

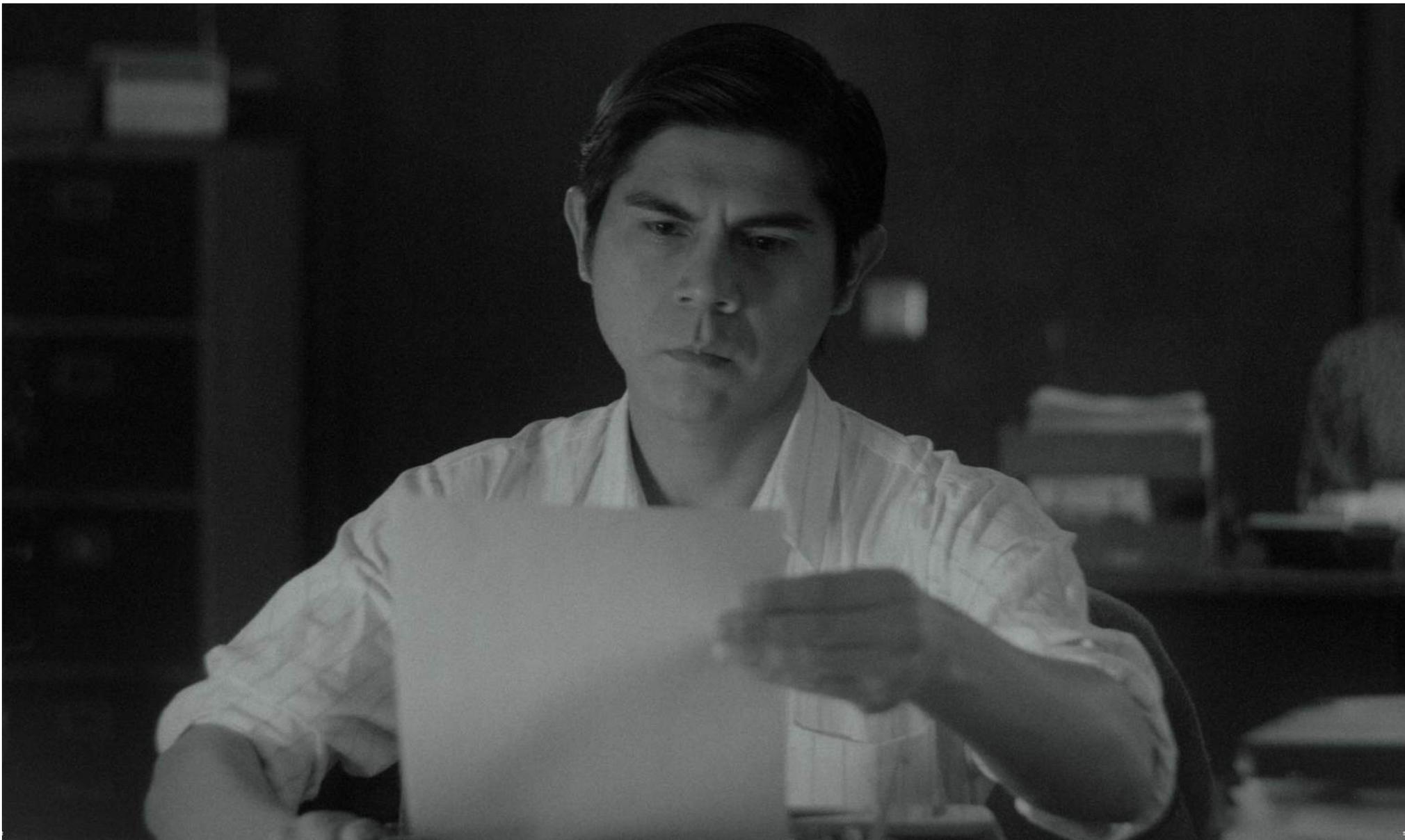
**QUINZAINÉ**  
DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT  
CANNES 2019

A FILM BY MELINA LEÓN

# SONG WITHOUT A NAME

(CANCIÓN SIN NOMBRE)





