



The Violin

(*El Violin*)

Directed by Francisco Vargas



**Mexico/2006/in Spanish/98 min.
35 mm / 1:1.85 / B&W / Dolby SR**

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SYNOPSIS

Don Plutarco, his son Genaro and his grandson Lucio live a double life: on one hand they are musicians and humble farmers, on the other they also support the *campesino* guerilla movement's armed efforts against the oppressive government. When the military seizes the village, the rebels flee to the sierra hills, forced to leave behind their stock of ammunition.

While the guerillas organize a counter-attack, old Plutarco executes his own plan. He plays up his appearance as a harmless violin player, and makes it back into the military-occupied village to try to recuperate the ammunition hidden in his corn field. His violin playing charms the army captain, who orders Plutarco to come back daily, consequently developing a relationship in which arms and music play a tenuous game of cat-and-mouse, which ultimately results in painful betrayal.

FESTIVALS/AWARDS (Excerpt)

The Violin is the most internationally awarded Mexican film in history!

WINNER – THREE ARIELES AWARDS - BEST DIRECTORIAL DEBUT, BEST SCREENPLAY, BEST ACTING TEAM, MEXICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES 2007

WINNER – UN CERTAIN REGARD - BEST ACTOR, CANNES FILM FESTIVAL 2006

WINNER – HORIZONS AWARD - SPECIAL MENTION, SAN SEBASTIAN INT'L FILM FESTIVAL 2006

WINNER – JURY AWARDS: BEST FILM, BEST SCRIPT, BEST ACTOR / THE AUDIENCE AWARD: BEST FILM / THE CRITICS AWARD: BEST FILM), GRAMADO FILM FESTIVAL 2006

WINNER – BEST IBERO-AMERICAN FILM, MIAMI INT'L FILM FESTIVAL 2007

WINNER – SKYY AWARD & AUDIENCE AWARD, SAN FRANCISCO INT'L FILM FESTIVAL 2007

WINNER – BEST FIRST WORK AND BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY AWARD, PROVIDENCE LATIN AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL 2007

WINNER – AUDIENCE AWARD, MORELIA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2006

WINNER – SPECIAL JURY AWARD & CRITICS AND PRESS AWARD: BEST FILM, ECUADORIAN IBERO-AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL 2006

WINNER – SPECIAL JURY AWARD & HONORABLE MENTION FOR BEST ACTOR, SAN PAOLO FILM FESTIVAL 2006

WINNER – BEST FEATURE FILM, GOLD AWARD FOR BEST FILM & GOLD AWARD FOR BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY, SPANISH IBERO-AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL 2006

WINNER – BEST FEATURE FILM, FRENCH INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL FESTIVAL 2006

WINNER – BEST HUMAN RIGHTS FILM, TESALONICA, GREECE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2006

WINNER – IBERO-AMERICAN JURY GRAND PRIZE, MIAMI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2007

WINNER – JURY GRAND PRIZE, FRENCH MUSIC FESTIVAL 2006

WINNER – BEST FILM, URUGUAY INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2006

WINNER – BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY, BOGATA FILM FESTIVAL 2007

WINNER – BEST FILM AND AUDIENCE AWARD, QUEBEC THREE AMERICAS FESTIVAL 2007

WINNER – AUDIENCE AWARD FOR BEST PICTURE, KERALA, INDIA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2006

OFFICIAL SELECTION – TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2006

OFFICIAL SELECTION – CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2006

OFFICIAL SELECTION – SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2007

OFFICIAL SELECTION – MONTREAL FESTIVAL DU NOUVEAU CINEMA 2006

CREDITS

CREW

Written, directed and produced by	Francisco Vargas
Cinematography	Martín Boege Paré
Production Manager	Luz Mariá Reyes, Claudio “Pache” Contreras
Editing	Francisco Vargas Quevedo, Ricardo Garfias
Sound design	Matías Barberis, Enrique Greiner, Marco A. Henández
Sound Recording	Isabel Muñoz Cota
Original music	Cuauhtémoc Tavira, Armando Rosas
Casting	Natalia Beristain, Isabel Cortazar
Costumes	Rafael Ravello
Make-up	Rubén Molina, Mario Zarazua
Produced by	Fidecine-Mexico (Fondo de Inversión y Estímulos al Cine) Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica, A.C
With support from	Cinéma en construction Toulouse (France) Donostia San Sebastián (Spain)

