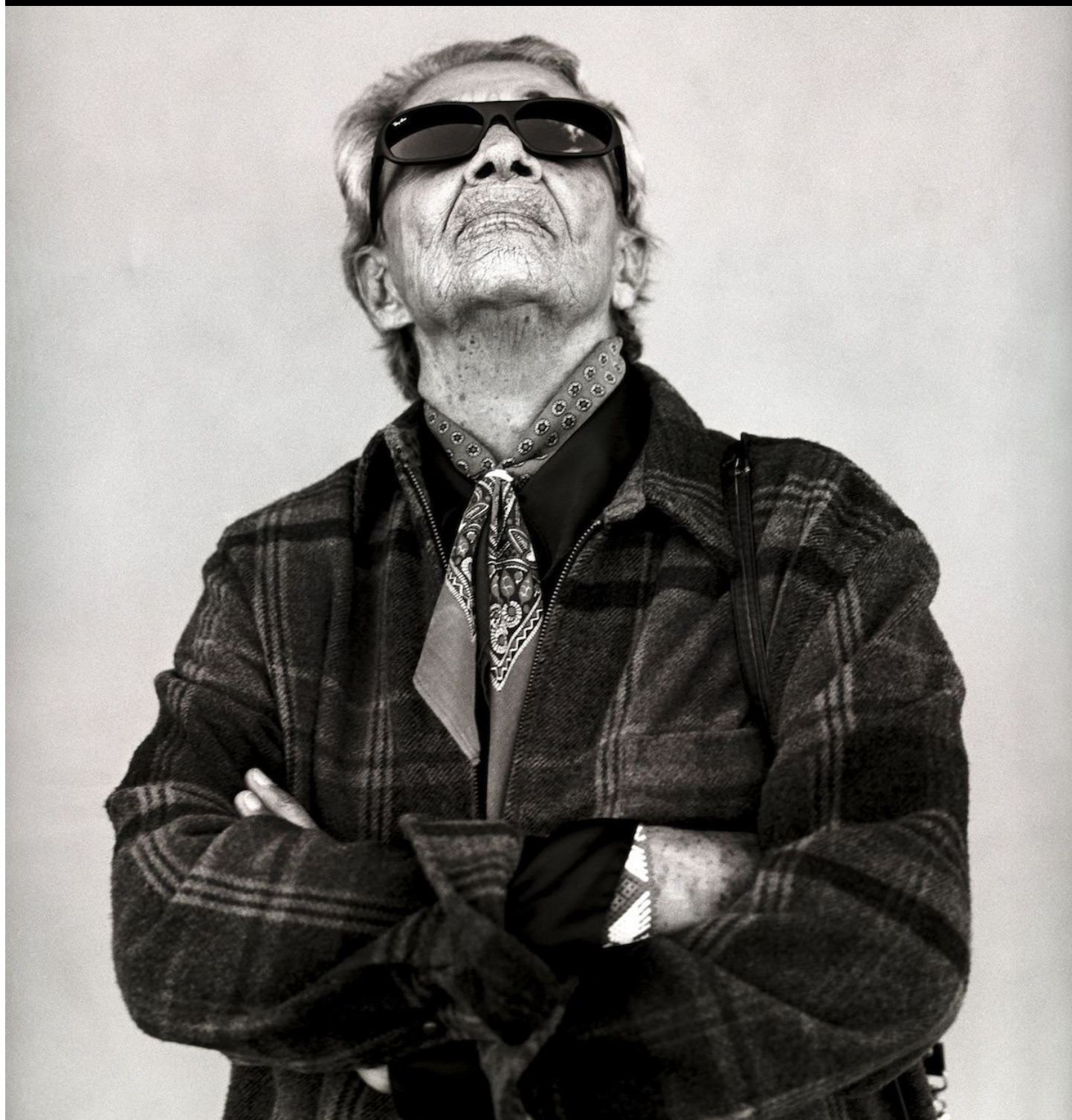


CHAVELA



C O N T E N T S

Logline & synopsis -	3
Treatment -	4
Director's statement -	5
About Chavela -	7
Marketing & Distribution -	9
Crew Bios -	10
Advisory Table -	13
Credits -	15
Selected Press -	16

Chavela Trailer

<https://vimeo.com/202123182>

High Resolution Photos:

<http://www.chavelavargasfilm.com/press>



An Aubin Pictures Production
Produced and Directed
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**AUBIN
PICTURES**

Logline

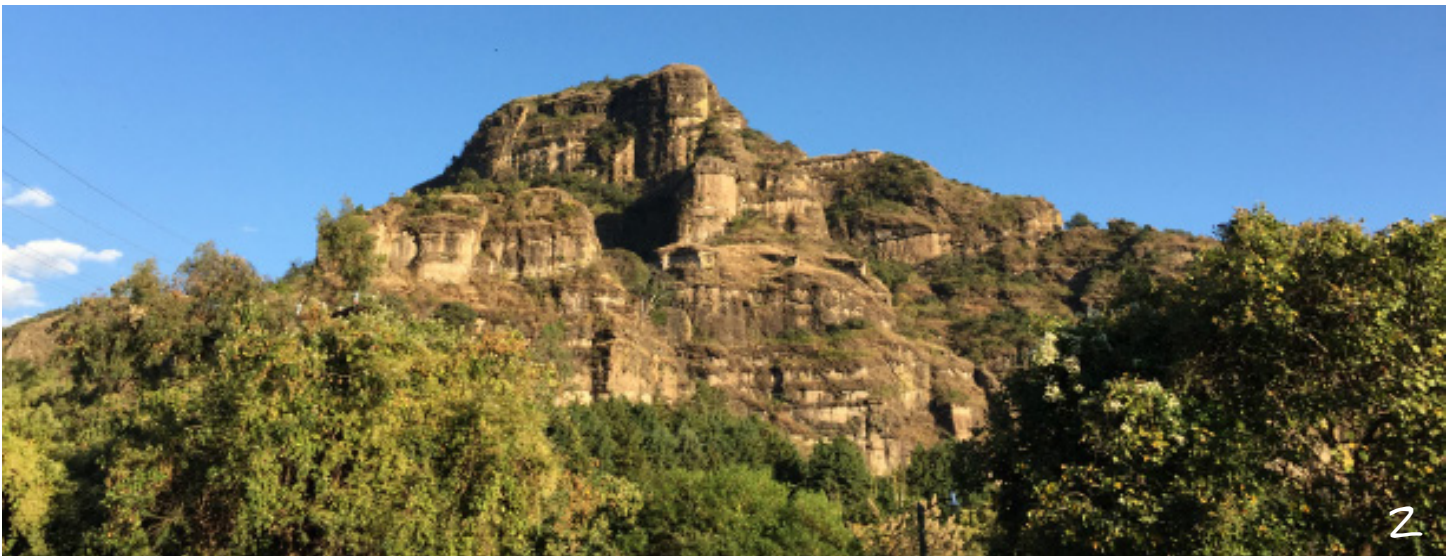
Centered around exclusive interview and performance footage of Chavela Vargas shot in 1991 and guided by her unique voice, *Chavela* weaves an arresting portrait of a woman who dared to dress, speak, sing, and dream her unique life into being.

(Spanish Translation) Inspirada por metraje exclusivo de una entrevista y presentación de Chavela Vargas en 1991 y guiada por su voz única, *Chavela* teje un retrato sorprendente de una mujer que se atrevió a retar al mundo con su forma de vestir, cantar y soñar.



Synopsis

Through its lyrical structure *Chavela* takes viewers on an evocative, thought-provoking journey through the life of iconoclastic, game-changing artist Chavela Vargas. Chavela's relaxed, conversational tone as she chats with a group of young lesbian admirers in footage Catherine shot in 1991 offers viewers a rare, intimate look at this iconic singer at a pivotal time in her journey. Having just returned to the stage after 12 hard years lost to alcoholism, and a painful breakup with the love of her life, the interview occurs just before she heads to Spain where she'll rise like a phoenix from the ashes. Strong, funny, and vitally alive, she was in her prime at 71. This unique interview serves as the spine running throughout *Chavela*, which explores her fascinating life from her birth in Costa Rica to her everlasting presence on earth in the form of passionate love songs and deep relationships that people will never forget.