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# Cast

Pamela MENDOZA (Georgina Condori), Tommy PÁRRAGA (Pedro Campos),  
Lucio ROJAS (Leo Quipse), Maykol HERNÁNDEZ (Isa), Lidia QUISPE (Eva)

# Crew

*Director:* Melina León

*Screenwriters:* Melina León, Michael J. White

*DOP:* Inti Briones

*Editor:* Melina León, Manuel Bauer, Antolín Prieto

*Music:* Pauchi Sasaki

*Sound Design:* Pablo Rivas

*Producers:* Inti Briones, Melina León, Michael J. White

*Coproducers:* Rolando Toledo, Rafael Álvarez, Patrick Bencomo, Andreas Roald,  
Dan Wechsler, Jamal Zeinal-Zade

*Production:* La Vida Misma Films

*Coproduction :* La Mula Producciones, MGC, Bord Cadre Films

*Associate Production:* Torch Films

*World Sales:* Luxbox

*French Distributor:* Sophie Dulac Distribution

**CANCIÓN SIN NOMBRE, 2019, 97 minutes, Peru, Spain, USA**

**Black & White 1.85 - 5.1 – Spanish, Quechua**





## Synopsis

Peru, at the height of the political crisis of the 1980s.

Georgina is a young woman from the Andes whose newborn daughter is stolen at a fake health clinic. Her desperate search for the child leads her to the headquarters of a major newspaper, where she meets Pedro Campos, a lonely journalist who takes on the investigation. Based on a true story.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

# Melina León

***Canción Sin Nombre ends with a dedication to Ismael León, your father. How is the film related to his work as a journalist?***

He was one of the journalists who founded *La República*, one of the largest newspapers in Peru. They founded it in 1981 with a headline about child trafficking and my father was involved in the investigation. He told me the story.

***How did you work on the screenplay? Did you try to stick to actual facts or on the contrary to keep a distance from them?***

My co-writer Michael J. White and I kept a great distance from it. We changed the time period to 1988 and created fictional characters. I needed to express the feeling of a time that I was able to remember myself and I wanted to be free to imagine the characters' emotions.

***With the black & white and the 4:3 frame, the film develops a very formal austerity. What made you and Inti Briones (the DOP) choose this sober style? Did you have influences to guide you?***

We really wanted to see the world as our characters saw it, so we figured that we needed to trap them. A wide landscape didn't seem appropriate for those days when we felt so constrained. Since our budget was so limited, we didn't have much control over locations so we figured we'd better use the format to achieve this feeling of entrapment.

Also, we felt that we needed to use every possible resource to contribute to transport people to the 1980's and of course 4:3 was the TV format in those days.

The choice of black & white comes from my memory of the photographs in the newspapers of the 1980's. They were not printing in color yet.

Inti and I watched films by Béla Tarr and Andrey Zvyagintsev and found our inspiration and common ground. We also talked a lot about *Yellow Earth* by Chen Kaige - which was shot by Zhang Yimou - and about the films of Jia Zhangke.



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***After the opening montage of newspaper clippings, the film mainly focuses on the investigation led by the journalist Pedro Campos. What role should the press play in troubled times like 1980's Peru?***

In Peru we don't know what it's like to live in times that are not troubled but the 1980's were completely out of control. Look at us nowadays, our former president Alan García Pérez (who was the president during the time period of our story) just shot himself in the head because the police were coming to arrest him for corruption.

Our democracy is weak and corrupt and misled by dogmatic neoliberals and corrupt politicians, we'd be gone without the press.

***As exemplified by the Kafkaesque steps and corridors of the Palace of Justice, the public authorities seem unreachable for Georgina and her husband. Do you think that there are still second-class citizens like them nowadays?***

Yes, a profound racism, a crazy inequality and dysfunctional governments are still our trademark.

***Although Georgina and Pedro come from very different backgrounds, their encounter is fluent and natural. What are they sharing and what brings them closer?***

He is not white to begin with, that brings him closer to her. He is supposed to be middle class, but he is actually really poor, doesn't even have a room for himself. He

sleeps on the couch and of course he knows exactly the experience of being marginal. He lives in a world of macho men and has to hide his gayness to survive. Geo and Pedro are carefully surviving in their own way.

