

MIFF 2016: THE FIVE BEST CUBAN FILMS SCREENING THIS WEEK

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MONDAY, MARCH 7, 2016 | 4 HOURS AGO



Courtesy of La Nube

Since Castro's revolution, Cuba's state-sponsored cinema had been controversial and intellectually crafted. In the 1960s, *Memories of Underdevelopment* and *De Cierta Manera* marked a golden age of nuanced social critique within the confines of the revolution's dismal sense of humor. But the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 brought the Special Period and dire economic circumstances on the island, forcing the Castro regime to lower the hammer on the film industry. In 1996, not one movie was made.

Since then, privately owned and international coproductions have placed filmmaking power back into the people's hands. *Melaza*, *Alicia en el Pueblo de Maravillas*, and *Viva Cuba* have been some of the country's best films, addressing controversial issues such as poverty, homosexuality, and sex work from compelling and honest perspectives.

Today independent films in Cuba circulate via street markets and external hard drives.

They're not even that easy to get ahold of in the States – sometimes you'll get lucky with a

YOUTUBE LINK. THIS YEAR, HOWEVER, THE MIAMI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL WILL SCREEN FIVE OF Cuba's most recent imports. Three were written, directed, and shot on the island, and two feature Cuban actors and narratives. If you're craving a taste of the Pearl of the Antilles or simply a good story, here are five Cuban films you won't want to miss.



Courtesy of The Forbidden Shore

5. *The Forebidden Shore*

Thursday, March 10, at 9:30 p.m. at Tower Theater

Cuba gave us the rumba, salsa, conga, danzón, and *La Reina* – Celia Cruz. So it's no surprise that magical things still happen on the island. Ron Chapman's documentary about Cuba's present-day music scene is an explosive story of the artists who are mixing past and present. Afro-Cuban rumbas, modern reggaeton, salsa, trova, nueva trova, rock, jazz, metal, rap, electronic, classical, choral, pop, changu, danzón, yoruba, bolero, conga, timba, and mambo are all accounted for in this ambitious doc. Featuring X Alfonso, Aldo Lopez-Gavilan, Kola Loka, and many other artists, this documentary is an inspirational survey of the power of Cuban sound.





Courtesy of *The Companion*

4. *The Companion*

Friday, March 11, at 9:30 p.m. at Tower Theater

In the 1980s, the Castro regime established Los Cocos, a sanatorium in Havana's suburbs where all HIV patients mandatorily cohabited under military watch. Each patient was assigned a companion who would monitor the patient's activities at the sanatorium. Cuban director Pavel Giroud's story blends historical fiction and an emotional narrative through the unlikely friendship of former Olympic boxer Horacio and former soldier Daniel, who is infected with HIV. Horacio is sent to Los Cocos after a doping scandal leaves him in dire need of redemption. But his companionship with Daniel blooms into a genuine friendship. Despite their bleak surroundings, they find strength and solidarity together.



Courtesy of *La Nube*

3. *La Nube*

Wednesday, March 9, at 9:30 p.m. at Tower Theater

Marcel Beltrán is one of Cuba's must-watch independent filmmakers. *Cisne Cuello Negro*, *Cuello Blanco*, an experimental documentary following his inner thoughts and daily life in Havana, screened at New York City's Museum of Modern Art in 2013. The following year, he received the Cinergia Award for the development of his documentary *Soles de Invierno*. In 2016, he branches out into scripted fiction with *La Nube*, a densely intimate and raw short.

This esoteric yet relatable film follows the story of Ana, a recent widow struggling to adjust to daily life after the abrupt death of her husband.



Courtesy of King of Havana

2. *The King of Havana*

Friday, March 11, at 7 p.m. at Regal Cinemas South Beach

This Spanish, Dominican, and Cuban coproduction was too controversial to film in Cuba. Shot on the streets of the Dominican Republic and starring Cuban actors, *El Rey de la Habana* (*The King of Havana*) follows Rey, a teenager struggling to survive during the Special Period. After he's unjustly imprisoned for a murder he didn't commit, Rey is left without a family. But he soon finds deep companionship and love with Havana's other pariahs.





Courtesy of Dark Glasses

1. *Dark Glasses*

Wednesday, March 9, at 9:30 p.m. at Tower Theater

Director Jessica Rodriguez is a rarity in Cuba's male-dominated film industry. But, like Sara Gómez before her, she creates critical dramas about Cuban life. *Dark Glasses* begins with a blind woman living alone in the countryside who entertains an intruder by retelling stories based on Cuban history. Rodriguez's protagonist travels through a half-century of Cuban history, layering the narrative like Humberto Solás' 1968 *Lucia*. The conceit sounds like an average visit to your *abuela's* house – to understand the present, you must embrace the past.

Miami International Film Festival

Through Sunday, March 13, at various venues throughout Miami. For a complete schedule and tickets, visit miamifilmfestival.com.

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