Treatment

Chavela Vargas was a bold pioneer, a sexual outlaw who stood in her truth at a time when being “out” was not only socially unacceptable, but often dangerous. She got away with it because she took Mexican ranchera music, stripped it down to the bone and gave it gravitas and audiences and friends loved her for it. Like Edith Piaf and Billie Holliday, she sang rancheras with raw passion and deep suffering, just like the blues. No one — particularly no woman — has ever owned the genre quite like she did.

Did Chavela really creep into women’s bedrooms late at night to steal them away from their husbands? Or scoop them onto a white horse to ride off with her? Did she pack a pistol and sometimes shoot it off just for fun? Or have epic drinking binges with friends that started on Friday and ended the following Wednesday? After she sang at Elizabeth Taylor’s Acapulco wedding to Mike Todd, did she really leave the party with Ava Gardner?

Collectively known as “the black legend,” these are a few of the incredible rumors people love to share about Chavela. Many she helped spread herself. Some are true. Known as a raucous, entertaining raconteur, Chavela chose the stories she liked best, breathed life into them and made them manifest. In her amazing journey from a 14-year-old rejected runaway born in Costa Rica to a world renowned, Grammy-winning Mexican icon, this dream weaver took bits and pieces of who she was and who she wanted to be and wove them into a reality.

So was she a liar? Let’s just say that as someone who played fast and loose with dates, times, places, and events, Chavela had no interest in hard facts. For example, in one interview she said she lived with Frida and Diego for a month while in others she said it was a year, 5 days, or 5 years. What difference did those details make? For her, the point of any story was that it made you think, and most importantly, how it made you feel. What mattered most was the love she shared with Frida and how it changed her forever. Or so she said. Others say the moment Frida said she loved her too, Chavela bolted and never saw her again!

Although she didn’t officially identify as a lesbian until she was 81 years old, Chavela carefully crafted a public persona as a powerful, rebellious, free spirited outsider, a sexy outlaw who blazed her own unique trail. “All my life I’ve been a woman of strong character. Even as a child. I created myself by myself. No one taught me to be the way I am. I learned by myself through tears, suffering, happiness, truth and lies.”

Like all good legends, Chavela left a trail of broken (yet fiercely loyal) hearts in her wake, but she is no longer here to tell us why she never seemed to find happiness in love. What we know is that after too many nights in Bohemia she got lost in her love affair with tequila and wound up living on the streets and depending on the kindness of strangers. We know that she stopped singing so long that people thought she was dead. We know that she suffered deeply. You can hear it in her voice.

Creating a work of art that captures and honors such an elusive, ingenious being demands an innovative approach to story telling that relies less on chronological order or fixed facts and more on the spiritual and emotional impact of her experiences, the effect she had on others, the difference she made in their lives and ours, and in the lasting impact of her music. Following Chavela’s lead, we have created an evocative, provocative film that plumbs the depths and scales the heights of her journey, exploring the many ways in which she, like many artists, repeatedly “created herself by herself.” Through music, poetry, verité, archival and contemporary footage, including many of Chavela’s own powerful words, we are telling the story of her fierce battle to be authentic. Her joyful, painful, musical, and deeply spiritual journey to self-acceptance are the heart and soul of Chavela.



Director's statement – Catherine Gund



For a few magical months, I found myself living and loving just south of Mexico City in the warm winter of 1992. My girlfriends played me Chavela's songs on record players and told me tales of her womanizing, her irresistible allure, her deep voice, her audacity. She moved all who met her. I had to meet her. Before cell phones put a camera in everyone's pocket, I carried a video camera in my backpack everywhere I went. I begged my friends to help me create a face-to-face moment with Chavela. I wanted to ask her some questions

in my broken Spanish, make her laugh her gorgeous laugh, feel her magnetism, hear her raspy tones, and squirm at the power of her promise. I asked her if I could videotape our conversation. She agreed and she did not disappoint. It is no wonder she is called The Rough Voice of Tenderness. I became obsessed with her ability to draw people in. I was fascinated by her lightness and ease, her masculinity. And with her song. But I came home and put those master tapes away. A decade later, I clamored to be among her fans smiling, with eyes closed, dreaming when she performed at Carnegie Hall. Then, among friends who treasured her, I mourned when she passed away three years ago at the age of 93. Finally, last spring, I decided to unearth my archival footage to see what I had captured all those years ago and there in her full glory was Chavela – relaxed, confident, and poetic in her raw honesty. It was a veritable gold mine of footage.

For me, Chavela's life is not a cautionary tale, but rather, a rich subterranean dimension of our own living. She is not a role model, but a muse. Not only an elder, but a frame for our contemporary desires.

My friend Daresha and I had always wanted to make a film together, so I showed her a small section of what I'd shot. She was mesmerized. Before she even knew who Chavela was, and all that she had accomplished, Daresha fell in love with her too and committed to help me produce and direct the film. It was a seamless, easy, even joyful and natural transition. We want to share our passion and discovery with others. Chavela is emerging from our collaborative revelation, investigation, desperation to hold onto the familiar yet inimitable magic of Chavela.



The importance of this work lies in its ability to strike a powerful chord in all who see it, to make viewers recall their places of deepest passion and yearning, and to feel that love is a productive, if abstract, land in which to live.

Director's statement - Daresha Kyi

In 1993 while working as an Associate Producer on ITVS' multi-genre four part series, Positive: Life with HIV, I met this smart, funny, sexy beast commonly known as Catherine Gund and immediately recognized her as kindred. She felt like family from the very start. Political, passionate, and deeply in love with life and human beings with all our fabulousness and flaws, she knew the power of media to change hearts and minds and was actively wielding it as a catalyst for change. I deeply admired her activist spirit and her belief in possibilities.



Flash forward twenty-odd years later, through multiple milestones including births, deaths, break-ups, a marriage (and divorce), and more projects than we can count, Cat and I have sometimes drifted but never disconnected - always circling back to pick up right where we last laughed. I have watched in admiration as she founded her production company, Aubin Pictures, to build a body of interesting, challenging and enlightening films, all while raising a family of four bright, bold, and beautiful people. A whirling dervish in perpetual, graceful motion, it's hard not to be mesmerized and moved by Cat's dance of life.

So, imagine my excitement when she invited me to join the dance with these simple words, "We should make a movie together." I didn't even know I'd wanted to do it until she said it, but once spoken, the words became a mantra. "We definitely should make a movie together!" And off we went in search of a subject that would burn bright enough that we'd be willing to tend the fire for however long it took to get the job done. When she first told me about the footage she'd just digitized that had been in storage for over 20 years, she tried to explain who Chavela was by singing like her. I was not convinced. We laughed and decided to sit down and screen it together - and that moment changed the course of our joint history. As soon as I saw Chavela, I was intrigued. She wasn't even singing, just sitting around talking to some friends but I had that visceral, gut reaction where you just know. Even though I still didn't know any of the details of Chavela's powerful story, I recognized her too, as kindred. And I knew hers was a story worthy of my time, energy, fire, desire, and oh, so much love.



About Chavela



Born Isabel Vargas Lizano in Costa Rica, Chavela Vargas (1919-2012) ran away to Mexico City in her early teens and began singing in the streets. By the 1950s, she had become a darling of the city's thriving bohemian club scene. Challenging mainstream Mexican morals by dressing in pants, drinking tequila, and smoking cigars while singing love songs intended for men to woo women and refusing to change the pronouns, "She was chile verde," remembers Elena Poniatowska, the grande dame of Mexican letters.

Although she lived out of the public eye for several years due to a long battle with alcoholism, Chavela was nursed back to health by a Huichol Indian family who also helped initiate her into Shamanism. For the rest of her life, Chavela was known as "La Cupaima," (the last female shaman). Her amazing comeback began at the age of 72 when Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar, who had featured her music in many of his

films, played an instrumental role in elevating her career to international acclaim. Whenever he introduced her to the public, he would kneel down to kiss the stage before she performed at renowned venues like New York's Carnegie Hall, Paris' L'Olympia Theatre, and Madrid's Plaza de España. Chavela also appeared in the 1967 movie *La Soldadera*, Werner Herzog's *Scream of the Stone* and Julie Taymor's *Frida*, and sang "Tú Me Acostumbraste" ("Because of You, I Got Accustomed") in Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel*.