***Georgina and her husband live on the outskirts of Lima, but come from the Andes. Why did you choose to focus on indigenous characters?***

Both Georgina and Leo come from the Andes, they are new in the city of Lima, the coast is their new home. Many people like them migrated to Lima to escape the violence of the Shining Path and the military, the poor living conditions in rural areas, lack of basic services and education, etc.

Why focus on them? Because we are them. In Peru we are mainly Andean, it's our culture but people don't want to see it because we still have a colonial mindset.

***Even if we understand that Georgina's husband is part of the Shining Path, the name of the organization is never mentioned in the film. Are the guerilla group and their actions still a sensitive subject nowadays in Peru?***

It is, the right wing always reminds us of that crazy group in order to suppress any sort of change in economic policies. It works to their advantage. If you want Telefónica to pay their taxes you get called either a "caviar" (a sort of ridiculous privileged leftist) or a subversive or a Shining Path terrorist.



***Pamela Mendoza is incredibly truthful and breathtaking in her interpretation of Georgina. Can you tell us more about the casting process for this lead role?***

I had no idea who could play this part, all I knew was that I didn't want any of the known Peruvian actresses who usually come from middle class backgrounds and whose Andean features are way too lost.

So I went to the neighborhood of Villa El Salvador and asked to talk to the director of the theater Arena y Esteras, Mr. Arturo Mejía, and right away he understood what I was looking for and introduced me to Pamela Mendoza Arpi.

Since I couldn't believe my luck, I continue to cast people with the help of Luz Tamayo, our casting director, who also used to live in that neighborhood.

But it was clear that Pamela's capacity for expressing with her body which she learnt in one year of physical theater training with Mario Delgado and all her experience doing political performances, plus her enormous talent... she was truly unbeatable.

So I just said to her, I think you'd be great, the only bad thing is that you are too skinny for a pregnant woman. And she was like, I could gain as many kilos as you need. So we agreed on 10 kilos but then she added 7 more just in case. It was amazing to see.

***The music of Pauchi Sasaki is very present throughout the film. Can you tell us more about your collaboration and about her inspirations?***

Pauchi is also an associate producer of the film. We have been really good friends for a long time, so she has witnessed the development of this film for many years and I have witnessed the development of her music. When the time finally came for her to write the score I really trusted her. She knew the story as well as I did and she knew my musical tastes better than me.

Most of her score reflects new compositions written specifically for the film, but for the ending we used a song from her second album. Oddly enough, it's called "In2thesun," which is exactly what we see in the final sequence.

***Even if it does not last, the romance between Pedro and his neighbor Isa tells a lot about the invisibility of gay people during these years. Is this aspect of the film based on actual testimonies?***

It's based on the observation of the lives of my gay friends in Lima. Homophobia is not a thing of the past at all. In Peru, gay people still have no rights, they can't get married, and it's considered an act of great courage to even hold hands in the streets. Of course, in those days it was much worse, but their oppression is nowhere close to ending.

***The film ends with Georgina singing a lullaby to her daughter. What is the meaning behind this?***

It's open for the audience to add their own meaning. For me, it means her love is unbroken.

***Canción Sin Nombre embraces the modern history of Peru on many levels. Do you think that now is the time for a national introspection***

I think that would be a good idea. We really need to ponder the fact that all our presidents from the past 38 years are either in jail for crimes against humanity or for corruption. Alejandro Toledo managed to run away to the US, and García, who was president twice, just committed suicide when he was about to get arrested. It's pathetic on the one hand, but if you really think about it we can be proud of our new group of prosecutors. We could also take the



opportunity to realize the dangers of corruption and actively participate in politics.

And for heaven's sake, we need to rethink our embrace of an economic system that encourages this corruption and perpetuates inequality. A system where numbers are always more important than people.

***The production of the film took many years and seems to be a proper story in itself. Could you tell us about the different processes?***

It was a long process. Basically, it came down to a couple of years trying to get it produced with a well-known New York based company, which in the end didn't work. Then taking things in my own hands in spite of my lack of experience.