CAST

Don Plutarco	Don Ángel Tavira
The Captain	Dagoberto Gama
The Lieutenant	Fermín Martínez
Genaro	Gerardo Taracena
Lucio	Mario Garibaldi

CAST'S BIOS

Don Angel Tavira (Don Plutarco)

Don Angel Tavira was born in Corralfalso, Guerrero (Mexico) on July 3, 1924. He is the direct descendant of an important line of traditional musicians, beginning with his grandfather, Bartolo Tavira, at the end of the 19th Century.

He started playing the violin at age six and rapidly became an expert in the field. At thirteen, his life changed drastically because of an accident in which he lost his right hand. Despite this, he continued to do what he loves most: playing the violin.

During the course of his life, he has been a farmer, a musician, an elementary and high school teacher, among others. He has also dedicated a large part of his life to the training of several generations of musicians. At age sixty, he went to the Conservatory of Music in Morelia to study score transcription in an effort to save traditional music. To continue his dream, Don Angel was also musical director of the group Hermanos Tavira Band, one of the rare bands concerned with saving and maintaining original traditional music.

Don Angel had his first experience in film with Francisco Vargas in the the making of the documentary *Tierra Caliente...Se Mueven Los Que La Mueven*—the story of Don Angel, and his efforts to preserve the musical heritage of his community, Tierra Caliente, Guerrero.

Dagoberto Gama (The Captain)

Born in 1959, Dagoberto Gama has acted in some 20 Mexican films since 1986. His credits include *The Crime of Padre Amaro* (Carlos Carrera, 2002) and *Amore Perros* (Alejandri Gonzalez Inarritu, 2000.) Ha has also acted in over 20 theater productions.

Gerardo Taracena (Genaro)

Born in 1970, since 1993 he has participated in both Mexican films and co-productions. His credits include *Sin Dejar Huella* (Maria NOvaro, 2000), *Man on Fire* (Tony Scott, 2004) and the recent *Apocalypto* (Mel Gibson, 2006.) He has also acted in over 20 theater productions.

Fermin Martinez (The Lieutenant)

Born in 1962, Fermin Martinez began his career in American films like *The Mexican* (Gore Verbinski, 2001) and *Frida* (Julie Taymor, 2002.) He has also acted in 17 theater productions.

DIRECTOR'S BIO

Francisco Vargas

After studying theatre, at the National Institute of the Arts, Francisco Vargas studied Communications at the Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana, as well as Dramatic Arts at the Hugo Argüelles workshop. In 1995, he began his studies in directing and cinematography at the University Center of Cinematography Studies. *Conejo*, his first short film, obtained a solid reputation while touring the international film festival circuit.

For some five years, he produced radio shows to help preserve and promote traditional Mexican music.

Since 1997, he has worked as a director or director of photography on several commercials, documentaries and short films.

In 2004, he made a documentary, *Tierra Caliente... Se Mueven Los Que La Mueven*, which was soon acclaimed in Mexico and the rest of the world.

The Violin, the short film, was selected by the Cannes Film Festival for the Cinéfondation.

In 2006, the feature length version of *The Violin* was selected by the Cannes Film Festival as an Official Selection - Un Certain Regard.

The Violin is his first feature film.

INTERVIEW WITH FRANCISCO VARGAS (by Susan King, December 2007)

Can you talk about the inception of the movie? Did you know Angel Tavira and wanted to write a movie for him or were you interested in telling a political story and cast him in the film?

The Violin was born out of a whole life process, nurtured by lucky encounters with magical people, like my two great-grandmothers. One who died at age 115, and inspired the image of the old storyteller, and the other one, a tough, hardened woman who rode horses, smoked cigars and drank alcohol; all this in the middle of the 19th century. That inspired the image of Don Plutarco, tough and tireless. Both these people were very strong in my life, and in the dramatic structure of this film; but also the love for music and Mexican traditions. And all within the context of the reality that's lived, on a daily basis, by millions of Mexicans and Latin Americans since many decades.

