

The
OLDIES

PASSION NEVER DIES



A timeless look at art, love and beauty, the oldies follows three elderly cuban musicians as they relate their stories of struggle and reveal their undying passion for life.

GENRE
FEATURE DOCUMENTARY

PRODUCTION
**KIISKAKUNA PRODUCTIONS &
JINGA PICTURES**

CO-PRODUCED BY
CNAC, ICAIC

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
ROSANA MATECKI

PRODUCED BY
**ROSANA MATECKI &
GIORGIA LO SAVIO**



SHORT SYNOPSIS

In the city of Santa Clara, Cuba, three elderly musicians drift between present and memory to relate their undying passion for what keeps them alive: music. Zaida sings her tired heart out, Bringuez struggles to play the saxophone again, and Cándido, with an impressively athletic form, uses old photographs and magazine clippings to convey his tireless love for life. The Oldies takes a look at the daily work and will of those who were once at the heart of Cuba's rich musical scene. This film uncovers the young souls of the artists who shaped the country's culture and offers an intimate and compassionate perspective on life in old age.

LONG SYNOPSIS

The Oldies are musicians Bringuez, Zaida and José Cándido, who relate the stories of everyday life in their culturally avant-garde hometown of Santa Clara, Cuba.

The documentary centers on the characters' old age and on their undying will to keep their musical craft alive. Still routinely performing, these Oldies embody the timeless and vibrant culture of a country that decided some 60 years ago to distance itself from the modern world. These artists' stories are framed by their memories of the rich musical tradition in today's aging country of Cuba. They tell their often uplifting, and at times anguished stories, with humor and drama.

Bringuez, an 88-year-old saxophonist struggles to pick up the instrument again with the help of a very young teacher, but has a relentless desire to perform with Los Fakires, the band he directs, one more time. We watch as he cares for his beloved wife Mirtha, who became mute following the death of the pair's eldest son, and observe the care and music he shares with her until her very last days. His story is one where we, as viewers, witness the passing of the torch to the generations below him: first, as he, once a teacher, now takes classes from a child, and second, as he becomes cared for by his son following his two strokes, in the same way that he had once cared for his dying wife.

José Cándido, another member Los Fakires, the group Bringuez heads, lives an active single man's life of music, bicycling, and regular Tai Chi. The 83-year-old son of Haitian immigrants, Cándido lives alone after two failed marriages. He helps out his children and grandchildren by working, in spite of his old age, as a night-watchman. An avid proponent of fitness and activity, Cándido is well-read and relives his bustling youth through a series of photographs we get the privilege of nostalgically flipping through alongside him. Throughout the course of *The Oldies*, we watch as Cándido frees himself from his heartwarming memories of times past, and finds joy in spending time with his friends and playing music with them once again.



Zaida, "The Queen of Feeling," recently remarried at the age of 82 to her longtime suitor, who became a musician in recent years in order to be at her side. *The Oldies* opens with a scene of Zaida at one of her doctor's visits, where he instructs her to not give up singing, as her passion for music is what is keeping her alive. A singer since childhood, Zaida made the decision to leave Havana after finishing her studies there, and chose a life of anonymity in her hometown of Santa Clara. She doesn't let her many years stop her from regularly walking the scorching streets of Santa Clara to perform at the town's social club.

The Oldies offers a poetic and oneiric portrait of three elderly musicians who have sustained their passion for art in the face of age, loss and struggle. It begs the following questions: How does a person sustain a desire for life in old age? What makes them happy, passionate, or sad? What is the everyday life of an elderly person who still has to work for a living? What do they yearn and hope for? What place does society hold for them?

Drawing on aspects of hyperrealistic cinema, *The Oldies* presents an intimate and compassionate perspective on old age while seeking to remember the fervor with which the aging live their lives.

CHARACTERS' DESCRIPTIONS



Juan José Bringuez is an 88-year-old musician fighting, against all odds, to play the saxophone again. Of his selfless wife Mirtha, who was mute and then fell gravely ill, Bringuez says: “She is my beloved wife who took such great care of me and put up with my absences when on tour in more prosperous times than these.” We follow Juan as he cares for her devotedly, then watch as Juan himself has to receive care after suffering two strokes. The Oldies also shows us this musician, who had once taught music, taking saxophone classes from a child himself.

