



A film by Eric Eason  
USA, 76 Minutes, 2003

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## ***Press Kit***

## CAST

Junior Moreno.....Franky G.  
Manny Moreno.....Leo Minaya  
Oscar Moreno.....Manuel Cabral  
Miriam.....Julissa Lopez  
Marisol.....Jessica Morales  
Abuelo.....Hector Gonzalez  
Rodchenko.....Panchito Gomez  
The Band.....Fulanito

## **FILMMAKERS**

Writer & Director.....Eric Eason

Producers.....Jesse Scolaro  
Allen Bain

Executive Producers.....John P. McGrath  
Paul Corvino  
Neil Davis  
Peggy Fry

Co-Producers.....Casper Martinez  
Lou Torres  
Darren Goldberg

Associate Producers.....Steve Carrillo  
Ferenc Toth

Cinematographer.....Didier Gertsch

Editor.....Kyle Henry

Sound.....Lanre Olibisi

Music.....Saundi Wilson

First Assistant Director.....Darren Goldberg

2<sup>nd</sup> Camera Operator.....Steve Carrillo

Production Designer.....Christine Darch

Art Director.....Melissa Imossi

# MANITO

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

Winner of the Special Jury Prize at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival, **MANITO**, directed by first time filmmaker Eric Eason, is a riveting story of two brothers set against the volatile backdrop of a changing inner city. Shot in cinema verité style, **MANITO** reflects a community when it transformed from drugs and violence to one of the most vibrant Spanish-speaking communities in the U.S. Although the dealers were disappearing their violent legacy remained casting a shadow over the neighborhood and its residents.

Junior Moreno (Franky G.), an ex-convict struggling to get his life back, is a product of that legacy. His brother Manny, (Leo Minaya) the salutatorian of his high school class, embodies hope in the neighborhood. On the night of his graduation party, Manny faces an ill-fated decision that could change his life forever, while Junior tries to prevent his little brother from becoming another casualty.

With gritty, luminescent cinematography and unflinching portrayals of characters that embody the heart and soul of the neighborhood, writer/director Eric Eason brings us an electrifying feature debut in the finest tradition of independent filmmaking.

## FESTIVAL HISTORY

- **Special Grand Jury Prize**, Sundance Film Festival
- **Best Emerging Filmmaker**, TriBeCa Film Festival
- **Open Palm**, Gotham Awards
- **Grand Jury Prize**, South by South West
- **Grand Jury Prize**, Urbanworld Film Festival
- **Best American Film**, Avignon Film Festival
- **Special Jury Prize**, Miami Film Festival
- **Special Jury Prize**, Atlanta Film Festival
- **Special Jury Prize**, Muestra Internacional de Cine de Santo Domingo
- **Independent Spirit Award** nomination, Best First Feature, Someone to Watch Award, Motorola Producers Award

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Writer/Director Eric Eason talks the creative concepts behind the making of **MANITO**:

"Our visual style was subordinated to our larger goal of trying to tell a story that was emotionally resonant and totally devoid of irony". Eason with the help of cinematographer Didier Gertsch decided to apply a very "unaesthetic aesthetic": "We made a conscious decision to try to break the rules of traditional film grammar. The idea was to force the audience into seeing imagery that did not correspond with 99% of the highly polished films that they were used to viewing. We hoped that our visual style (or lack of one) would "trick" the audience into believing that the family on screen was not comprised of actors--*but of real people*. And if we could get them to believe in our actors and story, then the potential existed for a greater emotional experience to occur."

"Credible casting was crucial to bringing **MANITO** to life. We tried to cast as many non-professional or unknown actors as possible so that the line between fiction and verité filmmaking was blurred. Four months before shooting began, we pasted fliers throughout Upper Manhattan that announced that we were making a film and were specifically looking for people who had never acted before. The response was overwhelming and we were able to cast the four lead roles with complete unknowns, who had never been in a feature film. The rest of our cast was found by networking with the actors and crew."

The "Manito" ensemble includes Franky G., an intense actor who plays Junior, the elder of two brothers whose day in the life is the film's focus. **MANITO** is Franky G.'s feature film debut and Hollywood took notice. He has since gone to Los Angeles and co-starred in the feature "Confidence" opposite Ed Burns, Dustin Hoffman, Andy Garcia and Rachel Weisz for Lions Gate Films. Franky has also co-starred with Edward Norton and Mark Wahlberg in "The Italian Job". He has recently finished shooting Wonderland (currently in post-production), where he co-starred with Val Kilmner and Lisa Kudrow. From the moment Eason met Franky G., it was instantly apparent that he was perfect for the lead role of Junior. Eason says of Franky G.: "The thing I liked best about him was his desire to do whatever it took to get something right. To me, his performance is the single most striking thing about the film."

Leo Minaya, who plays Manito, was a 17 year-old High School kid from uptown Manhattan when cast in the film. He had done a few school plays and performances. Since then, he has continued to pursue his acting career both in New York and Los Angeles. Eason says, "Leo was extremely comfortable in front of the camera. He never over-acted and his natural instincts and choices were better than any direction I could have ever given to him . We were lucky to find him."

