

Irremediabilmente juntos is a musical drama produced in 2011 by ICAIC, the Cuban Film Institute, and directed by Jorge Luis Sánchez, who also directed *El Benny*, a 2011 feature of the Minnesota Cuban Film Festival.

The film focuses on racial prejudice in Cuba from an idiosyncratic perspective. It was inspired by the theatrical musical comedy play, *Pogolotti-Miramar*, by Cuban playwright Alexis Vázquez. The title of the play is also the name of the two districts in Havana most representative of the extremes of Cuba's economic and racial disparity. Cuban writer Esteban Morales whose essays on race are newly available in English (more on him below) says: "With respect to education, it is now clearly evident that schools in Miramar, Vedado, or Plaza de la Revolución are not quite the same as those in Centro Habana, Párraga, or Pogolotti." (*Race in Cuba*, p. 76)

The film's music and dance frame the struggles of a young couple from two different racial backgrounds whose families, trapped in old prejudices, oppose their relationship. And it's not only the families, but seemingly most of Cuban society, that also suffers from acute racism. It's likely that this extreme view was exaggerated for purposes of the musical comedy on which the film is based. But in the film's more serious treatment of the subject, this depiction may trouble foreign audiences.

Racial relations in Cuba are complex, and they are very different from those in the United States. It's been said that African descendants in Cuba see themselves first as Cuban, not as Afro-Cuban. On the other hand, there is also a growing recognition in Cuba that doing away with institutionalized racism in Cuba after the 1959 revolution was not enough to eliminate it.

A discussion will be held following the film at Pracna on Main (take a left through the lobby). It will be led by August Nimtz, Professor at the University of Minnesota. August is the co-editor of the new English translation of essays by Esteban Morales, a prominent Afro-Cuban intellectual, who writes about race in Cuba. The discussion will begin about 10 minutes after the end of the film.

How this disparity must be addressed has now taken on new urgency in Cuba and has become a prominent subject in public discourse. We will take up some of these issues in the discussion following the film.

Who are the Cuban Five? If you haven't heard about the Cuban Five, please take a moment to review this case, which has received little attention in most of the US press.

In September 1998, five Cuban men were imprisoned in the U.S. for trying to monitor Miami exile groups planning violent acts against Cuba. They were never actually charged with espionage. Four are still in prison with four life sentences between them; one is on three-year parole in Florida. Appeals continue in the case, with one of the current issues being the discovery that Miami reporters were paid by the US government to write inflammatory articles about the Five while the trial was underway. More information about the case can be found at www.minnesotacubacommittee.org.

Upcoming films and other events

Coming up next Thursday is the fourth feature in the Minnesota Cuban Film Festival, *One Among Thousands*. It's a moving documentary about Santa Fe, New Mexico musician Victor Alvarez, one of the "Peter Pan" children, who revisits his Cuban homeland for the first time in 43 years. Victor will be present as a special guest of the film festival. We will also be showing *Omara*, (1983, Cuba, 25 min.) a lush documentary about singer Omara Portuondo whom we came to know through the Buena Vista Social Club. The film was a prizewinner at the 1986 Cannes Film Festival.

Pastors for Peace and Venceremos Brigade travel challenges: In July, two national delegations will again challenge US restrictions on travel to Cuba. Check our website for information on how you can join one of the caravans or participate in the annual send-off event in Minneapolis.

The Minnesota Cuba Committee meets every two weeks. The next meeting is on Sunday, March 10, at 6:00 pm at Boneshaker Books. Anyone interested in finding out more about our work is welcome.

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