

(17min. USA, 2018)

Press Kit

# ESTA NIÑA LINDA

*a short film by* Christian J. Fernandez

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## Logline

Siblings Perla and Marciel escape Cuba on a makeshift raft in search of a new home.

## Synopsis

Desperate to escape their native Cuba in a time of turmoil, Marciel and his young sister, Perla, journey in the cover of nightfall, boarding a makeshift raft. Cobbled together by twisted metal and foam and propelled by an old Soviet car engine, their vessel is the only thing that stands between them and the open sea. *Esta Niña Linda* is a short film about survival, and the story of a brother and sister's relationship as they trek 90 miles in search of the U.S.

## Director's Statement

In 2015 I found a raft with my father. We were coming back home from a fishing trip when we noticed something blue wedged in the mangroves of Cudjoe Bay. My father brought us as close as our boat could get, but as it got too shallow to go any further, I got out and waded to it. We knew what it was by now- a raft, often called a 'chug,' used by Cuban's to escape the island. It was empty of people, but not of life. It was blue, thick with steel and instant foam. In the back sat an immense rusted engine from an old Soviet-born car. On the floor of the raft were sugar packets, containers of vinegar, and a little girl's sweater. We towed the raft to our home, and I began to think about how to tell the story of *Esta Niña Linda*.

Traversing the Florida Straits in no easy feat in a real vessel, let alone a raft built by instant foam. The thought of the journey terrified me- knowing that Cuban's had been sacrificing themselves to water and sun since the Revolution was humbling and captivating. I decided I wanted to tell that story, the very human one of people on a raft, stuck between a past and a future. I wanted to give a voice to the empty raft I found, and I wanted those voices to ask me difficult questions- about my family's Cuban culture and history, about immigration, about sacrifice, about innocence and childhood and broken promises.

Nothing about *Esta Niña Linda* was easy. That is why I know it is special. I've put everything I am into this film, in the hopes that it would not be a film that had the right answers, but one that asked the right questions.

## FAQ's

### **Where did you shoot?**

We shot on-location in Cudjoe Key, Florida. Cudjoe is part of the Florida Keys and is about 15 minutes from Key West. The Keys & Key West community made it possible to make this film- local restaurants catered some meals and the KW Art & Historical Society hosted a fundraiser for us. My parents own a small home on the water in Cudjoe, and we were able to shoot the entire film in our backyard. The water is only about 3 feet deep, but there are jellyfish, so the crew had to wear pantyhose to protect against their itchy stings.

### **What was the biggest difficulty of the shoot?**

The hardest setback we had to overcome was losing our first day/night to a thunderstorm. Our first scenes to shoot were night scenes and our crew had set two large light fixtures with plenty of equipment. We had been tracking the summer storm for a few hours. It teased us all day, dissipating and reforming over and over again. Finally, we felt the raindrops and heard the thunder, and we had to call it. Losing that night was tough. We already had a tight schedule with shooting 8 scenes in 5 days with a child actress on the water, now we had to figure out how to make the film in 4 days. Luckily, we kept our heads and Mary McCune, the Producer, devised a plan that would lead us to success.

### **Is this a 'political' film?**

My goal was to make a film with heart, with real souls on screen that anyone, from anywhere, could relate to. Anything political drawn from that is out of my hands, but I enjoy and respect the importance of discussion instigated through film, and I hope with all my heart that *Esta Niña Linda* does just that. I feel the strength in what we do as filmmakers is proposing questions and themes for people to think on, and not pretend we have all the answers.

### **Do you still have the raft?**

About 2 weeks after we wrapped principal photography, Hurricane Irma struck Florida. I've only ever seen the words 'Cudjoe Key' on national television once, and it was because Irma made landfall there, a ¼ mile from where we shot our film. My family is fortunate to have a strong cement home, and us and our property turned out fine, but the raft was destroyed. The blue tarp and foam scattered the neighborhood- the only thing that was left in position was the 400lb engine. This was a tough realization, as I had planned a few pickups involving the raft.

