

Fábula explores the story of Arturo, a university student, and Cecilia, a prostitute, as they fall in love and struggle emotionally and economically to maintain a relationship. Based on the tale “*Fábula de un amor feliz*” (“Fable of a Happy Love”) by writer and editor Alberto Garrandés and directed by Lester Hamlet, the film reveals the complexity of relationships in Havana, a city where economic necessity may often trump love.



Arturo naïvely accepts Cecilia’s profession and even rejects an opportunity to leave Cuba for a career position. He tells her that he has saved a few CUC (Cuba currency equivalent to a dollar) in order to be with her and jokes when he asks for a student discount. The mood darkens, however, as Arturo struggles to find work and turns to selling his paintings in a street market. The film gives us a glimpse into gray areas of the Cuban economy, and the art of scamming tourists into paying high prices for what may or may not be contraband items.

The film takes several unexpected turns as Arturo’s character adapts to his situation. The viewer is left uncertain about Arturo’s sexuality and at least one critic has questioned whether some of the plot developments were added for sensational effect. Regardless, the film created controversy in Cuba, a nation still grappling with gender issues. Some critics have rejected the film’s content, although it reveals the Cuban reality that economic adversity requires unorthodox methods of survival.

Starring Carlos Luis Gonzalez as Arturo and Alicia Hechavarría as Cecilia, *Fábula* is narrated through Arturo’s eyes and structured as a frame story beginning and ending with his tortured departure from his family. Filmed entirely in Havana, the scenes cut back and forth between Arturo’s narration and the couple’s daily hardships and tender moments.

Director Lester Hamlet notes that essentially “this movie is a love story, but love that is hard, rough, rude, absent, almost at a balancing point between romance and utopia.” Like many recent Cuban films, its graphic portrayal of challenging social issues can be startling. Despite the controversial reception by critics and audiences, *Fábula* won the Coral Award at the 33rd International Festival of Latin America Cinema in 2011.

Fábula is the fourth film directed by Hamlet, who began his career directing music videos. His 2010 film *Casa Vieja*, about the return of a prodigal son to his rural village home where time stood still, also dealt with gender-identity themes. However, *Casa Vieja*’s lead character represents Cuban youth as fed up with the old ways and willing to contest the secrets and silences. In contrast, *Fábula* presents a darker, less hopeful vision of Cuba’s future, especially for its youth.

The film was produced by Firepower Entertainment of Canada and follows a recent trend of Cuban film production in partnership with international sponsors.

Who are the Cuban Five? Please take a moment to review this case, which has received little attention in most of the US press. In contrast, the arrest and sentencing of USAID contractor Alan Gross has been spotlighted as a gross injustice. More information on both can be found at minnesotacubacommittee.org and freethethefive.org.

Is Cuba a sponsor of terrorism? Despite growing appeals to remove Cuba from the State Department’s list of “state sponsors of terrorism,” our government persists in this relic of the Cold War. Please go to signon.org to add your name to the list of thousands who oppose this designation. The name of the petition is “Cuba is Not a Sponsor of Terrorism; Take Cuba Off the List.”

Following the film St. Thomas University Professor Sonia Rey-Montejo, will lead a discussion at Pracna on Main.

Sonia’s research focuses on contemporary Caribbean cultural representations in literature, film, music and art, as well as cultural representations of the Caribbean Diaspora in the US. Her current research projects are closely related to issues of race, gender, and social inequality in Cuba and how Plantation society has affected and continues to transpire in contemporary Cuban identity.

Upcoming films and other events

Coming up next Thursday is the last feature in the Minnesota Cuban Film Festival, *Los 100 Sonos Cubanos* (Cuba/Dominican Republic, 81 min.) by Alejandro Ruben Consuegra. In search of authentic Cuban son, the filmmakers travel the island for the best examples of the music and its artists. It will be followed by our annual closing night party at Pracna on Main featuring Tr30 Cubanía with Viviana Pintado, Gloria "la Niña" Rivera and Shai Hayo. Not to be missed!

The Minnesota Cuba Committee meets every two weeks The next meeting is on Sunday, March 24, at 6:00 pm at Boneshaker Books. Anyone interested in finding out more about our work is welcome.

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