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"Making This Movie Was an Act of Love": An Interview with Juan Javier Pérez



Alonso Díaz de la Vega

En el marco del **19° Festival Internacional de Cine de Morelia (FICM)** se estrenó *Vaychiletik*, documental de **Juan Javier Pérez** que integra la Sección de Documental Mexicano y que además es parte del **Foro de Pueblos Indígenas**.

El director se basa en la historia de su padre para crear un documental íntimo y honesto acerca de todo lo que conlleva ser un músico tradicional. Fue a través de los sueños que los dioses le revelaron a José su vocación de músico; a partir de ese momento, él ha dedicado su vida a tocar en las fiestas sagradas de Zinacantán, territorio maya tsotsil de los Altos de Chiapas.

El FICM tuvo la oportunidad de entrevistar al joven director **Juan Javier Pérez**.



Vaychiletik (2021, dir. Juan Javier Pérez)

Alonso Díaz de la Vega: *I would like to start talking about the film from a point of view that I find very interesting: You capture your father and your community without any idealization, which is what we normally see with documentaries that are made from the outside. Is this something that you consciously decided while making the film?*

Juan Javier Pérez: No, the truth is, I just think that I stuck with the story and with all the memories I keep to make this movie. In fact, it was rather unconscious. It's seen from within and we tried to look at it and make it that way. As I have said before, we have seen a lot of material about certain traditional festivities and therefore what we tried to do was tell it from the inside, with honesty and respect. I think things worked themselves out while filming and, I was also very clear about what I wanted to record, all this memory and memories of my father, of the sleepless nights of the parties and everything that is behind all these characters. Who they are. They're guardians of their culture and the role of a traditional musician is one that lasts a lifetime.

ADV: *In your opinion, what is the importance of looking at indigenous communities from the inside?*

JJP: I believe that it is another voice, another look, another kind of substance that perhaps can contribute to the cinema and get people closer. Sometimes movies or documentaries, when they get closer, can provide a deeper look. There are still many stories that need to be told and I think that will give our country another cinema. I have always said that now in Chiapas, for example, there are several colleagues from my generation who are beginning to make films in their communities and they are very interesting stories that had not been told. I think it is necessary to see these perspectives because they are being told from inside and with their own gaze; sometimes culture has become very romanticized, it is necessary, to be honest and tell the stories of what is, what exists.

ADV: *As a member of the community, did you have support from them? Did you talk to people about what you were doing?*

JJP: Not at first. I know my community and it's always frowned upon when someone films the streets of town with a camera, even more so if it's someone from town because there is a certain disappointment and betrayal thanks to how many people have come to do research in the community; they arrive, they leave, and you never see the result. The same

thing happened to me when they saw me there filming, they would always ask me, "What are you filming? When are we going to see it?" I told them that I was making a movie about my father and they finally gave me access because my father is known in the community. But yes, whenever I filmed a piece that was important for the documentary where there were many people, the elderly, women and others, they always approached me, so I promised to give them a copy of this party, of what we filmed. People were very happy because you could see them on the screen. We would like to screen it in the community, it is something that will probably happen in November, in fact, my parents and the whole family have already seen it.

ADV: *Considering that it's a very intimate story, very close to you, how was the process of making the film emotionally?*

JJP: Well yes, there were difficult moments. To begin with, this film, when I started to make it and film, there were many difficult things that weren't touched and that were deleted when I made the documentary. For me it is an act of love, after all, the characters are my parents and it is an acknowledgement of them, of everything they have done. There were many emotions, I was behind the camera handling sound and seeing and listening to all the conflicts in the family. For example, we are five siblings, I am the third and I am the only one who could finish university because of all this matter that my father has always been absent. My parents are peasants, so that's where my emotions touched me to make this film; beyond that, for me, this movie is an act of love.

ADV: *I think that's reflected in the style, you see your family very honestly, I find it very interesting that you use a lot of long shots that avoid narrating, very explicit elements of clarity, why?*

JJP: Well, at first it was like a style that I was looking for, always having fixed shots. I also feel that these open and fixed shots allowed us to know the space, the lives of the characters, and it could be said that that part of the image was taken care of. I think I did want to make this film a bit closer to the style of something very poetic, at parties and at night and well, that's another look we gave it. Showing the space gives you another sensitivity to understand life.

ADV: *Based on this focus on space, are you hoping the audience will feel a bit transported?*

JJP: Of course, I want people to get involved or immerse themselves in the universe of this community, this little town, this dream.

ADV: *So cinema would be a way to bring them closer, right?*

JJP: Exactly, cinema is a way of bringing them closer together and it's also a way of sharing. And I would like to thank the festival, we are very excited. It is my first feature film, I did not go to a film school as such, but I did have a Diploma I attended in San Cristóbal. I am very grateful to the festival for giving me this opportunity.



El FICM lamenta el fallecimiento de Ivan Reitman
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