Juan José Bringuez’s story is one of cycles and role reversals. It is the story of a leading Cuban saxophonist who strives to play with his group one last time, and refuses to let his physical decline get in the way. Bringuez uses his gift and undying passion for music to live a full life and defy the stigmas attached to old age.

José Cándido Remié is the son of Haitian immigrants whose earnestness causes him to frequently divulge the



loneliness in his life. “They always think a musician is a happy person,” he says. “On stage, this might be true, but home, solitude is not a good counselor.” He leads a dynamic and active life, riding his bicycle around Santa Clara, cleaning his house on all fours, and dedicating himself to regular Tai Chi practice. Twice divorced and never fully satisfied with his career as an artist, José blames music, which he could never forgo, for his inability to keep a relationship. He supports his children and grandchildren by working as a night-watchman. Through

photographs and magazine clippings, he speaks nostalgically and purposefully about his lust for life. Over the course of *The Oldies*, we watch as José Cándido frees himself from his emotional burdens and finds joy in the music he always wanted to perform.

Nicknamed “The Queen of Feeling” from a very young age, **Zaida Castiñeyra** came back to life at the age of 70



when she remarried for the third time—and now, she’s unstoppable. In her youth, she received the highest grades at the Cuban Music Academy, but relinquished the musical fame she could have achieved in bustling Havana by deciding to stay in her hometown of Santa Clara. Now in her old age, we see the myriad of pills she takes for her ailments and watch as she visits her doctor who urges her to keep singing, because music is what keeps her alive. She is now married to **Pedro Alejo**, her partner in love and on stage, who waited for her his entire

life and became a musician just to be at her side. Together, they made the transcendental decision to perform together until death takes them both. Speaking of age, Zaida makes the following claim: “What is old age? What are the years? Look, I have been an artist for 58 years, and every time I go on stage it feels like it is the first time... Like when I was a child. Because to truly sing, you have to surrender yourself. And to sing a bolero, a ballad, even a *Cuban son*, you have to feel like that, with a lot of emotions, with Feeling!”



VISION

Cuba, its people, its “cubannes”, have given me, through the years, the most complex and interesting relationship i hold with a country. The oldies takes a look at the old age of cubans who still need to work to survive. They hold a passion for life through their music.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

"Our treatment of the elderly reveals the failure of our entire civilization."

-Simone de Beauvoir, Old Age

For years, I have been fascinated with the idea of growing old. I have been attracted to the notion that youth is something found in one's soul, rather than in one's body – regardless of its age. I have also spent a large part of my life, especially my formative years, in Cuba, and have remained drawn to that island, to its culture, its music, and especially to its people.

I sought to tell a story that would marry my interest in old age and my fascination with anonymous characters, on which much of my work as a filmmaker has centered. I am drawn to an anonymous Cuba, one that exists outside of the postcard-perfect city of Havana.

My characters in *The Oldies* are anonymous ones; they're octogenarian Cubans and lifelong musicians who still work to make a living, and who relinquished any notion of fame by favoring their hometown of Santa Clara over the many artistic possibilities the vibrant city of Havana could have offered them.

But the story of these three musicians is neither sad nor grim. Rather, it is the portrait of seniors who reveal an overwhelming passion for life in the face of old age, illness, loss, and an ever-changing Cuba. This documentary places the viewer as the witness to the passing of the torch from the generation of our protagonists to their children and the children of the town, as they step up to care for their elders and teach them the music that these Oldies had once taught them.

The country I have known to be one way for so long is now declaring itself ready for change, and I am interested in the ways this contemporary film might alter a viewer's perception of aging, and in that way, directly juxtapose the fixed island identity the generation of my protagonists has clinged to for so long.

As a director, life and cinema is one and the same to me. I started this project with the personal question: "How would I like to live out my older years?," and have found the answers in my characters, in their fierce devotion to life, and in the effervescent souls within them.

ROSANA MATECKI DIRECTOR - PRODUCER

"...The final impression of a rarely seen world, as if it were captured on a multi-paneled painting, in which the eye can stare freely in any direction. This requires an enormous control of technical and cinematic resources, which Matecki displays in an impressive manner..." Quote extracted from the article dedicated to the documentary "Story of a Day", written by Robert Koehler, from film magazine Variety 2010.