In her lifetime, Chavela was credited with recording 80 albums, received a Latin Grammy for Lifetime Achievement, and was the second woman to win Spain's most prestigious artistic award, the Grand Cross of Isabel, the Catholic. She was close to many prominent artists and intellectuals including Juan Rulfo, Agustín Lara, Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, Dolores Olmedo, José Alfredo Jiménez, Lila Downs, and Joaquín Sabina. In 2012 Chavela passed away at the age of 93 after touring to support her last album *La Luna Grande*, a tribute to the poet García Lorca, with whose spirit she communed daily.

Marketing & Distribution

Aubin Picture's past films have taken an intensely personal look at exceptional individuals, and *Chavela* will continue in this tradition. Guided by Chavela's indomitable spirit, *Chavela* will resonate with a wide spectrum of viewers including lovers of art, music, cultural outlaws, and visionaries. While we know the film will appeal to a large general audience, we are particularly interested in reaching women, queer people, and people of color who don't often see their images in the media.

Through our last feature, *Born to Fly: Elizabeth Streb vs. Gravity* (2014), Aubin Pictures established a strong outreach network of artists, queer women, and those living on the margins of the mainstream, which we will utilize to promote this film. As a trailblazer who empowered people to stand in the truth of their most authentic selves no matter the risk, Chavela is an inspiring role model for young queer men and women as well as artists of all nationalities who are struggling to preserve their integrity and find their authentic voices.



Chavela will resonate deeply with Latin American viewers in particular, who represent a rapidly growing market that has been historically underserved by the media, adding a much-needed chapter to the rich history of Latinx, especially queer Latinas, which is rarely captured on screen. According to the 2015 Hollywood Diversity Report issued by the Ralph J. Bunche Center, both women and minorities remain underrepresented on nearly every front of the industry both in front and behind the camera. Aubin feels strongly about creating imagery that reflects, uplifts, and enlightens these often forgotten core audiences.

With both a queer woman and a woman of color co-directing our film (and a predominantly female crew), Aubin is confident that *Chavela* will speak to this gap from both behind and on the screen. Aubin Pictures has a long track record of producing quality films that premiere at top-tier festivals including Sundance, Berlin, Toronto, SXSW, LAIFF, and Tribeca. *Born to Fly: Elizabeth Streb vs. Gravity* screened in over 60 local and international festivals. Our previous projects have screened at the Seattle International Film Festival, AFI Fest, Margaret Mead Film Festival (opening night), Hamptons International Film Festival (Golden Star Fish Award), and the Cleveland International Film Festival among many others. We expect an equally enthusiastic reception on the festival circuit for *Chavela*.

We build the audience for each film by creating a strong social media presence, successful festival screenings, a theatrical release and ultimately, a television broadcast. Three of our previous films— *Born to Fly*, (Emmy nominee, with 1,862 air dates and a culminated 1,466,000 views on PBS); *A Touch of Greatness* (Emmy Nomination), and *Motherland Afghanistan*—were broadcast on PBS' Independent Lens. *What's On Your Plate?* was on Discovery Channel's Planet Green and *On Hostile Ground* appeared on the Sundance Channel. Finally, we release our films via iTunes, Netflix, and through DVD sales to maximize their visibility. As a non-profit organization, Aubin also reserves the right to sell and stream the film from our website, providing an affordable, accessible way for audiences to interact with each movie. Additionally, we work in collaboration with seasoned educational distributors to put our films into educational markets and universities.

Crew Bios



Catherine Gund, Producer and Director

Catherine Gund, the Founder and Director of Aubin Pictures, is an Emmy-nominated producer, director, writer, and activist. Her media work focuses on strategic and sustainable social transformation, arts and culture, HIV/AIDS and reproductive health, and the environment. Her films - which include *Chavela*, *Dispatches from Cleveland*, *American Rhapsody* (in progress), *Born to Fly* (Emmy-nominated), *What's On Your Plate?*, *A Touch of Greatness* (Emmy-nominated, Hamptons' Starfish Award), *Motherland Afghanistan*, *Making Grace*, *On Hostile Ground*, and *Hallelujah!* - have screened around the world in festivals, theaters, museums, and schools; on PBS, the Discovery Channel, and the Sundance Channel. Gund currently serves on several boards including Art Matters, Solidaire, Osa Conservation and The George Gund Foundation. She co-founded the Third Wave Foundation which supports young women and transgender youth, and DIVA TV, an affinity group of ACT UP/NY. She was the founding director of BENT TV, the video workshop for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth. She was on the founding boards of Bard Early Colleges, Iris House, Working Films, Reality Dance Company and The Sister Fund and has also served for MediaRights.org, The Robeson Fund of the Funding Exchange, The Vera List Center for Art and Politics at the New School, and the Astraea Foundation. Gund's most recent project, *Dispatches from Cleveland*, consists of five short films that look at the police murder of 12-year-old Tamir Rice and show how people joined together to vote out the prosecutor who didn't have their backs. Her other film *Born to Fly* pushes the boundaries between action and art, daring us to join choreographer Elizabeth Streb and her dancers in pursuit of human flight. She lives in NYC with her four children.



Daresha Kyi, Producer and Director

Daresha Kyi is an award-winning filmmaker and television producer with over 25 years in the business. A graduate of NYU Film School, she also won a full fellowship from TriStar Pictures to attend the Directors Program at The American Film Institute (AFI) based on her multiple award-winning short film *Land Where My Fathers Died*, which she wrote, produced, directed and co-starred in with Isaiah Washington. She recently served as executive producer of the award-winning short, *Thugs*, *The Musical* starring David Alan Grier and Margaret Cho. She has also worked extensively as a television producer - most recently she was field producer on *Totally Biased* with W. Kamau Bell, story producer on *La Voz Kids* (Telemundo's The Voice for children), and writer for the weekend morning talk show *Arise & Shine*, hosted by Richard Pryor's daughter, Rain. She is currently co-directing and co-producing Aubin Pictures' *Chavela* and producing *Dispatches From Cleveland*.



Carla Gutierrez, Editor

Carla Gutierrez is a documentary editor based in New York City. She edited the Oscar nominated film *La Corona* for HBO and the Emmy nominated documentary *Reportero*, which broadcast on POV. Carla also edited *Kingdom of Shadows* which premiered at SXSW, opened theatrically in Mexico, and it is slated to broadcast on POV in 2016. Her latest work, *When Two Worlds Collide* premiered at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival where it won the World Documentary Special Jury Award for Debut Feature. Screen International Magazine described *When Two Worlds Collide* as a, "deftly edited, heart-on-sleeve social documentary." And Variety Magazine observed, "Carla Gutierrez is key in shaping a coherent narrative from what was doubtless a daunting mountain of material on a complicated subject." Carla's work has screened at Sundance, IDFA, SXSW, Full Frame, AFI, Los Angeles Film Festival, HotDocs, Ambulante,

among other festivals. Her films have broadcast on HBO, BBC's Storyville, POV, Independent Lens, the Sundance Channel, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. She has been a creative adviser for the Sundance Edit Lab, and a mentor for Firelight Producers' Lab. Carla received a Masters in Documentary Film from Stanford University.



Gil Talmi, Composer

Gil Talmi is a world-renowned Emmy-nominated composer, producer and recording artist with a passion for socially conscious projects. Blending his traditional orchestral background with eclectic world music sensibilities and tasteful analog electronics, Talmi has created a signature sound that can be heard in many award winning productions worldwide. Some of Gil's most recent work includes *Desert Migration* (Best Revenge Productions), *Remittance* (Green-machine Films) and *The Memory of Fish* (Reelblue). Three documentaries which Gil scored premiered simultaneously at Doc NYC 2015: *All Rise*, *The Lost Arcade* (26 Aries) and *Love Between The Covers* (Blueberry Hill Productions). Gil has scored the Peabody Award winning documentaries *Between The Folds* (PBS Independent Lens), *Who Killed Chea Vichea?* (PBS) and *New Year Baby* (PBS Independent Lens), winner of the Amnesty International 'Movies That Matter' Award. Gil was nominated for a National News and Documentary Emmy Award for his work on CBS Evening News and recently won Best Documentary for his score for *Tales Of The Waria* (PBS).



