

Chico & Rita

CHICO PLAY PIANO IN A HAVANA CLUB



CHICO & RITA IN A HAVANA CLUB

A FILM BY

FERNANDO
TRUEBA

&

JAVIER
MARISCAL



CHICO & RITA AT PIANO, CHICO'S APARTMENT



VILLAGE VANGUARD, NEW YORK

Chico & Rita is a film by Fernando Trueba and Javier Mariscal with beautiful music and artistic appearance. Wolfgang Wick designed the printed matters for KOOL Filmdistribution and so got in touch with the artists to get an insight view into this fabulous project.

AND THE CABALLEROS

Among low warehouses two historical motor scooters from the 50s are parked. Besides that a broken fence, a crooked little company sign and an iron door. This is how Estudio Mariscal presents itself from the outside in 2007. The young PR manager Eva greets us and shows us around the two-storeyed studio. The lower area is full of simple shelves as room dividers and the in-house designer toys are presented in the shelves. One repeatedly finds conference tables between the shelves. Javier Mariscal, boss and eponym, sits at one of them, just in a conversation. The designer is well known as the inventor of the Catalan shepherd dog *Cobi*, the mascot of the 1992 Olympic Games. Upstairs, Tono Errando, one of the brothers of Mariscal, organizes the animation business. Here the employees sit at large tables, draw and color by hand.

Eva talks about the latest project, an animated film set in the time before and after the Cuban revolution. She also shows us the unfinished trailer: *Chico & Rita*, a love story between a musician and a singer, with jazz music from Havana and New York in the 50s.

With shining eyes she tells us about the genesis of the film. Errando and Mariscal work at *Chico & Rita* together with the Oscar-winning director Fernando Trueba (*Belle Époque*). Since Mariscal designed all artworks for Trueba's jazz documentary *Calle 54*, both share a deep friendship, which also led to an own jazz restaurant in Madrid. And now a common film, in which Cuban musicians move to New York and team up with the local jazz musicians. Besides, design and architecture of the 50s fit in with Mariscal; they are part of his visual world.

In the film, the story of the musicians only represents the context. Fernando Trueba wants a classical love story: falling in love, separation, finding love again. Embedded in the two worlds of Havana and New York of the time. The directors spent four weeks in Havana to film, even though *Chico & Rita* will be an animated film. Eva explains that the filming helps the illustrators / drawers to visualize the movements of the acting persons and makes the camera movements more natural and human. In addition, the filmmakers discovered a real treasure: An archive stores photographs from every street corner in Havana from 1949. They found musicians playing and Americans smoking on photographs taken in airplanes, which brought the party guests to Cuba in the 40s and 50s.

In the next step, the *Caballeros* had to find out in which animation style the film should be drawn. Realistic or graphic? Or a melange? Real events are very accurate, animation, however, invents reality. The figures move differently; actors may add feelings, but animation also adds poetry. Therefore, the directors sought out some of the best designers with lots of experience and the ability to move away from their old tools to new animation techniques.

Another challenge came with the relocation of the plot from Havana to New York. The mood of the film changes abruptly because Manhattan is a vertical city and almost monochrome; Havana is horizontal, sunny, warm, colorful. Eva cites Mariscal: "We have New York and Havana. We have Latinos and Anglos. What is a Latino? A specific weather, a color, music, fashion, a way of loving."

Although the setting is important, the story still has priority. Again Mariscal: "It's always about the story. Every point, every line, every color, every movement, every background should tell the story. The world we need to create is always: 'Yes, Rita, please kiss Chico again, fabulous.'" What a wonderful drawing of Mariscal, such a beautiful light, what a great movement. "No – I do fantastic drawings and then throw them away because they are useless at that moment. The whole time I reflect upon what would be best for the audience. That is what we have to do."