Access to the community was very important to us. Casper Martinez and Lou Torres, our Associate Producers on **MANITO** are heavily involved in the New York Latino Community. Casper is an actor, a stand-up comedian and also works in television, (producing a show for Telemundo) and in local radio—working with the top rated Spanish-language station 97.9 “La Mega.” Lou, Casper’s partner on many ventures has had an extensive acting career appearing in over 50 works. We also had the great fortune to have the support of Jimmy Rodriguez, the owner of “Jimmy’s Bronx Café” which served as the location for the graduation party scene. Through Jimmy and Casper the filmmakers were able to get the Grammy nominated meringue band “Fulanito” to appear in the film. They have an enormous following among Latino teens and their albums have been top sellers in both Latin America and the United States.



## **ABOUT THE STORY**

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## **ABOUT THE CAST**

### **FRANKY G. (Junior Moreno)**

Franky G. makes his feature film debut with a tour de force portrayal of Junior Moreno, an ex-convict trying to get his life back together. With no prior experience or formal acting training, Franky G. seems destined to play the role of Junior. Born in Brooklyn, New York of first generation Puerto Rican parents, Franky G. was a standout high school athlete and later played semi-professional football before a knee injury prematurely ended his sports career. Before turning to acting, Franky held a number of jobs, everything from bouncing to security work. In the wake of **MANITO**'s acclaim at the Sundance Film Festival, He went to Los Angeles and co-starred in the feature "Confidence" opposite Ed Burns, Dustin Hoffman, Andy Garcia and Rachel Weisz for Lions Gate Films. Franky has also co-starred with Edward Norton and Mark Wahlberg in "The Italian Job". He has recently finished shooting Wonderland (currently in post-production), where he co-starred with Val Kilmner and Lisa Kudrow.

### **LEO MINAYA (Manny Moreno)**

Leo Minaya is a 17-year-old High School student from uptown Manhattan. He has appeared in school plays and several television commercials. **MANITO** is his feature film debut.

### **MANUEL CABRAL (Oscar Moreno)**

Dominican born actor, Manual Cabral has appeared in several films and television shows both in the United States and in the Caribbean. His most recent feature projects include "Boriqua's Bond", "After Hours", "Happy Hour", "Life Drawing", and "A Time to Die."

### **JULISSA LOPEZ (Miriam)**

Bronx born and raised, Julissa Lopez had always aspired to be a professional actress and when she saw the ad for "Manito" in Backstage, she decided to take a chance and submitted a snap shot and hand-written letter to the producers.

### **JESSICA MORALES (Marisol)**

Jessica Morales is a medical assistant for a Manhattan pre-natal physician. Prior to appearing in “Manito” she had never before acted or even considered acting as a profession.

### **HECTOR GONZALEZ (Abuelo)**

Hector Gonzalez is a veteran New York actor who has had a recurring role on the Sidney Lumet television series “100 Center Street.” Hector has also appeared in over 30 feature films and television shows both in America and Puerto Rico.

### **PANCHITO GOMEZ (Rodchenko; the Mexican foreman)**

Panchito Gomez began acting as a child and appeared in over 50 television shows ranging from “Chips” and “Barney Miller” to “Hill Street Blues”, “Different Strokes” and “Simon & Simon.” Panchito has an impressive resume of feature credits that include principal roles in “Selena”, “American Me” and “Mi Vida Loca.”

### **FULANITO (The Band)**

Washington Heights based Fulanito is the first musical group known to combine "perico ripiao" – traditional accordion-based meringue sounds from the hills of the Dominican Republic - with modern hip-hop and rap. Their songs have charted the top spots of Billboard Magazine's Tropical/Salsa and Hot Latin Tract listings throughout the United States, the Caribbean and Latin America and they have sold more than 2 million albums worldwide. Their first hit single, “Guallando,” from its debut album release, “El Hombre Mas Famoso De La Tierra,” went to the top of the charts, as did its subsequent hit, “El Cepillo.” Fulanito's music has been featured in John Singleton’s “Shaft”, TV commercials for Heineken Beer, and the fashion industry has taken notice of this exciting new group by featuring members in endorsements for Tommy Hilfiger. Fulanito received a Grammy Award nomination for Best Meringue Album in 2001. They recorded an album called “Americanizao” in 2002 and toured the world.

## **ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

### **ERIC EASON (Writer/Director)**

Recently named “People to Look Out For” by the Los Angeles Times, Eric Eason was born and currently lives in New York City. He began filmmaking with a series of experimental Super 8 shorts. In 1995, he moved to Budapest and wrote a novel about the War in Bosnia. After returning to the U.S., Eric wrote and directed three 16mm narrative short films. “Manito” is his feature film debut.

### **JESSE SCOLARO & ALLEN BAIN (Producers)**

Allen Bain and Jesse Scolaro graduated together from the film program at SUNY Purchase in 1997. In 1999 they founded The 7<sup>th</sup> Floor. In 2000 Darren Goldberg joined the team as a Partner. Since its inception, they have produced several projects including “Manito” (Special Jury Prize - Sundance 2002 – Dramatic Competition), “Cry Funny Happy” (Official Selection - Sundance 2003- American Spectrum), and “Deprivation” (Official Selection - SXSW 2003)

The 7<sup>th</sup> Floor has also Co-Produced and Associate Produced a wide range of projects including “Little Senegal” (Official Selection – Berlin 2001), “Camp” (Official Selection - Sundance 2003 – Dramatic Competition), “Rick” (Starring Bill Pullman and Dylan Baker), “Soliloquy” (Directed by Shirin Neshat) and “XX/XY” (Starring Mark Ruffalo, Official Selection Sundance 2002 – Dramatic Competition).

The 7<sup>th</sup> Floor development slate includes projects directed by Ziad Doueiri (“West Beirut”) and Brant Sersen (“Sick of It All” and “Release”).