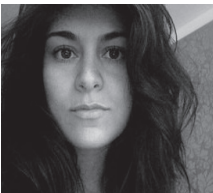
Lourdes Portillo, Consulting Producer

Lourdes Portillo is an Oscar-nominated writer, director, and producer of films focused on human rights and the search for Latino identity. She has worked in a richly varied range of forms, from television documentary to satirical video-film collage. Her films include *Al Más Allá*, *El diablo nunca duerme: The Devil Never Sleeps*, *La Ofrenda: The Days of the Dead*, *Las madres de la Plaza de Mayo: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo*, and *Después del terremoto: After the Earthquake*.



Juan Mandelbaum, Consulting Producer

Based in the Boston area, Juan Mandelbaum runs Geovision, a multicultural communications agency. His television work has been broadcast on a variety of venues, from Independent Lens to Sesame Street and has won multiple awards, including Emmy awards and nominations, Cine Golden Eagles, Gabriel awards, Chris award, and a Silver Apple award. Juan has also curated several film series, including Latin Visions, at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and Cine Argentino, at the Institute of Contemporary Art. Juan studied sociology in his native Argentina, and worked as a journalist, photographer and educator until he left for the US in 1977 to leave behind the military dictatorship.



Natalia Cuevas, Cinematographer, Mexico

Natalia Cuevas is a Mexico City-based cinematographer whose body of work includes the feature films *Elvira* and *Ricochet*. Her television credits include work for HBO Latino and the USA Network, as well as extensive commercial work.



Paula Gutiérrez Orío, Cinematographer, Spain

Paula Gutiérrez Orío is a documentary cinematographer based in Madrid. The majority of her work has been developed for Spanish television and other international networks and has covered a wide variety of topics from the famous reality game show *Pekín Express* to documentary programs *Con Una Sonrisa* for RTVE and *24 Horas Con Los Nuestros* and *El Xef* for Mediaset-Spain. She also shot the docu-reality series *Quiero Ser Monja*, an adaptation of *The Sisterhood: Becoming Nuns* for Mediaset-Spain.



Laura Tatham, Associate Producer

Laura Tatham hails from the world of book publishing, having spent five years working in both the corporate (Simon & Schuster) and non-profit (Feminist Press) sector. In that time, she worked on multiple New York Times bestsellers, as well as Lambda Literary and Pulitzer Prize winning works. She has experience in marketing, publishing, as well as film and book production. She has a background in literature, having earned a Master's degree in American Literature from Drew University in 2009. Laura is also associate producing Aubin's *Dispatches from Cleveland*. Laura resides in Jersey City with her loving partner and cat.



Laura Pilloni, Associate Producer

Laura Pilloni has been working on feature-length and short form documentary and narrative film projects such as *Front Cover* (2015) and *Kingdom Of Shadows* (2015) since 2013. Most recently she was an associate producer for the upcoming women and human rights documentary, *Home Truth*. Keeping in line with her work on these impactful films, she was very excited to become part of such an innovative and socially conscious production company when she joined the Aubin Pictures team. Laura graduated summa cum laude from the City College of New York (CCNY) where she received a BFA in Film and Video Production. She worked as a tutor and administrative assistant at the CCNY Writing Center for four years. She was also a mentor and videographer at Hofstra University's Documenting Diversity program. In her spare time, Laura enjoys working as an assistant director on short films, reading, and watching films.



Adrián Gutiérrez, Archival Producer

Adrián Gutiérrez is a Mexican filmmaker and archival researcher extraordinaire. He has been in the film industry for over twelve years working on a variety of filmmaking endeavors, from commercials to documentary films to educational videos. In 2011, he co-founded his own production company, NOMAD Media Group, which has more than 100 film and video projects to date, including *Cielos Despejados*, an educational YouTube channel about science and astronomy in Spanish. In 2015, he was a Field Associate Producer on the documentary, *Kingdom of Shadows* (2015), directed by the Emmy-nominated Bernardo Ruiz and distributed by Participant Media. Adrián received a degree in Film-making and TV Production from Transforming Arts Institute (previously known as Escuela TAI) in Madrid, Spain. He is currently in NYC as a fellow of the UnionDocs Collaborative Studio 2017.



Hajer Salem, Assistant Editor

Hajer Salem graduated with degrees in both Sociology and Biology from Louisiana State University. She forwent graduate studies in medicine to pursue a career in storytelling. Post-graduation, Hajer spent time traveling throughout American, Europe, and North Africa. She also spent two years working with at-risk girls through Americorps and Girls, Inc. She has worked as an assistant editor for films that have screened at Sundance, SXSW, and Tribeca. As an editor, she has worked for Complex, Vice, Mssng Peces and BBDO. Alongside her editing work, she currently works as a creative for Laundry Service's new media startup Cycle.

Advisory Table



Mariela Besuievsky is a partner of Tornasol Films, as well as a producer and executive producer of more than 118 films. Her first film as a producer was Pablo Dotta's *El dirigible*, the first Uruguayan movie to participate in the Festival de Cannes (Semaine de la Critique 1994). In 2011 she received the Eurimages Co-production Development Award from the European Film Academy. Her film credits include: *El secreto de sus ojos* (The Secret in their Eyes, 2009), directed by Juan José Campanella, winner of the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film; Álex de la Iglesia's *Balada triste de trompeta* (The Last Circus, Silver Lion at Venice, 2010); *Los crímenes de Oxford* (The Oxford Crimes, 2008); and Felix Viscarret's miniseries *Four Seasons in Havana* (2016) starring Jorge Perugorria.



Carlos A. Gutiérrez is the Co-founder and Executive Director of Cinema Tropical, a New York-based non-profit that promotes, distributes, and programs Latin American cinema. As a film/video programmer, cultural promoter, and arts consultant, he has presented several film/video series at institutions from NYC to San Francisco to Mexico City, as well as a juror, panelist, and expert nominator on numerous national and international film festival selection committees. Carlos holds a MA in Cinema Studies from New York University and a BA in Communications from Universidad Iberoamericana (Mexico City)



Sonja Henrici is Co-director at Scottish Documentary Institute (SDI), which she joined in 2004, and a co-founder and co-director of SDI Productions Ltd. Prior to this, she worked in the administration of Edinburgh International Film Festival, and as freelance programmer and writer. She has a BA Hons (Media Studies) and MA (English Literature) from University of Sussex. She has produced and exec-produced more than 30 short documentary films, which have regularly screened in over 50 countries, including Sundance, IDFA, Tribeca, SxSW. She's produced four features (*I Am Breathing*, *Future My Love*, *Pablo's Winter*), and her latest one, *Seven Songs for a Long Life* has its North American premiere at SxSW 2016.



Maria Hinojosa is an award-winning news anchor and reporter who covers America's untold stories and highlights today's critical issues. In 2010, Hinojosa created the Futuro Media Group, an independent nonprofit organization producing multimedia journalism that explores and gives a critical voice to the diversity of the American experience. As the anchor and Executive Producer of NPR's Peabody award-winning show *Latino USA*, and anchor and Executive Producer of the PBS show *America By The Numbers* with Maria Hinojosa, both produced by Futuro Media, she has informed millions about the changing cultural and political landscape in America and abroad



Susana Torruella Leval has been an art writer and curator of Puerto Rican, Latino and Latin American contemporary art in New York City since 1970. She was Director of El Museo del Barrio, from 1994 –2002, after serving there as Chief Curator, and named Director Emerita by its Board. Ms. Torruella Leval was Chair of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG) in New York, and Vice President and President Elect of the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD.) She has recently joined the editorial board of the International Center for Art of the Americas (ICAA) at The Houston Museum of Fine Arts, and has been named to the board of the IMLS (Institute of Museum and Library Services) by President Obama.