I always wanted to write a script about this hidden Mexican reality. Today, still, these muffled voices must resort to pressure methods as absurd or dangerous as armed uprisings to make themselves heard. And it's not something I'm trying to justify, quite the opposite. However, I present it in the film, since at this very moment, and for very many years, in many Mexican regions the people suffer governmental violence or human rights violations. The alternative voices to the "official democracy" are repressed.

The case of Don Angel is interesting, because I met him a long time after I finished this film's script, however, once I met him and I found out that he plays the violin with only one hand, I thought he was a strong and exceptional human being. He comes from a family of musicians with a tradition that dates back 150 years. And the music in his region, in the state of Guerrero, in his town, is disappearing, and there are only, apart from Don Angel, about 6 or 7 old people who play. So I decided to make a documentary about the music on this region. That film is called "Tierra Caliente, se mueren los que la mueven" ("Tierra Caliente, The Best Ones Are Passing Away")

After that I decided to start The Violin. And because of the characteristics of this movie-- the shoot had to be only 4 weeks, in the mountain, with very cold temperatures, with limited material, a small crew, etc.--I decided it would be good to have an actor as the protagonist, so I asked the casting director to find one. But after 6 months of not finding him, she came back to me and suggested looking among the old musicians that I already knew and with whom I had worked on the documentary. At that moment I said that we could stop the search and I would invite Don Angel to work in the film, although there was a risk because of his lack of experience as an actor. And the greatest surprise for everyone was that he ended up being a great actor, since he is a born artist, all his life devoted to music, and when it was time to shoot we only had to train him and take him to the set. And apart from his great screen presence and charisma, his work is the result of, not only my own work, but the work and support he always had from the wonderful professional actors that were by his side, guiding him and supporting him. Great actors like Dagoberto Gama, Gerardo Taracena or Justo Martinez, who worked as actors and at the same time as teachers.

Had he ever acted before? I heard he was 81? Has he made any other movies since?

Although he's already an old man, Don Ángel is now devoted to promoting his most recent album in Mexico. And regarding film, they have recently called him to play a small part in another movie. Let's hope we will soon see him on screen.

Would you talk a bit about the political climate in Mexico during the time the film is set?

When the spectator enters the film, the black and white erases the temporal and spatial limitations. This element, as well as the use of handheld camerawork and the mix of professional and non-professional actors, are the choices with which I try to give the film a documentary-like feel.

Also, since the writing of the script, I worked on it in such a way that all references to any Mexican socio-political event were erased. The set and costume design teams followed that same guideline to construct a reality that refers to both a Mexican and a more general Latin American feel. So that it could be Colombian, Bolivian, Guatemalan, or from any of our Latin American countries that have suffered the same experience of confrontation between a civil society and its government, and of armed uprisings, since memory serves us.

Sometimes I like to clarify that, actually, The Violin does have a defined space and time period. Only that it is more difficult to point out--one merely needs to grab a world map and put it in front, close one's eyes, and point at a random spot on it; if you're not pointing to the sea, then you'll be pointing at a place where a similar story has taken place since centuries ago, is taking place right now, and, unfortunately, will still take place in the future.

Were you surprised at the international acclaim for the film? I read that the film has won more international awards than any other film in Mexican cinema history.

Yes, it has become the most awarded film, which is something that fills me with pleasure and emotion, because it's the recognition of the work of everyone that was involved in the film. One can't forget that a film is not made by a single person, and that's why we have received awards for the actors, art design, direction, screenplay, cinematography...

And getting awards has given us the opportunity to have this film seen in the most remote places, where otherwise it maybe would never have arrived. They (festivals and awards) are a wonderful window to be able to carry that message further.

And in a certain way it did surprise me, because when one is making a film one is not thinking about the prizes or recognition, or festivals or fame. One is thinking of how to tell a story the best way possible, in the most honest way, and, in Mexico, because of the characteristics of our film industry, when you're filming you're thinking about how you will finish the movie.

What are you working on now?

I am finishing the promotion for *The Violin*, but I'm already working on two other stories. One of them is in the final writing process, and I hope to be able to finish it soon so that I can shoot it next year.

At the same time I continue to produce documentaries. Right now I'm producing one in Southeast Mexico. And a few months ago we co-produced a fiction short that was shot in Mexico with a French company.