

The Festival and I

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Sometimes time passes without we realize it.

The 39th edition of the International Festival of New Latin America Cinema is running now and I remember when I started in these affairs, in the 15th edition, over 20 years ago.

In these more than two decades I only missed one edition of this seventh art event and that happened when my daughter Liz was born in 2006. Then I have participated actively in the rest, although in recent times the quality of the film proposals has declined quite a lot. But hey, I am not going to talk about that, so no one thinks it is about an old man's aftertaste; whoever reads these lines will appreciate it on his/her own.

In 1993, I was in my second year at the University of Havana, and the Festival hadn't trapped me. Twelve months earlier, I went through several movies and was frightened by the long lines, since I have always been an enemy of those idiotic schemes that are both necessary and unbearable. Inexperience made me think that such figure of people could not fit in the movie, and passed by.

However, excited by a more experienced mate from the boarding school, I

decided to try my luck and woke up one day for the first show at Chaplin movie. I will never forget it, not only for what came later, but also because my buddy “entered me” into the movie even without buying the ticket. The film was “Tango Feroz” (Fierce Tango), and it ended up bringing down the taboos I had on Latin American cinema, which I had appreciated wrongly and little.

As it became customary edition after edition, I finished that one, which also had an unforgettable presentation (the cleverest in my opinion throughout this already long time of festival celebrations), with more than 20 films seen, most of them belonging to samples from Spain, France, Nordic countries, Italy, Germany, retrospective from some famous filmmaker and special presentations. Certainly, although the youngest do not believe it, all those samples were shown at the same time during the festivals, and you could connect one with the other without going through so many misfortunes, like those I have found too frequently in the last decade.

Nor can I forget the day when I saw “Fresa y Chocolate” (Strawberry and Chocolate), at Chaplin movie too. I have already said that my debut was quite devious; because for Titon and Tabio’s film the strategy was to go to the previous show and then to hide myself in the toilet, because I knew that half Havana and its nearby towns were waiting outside. The previous film was “Tirano Banderas”, a wonderful adaptation of the literary classic practically forgotten, and at the end I was about to go out after squeezing the last credit on my seat, when I ran into an avalanche of spectators on the corridor that leads to the exit door. They overlooked the police, glasses and usherettes. Thus I returned to the seats, without thinking twice, and remember that I saw the film in the middle row, in a seat facing the corridor, where no one could walk, because all spaces were occupied by people sitting on the floor.

After that year, there have been many stories, lines, whacks from the people and the police in a riot and, especially, the great films I could see, but I always keep a nice memory from that, my first time.

Translated by Jorge Mesa Benjamin / Cubasi Translation Staff