Scotch Ellis Loring has been in arts and entertainment as an actor, singer, writer and producer, and director for decades. As a writer, Scotch's first produced screenplay, *WIG*, was featured in festivals across North America and is currently making the rounds internationally. A talented singer/songwriter, he released his first album *Standard Scotch* in 2009 and completed the follow up *Original Scotch* in 2011. As an actor he has appeared in *Finding Mr. Wright*, *Hard Pill*, *Fight Club*, *K-911*, and *Firehouse Dog* – where in addition to starring, Scotch wrote and performed the closing theme song *Lost Till I Found You*. Scotch's latest venture which he wrote produced, directed and starred in is the award winning web series *Faux Show* also featuring Kim Coles and Tiffany Haddish.



Catherine Murphy is a San Francisco-based filmmaker who has spent much of the last 10 years working in Latin America, and whose work as an independent producer has largely focused on social documentaries. She is founder and director of The Literacy Project, a multi-media documentary project on adult literacy in the Americas. She has field produced films like Saul Landau's *Will the Real Terrorist Please Stand Up?*, and Eugene Corr's *From Ghost Town to Havana*. She also served as archival researcher for Susanne Rostock's recent biography of Harry Belafonte, *Sing Your Song*. Murphy served as senior staff producer at the TeleSur TV Washington bureau in 2006 and has produced content for PBS, TeleSur, Avila TV, Pacifica Radio National, WBAI and KPFA. In 2012, she directed the documentary short, *Maestra*, about the National Campaign for Literacy that swept through in Cuba in 1961.



Diana Taylor is professor of Performance Studies and Spanish at New York University. She is also Founding Director of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, an organization working at the intersection of scholarship, artistic expression, and politics to explore performance as a vehicle for the creation of new meaning and the transmission of cultural values, memory, and identity. As a major contributor to the area of Performance Studies in the Americas, Professor Taylor's work focuses on Latin American and U.S. theater and performance, performance and politics, feminist theater and performance in the Americas, hemispheric studies, and trauma studies. Her books include *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, *Theatre of Crisis: Drama and Politics in Latin America*, and her latest book *Performance*, all published by Duke University Press.



Caterina Toscano is a producer and curator of cultural events with more than 20 years of international professional experience. During her career, she has promoted culture and heritage in several private and public institutions in Europe, Mexico, and the United States; specializing in cultural diplomacy as an efficient tool for international relations. Before her arrival to New York, Caterina was based in Barcelona, where she led and produced diverse activities and programs in the Mexican Consulate. She has also coordinated, produced and curated exhibitions for galleries, foundations and museums in Barcelona, Madrid, Lisbon, Paris, and Mexico City. Currently, Caterina is the Executive Director of the Mexican Cultural Institute of New York. Caterina holds a bachelor's degree in Media Studies and Communication as well as a master's degree in Philosophy, focusing on Contemporary Art.

Credits

PRODUCED & DIRECTED BY

Catherine Gund and Daresha Kyi

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Lynda Weinman and Bruce Heavin

CO-PRODUCERS

Pepita Serrano and Agnes Gund

CINEMATOGRAPHERS

Catherine Gund (Mexico), Natalia Cuevas (Mexico), Paula Gutierrez (Spain)

EDITOR

Carla Gutierrez

COMPOSER

Gil Talmi

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS

Laura Tatham, Laura Piloni

FEATURING

Chavela Vargas

AND

Pedro Almodóvar, Elena Benarroch, Miguel Bosé, Alicia Elena Pérez Duarte y Noroña, Liliana Felipe, Patria Jiménez Flores, Laura García-Lorca, Martirio Gira, Mariana Gyalui, José Alfredo Jiménez Jr., Eugenia León, Tania Libertad, Diana Ortega, Tlany Ortega, Jesusa Rodríguez, Marcela Rodríguez, Betty-Carol Sellen

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androgynous look of ponchos over pants that made her a queer icon long before she openly defined herself as a lesbian at age 81.

A natural for LGBT film forums as well as music-related programming, the entertaining documentary is by Catherine Gund (whose 2014 feature, *Born to Fly: Elizabeth Streb vs. Gravity*, also blended performance with personal profile), co-directing with Dareshi Kyi. The strong connection to the subject is evident from the grainy video interview with Vargas that serves as the film's spine, shot by a young Gund in the early '90s in Mexico and dug out after the singer's death in 2012, aged 93.

The core material is augmented with a wealth of archival footage and photographs, as well as extensive interviews with music aficionados, associates, friends, lovers and admirers. While the package is fairly conventional in assembly, the talking-head elements are graced by the choice to shoot in homey spaces like kitchens and living rooms or outdoors, with the interviewees surrounded by food, books, records, artworks and mementos — or by nature. That creates a lovely suggestion of life coursing through the movie, an idea in keeping with the subject herself.

Born Isabel Vargas Lizano in Costa Rica in 1919, Chavela was an unloved, lonely child whose boyish manner was an embarrassment to her traditional churchy parents. The Golden Age of Mexican Cinema drew her as an angry young runaway to her adoptive country, where she eventually became a professional singer.

While Chavela appears to have been a striking, Modigliani-esque beauty in photos from her early adulthood, she claims: "Dressed like a woman, I looked like a transvestite." Only once she settled on her defining personal style did her fame grow. With her hair pulled back in a severe braid and later chopped off, wearing no makeup and masculine clothing, she began singing deeply felt songs of pain, solitude and lost love in a voice both rough and tender that suggested she had literally been torn apart. The filmmakers run English translations of the lyrics onscreen in an elegant, floating font, underlining the unifying sentiments of the songs, many of them popularized by Jose Alfredo Jimenez and intended to be sung by men for women.

At the same time, Chavela was partying hard with fellow traveling musicians, draining bottle after bottle of tequila in rowdy all-night sessions at bohemian hangouts. "She had to be stronger, more macho and more drunk than all the other singing cowboys," comments one observer. She became a sexual outlaw in a misogynistic, homophobic, patriarchal society. Her unambiguous homosexuality mostly went unacknowledged, even if she allegedly was sleeping in secret with countless wives of politicians and intellectuals.

Chavela herself, along with others, admits that accounts of her conquests — such as slipping away with Ava Gardner from Elizabeth Taylor's Acapulco wedding to Mike Todd — may or may not have been embroidered. She also retains an air of mystery regarding her brief but intense liaison with Frida Kahlo, illustrated in some fabulous photos. But the documentary makes a persuasive case that legend trumps truth. This also applies to under-explored mentions of her propensity for violence and gun-slinging.

There were dark times, during which she dropped out of sight for 12 years, living in Tepotzotlan in the 1980s in a haze of alcoholism before being rescued by a Huichol Indian family that turned her onto Shamanism. She then enjoyed an amazing comeback in her 70s in Spain, when Almodovar's influential support helped introduce her to a wider audience and led to her playing the great stages that were off limits in her younger years, among them Carnegie Hall, the Olympia in Paris and the Bellas Artes in Mexico City. Footage of these late-career performances becomes increasingly emotional as she grows frailer, with her former manager noting that she tried as hard as she could to die onstage. Images from her funeral bring tears.

"Chavela lived in a continuous state of farewell," says Almodovar, describing her hunger to keep performing until the end. The warmth and humor with which the director speaks of her is matched by words from other intimates like Spanish pop star and actor Miguel Bose, who recalls Chavela telling him: "If I had been a man you would have been my perfect woman." That kind of subversive gender twist seems all the more radical coming from a woman of Vargas' vintage and background. Among the most touching tributes come from her longtime lover Alicia Elena Perez, who refers to her grandly as "la Senora," though doesn't gloss over the more tempestuous side of their relationship.

"What a blessing from the cosmos to be born a woman," says Chavela, who lived out and proud for decades before she put a name to her sexuality, but dedicated all her songs to every woman. And yet as Almodovar attests, she created such an intimate rapport between performer and listener that she seemed to be singing only to you.

CHAVELA, RETRATO DE UNA MUJER IRREPETIBLE. ENTREVISTA CON LAS CODIRECTORAS DEL DOCUMENTAL SOBRE LA GRAN CHAVELA VARGAS

José Manuel Cruz ha entrevistado a Catherine Gund y Daresha Kyi, codirectoras del documental *Chavela*. Una charla emotiva en la que salen a relucir las claves de un documental que bien podría haberse titulado "Queriendo a Chavela".



