew some men who would spend their days playing dominoes at a park in the Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago and we filmed one of their afternoons. The result was a short film called "Rice, Blood and Hot Sauce." We worked well together and agreed to make more films.

Our initial plan was to go around the Humboldt Park neighborhood and make other short films about that community. Josue mentioned a flier about a transgender pageant that would happen in a few months and we thought that would be a nice piece for the Humboldt Park project. After getting the ok from the organizers of the pageant, VIDA/Sida, we started meeting the contestants and they were all happy to talk to us about their lives.

As the months progressed it became clear that this small project should be a film by itself. We had a lot of misconceptions and our initial plans for the film started changing as we learned more from the young women we interviewed. We realized we didn't know anything about what it is to be a transgender and that the best we could do was to let these women speak for themselves and to teach us and the audience. There would be no narration, no explanatory texts, just their voices and their actions telling their stories.

When you work on a documentary you have to relinquish a lot of the control that a film director normally has. As we continue on this project we were constantly amazed by the way the film was making itself. We could not have scripted this better ourselves. We were very lucky to meet these young women who had totally different personalities and personal journeys. What were the odds that the two main characters in the film would have the same name, one Julissa, the other Jolizza, with total opposite personalities, and both would end up as the two finalists on the pageant?

We are very happy with the final film. I think in the end it shows how complex it is for these women to become true to themselves, and what a high price they have to pay. And how hard it is for their families as well, who had no idea on how to handle this issue, seeing their sons becoming their daughters. How these women and their families negotiated this transition will be a major factor on how easy or hard their lives will be. The fact that one of the women in the film had a very supporting family helped the film to make this case. We hope that the film will help other families of transgender youth struggling with these same issues to see the value of acceptance and love. As the mother of Julissa says in the movie: "If you don't find the support you need in the home you will find it in the streets, and the streets is the worst".

Henrique Cirne-Lima, Director

September 2015

ABOUT VIDA / SIDA

Founded in 1972, the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC) is a non-profit, community-based umbrella institution which serves Chicago's Latin@ community. The PRCC first responded to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in 1988 by opening an all-volunteer health clinic. Vida Health Clinic provided free alternative therapies to people diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. In 1992, the PRCC developed an HIV/AIDS prevention initiative that evolved into what is currently the Vida/SIDA Bartolo Hernandez de Jesus HIV/AIDS Initiative, or Vida/SIDA. Vida/SIDA's mission is to educate, empower and advocate for Chicago's Latino community, and to combat homophobia within that community.

Through educational seminars, testing, public outreach and prevention interventions Vida/SIDA has provided culturally appropriate services to the Midwest's largest Latino community for over 20 years.

Vida/SIDA serves Chicago's Puerto Rican/Latino community by promoting culturally responsive health resources and services including HIV testing and a supportive living program for homeless LGBT youth. Generation L is a program of Vida/SIDA led by gay, bisexual and trans Latin youth that is focused on providing safer sex education and encouraging community-building and identity pride.

The Cacique & Cacica Pageant is dedicated to Bartolo Hernández de Jesús. The purpose of the pageant was to create a safe environment in which young Latino MSM can feel comfortable assessing HIV/ AIDS and STD prevention education. The pageant was partially funded by the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the AIDS foundation of Chicago.

ABOUT HUMBOLDT PARK, CHICAGO

Humboldt Park is one of 77 officially designated community areas, located on the West Side of Chicago, Illinois. The Humboldt Park neighborhood is known for its dynamic social and ethnic demographic change over the years. The Puerto Rican community has identified strongly with the area since the 1970s; however, gentrification and displacement has significantly decreased the number of Puerto Ricans in the neighborhood. In 1995 city officials and Puerto Rican-American activists in a symbolic gesture to recognize the neighborhood and the Puerto Rican residents' roots, christened a stretch of Division Street "Paseo Boricua". Two metal 59 feet tall Puerto Rican flags, each weighing 45 tons, arch over the street at each end of the strip. There is a proud historical and ongoing imprint of Puerto Rican identity in Humboldt Park.