Venezuelan filmmaker who has dedicated her 25 years of professional career to independent writing, making and production of documentary films. Her free spirit work is an authorial search which seeks anonymous gazes. Her films suggest establishing a cautious look of the image through the aesthetics of feeling.

"...I explore characters invisible to society, those who turn on a light in the darkness, people who have decided to live forever..." Rosana Matecki.

Founder of Kiiskakuna Productions, a company that assembles a group of collaborators from different parts of the Americas, Europe and Africa. Their films have been shown and won major awards at prestigious film festivals around the world. Their documentary projects constantly appear in international funds and markets.

She has also made a contribution to the academic field, with teaching courses on scriptwriting, creation modules and documentary filmmaking. She has taken part in the making of several television series of cultural, experimental and educational nature.

Kiiskakuna Productions, founded in 2002, assembles a group of collaborators from different parts of the Americas and Europe who have produced a number of documentaries together. Its films have been shown and won major awards at prestigious film festivals around the world. Its documentary projects constantly appear in international funds and markets.

FILMOGRAPHY

- The Oldies (2017) 93min
- Ancestral Sincretism TV Series (2016)
- Kandire (2015) 20 min <https://vimeo.com/120850857>
- The Awakening of the Soul (2013) 98min <https://vimeo.com/66863681>
password: matecki
- Dialogues of a Cabaret (2012) 27min
- Left On The Shelf (2011) 52min
- Story of a Day (2010) 89min <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsyP9-byi-c>
- Le Dernier Don (2007) 52min
- Ancestral Women (2008) 48min
- ekuana (2004) 48min

GIORGIA LO SAVIO **PRODUCER**

Giorgia Lo Savio has worked in the filmmaking industry for over 20 years across various positions in the UK and the United States.

As producer, she is currently developing projects Latin America, the US and New Zealand as well as overseeing artist development and video production for Miami- and London-based entertainment group, Alacran.

PRODUCER HIGHLIGHTS

'Only When I Dance' (2009)

A feature length documentary shot in Brazil, Switzerland and New York, commissioned by Channel 4, Arte France and NPS TV (Netherlands).

Winner of the UK Film Council Development Fund and The Tribeca Gucci Fund, it went on to premiere in competition at the 2009 Tribeca Film Festival, showing at major festivals around the world. The film was released theatrically and sold worldwide.

'The Awakening of the Soul' (2015)

A feature documentary shot in Bolivia and Venezuela which had its world premiere at the Warsaw Film Festival and was launched at festivals worldwide.

Directed by Venezuelan/Canadian director Rosana Matecki.

'The Oldies' (2017)

A feature documentary shot in Cuba. The film is soon to be launched at festivals worldwide Also directed by Rosana Matecki.

WORK HISTORY

Giorgia's first 6 years were spent at the iconic independent studio FilmFour working her way up from publicity through to development, production and international sales.

In 2003 Giorgia co-founded the distribution company Verve Pictures and a year later launched her film production company Jinga Pictures.

Giorgia was offered the opportunity to take her experience to the US and in 2011 went on to head up sales and purchases at Ondamax Films in Miami, specializing in Latin American titles. She went on to forge connections on both sides of the Atlantic whilst utilizing her talent for languages (Giorgia is fluent in English, Italian, French, Spanish and German).

In 2013 she produced and filmed Diego Amador's live music show at The Fillmore in Miami with special guest Joaquin Cortes.

Giorgia subsequently went on to co-found the Alacran Group in 2016 - an entertainment business focusing on music. She works with new artists and oversees every aspect of their musical development, as well as producing all the video content for the group. Recent productions include two high-quality music videos, shot in Detroit and Miami with director and associate Amy Gilliam.

Along with her sister, Giorgia is executive producer of the latest Terry Gilliam film 'Don Quixote', which is launching in 2018.

Giorgia loves meeting people, immersing herself in new cultures and enjoys giving birth to new creations, from conception to adulthood. She worships the sea, the sun and outdoor sports.

NICOLAS VILLEGAS **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

Originally from Colombia, I finished my Master's degree in direction of photography in the Polish National Film, Television and Theatre School in Lodz, Poland. I have been working with most formats available to cinematography, ranging from Fisher-Price PXL cameras to 35mm, in traditional cinema, stop motion animation and video-art.