JOSÉ MANUEL CRUZ — 31 MARZO, 2017

Ecós del 20 festival de Málaga. Cine en español: *Chavela*, retrato de una mujer irreplicable

El 21 de marzo de 2017, el Festival de Málaga proyectó, en el Auditorio del Museo Picasso, dentro de la sección **Documentales-Pases especiales** (por tanto, fuera de concurso), el documental *Chavela*, codirigido por las realizadoras Catherine Gund y Daresha Kyi. Chavela es, por supuesto, Chavela Vargas, la cantante mexicana (aunque nacida en Costa Rica, dato que sorprenderá a muchos) que es más que una cantante, que es más que una artista, que es todo un símbolo de lucha, de resistencia y de valentía. En MoonMagazine, queremos dar a este documental, por su importancia, todo el espacio que se merece. Por eso, le dedicamos un artículo en exclusiva, el cual incluye una amplia entrevista a sus dos codirectoras.

[#Chavela, el documental. Entrevista a sus codirectoras, @Daresha11 y Catherine Gund.](#)

[@jmcruzbar](#) **CLIC PARA TUITEAR**

Proyección del documental en el Festival de Málaga, el pasado 21 de marzo de 2017

CHAVELA

Título: *Chavela*.

Título original: *Chavela*.

AÑO: 2017.

Dirección: Catherine Gund y Daresha Kyi.

Guion, Dirección de fotografía: Natalia Cuevas, Catherine Gund y Paula Gutiérrez Orio.

Montaje: Carla Gutiérrez.

Música original: Gil Talmi.

Intervienen: Chavela Vargas (imágenes de archivo), José Alfredo Jiménez (imágenes de archivo), Frida Kahlo (imágenes de archivo), Pedro Almodóvar, Elena Benarroch, Miguel Bosé, Alicia Elena Pérez Duarte, Liliana Felipe, Patria Jiménez Flores, Laura García Lorca, Mariana Gyulai, José Alfredo

Jiménez Jr., Eugenia León, Tania Libertad, Martirio, Diana Ortega, Tlany Ortega, Jesusa Rodríguez, Marcela Rodríguez, Betty-Carol Sellen.

País: Estados Unidos-México-España

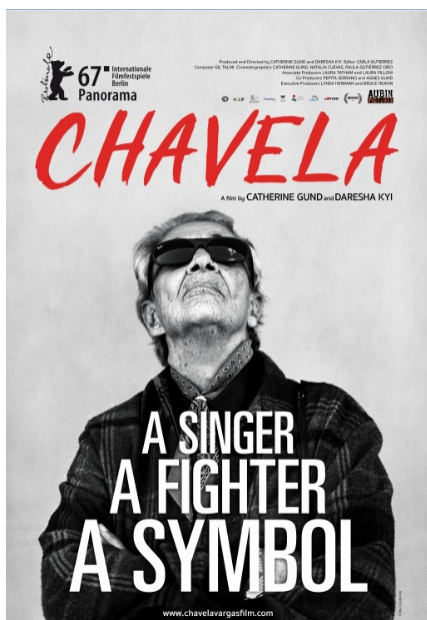
[Página web oficial](#)

Hay artistas en los que su biografía, su personalidad, sus cicatrices, su carisma y su capacidad de expresar sentimientos se unen para formar un todo compacto, coherente y expansivo. Compacto, porque, al final, se hace imposible separar unos elementos de otros. Coherente, porque todos ellos acaban formando unas líneas claras y precisas que trazan un dibujo perfectamente definido. Y expansivo porque su fuerza y su ejemplo no se agotan en ellos mismos sino que acaban siendo símbolos vivos para otras personas que sienten cómo han compartido sufrimientos, se identifican con sus vivencias o, simplemente, llegan a comprender su trayectoria tortuosa y triste. En un momento dado de este documental, **Miguel Bosé** afirma que, durante sus actuaciones en Madrid, en los años 90, parecía que Chavela iba a morir en cada canción. En realidad, **la biografía de Chavela Vargas revela que esta mujer irrepetible estuvo al borde del abismo en todos y cada uno de los momentos de su vida.**

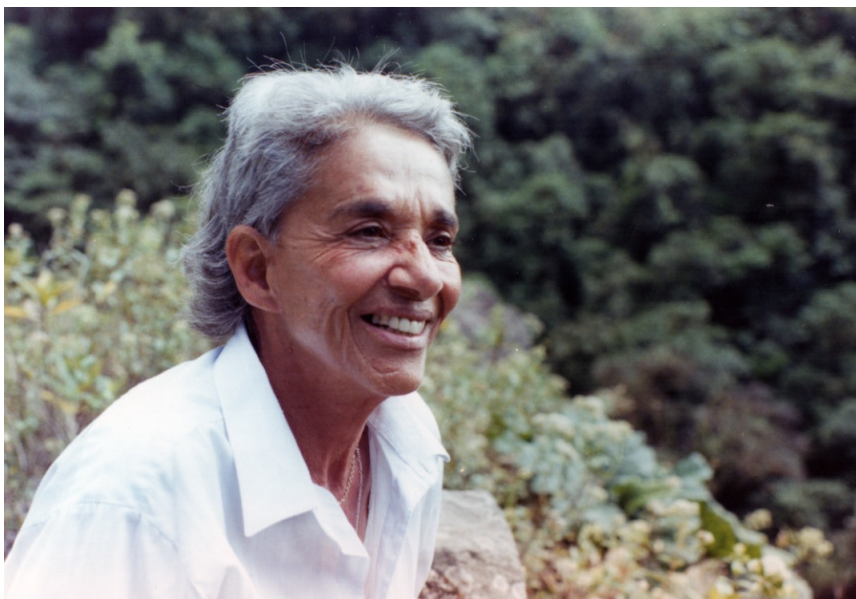


Fotografía de Chavela Vargas proveniente del archivo de Alicia Elena Pérez Duarte

Por su condición sexual (porque Chavela Vargas era lesbiana), **sus padres la escondían de las visitas que llegaban a su casa.** Por esa misma condición sexual, Chavela tuvo que sufrir cómo un sacerdote la avergonzaba en plena misa advirtiéndole de que lo único que merecía era la excomunión. Por su condición sexual, acabó huyendo de su Costa Rica natal hasta México, país que, a la postre, tampoco era muy tolerante con lo que Chavela era y quería ser. Y, como en otro momento del documental se afirma, **en vez de hundirse o vivir como algo distinto a lo que realmente era, la artista decidió «ser la más macha en un país de machos».** El rechazo, el sufrimiento por una familia que nunca la comprendió, la amenaza permanente de la marginación y la lucha constante contra una hostilidad siempre dispuesta a morder y atacar los enfrentó con el alcohol y con un arte único expresado a través de una voz rota que sólo podía emitir sentimientos desgarradores y angustias nunca olvidadas. Por todo ello, la muerte y el colapso siempre estuvieron cerca de ella. Pero lo sorprendente es que la artista supo superar todos los peligros que la acecharon (murió nada menos que con 93 años a pesar de sus problemas de hígado) para acabar dibujando una biografía fascinante y cautivadora. El documental *Chavela* da cuenta, con precisión y pasión, de todo ello.



Sorprende en *Chavela* su colosal labor de documentación, que permite rescatar imágenes sorprendentes de la juventud y de las primeras actuaciones de la artista y que, a partir de ahí, logra trazar un recorrido prácticamente completo de todas las etapas que jalonan su vida y su carrera, mostrándonos momentos únicos cuya recuperación roza lo milagroso y lo inverosímil (en la entrevista, preguntaremos a los codirectoras cómo consiguieron las joyas visuales que aparecen en el film). Otra virtud del documental es su claridad y transparencia expositivas, de modo que en noventa minutos no sólo consigue transmitir al espectador los aspectos esenciales de la biografía vital, profesional y emocional de Chavela sino que, al mismo tiempo, dibuja un retrato vívido de la época y de la sociedad que a la artista le tocó vivir. El film prescinde del consabido recurso de la voz en off para que sean los testigos reales los que nos cuenten su visión de lo que vivieron y cómo lo recuerdan, de modo que se consigue un fresco coral de gran dinamismo y plasticidad.



