

Miami Herald

Short film by two Hialeah natives to be featured in Miami International Film Festival

BY JACKIE SALO

JSALO@MIAMIHERALD.COM

03/05/2015 5:51 PM



'El Mago' executive producer Ana Rodriguez, left, and director David Liz, right, enjoy some popcorn and jokes at the Hialeah Muvico Theater on Wednesday, March 4. NICK SWYTER MIAMI HERALD STAFF

After premieres from Monaco to Indonesia, the Miami-based short film *El Mago* will return home for its first stateside showing Thursday at the Miami International Film Festival.

The 12-minute silent movie, which premieres as part of the festival's Ghost Short Stories program, was directed by David Liz and executive produced by Ana Rodriguez, both originally from Hialeah.

Rodriguez, a classical pianist, had been looking to create a film that would highlight her original compositions when she came across Liz's work online. She gave him a call and he decided he wanted to be part of the project after hearing her vision.

El Mago depicts a frustrated pianist who feels she cannot live up to expectations. She then encounters a wizard, who offers her a magic potion, which she gamely takes. However, she then has to face the consequences that ensue.

"For me, the film is about wishes," Liz said. "If something is handed to you, it is not as meaningful."

Set in Cuba, but shot in South Florida, many of the scenes were filmed with Miami as the backdrop. All Angels Episcopal Church in Miami Springs and Rodriguez's Hialeah home were among the set locations.

Both say that Miami influenced the film, especially since they honed their creative skills here.

Liz, 27, attended Hialeah High School before getting his degree in film studies at Miami-Dade College and Florida State University.

Rodriguez, 35, also studied her craft in Miami. She took piano lessons throughout her childhood starting at age 4. A graduate of Our Lady of Lourdes Academy, she then went on to study piano performance at the University of Miami Frost School of Music and Mannes College of Music in New York. Currently, she is a professor of Arts and Philosophy at Miami Dade College.

Until *El Mago*, Rodriguez had been reluctant to compose her own pieces, but she felt she could no longer suppress the ideas she had for the music that inspired the film. Even though *El Mago* is silent, the narrative is conveyed through Rodriguez's piano compositions, which she describes as "really dark."

Liz believes the nature of the film and transcendent power of music are in part responsible for the film's international success..

"Since it is a silent film, it allows it have a universal reach," Liz said.

Since its November premiere, *El Mago* has amassed several accolades internationally, including best art film and best original score at the Monaco International Film Festival. It also won best original score at the Delhi International Shorts Film Festival.

Despite appearing at film festivals all around the world, the two are excited for the documentary to debut in Miami, as it's the first time family and friends will be in the audience.

"To be able to see the film here is a treasure," Rodriguez said. "It is great to be present and part of the audience to see their reactions."