My work has taken me to collaboration with an international pool of directors and locations beyond my country's borders. After finishing my Polish first feature as cinematographer, I began to work more in commercial projects and feature-length and short independent films. I also completed two short animated films for Oscar winning Breakthru films. Both are stereoscopic films shot in stop motion.

The films I have lensed have been screened in numerous festivals and have won various prizes. Among these, for cinematography, the Silver Tadpole for Normal People, during 2011 Camerimage Film Festival, The 2013 Cinematography award by the Polish Independent film Academy for Potwor, and the best cinematography award during The International short film festival in Almeria, Spain, also in 2013.

Although always developing, I have focussed my work on building images that enhance the story without over-riding it, working on camera work that attempts to be honest and emotional at the same time.

LUCAS VILLEGAS **EDITOR**

Editor and Producer specialized in post-production workflow. Lucas has edited several feature documentaries, fiction and documentary short films as well as several series for Discovery Channel, Canal D, and History Channel, among others. He's the producer of the short documentary film "La pesca", which premiered at Visions du réel in Switzerland in 2017, where it won Best Documentary Short Film. He's currently developing two fiction short films.

DAVID DE LUCA **EDITOR AND SOUND EDITOR**

David De Luca, is a Venezuelan Sound Designer who studied Cinema and TV at the University of the Andes in Venezuela, obtaining their specialization in Sound Film. Since 2005 he has developed as a sound recordist, sound editor and sound designer in more than 30 documentary films, 15 TV series and a dozen of fiction films, being the Director of the Audiovisual Production Company Polvora Cine Sonido. As Sound recordist, he has gained experience in diverse climates: high mountains, wet forests, large cities and complex weather conditions; always providing a positive attitude and optimal results. As Sound Editor, he has been working for several productions, especially on Documentary films and Animation. Since 2015 he has been teaching sound for his former school in the University of The Andes. Also, he has being awarded by several national recognitions and his work has been heard in different international film festival.



INTERVIEW TO DIRECTOR/PRODUCER ROSANA A MATECKI

In her latest film, *The Oldies*, director Rosana Matecki honors the lives of octogenarians who never grew out of their young souls, and whose undying passion for beauty, art and love has kept them flourishing and thriving during their long years. This award-winning documentary filmmaker has spent the past twenty years making immersive noncommercial films that leave their viewers feeling like they have experienced a day in the life of her often anonymous subjects. Here, Matecki speaks about the making of *The Oldies*, what drew her to focus on Cuba's elderly, and her experience of island culture.

As a Venezuelan director living in Canada, I'm curious about what attracted you to making a film in Cuba.

It was really Cuba's heavy charge — its energy. I've had a long relationship with Cuba. I've been going there many years, since childhood, and later, I lived there during the difficult period after the Soviet Union stopped being Cuba's ally, to put it one way.

I spent some time traveling to Cuba to take several workshops at the International School of Film and Television in San Antonio de Los Baños. It's a renowned school that Robert Redford, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, and Fernando Birri founded. I loved the school — it was a place for third-world students, more or less, to take classes with the likes of Jim Jarmusch and [Francis Ford] Coppola. It was a great opportunity in an incredible school. It was during one my workshop trips that I met Juana Bacallao.

I stayed in Cuba some time after finishing, and I have many friends there now. And, like I said, I lived there during that period—that special period of time.

So Cuba was really formative for you, not only with regards to the time that you spent there, but also studying with such notable filmmakers must have really paved the way for your career.

Yes, that's where my beginnings are as a filmmaker. Fundamentally, who I am as a filmmaker, that all started in Cuba. I lived a really hard period of time there and it taught me a lot. I feel like I am who I am because I lived that. Do you know what I mean?

Definitely. Tell me, how did you start making your latest documentary, *The Oldies*? How did the idea for the film come about?

Well, it started with this woman, this woman I met who was singing in Havana. I was with a group at a bar, we were all drinking, and by the end of the night I was so enchanted by her music that I said to her "I want to make a movie about you." I wanted to tell her in that moment: You are cinema.

That's how *The Oldies* started. It started as a film about that singer, Juana Bacallao, which never got made. The thing that was so fascinating and intriguing to me was that she was 96 years old. I thought, where does an old lady in her mid-nineties find that power? What is it that happens in her soul?

My attraction to her as a character was also a reflection on my own other — I don't love how she has aged — and I wouldn't like to age the way she has.