Fotografía de Chavela Vargas proveniente del archivo de Alicia Elena Pérez Duarte

Catherine Gund y Daresha Kyi saben imprimir a la película un tono vibrante y emotivo y ello sin que se pierda objetividad ni se oculten las luces y sombras de la

artista. Chavela se nos revela tal como es, con sus virtudes y defectos, con su lado deslumbrante y con los aspectos que desconcertaban a quienes estaban cerca de ella. Sin duda alguna, podemos afirmar que la suma de todo lo expuesto (esto es, el retrato fiel y total de un personaje único y relevante, la reconstrucción de un mundo y de un tiempo y su maestría narrativa y su esfuerzo por conseguir que su mensaje trascienda el marco temporal en que se desarrolló la vida de la artista para convertirse en testimonio útil y fructífero para las nuevas generaciones) convierte a *Chavela* en el documental perfecto y en un ejemplo a seguir en el futuro para proyectos similares.

Nota (de 0 a 10): 10.

Lo que más me gustó: Todo. Sabe transmitir a la perfección el carisma y relevancia del personaje.

Lo que menos me gustó: Nada.

Para entrevista: <http://www.moonmagazine.info/chavela-retrato-de-una-mujer-irrepetible/>

La *Berlinale* recibe con emoción documental sobre Chavela Vargas

ALIA LIRA HARTMANN

Corresponsal

Periódico La Jornada
Sábado 11 de febrero de 2017, p. 6

Berlín.

La figura de Chavela Vargas fue el plato fuerte de ayer en la sección Panorama, en la segunda jornada del Festival Internacional de Cine de Berlín.

Las directoras y productoras estadounidenses Catherine Gund y Daresha Kyi estrenan *Chavela*, filme documental alrededor de la cantante mexicana de origen costarricense, además de ser homenaje a una figura sin comparación. "Esperamos que este trabajo contribuya a mostrar al mundo, mediante Chavela, los valores culturales de México, tomando en cuenta el difícil momento que vive en sus relaciones con Estados Unidos", declaró Gund al inicio de la presentación.

El recibimiento en Berlín fue inmejorable: las localidades para las presentaciones se agotaron y un largo y emotivo aplauso coronó el estreno.

Aunque no es el primer trabajo documental dedicado a Chavela, contiene material de archivo hasta ahora inédito, grabado hace más de 25 años por Catherine Gund, quien durante su estancia en México, grabó sus conversaciones con Chavela, entonces tenía 71 años y ya estaba retirada de los escenarios.

La fascinación de Catherine Gund por la cantante continuó a lo largo de los años y fue testigo de su memorable concierto en el Carnegie Hall.

Tras la muerte de Chavela Vargas, en 2012, y ya con una carrera detrás como documentalista y fundadora de la productora Aubin Pictures, Gund comparte su pasión por a quien considera una musa con Daresha Kyi y se embarcan a la tarea de recopilar material y testimonios de quienes caminaron junto a Chavela, como Pedro Almodóvar, Jesusa Rodríguez y Liliana Felipe, Eugenia León, Tania Libertad y Miguel Bosé.

El hilo conductor son las interpretaciones de la cantante alternadas con numerosos testimonios. Las documentalistas emplean el recurso de la traducción al inglés en un formato de escritura paralelo al canto. *La Macorina*, *Adoro*, *Luz de Luna* y *Volver, volver* hicieron derramar lágrimas a más de uno de los asistentes al estreno en la *Berlinale*.

Las palabras finales dan testimonio de la honestidad con la que Chavela caminó por el mundo: "Es un privilegio haber nacido mujer; le canté a todas las mujeres, hijas, hermanas, esposas, amantes, cuando eres verdad te impones y sales adelante... me llamo Chavela Vargas, no se les olvide".

Berlin Film Review: 'Chavela'

Jay Weissberg



FEBRUARY 11, 2017 | 11:47AM PT

Legendary Mexican singer Chavela Vargas receives justifiably laudatory treatment in this documentary celebrating her refusal to compromise together with her musical brilliance.

In 1992, [Catherine Gund](#) met legendary Mexican singer [Chavela](#) Vargas and filmed her with a simple video camera; after Chavela's death at the age of 93 in 2012, she unearthed the footage and discovered she had an invaluable record of the great artist candidly responding to questions ranging from career details to her philosophy on life. This fuzzy material forms the core of "Chavela," a justifiably laudatory love letter to a woman whose voice drew forth a song's every emotion, and whose life as a trouser-wearing lesbian celebrity became an inspiration throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Loaded with concert footage, interviews with friends, and terrific photos, this well-balanced documentary directed by Gund and [Daresha Kyi](#) celebrates the woman and the legend, and if the stock archival material doesn't always fit, few will mind. Festival play is assured, but pubcasters and specialty art houses should also take note.

After watching the film, it's hard to separate the image of the woman from the sounds she made. She had two zeniths: During the first, she already wore her scandalous pants and signature poncho, her hair pulled back to emphasize her smooth, confident face. This was the time when she was the lover of Frida Kahlo, among many others. Decades later, following a 12-year hiatus spent in an alcoholic spiral, she returned with short white hair and lined features, even more determined than before to conquer the world.

Gund's method of conquest was her voice. Fellow singer Eugenia León talks about how Chavela tossed aside the trappings and embellishments of traditional Mexican song (and presentation), zeroing in on the wounded soul called forth by "ranchera" music. Gund ("Born to Fly") and Kyi open with a 1991 Mexico City concert in which the 72-year-old sings with an emotion that, despite the exaggeration of performance, draws forth the wellspring of pain that comes from "soledad," or "solitude." Even as her voice became less supple, she was able to pour into her songs the intensity of loves that caused unwelcome anguish yet unrenounceable sorrow.

Chavela's pain began early in life, when her parents withheld affection and everyone denigrated her boyish manner. Full of rage and realizing that her birthplace, Costa Rica, was too provincial for her tastes, she went to Mexico where she was taken up by the cabaret world. At first she played the game, wearing gowns and high heels, but her career properly took off when she found her true style and became the bohemian darling of the café crowd. That's also when the drinking began, well-partnered by master ranchera singer-songwriter José Alfredo Jiménez.

When the alcoholism became chronic, her career took a nosedive. Broke and alone, she seems to have lived in a haze, rescued by her relationship with lawyer Alicia Pérez Duarte. When that ended, nursing a major new sorrow, she resurrected herself, this time in Spain where Pedro Almodóvar did much to spread the word. Filled with a new hunger and lapping up the adulatory audiences, Chavela finally transitioned from cabaret houses to leading concert halls, performing until practically her last breath.

The documentary packs in a lot of information but doesn't feel crowded, and the concert footage will help recruit legions of new fans. Many undoubtedly will first be drawn to the woman's bravery, her insistence on living life her way, and though she didn't publicly acknowledge her sexuality until she was 81, she presented herself in a manner that left little ambiguity on that score. What makes Chavela so special though is the way she exposed her soul in song: as a lesbian unwilling and unable to hide, and also as a wounded woman who recalls lost loves with pain but without regret.

Gund and Kyi load up on evocative photos and insightful interviews, though Gund's own recordings from 1992 are the most revelatory in demonstrating Chavela's mix of confidence with injured pride and a flirtatious desire to control her own legend. The only place the directors trip up is in the generic archive footage used to set each place in time and space: The period is often wrong, and the blandness of the images never really illustrates the cities where Chavela's outsized presence was felt.

Berlin Film Review: 'Chavela'

Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (Panorama Documentary), Feb. 10, 2017.

Running time: **91 MIN.**



Frida Kahlo y Chavela Vargas.