### **What was the most memorable moment of the shoot?**

For our last scene on our last day we had to travel 40 minutes by boat to an island. We needed it to be low-tide at the same time as the Sun was setting in order to expose the sand bar we wanted our final scene to take place on. The last day was the only time low tide and sunset coincided, and we were beyond worried we'd catch another storm or that the clouds would be too thick to see a sunset, which was the case for the previous days. Well, lo and behold, the skies opened up and brought us the most magnificent sunset many had ever seen. The cast and crew was so excited to step foot on this humongous sand bar, but we had to focus up very quickly as we only had an hour to get what we needed.

## Cast

### **Isabella Rivera-Gandulla**

Isabella was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, but she grew up in Caguas. She started acting professionally when she was seven years old, appearing in films and television commercials. She is a model brand ambassador for Big Love. Isabella also enjoys singing and has participated in music videos and songs. She is also an avid animal rights activist- with her own foundation called Kids for Animals, where she provides education to children on how to treat animals with respect and how to help prevent the continuation of stray animals. Isabella practices chess and soccer, and is a chess champion for her age division in Florida and Puerto Rico. During the summer Isabella will be guest starring in season 2 of *The Oath*, a television series on Crackle. She will also be working on a film called *God's Eye*. They are both currently in pre-production stages.

“Working on *Esta Niña Linda* was very fun. It was the first time in which I got to be the principal character in a film. I got to be in a different filming environment, because even when I had filmed on locations before, I had never filmed in the ocean. It turned out to be both challenging and fun. It also impacted my life to know that people would go on a raft leaving their family and belongings behind not even knowing where they would land seeking freedom. I got to meet the crew who were people from many different cultures and countries, like Egypt, Venezuela, Ecuador, Cuba and so on. I also got to learn how to fish which was super fun!”

### **Reymond Miranda**

Reymond was born in Havana, Cuba, on November 30, 1995. He was the joy of his house and the soul of family parties. Always making jokes, imitating actors and learning monologues, with which his audience (family and friends) was delighted. Reymond went to a theater group for children at 13, and his teacher noticed a potential in him, enough to tell his parents. In 2008, Reymond joined the theater group Olga Alonso directed by maestro Humberto Rodríguez, where he prepared to enter the National School of Performing Arts of Cuba (ENA). He studied for 4 years, learning the acting method of Stanislavski and other masters such as Uta Hagen, Sanford Meisner and William Layton's method of improvisation. Thanks to his performance in the piece "El Decamerón," Reymond joined the theater company "El public," performing more than 100 performances of that theater piece. On television he conducted the weekly "Cinecito en TV" (Dir. Abel Oliveros), starred in the telefilms "Línea Roja" (Dir. Alejandro Gil) and "La pepper and soap" (Yaima Pardo) and interpreted the character -Guosa- in the Cuban soap opera "La Sal del Paraíso" of 60 episodes (Dir. Joel Infante). In the fall of 2016 I made my film debut in the film "Cuatro Estaciones en La Habana" (NETFLIX) (Dir. Félix Viscarret).

“*Esta Niña Linda* has been the most special professional and personal surprise I have received. As it is said in Cuba, I fell from heaven, but this time literally. I had just arrived in the United States practically and I was still learning how this new industry worked and how I could insert myself into it. I was aware of the important step I had taken when leaving Cuba, leaving behind my first achievements and above all, separating myself from my family; but I knew that I was looking for my happiness. Every day I worked and I learned with enthusiasm the operation of this business, and I was not overwhelmed by so much new information, I read about managers and demo reels and headshots and I put myself to it. I knew it was a process that would take a while to adapt to, but at the same time I wanted so badly that it would happen now; and that was when I received Christian's email where he presented the project to me. First I thought it

was a scam or a joke, but at the same time, I felt it was real and I really wanted to know more about the project. You always hear to this kind of story in Cuba since being a child, but you cannot recognize the magnitude of the fact, the causes and the consequences until you grow a bit and you also become an immigrant yourself. This particular story is quite special, I fell in love since I read it and I also fell in love with the process of working with Chris and with the beautiful Isabella. It was a very enriching process because of the variety of points of view on the same scene. Sincerely, it was a privilege to be able to participate in this story of pure roots. I have a lot to thank the film crew for, Chris' family and Chris for this opportunity, for the freedom he gave us to create, for his personality outside and on the set, and that I must say is one of the most magical people I know. Now I live in Los Angeles focused on my career as an actor and I work on a Morning Show for Estrella TV channel."



