

ISMAEL ALBELO

National Ballet School of Cuba Historian and Lecturer

Your (OUR) documentary is very deep into my heart and soul. The end is a nice hope for our future: everybody will make whatever they want and need and all of us continue to be together as a big Cuban family.

BESTOR CRAM

Creative Director, Northern Light Productions

Last night was a special evening seeing your beautiful cinematography and your uniquely crafted storytelling. I was stunned that I could continue to look at legs and toes for 90 minutes and feel I was always seeing anew. The defection is a fascinating part of the story and I found that you chose to keep it personal and not a political thing so consistent with the film.

As a viewer, I wanted to know what made a young person become so determined to be a ballet dancer. I think your observational approach with the austere narrative voice encouraged me to look hard to discover that answer. It isn't just a leap from poverty's dependence but an enactment of discovering personal independence and the joy it accompanies.

It is so nice to see a film that begs you to watch, not just to see voices illustrated. You did it beautifully with a pace that encourages one to understand that in watching cinema comes the experience of becoming aware of your own sense of self.

CHARLES WARREN

Professor of Film History and Theory, Harvard University and Boston University

It's very beautiful - being immersed in that building, the dancing, the young people, everything. I think you got that question from the trained dancer because your shooting and editing just seem so intuitively engaged with the dance - the dance becomes film in what seems like a very natural way, and there's a transcendence about it. The social realities, these kids' backgrounds, the peculiarities of Cuba, all are made quite plain in the film, and yet the dedication to art and the excitement and fulfillment of it are felt very strongly - it seems, because YOU feel it, as the dancers and teachers do.

ABELARDO MORELL

Internationally acclaimed photographer

Secundaria is a remarkable film. Seemingly about dance, and it's a wonderful visual homage to that subject; it deeply captures how students, entwined in a strange dance with a regime that is less than free manage to find a freedom of a sort. The film is also about the kind of ambition young artists are able to maintain when so much is still in question. Like Yeats' line "how can we know the dancer from the dance?" This film asks further: How can we know the dancer from society?

GERALD PEARY

Film Critic and Curator, Boston University Cinematheque

Secundaria, is BU filmmaking professor Mary Jane Doherty's superb documentary observation of Cuba's National Ballet School, subtly filmed and shaped from 21 trips to Havana. Doing both camera and sound, Doherty shows us exquisite dance up close, on a stunning visceral level, but also tells the extraordinary story of a ballet school which allows its students the chance to escape from poverty and, for the young and brave, the daring possibility to prance away from Cuba.

HUBIE JONES

Boston Children's Chorus Founder. Social Activist. Dean Emeritus Boston University

I have been to Cuba three times and love the Cuban people and their embrace of music and the arts. Your film captures the investment of parents and other adults in children. You certainly captured the progression of ballet training in all its humanity and drama. The section on the defection of the Cuban young dancer was powerful. The photography was fabulous!

LUIS D'ELIAS

Musician, Berklee College of Music

The film is amazing. I love how despite being a documentary, there is an enormous dramatic content. It's amazing how people's lives are as dramatic as fiction. It reminds me that fiction mimics it, rather than otherwise.

RICARDO ACOSTA

Filmmaker: Herman's House and Marmato. Sundance Documentary Labs

(A) beautiful story filmed over many years with little girls that transform into powerful Dancers, your perseverance and the master piece of Cinema Verité that "Secundaria" is.

(Then Jan 2014) Thanks for making a film so beautiful and soft and profound, Secondary is a treasure of cultural enhancement for any audience that want to see the reality and the passion, the personal and the universal story of a cuban adolescent building their dreams in a time of dysfunctional changes in their country, its also a story of resilience and "Duende" - those very important component of any good Artist's gift. I cried so much with joy and sadness- there are so many moments of beauty- complex beauty in your film!!

TY BURR

Boston Globe Film Critic

Wonderful. You have such an eye for the arresting image; I could tell within the first minute that I was in the hands of a natural filmmaker.

ROSS MCELWEE

Filmmaker: Sherman's March, Photographic Memory

What struck me about your film, aside from how terrific the shooting was throughout, was the immense sympathy you have for your young subjects. You're quite clear-eyed, of course, and you don't sentimentalize, but you are sympathetic, and convey that sympathy to us as viewers. I had intentionally not read about your film in advance, and did not know about the defection that would occur at the end. Stunning. And yet, probably inevitable. I appreciated the way your film simply recorded the event, noting its effect on family and fellow dancers, without becoming encumbered in the political ramifications. Deftly done.

ANA BELEN ESCOBAR

Cuban National Ballet High School alumna

I was feeling I was in Havana, in school every minute of it.

BILL POLITIS

Boston University Alum, Senior Producer BU Today

The dancers practice like it's any other day but your compositions made their movements beautiful and meaningful for a reason I can't really describe. Maybe it's a sense of abstraction from what's going on. Instead of an arm or a leg it's this beautiful shape moving gracefully through this perfectly composed world created by your frame. It's so incredible that framing and composition can do that. It wasn't a cerebral thing either. I just felt moved by what I was watching. It's that feeling of being moved, discovering something beautiful about the world (all because composition and formal technique married the content of the scene) that made me really value your movie.

DEBBIE DANIELPOUR

Screenwriter. Associate Professor, Boston University

All of us were moved by the gorgeous images of people and places, your use of natural light (I loved the movement/rhythm you caught in the repeated images of legs, or columns or stairs.), by that held image of the teacher at the very end, at how you shaped a story from your "poem."

GARLAND WALLER

Associate Professor, Boston University, Hot House Productions

Masterful. Poetry in Motion. MJD pirouettes in body and spirit.

HYUN-YEUL LEE

Samsung VP, Graphic Design

Brilliant and seamless narrative continuity. Thank you for your sharing your brilliant work with us!

KIM SMITH

Landscape Designer, Blog: Good Morning Gloucester

I, as well as the unknown-to-me women sitting to the left and to the right of me, were all sobbing as the story unfolded—crying tears of joy and of sorrow. Mary Jane didn't have any part in the dramatic turn of events that took place during the making of the film, and was as shocked by the events as is the first-time viewer.

LISA HITON

Arts Educator, MFA Poetry, Boston University and M.Ed, Harvard

It was a film poem to me--something that made voices of the unheard visible and asked its receivers to join in a cause, in a tribe.

MARGIE RUDDICK

Landscape Architect: Winner of 2013 Cooper Hewitt National Design Award

And politics? Excuse me, Moisés? The two-room Mayara house vs. Gabriela? The defection itself? The coffee table? The politics are everywhere in the movie, they just aren't TOLD, they reveal themselves.

THORSTEN TRIMPOP

Filmmaker and Germany's 2012 Gerd-Ruge Grant Recipient

Secundaria is amazing. You've done a consummately beautiful thing in showing people in a gentle and respectful closeness that never loses its earnest distance. It's really astonishing to follow the story that develops by its own pace to the final emotional events. I love all the details that your wide awake camera eye captures. I loved the rain, the women singing in the restroom, the whole Johannesburg sequence and the balance you found between the atmosphere in Cuba and the travels. Your film shows Cuba from an unexpected angle that I'd never seen before and is of course so much more about the culture and life itself than about ballet.

KIKU ADATTO

Scholar-In-Residence, Harvard University, Mahindra Humanities Center

Your documentary of the Cuban ballet school was brilliant--deeply moving, the narrative was powerfully carried by the unfolding images.