Chavela Vargas no nació siendo Chavela ni en México. Costarricense nacida en San Joaquín de Flores en 1919, María Isabel Anita Carmen de Jesús Vargas Lizano fue una niña especial, a la que sus padres escondían cuando venían las visitas por su extraña manera de ser y de vestir. Cuando el matrimonio se divorcia, ella se va a vivir con sus tíos, y a los 17 años toma una determinación: irse a México, comenzar una nueva existencia como Chavela Vargas. El filme mezcla entrevistas con la artista en distintas épocas, con declaraciones actuales de quienes la rodearon y la quisieron, y actuaciones y grabaciones históricas. Por eso Chavela acaba siendo quien cuenta sus propias vivencias, como cuando recuerda cómo en aquellos primeros años en México intentó actuar como el resto de las cantantes, con tacones y vestidos con los que se tropezaba en el escenario. Finalmente, acabó usando sus míticos pantalones y ponchos, y así la descubrió un día en un club en la década de 1940 por la esposa del mítico compositor y cantante José Alfredo Jiménez. Su voz era única, su forma de moverse en un escenario también, y José Alfredo entendió que Chavela poseía una extraordinaria capacidad de canalizar el dolor a través de su voz, un sentimiento que burbujeaba en todos los temas del compositor.

Aquella unión, perfecta en lo artístico, también fue mítica en su alcoholismo. Ambos bebieron y bebieron, cayeron al suelo decenas de veces embriagados por miles de litros de tequila. Sin embargo, el talento de Vargas chocaba con el México tradicional. Nunca llegó a actuar más allá de clubes y cabarés. Fue pareja de Frida Kahlo. Logró cierta fama en el Acapulco de finales de los años cincuenta, repleto de turistas estadounidenses. Actuó en la boda de Elizabeth Taylor y Michael Todd -"y amanecí con Ava Gardner", apunta-, y tuvo romance con decenas de mujeres, incluidas esposas de jerifaltes del gobierno. Entre ellas, a la novia de Emilio Azcárraga, el todopoderoso empresario que vetó su carrera musical en compañías de discos. Y sí, hizo alguna serie de televisión y alguna película, pero languideció. Durante años vivió de la caridad de amigos. Hasta que un día se cruza en su camino [la joven abogada Alicia Pérez Duarte](#), con la que inicia una intensa relación.



Chavela Vargas y Pedro Almodóvar.

Pérez Duarte da muchas claves en *Chavela* sobre la cantante. por ejemplo, su capacidad para reinventar hechos de su vida y convertirlos en leyenda. Como su abandono del alcohol. Según la artista, lo lograron unos chamanes.

Según Pérez Duarte, ocurrió tras un feo incidente con una pistola que involucró al segundo hijo -entonces de ocho años- de la letrada. La misma cantante dice que Isabel es una persona maravillosa, pero Chavela es un toro complejo de lidiar.

Sobria, Chavela Vargas retoma su carrera. La mayor parte de sus fans pensaba que había muerto, y a finales de los ochenta reaparece actuando en Ciudad de México. Allí le ve un empresario español y en 1993 actúa en la Sala Caracol de Madrid. Comienza su segunda carrera, con la que por primera vez pisará teatros. [Pedro Almodóvar](#) se convierte en su amigo y padrino y logra que actúe en el Olympia de París. Y solo entonces es cuando definitivamente México le abre las puertas y canta en el teatro Bellas Artes.



Chavela Vargas, en la segunda parte de su carrera.

En *Chavela* se escuchan sus frases rotundas, sus sentencias que resuenan por su voz como bombas: "Lo supe siempre. No hay nadie que aguante la libertad ajena; a nadie le gusta vivir con una persona libre. Si eres libre, ese es el precio que tienes que pagar: la soledad"; "Nadie se muere de amor, ni por falta ni por sobra"; "El amor no existe, es un invento de noches de borrachera". También se ilustra su soledad, su independencia, su lesbianismo nunca anunciado públicamente hasta que cumplió 80 años (probablemente porque no hacía falta; probablemente porque en México se permite todo en un escenario pero nada en la calle), su liderazgo en la comunidad lésbica mexicana... En España hablan de ella Miguel Bosé, Elena Benarroch o Laura García-Lorca: su último concierto es en la madrileña Residencia de Estudiantes en julio de 2012 y dos días después vuelve rápidamente a México para poder morir allí, lo que ocurre el 5 de agosto de 2012.

Chavela es un documental excepcional porque en 90 minutos fija la imagen y la vida de la artista sin regatear sus contradicciones, sus dolores (murió aún rabiosa por la falta de amor de su madre con ella), sus pasiones y su

talento. Ayer en Berlín el aplauso fue merecido.

ARCHIVADO EN:

Pedro Almodóvar · Elena Benarroch · Miguel Bosé · Chavela Vargas · Berlinale · Documental · Festivales cine · Festivales · México · Cine
· Cultura · Cantantes · Gente · Sociedad

'Chavela': Berlin Review

Screen Daily

11 February, 2017 | By Jonathan Romney



Documentary about the extraordinary life of Mexican singer Chavela Vargas, adopted by Almodóvar in her late-life revival

Dirs: Catherine Gund, Daresha Kyi. US, 2017. 90 mins

'Solitude', 'pain' and 'desolation' are key words in the repertoire of Mexican singing legend Chavela Vargas but – as an admirer comments in documentary *Chavela* – dark feelings can be hugely cathartic. And indeed this depiction of the singer's chequered life turns out intensely celebratory, and will send fans and newcomers alike rushing to the back catalogue of a great vocalist whose international reputation received a boost when Pedro Almodóvar started featuring her songs in his work.

Certainly, films about the expression of agony rarely feel this uplifting

Comprised of interviews, archive footage and stills, plus footage of Vargas herself, both in interview and in full flight on

stage, *Chavela* is a vivid portrayal of an artistic, social and sexual rebel whose difficult but finally triumphant life finally proved that there sometimes really are second acts in showbiz lives. A must for festivals with either LGBT or musical focuses, *Chavela* should spread considerably wider.

Formally conventional, but never less than involving, the film – by the Aubin Pictures team behind documentaries including 2014's *Born to Fly: Elizabeth Streb vs. Gravity* – begins with Vargas interviewed in her Mexico home in 1991, aged 71. She insists that she'll talk about "where I'm going, not where I've been" – words that make sense when we realise that, even this late in life, she had a lot of career ahead of her.

The film traces her life from her birth in 1919 as Isabel Vargas Lozano in Costa Rica, beginning with her parents rejecting her because of her boyish demeanour. As a young woman she moved to Mexico City, where she sang in the capital's cabarets, and where her career really took off once she rejected the conventional feminine mannerisms of Mexican female singers, dressing in a more masculine style with trousers and her trademark poncho, and establishing the persona that allowed her to be a deeply moving interpreter of songs of love and loss (the lyrics of her repertoire, translated in English on screen, show a remarkable consistency in theme and intensity).

The film isn't always as informative as it might be about Vargas's dark side – although long-term lover Alicia Elena Pérez talks about a propensity to violence – but it's clear that she had one. The singer, emerging as witty and acute in her self-knowledge, says she sees 'Chavela', her persona that emerged in the early 40s, as "a bull... kicking against life". Vargas's hard living emerges vividly, whether it's the lifelong drinking that began in the bohemia of Mexico City, or her career as a formidable lesbian seducer with a penchant for the wives of eminent men, as well as celebrities, including – she insists – Ava Gardner. She also had a close friendship, at the very least, with Frida Kahlo.

For quite a stretch, Vargas's story looks set to be a classic showbiz tragedy, as drink and poverty lead her into reclusion in the town of Tepoztlan. But after 12 years' silence, she returned triumphantly to the stage in Mexico, then visited Spain, where she was discovered by, among others, Almodóvar, who is seen calling her "a faithful representation of myself." The Spanish director helped promote the remarkable comeback that Vargas staged in her 70s, and other friends from this period including

singer-actor (and sometime Almodóvar star) Miguel Bosé. There are also testimonies from lovers and associates, notably lawyer Perez, who refers to her former partner as 'Senõra' - "with a capital S," she insists - and hints at the singer's intractably difficult personality.

The performances - some seen in rough archive footage, although the sound is always high quality - show just what the qualities were that made Vargas's singing so moving. The sheer intensity of her singing would certainly seem to testify to the life of suffering she experienced, whether from parental rejection or from the difficulty of living in Mexico as a lesbian; but whether that intensity is the result of an agonized soul, or more simply an effect of phrasing and consummate performance skills, is a matter for listeners to decide. By the time she died in 2012, having at last gone public about her lesbian identity, Vargas was a legendary figure - and the film makes a case for her being one of Latin song's true immortals. Certainly, films about the expression of agony rarely feel this uplifting.