ABOUT THE CAST



Ginger Valdez: Born in Puerto Rico and having lived in New York and Chicago, Valdez is the voice of wisdom in the film. She is the pageant coordinator and will guide the young contestants on how to be their best for the competition. Coming from another generation, she knows how much things changed and how much things stayed the same for transgender people. Valdez was kicked out of her house when she was only 14 years old, and was beaten up but the police when dressing up as a women was illegal in Puerto Rico. She is a talented performer with a great sense of humor, which helped her surpass all the adversities in life and become an optimistic, wise and generous human being.



daughter in their lives.

Julissa Ortiz is a mature 20 years old transgender woman. When she decided to come out to her family as transgender she encountered the usual resistance from her family. She was wise and lucky, having a family who decided to listen to her needs, but she also decided to listen to her family concerns. In the end, they negotiated, they would accept her as transgender, but she would also postpone her transitioning until she was 18 years old. The result was a happy situation for everybody, Julissa avoided the path of going to the streets and the family had their



Jolizza Colon is also 20 years old. Funny, strong, independent and courageous, nothing will stop her from being true to herself. She struggled with her mother, also a strong personality, who would not let her dress up as a woman. In the end, Colon chose to leave the house and find support with other young transgender people she met on the streets. She has the support of her sister and cousins, and continues to work on her relationship with her mother.



Bianca Feliciano was the youngest of the women, having just turned 18 years when filming started, and had the hardest journey to the pageant. She was put in a foster home at a very young age, where she was abused and unhappy. When Feliciano finally got reunited with her family a lot of issues had to be worked out, including her decision to transition into a woman. She struggled with her family and in the end had to leave the house to find support with other transgender women she encountered in the streets of Chicago.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Josue Pellot currently resides in Chicago. He received his MA from Northwestern University and his BFA from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Pellot has received attention through a number of solo exhibitions, among them: Universidad Catolica De Puerto Rico, Ponce, Puerto Rico; Museo de Arte de Caguas, Caguas, Puerto Rico; Chicago Cultural Center; and Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago. His work has been included in group exhibitions at: Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, San Juan, Puerto Rico; Contemporary Art Society, London; Vane Contemporary, Newcastle, England

Henrique Cirne-Lima was born in Brazil where he received a Bachelors degree in Graphic Arts at the Universidade Catolica do Rio De Janeiro. He received a MFA degree from University of Illinois at Chicago. He works at the University of Illinois at Chicago producing educational and training videos. He has shown his films in numerous film festival and has received various awards:

1998: Directors Choice Award at the Black Maria Film Festival

1996: Special Mention at the XVIII Edition de la Semana Internacional del Cortametrage de San Roque, Spain

1995: Regional Finalist at the 22nd Annual Student Academy Award

1994: Certificate of Merit at the Chicago International Film Festival

1991: Third Prize at the Chicago Filmmakers Student Festival

1990: Certificate of Merit at the North Carolina Film and Video Festival

STATISTICS TO KNOW ABOUT GAY & TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

Reliable estimates indicate that between 4 and 10% of the population is gay, which means in a public school system of more than one million, like New York City's, there are at least 40,000 to 100,000 gay students.

Academics

- LGBT students at schools with comprehensive policies on bullying and harassment are much more likely to report harassment to school authorities who, in turn, were more likely to respond effectively.
- LGBT students are twice as likely to say that they were not planning on completing high school or going on to college.

Health

- Gay teens are 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide and 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression compared with peers from families that reported no or low levels of family rejection.
- LGBT youth who reported higher levels of family rejection during adolescence are three times more likely to use illegal drugs.

Family & Shelter

- Half of gay males experience a negative parental reaction when they come out and in 26% of those cases the youth was thrown out of the home.
- Studies indicate that between 25% and 50% of homeless youth are LGBT and on the streets because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- LGBT youth are overrepresented in foster care, juvenile detention, and among homeless youth.