So once I identified that aging was the center of the movie, Juana wasn't integral to the film anymore. And when we weren't able to work with her because of issues with Juana's manager, we already knew the kinds of characters that we were going to set out to find.

So the film, for you, more than being about musicians in Cuba, is about the process of aging.

Yes, the film is about old age and how the older generation lives in their bodies. It's about how old age — more than old age, it's about how the body — determines when your life is over, and determines when you're considered "old" or not.

So, the film is sort of about that. It looks at a group of three of these seniors who live in the same town but are in different places in their lives with regards to their bodies and their age. And well, they all have a craft in common, which is music. But that was more like a bonus.

Tell me more about the town where they all live, Santa Clara, where *The Oldies* takes place. How did you end up filming there?

When I lived in Cuba, I would go to Santa Clara very often. It's a very particular place because of the way the city moves. Santa Clara is so dynamic, and there's so much talent in that young and vibrant town. You can get a sense of how alive art and culture is there, much more than in Havana. But Santa Clara is also a city without sea. For me, it was really interesting to talk about a Cuba without sea, because the country is an island. In that sense, I feel that Santa Clara encompasses everything.

The characters, they've all known each other for 40-something years, because they've always lived in that town and they're really vital to its fabric. Imagine: All of Santa Clara has fallen in love, separated, and lived their lives with these characters' music as their soundtrack. Even when the protagonists of *The Oldies* die, they will always be an invisible and fundamental part of the town. And I love Santa Clara because of the people who live there and have decided to live there. These super talented artists, by choosing to spend their lives in Santa Clara, accepted total anonymity, because everyone who isn't in Havana leads a quite anonymous life. So I wanted to touch on all of that a bit, without deviating too much from the subject of old age, which was the center of my film. And I'm incredibly happy with my decision to shed light on Santa Clara, since it's a beautiful part of Cuba that seldom gets to be seen.

What was the process of filming *The Oldies* like? How do you usually go about making a documentary?

Well, first, it was touring a bunch and trying to find the right characters to focus on. I work with mise-en-scenes so I wasn't filming everything all the time. In fact, the kinds of films I make are called free-spirit documentaries. Most of all, I don't believe in the genre — that is, I don't believe there is documentary and fiction. For me, you make a film and that's that.

That's why I'm not really the kind of person who is filming and documenting and recording constantly. I establish my points of contact with people in their spaces and such. And I start filming once I've arranged the sets of each scene to my liking. For example, it's possible that in one day, I only get to shoot two or so scenes.

So you mean that each scene, even though it looks completely candid, is totally planned?

They're all entirely planned. But I've followed the characters around for a while, and I've lived the experiences I'm filming with them. I've seen them do their routines and go about their daily activities several times. And I can see which parts of their days play a big part in their lives and stories more broadly.

So once I've gathered that information and achieve a certain intimacy with my characters, I begin to direct them. But they're acting their own lives! In that way, it's all documentary. But everything is more elaborate. I mean it is a documentary, fundamentally. But I'm not constantly shooting – for me, that's a little old school.

I also wanted to ask you about the motif of water that appears throughout the film. The Oldies begins and ends with this underwater dance... What is the significance of that for you?

Well, Cuba is an island. And I am also from an island; I was born in Margarita, in Venezuela, and for me, the whole idea of being an islander is a thing I find very interesting.

I am really interested in mixing a lyrical language with a social language, and with a bit of a hyperrealistic take. And so, that fishbowl scene you're alluding to... For me, Cuba is a fishbowl and its characters live in a fishbowl. The whole era is a fishbowl, and maybe the characters come up for air but then they go back underwater. Perhaps out of fear, perhaps for a million of other reasons. But a bit of it is that.

Also, all bodies move in a similarly weightless way underwater. Regardless of age, a body's movements in the water are quite the same. So water is like this great equalizer.

And for me, the sea is this possibility of escape. As an islander, I don't see the sea as a barrier or constraint; on the contrary, to me, it symbolizes all this possibility. So that's a bit of where my soul comes into this movie, too.

The water is a bit about remembering the era in which these characters lived, and at the same time it's a bit about creating a dreamscape of possibilities for the viewer.

Yes, that makes a lot of sense.

After all, that's what film is, right?

Absolutely.

It's about saying everything is possible, you know what I mean? Everything is possible.

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