

LA TRINCHERA LUMINOSA DEL PRESIDENTE GONZALO

(The Shining Trench of Chairman Gonzalo)

a film by Jim Finn, 64 minutes, 2007

SYNOPSIS

La Trinchera Luminosa del Presidente Gonzalo has the look of a Maoist home movie from the 80's. Shot in Hi-8 video in New Mexico, the film is one day in a Shining Path women's prison cellblock in Peru. After capture, the Gang-of-Four Maoist revolutionaries basically ran their cellblocks as if they were training camps. Heavily researched, the film draws from many sources including video footage from the prisons and interviews with Shining Path militants and their leader Chairman Gonzalo, the former philosophy professor Abimael Guzman. It follows the inmates organizing classes, marches, criticism sessions, a dance party, and playing scenes from a Navajo-language Macbeth.



SELECTED PRESS FOR JIM FINN'S DEBUT FEATURE "INTERKOSMOS"

"Jim Finn's Interkosmos, a retro gust of Communist utopianism... Finn's deadpan is immaculately bone-dry, and his antiquarian fastidiousness is worthy of Guy Maddin." (Dennis Lim, THE VILLAGE VOICE)

"Poker-faced, often hilarious, and endlessly inventive.. In short, this is very special. Colleen Burke and Jim Becker wrote the delightful percussive score." (Jonathan Rosenbaum, CHICAGO READER)

A delightfully tongue-in-cheek homage to a fictional East German space project, Jim Finn's "Interkosmos" uses recreated newsreels combined with musical interludes to resurrect the '70s in all its Brezhnev-era glory."

(Jay Weissberg, VARIETY)

"...the debut feature film from Jim Finn....will undoubtedly become a cult classic." (Matthew Tempest, THE GUARDIAN)

Named to "Best Shoestring Sci-Fi OF 2006" (WIRED Magazine)

Named to "Best Undistributed Films of 2006" (INDIEWIRE)



PRINCIPAL CAST

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Magali Arreola</i> | <i>Rebeca Mayorga</i> |
| <i>Yazmin Chavez</i> | <i>Denisse del Rio</i> |
| <i>Gabriela Mayorga</i> | <i>Isela Cruz</i> |
| <i>Amanda Louis</i> | <i>Sophina James</i> |

PRINCIPAL CREW

| | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Writer/Director</i> | <i>Jim Finn</i> |
| <i>Art Directors</i> | <i>Mike Slattery, Joe Bristol</i> |
| <i>Camera</i> | <i>Dean DeMatteis</i> |
| <i>Assistant Director</i> | <i>Cat Mazza</i> |
| <i>Costume</i> | <i>Dana Carter, Cecilia Rubalcava</i> |
| <i>Music</i> | <i>Jim Becker, Colleen Burke</i> |

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The music for the film was created by Jim Becker and Colleen Burke. Besides writing and touring with his band Califone, Jim Becker most recently has toured with the bands Freakwater and the Dirty Three. As well as playing piano in the band We Ragazzi, Colleen Burke has toured with Smog. They collaborated on the soundtrack for Interkosmos in 2006.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When members of the Peruvian Maoist revolutionary-terrorist group the Shining Path were captured and imprisoned, the authorities kept them in their own cellblocks which they then ran basically as guerrilla training camps. The Shining Path prisoners called their cellblocks "shining trenches of combat." They had propaganda, literature, and military classes as well as marches, criticism sessions, and dances. Outside the prison walls their cult-like leader Chairman Gonzalo, the nom-de-guerre of former philosophy professor Abimael Guzman, used to read the guerrillas excerpts not only of Mao and Stalin but also Shakespeare so they would understand how conspiracies are formed and how power works. Though his leadership was absolute, the Shining Path paradoxically had the highest proportion of women commanders in Latin American guerrilla history. It was typically a woman, for example, that would perform the coup-de-grace on a wounded victim. The extreme violence and ideological dogmatism of the Shining Path was seen at the time as an aberration among Latin American guerrilla groups, but now it seems that they were more in line with 21st-century guerrilla tactics.

La Trinchera Luminosa del Presidente Gonzalo was shot in Hi-8 analog video as if it were an amateur documentary in the late 80s. This was the bootleg video that I would have wanted to find in a market in Lima. The location for the film was the New Mexico State Fairgrounds' 4H Youth Dormitory in the middle of Albuquerque. We painted it with Maoist murals and cast actors in New Mexico who could speak Spanish or Navajo (Dine'). Navajo is used because so much of the recruitment for the Shining Path was done in among the Quechua, Ayamara and other Indian groups. In this fictionalized Shining Path world, Navajo is spoken in prison. The Navajo actors translated scenes from Macbeth into tape recorders and played it back to better the translation and memorize the dialogue. They helped create the performance as well as the sets for the Revolutionary Theater piece within the film. The rehearsals and choreography for the film were worked out with the help of Working Classroom, an Albuquerque theater group for artists from marginalized communities. Many of the actors were trained there and the collaboration with the organization helped create a real sense of community on the set. The main difficulty for the actors was to memorize lines in the stylized Gonzalo-speak Spanish. The Shining Path had a unique way of speaking based on didactic Gang-of-Four or Cultural-Revolution Maoism and Gonzalo-Thought, basically the sayings of their leader Guzman. The script is based on a core of interviews, readings and other research which was turned into a stylized version of a day in the life of the cellblock. The music for the film was created before filming by the same musicians that scored my film Interkosmos. I wanted the actors to be surrounded by the language, literature, art and music of the Shining Path to portray the characters as authentically as possible.

I made this film to try to understand how a 16-year-old Indian girl becomes a trained killer versed in Marxist rhetoric and willing to go to any lengths for a future society of great harmony. To do that, I wanted to recreate the logic of the Shining Path and the intensity of this unique form of Cultural-Revolution Marxism without showing any actual violence. I wanted to see how they train and what they say and not interject an omniscient narrator or editor to explain or contextualize the characters. In a sense the film is a kind of socialist realism film or perhaps a failed propaganda film - one that didn't pass the Shining Path censors. What has been created is a slightly stylized and fictionalized world based in fact. A women's prison movie without a shower scene; a Latin American guerrilla film without guns; and a Shakespearean drama without the dramatic ending. Though set in the late 80s, a movie about terrorist extremists locked away and forgotten in prison with nothing but their ideology has a relevance that doesn't seem to be fading any time soon.



CONTACT

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ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

"Jim Finn has made a name for himself...thanks to his feeling for irony and his capacity to shape something new from propaganda, news and other historic images. Not to forget his very dry sense of humour"

- Rotterdam International Film Festival

Jim Finn (b. St. Louis, 1968) studied Creative Writing and Electronic Arts and has lived in Chicago, Central America, Tucson and currently lives in Troy, New York. His films and videos have screened at festivals and venues as diverse as the New York Underground Film Festival, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, Sydney Film Festival, Danish Film Institute, and the Harvard Film Archive. His first feature-length film "Interkosmos" premiered at the 2006 International Film Festival Rotterdam.