Harassment & Violence

- Nearly a fifth of students are physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation and over a tenth because of their gender expression.
- About two-thirds of LGBT students reported having ever been sexually harassed (e.g., sexual remarks made, being touched inappropriately) in school in the past year.
- The average GPA for students who were frequently physically harassed because of their sexual orientation was half a grade lower than that of other students.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTORS

Courtesy of Edge Media Network:

<http://www.edgemedianetwork.com/index.php?ch=entertainment&sc=movies&sc3=&id=116468>

Thanks to the work of Chicago filmmakers **Henrique Cirne-Lima** and **Josue Pellot**, the word is slowly beginning to leak that vibrant and open LGBT communities are not limited to the city's North side -- and such depictions are long overdue for a city that's been focused on Boystown for far, far too long.

Through their first-time full-length film, titled **I Am the Queen**, Cirne-Lima and Pellot have offered up a side of queer Chicago that isn't often included in more mainstream representations of what the city has to offer: A small group of transgender women, all of Puerto Rican descent, competing in the annual Cacique beauty pageant in Humboldt Park, a neighborhood on the city's Near West Side.

Through following the pageant's four contestants, the filmmakers offer a rare glimpse into the day-to-day struggles and triumphs that define a queer community that's chosen to carve out its own unique space under the broader LGBT umbrella. Their representation belies stereotypes that all too often reduce the transgender community to caricature and presents a welcome alternative to the traditional media's narrative of tragedy and discrimination. This tale, instead, is one of redefinition and reclamation -- that of one's body, one's family, one's community and one's livelihood.

“Stumbled upon pageant”

EDGE: What inspired you to create a documentary on this subject?

Josue Pellot: We stumbled upon an invite to a beauty pageant one day and the invite alone just said it all. It said it was a beauty pageant for Puerto Rican transgender youth from Humboldt Park and it was just so focused that I found it to be really interesting. It was layers of minority on top of minority. I brought it up to Henrique's attention and from there we just started slowly looking for who was sponsoring the event and one thing led to another. We had intended for it to be a short film and we ended up with a feature length project.

Henrique Cirne-Lima: When we first started doing the interviews, we thought the film would be about transgender people in general, but when we met the main characters at the first Vida/SIDA meeting for the pageant, the film took a totally different direction. The women in the pageant were really interesting to us and opened up a lot of their time and lives to us. The film became about their lives and we wanted the larger picture to come through their experience.

EDGE: What was it about these women that really appealed to you? When did it really click that you wanted the pageant to be the central focus of the film?

HC: When we went to Ginger's house [the fiery matriarch of the neighborhood's transgender community], it was the second meeting and the second time we met them and it really took off in terms of how lively it was. We pointed the camera and things would happen. It was so spontaneous.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTORS CONT'D

JP: Little by little, all of these things kept developing right in front of us, and I think we got really lucky with the story. Even with Julissa and Jolizza [two of the pageant's contestants], it was confusing because we were even confusing them and during the interviews, it was night and day. These were things we weren't expecting.

HC: And then, with the end of the film coming down to the two of them facing each other waiting for the pageant results, that was really fantastic. We couldn't have scripted the film to play out in a better way.

We wanted the audience to get to know them and get a glimpse of their personalities and lives and learn through that way. I think it's the best way to break down stereotypes and prejudices -- getting to know a person from that group.

"Much support, little homophobia"

EDGE: Was there anything that really surprised you to learn or uncover while you filmed this?

HC: One thing was Julissa's family support. I was really surprised to see that. I expected most of them to be homeless or have no family ties at all, so that was a really unique and beautiful thing. Also, I was surprised to see the lack of explicit homophobia in the community. I expected the film, because of its subject, to have much more of that coming through, but it really didn't. In a Latina community, I expected there to be more machismo, homophobia or dirty looks, and there was some of that, but it wasn't as explicit or clear as I expected.

JP: They said they have more problems with that in Boystown than on Division Street.

EDGE: Tell me more about that -- the safety and support this specific community offers for these women, that they don't feel from the "mainstream" gay neighborhood. I think a lot of people might be surprised to hear that.

