

CIELO

A Film by Alison McAlpine
(Canada/Chile, 78')
cielo-thefilm.com

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Trailer: vimeo.com/234599441

SYNOPSIS

CIELO is a cinematic reverie on the crazy beauty of the night sky, as experienced in the Atacama Desert, Chile, one of the best places on our planet to explore and contemplate its splendour. Director Alison McAlpine's sublime nonfiction film drifts between science and spirituality, the arid land, desert shores and lush galaxies, expanding the limits of our earthling imaginations. Planet Hunters in the Atacama's astronomical observatories and the desert dwellers who work the land and sea share their evocative visions of the stars and planets, their mythic stories and existential queries with remarkable openness and a contagious sense of wonder. A love poem for the night sky, CIELO transports us to a space, quiet and calm, within which we can ponder the infinite and unknown.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The unforgettable Chilean sky and the remarkable characters we filmed are at the heart of Cielo. These desert dwellers and scientists who live and work in the Atacama Desert- their stories, their reflections, their humour and humanity and the endless beauty of the sky- were and are my continual inspiration. So few of us look above and pay attention to the stars or planets in our daily lives; what would it be like to live among these extraordinary people in this otherworldly landscape whose gaze is totally directed upward?

CIELO is also an exploration of what a story can be. The unfolding of our narrative is more associative than logical. We reveal with juxtapositions of image and sound- for instance, the intimacy of a human moment vis-à-vis the epic scale of the night sky. Cielo is an invitation to slow down, reflect and rediscover our world, offering the audience an evocative space in which to think and imagine for themselves. Or even experience a moment of transcendence, what photographer Robert Frank calls, "the poetry behind the surfaces of things".

DIRECTOR'S TECHNICAL NOTES

Time-lapses and Cameras

How can you possibly capture the depth and limitless beauty of such a night sky within the limits of a picture frame?

We've seen so many time-lapses and they are usually very fast, appearing like special effects or fireworks. There is no time to feel or enter the image. I wanted to re-invent time-lapses so that the rhythms and textures felt human, natural.

Shooting the night sky was a continual process of exploration. We photographed most often 5-7 days before or after the new moon or when there was an astronomical event, like a lunar eclipse. We shot short exposures of 4-6 seconds. I was after simplicity, images that felt raw and alive. I did not want dolly shots. Most often we used a tripod, at times we used a simple motion control head which slowly followed the moon or the milky way. During the night we used a Sony A7s for shooting time-lapses or filming with characters. At times we also used an Atomos Shogun. When filming by day we used a Sony FS7.

Sound and Music

How do you reveal the silence of the Atacama Desert, the driest desert in this world? Parts of the desert are like Mars, if there is life it's beyond the pick-up of any microphone. A profound quiet which inspires contemplation, reflection and for me, extraordinary joy. And what are the sounds of the stars, of the universe? Sound was extremely important throughout our process: the natural sounds of the desert and each locale; the wild and wonderful sounds in the observatories, howls and purrs as these giant beasts come to life at sunset. Vents and domes opening, telescopes sliding, grinding into position, turning upward, photographing, searching, a dance until dawn. We used Schoeps and Neumann microphones, recording in mid-side.

I heard acoustic music, a grammar of sound distinct from the electronic world of the observatories. I wanted music which has its own narrative form, music that feels like part of our innermost being. "Film as dream, film as music", Ingmar Bergman says, "goes directly to our feelings, deep down into the dark rooms of the soul."

Organic Effects

As the film was evolving in the editing room, we began looking for imagery that evoked the stars and planets intimately. NASA images are beautiful but too familiar. CGI was unaffordable and not what I imagined. Inspired by creation of the world images from the "Tree of Life", we decided to create organic effects for Cielo. I gathered a wonderful crew in Montreal: DOP Mathieu Lavardière, camera operator Frédéric Chamberland, Supervision VFX Philippe Toupin. We researched special effects legend Doug Trumbull's process and storyboarded and planned extensively. Thanks to the extraordinary generosity of Frédéric Chamberland, owner of a Phantom camera, we improvised for three days in his studio using studio lighting, glass, paints, ink, dust, milk, all organic materials, shooting in 2000 and 1000 frames/sec to create specific sequences in Cielo. Dust falls like rain at 2000 frames per second introducing the voice of the miner character; we conjured planets eclipsing their stars and dream-like galactic imagery to evoke the journey of the light of a star; observatory computer screens were filled with sci-fi imagery we created in the studio etc. In postproduction, we enhanced our imagery with colour treatment, subtly adding visual layers, textures, working towards an aesthetic that felt natural, non-digital, human. At times we added star imagery we shot in Chile.