For a few more years I was working in NY as an editor of corporate videos while trying to get the money from the Ministry of Culture of Peru but that was not working either.

In a final chapter I took the advice of my friend Pinky and went back to Peru to develop a serious application. So I did, I got a job in Peru, got the grant money to start and then it was a matter of getting more grants and investors. We even ran a Kickstarter campaign with my friends at Torch Films and our cowriter/producer Mike White. We also got help from the Jerome Foundation and Ibermedia, and then towards the end, our Spanish co-producer got us some support from ICAA and to complete the story Luxbox came to finish it up.

The whole thing was really long and sort of painful, I really hope next time things work a bit easier. Thank goodness Inti Briones became one of the producers, because otherwise I think I would have lost it. He brought in his great friend Maria Carlota, connected us to the amazing O2 lab in Brazil, and gave us everything of his experience, intuition and patience.



# Melina León

## Biography

Melina León is a Peruvian director based in Lima and New York. An MFA film graduate of Columbia University, her short film *El Paraíso de Lili* (Lili's Paradise) premiered at the New York Film Festival and won 11 awards at over 20 international festivals, including Best Latin American Film at the Sao Paulo International Short Film Festival. Her debut feature, *Canción Sin Nombre*, is inspired by a true account of child trafficking originally reported by Ismael León, her father. It is supported by the Ministry of Culture of Peru, Ibermedia, the Jerome Foundation and ICAA (Spain.)

## Filmography

- 2019** Song Without a Name (*Canción Sin Nombre*)
- 2009** Lili's Paradise (*El Paraíso de Lili* – Short)
- 2007** Girl with a Walkman (Short)



## Pauchi Sasaki

### Music Composer

"The film's general rhythm was a constant process of discovery throughout post-production. I observed the inner world of each character, the silent presence of the camera and the interaction between these elements in every space. The dance between these elements ended up setting the tempo. Even if the film presents a very difficult journey for Georgina, the tender timber of the charango reminds us that this story is not only about an extraordinary case of social injustice in 1980's Peru. It's about the universal forces of compassion and profound maternal love."

## Inti Briones

### Cinematographer

"We practically used only natural lights for the shooting, together with a lomography optic from the USSR era, which allowed us to adopt an objective and almost documentary point of view. As the true story is raw and even irrational, reality seems inevitably to outpace fiction to the extent that it is not believable. The 1980's in Peru can be remembered as times in which History lost its sense along the way. Looking back at those times is being on an edge where light, shadow, life and death have lost their classic meaning."

## Michael J. White

### Co-screenwriter

"Back in 2003, I traveled to Peru and stayed with Melina's family where I grew to love swapping late-night stories with Ismael León, the journalist who broke the child-trafficking case that inspired our script. I also became friends with Rosa Ramos, a housekeeper from the shantytown where some of the kidnappings took place. Despite the shocking poverty, I was fascinated by the accomplishments of the many extraordinary characters in Rosa's everyday world; I never could have written the script without them. While our script involved countless drafts, I'm especially proud of our many non-professional actors from affected communities who Melina encouraged to make the script their own."

# GEORGINA'S LULLABY

## *La canción de cuna de Georgina*

*Traditional Peruvian song from unknown artist*

Sleep baby, sleep / Duerme bebita duerme  
I will sleep baby / Yo voy a dormir bebita  
Why aren't you sleepy? / ¿Por qué que no tienes sueño?  
Why aren't you sleepy? / ¿Por qué que no tienes sueño?  
Baby you sleep / Bebita tu sueño  
Baby you sleep / Bebita tu sueño  
May your sleep be of love and peace / Que tu sueño sea para siempre de amor en paz  
May your sleep be of love and peace / Que tu sueño sea para siempre de amor en paz  
I will sleep baby / Yo voy a dormir bebita  
I will sleep baby / Yo voy a dormir bebita  
Angels will come / Los ángeles van a venir  
To sing to you and see you / A cantarte y a verte  
So that you sleep well / Para que duermas bien  
Sleep / Duerme  
I will sleep / Yo voy a dormir  
Sleep baby / Duerme bebita

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