HC: Some of the women said they don't like coming to Boystown and that they feel much safer in their community. Everyone knows each other and it's a little more protected. A lot of them grew up there, and a lot of the people in the neighborhood knew them from when they were little boys ... It doesn't come through the film too much, but from their perspective, they feel very left out from the gay community. When we first started filming, Julizza told us that the T in GLBT was silent and we love that line. The film was going to be called "The Silent T" for the longest time.

JP: I was really touched and impressed with this event, a lot of times it felt like it was all being held together by duct tape, but I think it actually made a difference and gave these girls something to look forward to and take aim at. They are like a family, and sometimes there's gossip there, but it's all there and this really brings a snippet, an intimate side of this community and these peoples' lives. I really hope that side comes through.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTORS CONT'D

EDGE: How has the response been so far from those who have seen it?

HC: Pretty far, it's been good though we haven't shown it to too many people yet, just select close friends. What we always get is a lot of discussion and thinking that it triggers.

JP: We've had a few transgender people watch it from the neighborhood and the LGBT community and we've gotten really good feedback from them. They like the angle that we pushed.

HC: I think they were touched that we showed their lives as their lives, not relying on the stereotypes. We showed the dark side, a side that hasn't been shown too much.

JP: We're also already working on a part two, a sequel.

HC: I want to follow their lives again and see what happens six months or a year after the pageant, to see how the film affected them.



Bianca, Allan, Jolizza and Julissa during a photo shoot for the Vida/SIDA Pageant

TIME OUT CHICAGO

“I Am the Queen documents a Trans youth beauty pageant”

Coverage following a screening at Roberto Clemente High School in Chicago

Twenty-five years from now, *I Am the Queen*, a new documentary film about the lives of trans-identified Puerto Rican teenagers competing in a beauty pageant, might be the most mundane 78 minutes of cinema available.

That would be a compliment of sorts to Chicago-based filmmakers Josué Pellot and Henrique Cirne-Lima, whose intentions were simply to follow the everyday lives of three transgendered women competing in the Paseo Boricua, a beauty pageant held annually at the Puerto Rican Cultural Center in Humboldt Park. But until mainstream acceptance for trans-identified people comes to America, just watching these women order a soft-serve cone from an ice-cream truck seems revelatory. “How normal their lives were is what really attracted me to the whole experience,” Cirne-Lima says. “I expected a lot of machismo and a lot of homophobia. I didn’t see that.”

Pellot and Cirne-Lima met two years ago at UIC, where they were both employed. Pellot is a Puerto Rico native, but went to school in Chicago, where he has earned a B.F.A. and M.F.A. in art and art theory respectively. Cirne-Lima, meanwhile, came to Chicago almost 20 years ago from Brazil to study film and video.

The duo’s first collaboration was a six-minute doc about men in Humboldt Park who hang out daily and play dominoes from dawn until dusk. This sparked the idea to create a series of shorts about people in the neighborhood until one day Pellot discovered a flyer at a coffee shop advertising a beauty pageant for Puerto Rican transgendered youths. “I went to Vida/SIDA [a nonprofit HIV/AIDS org] that is associated with the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and they introduced me to one of the girls who was going through a transition and it turns out that I knew her, but I knew her as Jonathan, the son of a friend of mine who runs the coffee shop where I found the postcard. That was the clincher.” After more introductions, Pellot and Cirne-Lima pointed their camera at their subjects and let their stories speak for themselves.

I Am the Queen follows Bianca, Julissa and Jolizza (the latter derives her feminine moniker from the Ting Tings hit “That’s Not My Name”) as they prep for the pageant and negotiate being trans and teen in Latino Chicago. While the women avail themselves of services offered at the Center on Halsted, surprisingly little film footage comes from Boystown. Pride flags make only the briefest appearance in *Queen*, while Puerto Rican paraphernalia dominates. “Above all, before you’re gay, straight, lesbian or American even, you have to be Puerto Rican,” Pellot says. Cirne-Lima agrees. “I felt like I was on an island,” he says. “The people carry the culture really strong over there and I think it’s important that the film represents that.”