For both figures, the filmmakers found real-life people as models. Bebo Valdés, the Cuban pianist, band leader, composer, and arranger was the inspiration for Chico. After all, Trueba had rediscovered him in Stockholm and then produced the Grammy award-winning album *Lagrima Negra* with him. Valdés composed the film music. A photo from his early years inspired Mariscal while designing Chico's appearance; still, the figure of Chico should be a tribute to all Cuban musicians of this period. Flamenco star Estrella Morente was a model for singer Rita. According to Trueba, she stands with one foot in the 19th and with the other foot in the 21st century. She is venerable and at the same time modern. A balancing act which can also be found among the musicians. The crew decided to ask contemporary musicians to play in the style of former musicians like Cole Porter or Thelonious Monk. They casted a tenor saxophonist who can play Ben Webster, an alto saxophonist in the style of Charlie Parker, or a trumpeter like Dizzy Gillespie.

And then Eva shows us the trailer once more. Images and music arouse a nostalgic desire in me to immerse myself right here in the whole movie, but our time is up. We say thank you to Eva and leave the Mariscal Studios through the iron door. As we pass the historical motor scooters, I realize: they are not simply parked among the warehouse atmosphere, they are visual templates for the artists. For a brief moment the credits of the trailer appear once more in front of my eyes.

"Love is a song that you will never forget."

THE “BANDE DESSINÉE” TRADITION*

* Bande Dessinée (BD): Franco-Belgian comics are created for a Belgian and French audience. These countries have a long tradition in comics and comic books, literally drawn strips in French and stripverhalen (literally strip stories) in Dutch. Flemish Belgian comic books (originally written in Dutch) are influenced by francophone comics, yet have a distinctly different style.
→ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franco-Belgian_comics

This interview has been conducted by Wolfgang Wick with Javier Mariscal in January 2013 on his animated film *Chico & Rita*.

WOLFGANG WICK Since working for jazz-doku *Calle 54* you have had an intensive friendship with Fernando Trueba. Together you run a jazz restaurant in Madrid. What is your favorite direction in jazz?

JAVIER MARISCAL My favorite is Latin jazz: the Latin jazz story is the central topic in the film *Chico & Rita*; how it developed in Cuba and how it made its way around the USA and Europe.

You know a lot about jazz. What do you think is special about the jazz history of Cuba?

Everything in Cuba is special; they have developed a jazz story on the island, a jazz where you can notice the African roots, the slave music and the Caribbean way of life ...

La Habana / New York – The contrast of colors, people and locations are so important in *Chico & Rita*, but yet the jazz music is used as the global language throughout the whole movie. Do you think jazz is still important for Cuban people today?

Of course, the new Cuban groups are still in the same jazz stream.

In 2010 I saw Hugo Valdez play at Teatro Mella in Havana. It was a great concert and people told me Hugo had played in New York just a few days before. Teatro Mella was sold out and it was a fantastic atmosphere that continued on during the drive back downtown along the Malecón in an old 57' Chevy Taxi stuffed with lots of people. Is it this Caribbean drive in the music of Cuba that one feels in *Chico & Rita*?

***Chico & Rita* script is the history of Latin jazz based on Bebo Valdés story. Together with Fernando Trueba I wanted to make a homage to Bebo Valdés' music and his contribution to expand Cuban jazz beyond the borders of Cuba.**



TONO ERRANDO, FERNANDO TRUEBA
AND JAVIER MARISCAL

Why did you draw the movie in 2D?
The style of the movie follows the “bande dessinée” tradition, it’s a 2D style.

Is the dream sequence the most important part for your illustrations in *Chico & Rita*?
A film cannot express the whole idea in a single sequence; I hope that people will catch other ideas as well in the film.

Which part of the movie do you like best?
... too many to be described here.

Chico & Rita is a story based in Cuba’s past. Only once you show contemporary young Cubans listening to Rap on the streets of Havana. Could you imagine making a film about contemporary Cuban music?
To make a movie is an extraordinary experience. Let me know if you find a producer and I’ll start a new one whenever you want.

Do you know Mr. Candyman, Baby Loes or Gente D Zona?

Not as well as I would like.

Young Cuban people are listening to Rap and Reggaetón. Do you think *Chico & Rita* also has a message for young Cubans today?
I think that contemporary music is always related to the music of the past. It maintains, revisits, plays and breaks the rules of everything before it.