PEOPLE/LOCATIONS

Mercedes Lopez and Néstor Espinoza, planet hunters, Las Campanas Observatory

Casiano Ardiles and Lilian Rojas, algae collectors, Los Pozos, Huasco

Jorge Rojas, algae collector, young man cooking, Los Pozos, Huasco

Mario Salas Schered, photographer of UFOS, Requeña, Huasco

Cipriano Castillo and Gabriel Castillo, cowboys, Andean mountains Elqui Valley

Raúl Adriazola, miner, Inca de Oro

Roberto Garcia, storyteller, man who flies, Catarpe

Francisco Pepe, planet hunter who sings, La Silla Observatory

Stéphane Udry, planet hunter, La Silla and Paranal Observatory

CREATIVE TEAM

Alison McAlpine (Writer/Director/Producer, Second Sight Pictures) Alison's roots are in poetry, which she began writing as a teenager, publishing in her early twenties. At a writing workshop in Banff the novelist Alistair MacLeod described her work as film poetry. Soon she discovered theatre in Ireland, writing highly visual poetic monologues which were performed in Dublin. In Canada, Alison formed a theatre company and wrote and directed plays that were presented at festivals in Canada, Ireland and France. She was encouraged towards cinema and received a commission to write a TV Opera based on a play she had written. Her mid-length film SECOND SIGHT (2008), "a nonfiction ghost story," was screened at more than 35 international film festivals. She had two BBC Commissions, versions of "Second Sight". "Ghostman of Skye" was "Pick of the Day" or "Critics Choice" in every UK newspaper. Cielo is Alison's first feature film. www.alisonmcalpine.com

Carmen Garcia (Executive Producer, Argus Films) produces documentary films exploring and questioning social, political and cultural issues from a humanistic perspective. Her company, Argus Films, has a large experience filming on all continents working with a team of seasoned filmmakers and collaborators who have won many awards for their work.

Paola Castillo (Co-Producer, Errante Producciones) Director and Producer of acclaimed Chilean documentaries and international documentaries such as Beyond My Grandfather Allende (Documentary first prize, Cannes). Executive Director of CHILEDOC, which helps distribute Chilean documentaries. Paola has also been invited to serve on juries and conferences at many festivals such as IDFA, DOKLeipzig, It's All True etc.

Sean Farnel (Producer, Marketing and Distribution) has been working in creative documentary for some 20 years. He founded the documentary programme at TIFF, the popular screening series Doc Soup, and was the first Director of Programming at Hot Docs. His company, SeaFar North, provides marketing, sales and distribution services to independent documentary producers worldwide.

Benjamin Echazarreta (Director of Photography) Born in Paris and based in Santiago, Benjamin's work as a Director of Photography includes A FANTASTIC WOMAN (2017), REY (2017), SEX LIFE OF PLANTS (2015), GLORIA (2013), EL CIRCUITO DE ROMAN (2011), MOZART'S SISTER (2010), NAVIDAD (2009), HINTERLAND (2007, Tiger Award), 1,2,3 WHITEOUT (2007) and L'EVANGILE DU COCHON CREOLE (2004).

Andrea Chignoli (Editor) Based in Santiago, Andrea has worked as a film editor since 1995. Her filmography includes THE DESERT BRIDE (2017), THE BLIND CHRIST (2016), NO (2012, Academy Award nominee, Best Foreign Language Film), VIOLETA WENT TO HEAVEN (2012, Sundance World Competition Jury Award), CIRCUMSTANCE (2011, Sundance Audience Award, U.S. Competition), POST MORTEM (2010), THE GOOD LIFE (2009, Goya Award, Best Foreign Film) and TONY MANERO (2008).

Phillippe Lauzier (Music Composer) Phillippe Lauzier is a Montreal based musician dedicated to the art of improvisation. He has toured Europe, North America and Australia with groups like Saint Laurens, Quartetski, Toiture and Not the Music, as well as playing concerts with Tétreault, Kim Myhr, Franz Hautzinger, Xavier Charles, Jim Denley, Tatsuya Nakatani among others.

Miguel Hormazábal (Sound Design/Supervision) Miguel's numerous credits include THE DESERT BRIDE (2017), NERUDA (2017, Fenix Award Nomination, Best Sound), EL CLUB (2015, Felix Award Nomination, Best Sound), NO (Academy Award nominee, 2013) (2014), Violeta Went to Heaven (2013); POST MORTEM (2010) , MACHUCA (2004, Ariel Award Nominee).

A Second Sight Pictures production

in association with Argus Films

in association with documentary Channel

in co-production with Errante Producciones

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