COVERAGE FROM TIME OUT CHICAGO CONT'D

Jolizza is a spirited character who drinks and smokes and has gay family members. Julissa, meanwhile, leans heavily on her family who support her unconditionally. "It's not about accepting or respecting," says her mother. "This is my daughter and this is it." Likewise, her three brothers are wisecrackers, but also crack wise. "We're not going to hold her back by not supporting her," one says earnestly, "because that's when people end up with problems."

As the film shows, these women do have problems. Breezy Jolizza admits that just riding the bus is hard and that she goes home sad every night. Footage of Bianca is at a minimum due to her transient lifestyle. "She'll stay from house to house," Pellet says, "so sometimes we'd know where she'd hang out and we'd wait there for hours until she'd jump out of a bus and say, 'hey, what's going on?'"

Yet the film feels almost defiantly upbeat, especially leading up to the hopes and dreams and ebullient energy surrounding pageant night. "My expectations were to go in and see a lot of tragedy," Cirne-Lima says. "What we found was actually very enjoyable."



Jolizza Colon during the filming of I Am The Queen

The full article can be found at Time Out Chicago: <http://www.timeout.com/chicago/gay-lesbian/i-am-the-queen-documents-a-trans-youth-beauty-pageant>

FILM CREDITS:

Produced and
Directed by:

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Josué Pelot

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Henrique Cirne Lima

Additional Camera:
Andrew G Krzak

Still Photography:
Elias Carmona

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Written and performed by
Armando Perez and Juan Lugo
from the album entitled:
"Jugo de Mango"
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"La Vela"
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Army of Juan
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and Marco Morales
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DIGITAL ASSETS:

Youtube Trailer: <https://youtu.be/bbGOrn3OeAA>

Youtube Clips & Albums: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCOaARTycsUIMgUyoHPrnRU4tu6SUUcnb>

Vimeo Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/136012663>

Vimeo Clips & Albums: <https://vimeo.com/album/3517418>

“Introducing the Vida/SIDA Transgender Pageant of Humboldt County”

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/140251947> or on Youtube: <https://youtu.be/aXiXl8Q06Ag>

Jolizza, a transwoman, discusses her second entry into the Vida/Sida pageant before we meet Zenaida Lopez Vida/SIDA coordinator discusses the founding of their pageant, designed to give the Latin American transgender community a place to feel safe and welcome after being so marginalized.

“The Vida/SIDA Pageant First Meeting with Jolizza and Bianca”

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/140252245> Or on Youtube: <https://youtu.be/Z-iqHl6W8F4>

While goofing around with Bianca, Jolizza explains how she takes part in her community and says that she rather than competing with the other contestants in the Vida/SIDA pageant, she hopes to exude confidence and just let the best contestant win. Bianca and another contestant, Allan, discuss their entry to the pageant and their desire to win the crown.

“Ginger Valdez on the Evolution of the Transgender Community”

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/140252415> Or on Youtube: <https://youtu.be/DiQYVrUgD6c>

Ginger Valdez, Vida/SIDAPageant Coordinator and MC, discusses how when she came out as Transgender in Puerto Rico it was illegal at the time and cost her a relationship with her mother, and how that fuels her desire to help the pageant by working as a seamstress to make sure the contestants all look and feel their absolute best on the big night.

“Julissa’s Mother Discusses the Difficulties of Coming Out as Transgender”

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/140252557> Or on Youtube: https://youtu.be/yeQcrNXjo_w

Bianca visits her mother Lisa at work, where Lisa reveals she had a difficulty accepting that her son was gay, and eventually trans, and the two didn’t speak for weeks until Lisa realized that this was not a phase, but truly part of her child’s identity and she needed to be educated.

“Jolizza’s Family Takes Steps Toward Accepting Her Transition”

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/140252676> or on Youtube: <https://youtu.be/DIW-kKfuHQo>

Jolizza’s mother, Angela, who has had a strained relationship with Jolizza since she transitioned, shows up to the pageant to try to support her child, saying they are working on their relationship. Emily, Jolizza’s sister, jokes that she was the one that got Jolizza started by introducing her to drag and dressing her up in her clothes when Jolizza identified as a young boy.