## Crew

### **Alexandra Hart Brown | Cinematographer**

Alexandra received her BA in Anthropology from Columbia University in 2012, a Graduate Certificate in Documentary Media Studies from The New School in 2015, and an MFA in Cinematography from Brooklyn College Barry R. Feirstein Graduate School of Cinema, Steiner Studios, in 2018. Prior to attending graduate school she worked in the film industry as a location scout, assistant location manager, and producer's assistant in New York City and Los Angeles. Her credits include director of photography for the documentary, "How the Air Feels," directed by Khaula Malik, which received a student award from the National Board of Review and premiered at AFI Docs in 2017. She was also selected to be the director of photography for a half hour comedy pilot for the Made in New York Series Competition entitled, "Maturity," that aired on NYC Media in 2018.

### **Mary McCune | Producer**

Mary McCune is an independent producer based in Brooklyn, NY. She produces commercial and narrative content, with a focus on bringing thoughtful and new creative voices to screen. In 2017 she produced the pilot episode of *Half-Life*, which won the Made in NY Series Competition. Mary graduated from Brooklyn College's Feirstein Graduate School of Cinema in 2018.

### **Christian J. Fernandez | Writer & Director**

Christian is a first generation Cuban-American. He was born in Miami, but grew up in the Florida Keys, where his connection to the Ocean and to Cuba flourished. Christian co-exists between Brooklyn, NY, and the Cudjoe Key, FL. He is dedicated to creating films that are an experience to create, with friends and with love, and an experience to watch. Christian graduated from Brooklyn College's Feirstein Graduate School of Cinema in 2018.











Written & Directed By Christian J. Fernandez

Produced By Mary McCune

Co- Producer Alyssa Villegas

Director of Photography Alexandra Brown

Editor Nolan Metcalf

Composer Travis Devin

Colorist Alex Berman

Isabella Rivera-Gandulla

Reymond Miranda

For Abuelo

#### CAST

Perla Isabella Rivera-Gandulla

Marciel Reymond Miranda

Voice Over Talent "Mama" Maria Curcio

Voice Over Talent "Papa" Luis Caballero

Voice Over Talent "Cuban Soldier" Randy Manuel Cobas

#### CREW

1st Assistant Director Mary McCune

2nd Assistant Director Hisham Moll

Script Supervisor Mario Vilavicencio

1st Assistant Camera Giovanni Alfonzetti

2nd Assistant Camera Jadzia Erskine

Still Photographer Jeremy Bailey

Gaffer Matthew A. McCanna

Best Boy Electric Jeremy Bailey

Key Grip Krittin Patkuldilok

Best Boy Grip Fan Chao Meng

Production Sound Mixer	Travis Devin
Key Makeup Artist	Alina Barreto
Set Medic	Omar Fernandez
Water Safety	Effie Ford
Lead Boat Captain	Omar "Captain O" Fernandez
Boat Captain	Lizette Javierre
Boat Captain	Jeb LeDuc
Location Manager	Teresa Fernandez
Production Assistant	Benjamin Theisen
Catering "Short Short Order Cook"	Teresa Fernande
Catering	Dossie Pombo
Catering "Chef"	Serban Dronca
Catering	The Boat House Bar & Grill
Catering	Boondocks Grille & Draft House
Sound Design	Travis Devin
Foley Artist	Travis Devin
Foley Artist	Kailtyn Cortes
Storyboard Artist	Ali Vil
VFX Artist	Ali Vil
VFX Artist	Christian Nuñez
Grip/Lighting Provided By	Moving Picture Rental

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Tommy Mack	Chloe Pombo
Rick Haskins	Phoebe Pombo
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Matthew McCanna	Teresa Fernandez
Logan Hunt	Adam Fernandez
Cheryl Theisen	Randy McCune
Lizette Javierre	Baby McCune
Serban Dronca	Rory McCune
Jeb LeDuc	Mary Andersen
Isabel Gandulla	

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Key West First Legal Rum Distillery Logo

Boondocks Grille & Draft House Logo

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