

SEPTEMBER 2026
INAUGURAL ISSUE

VOZ LATINO

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MAGAZINE

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VOZ LATINO

FROM THE EDITOR

Why We Are Here

Every festival season the same thing happens. A filmmaker from San Antonio or Houston or the Valley finishes something remarkable, screens it to a room that understands exactly what they made, and then watches it disappear, because nobody wrote it down.

That is the gap this magazine was built to close.

Voz Latino is not a fan publication and it is not a trade sheet. It is a record. We intend to cover independent Latino cinema the way serious criticism has always covered work it respects: closely, specifically, and on the assumption that our readers are filmmakers themselves.

We begin with three commitments.

Craft first. We will write about coverage and cutting patterns, about sound design and production design, about what an actor chose not to do. Adjectives are cheap and a filmmaker cannot use

them. Observation is the only kind of praise worth printing.

The region is not a satellite. Texas and the Southwest are not a waiting room for Los Angeles. The work being made here has its own lineage, its own audience, and its own reasons, and we will cover it as a center rather than as a feeder.

Lineage matters. No one making a film today is starting from nothing. When Gregory Nava accepts a lifetime achievement award in San Antonio, and a first-time director screens a short two rooms away, those are not separate stories. They are the same story at different points on the road. We intend to keep printing both.

We are a new publication carrying an old obligation: to pay attention, in public and in writing, to work that deserves it. If we do that well, the films in these pages will still be findable in twenty years.

Welcome to the first issue.

Linda P. Garza

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

OUR PURPOSE

Voz Latino Magazine exists to give independent Latino cinema the serious, sustained coverage it has earned. We report on the films, festivals, screenplays, and artists shaping Latino storytelling in film, television, and media, from first-time regional filmmakers to the figures whose careers built the road. We write for the people doing the work, and we keep the record for everyone who comes after them.

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CRITIC'S BEAT

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REVIEWED BY THE FILM DESK

The Interview

Five candidates, one straight-faced interviewer, and a room where nobody will admit anything strange is happening.

BY THE VOZ LATINO FILM DESK

Disclosure: The Interview was produced by an affiliate of Legacy Publishing Agency.

An interview room is a gift to a comedy writer: fixed geography, enforced politeness, and a power imbalance nobody present is permitted to name out loud. *The Interview*, written by Brian Kryszewski de Ybarrondo and directed by Brandon Kafarela, takes that arrangement and drops it into a hiring market where the stakes are usually emotional rather than professional. The conceit could easily have curdled into a sketch. It doesn't, and the reason is discipline: the film plays its absurdity absolutely straight and trusts the audience to notice.

THE SETUP

Synopsis & Premise

Victoria Reynolds (Evelyn Juarez) is behind on rent and running out of runway when she finds a listing paying \$8,000 a month. The posting is vague in exactly the way that should register as a warning. What she walks into is a group interview: five candidates, one room, and an interviewer who conducts the proceedings with the unhurried authority of a man who has done this many times before.

The construction is older than it looks, and deliberately so. Seat one unflappable authority figure behind a desk, march a parade of spectacularly unsuitable applicants past him, and never let anybody in the room acknowledge that something strange is happening. It is the engine of the classic half-hour sitcom, the *I Love Lucy* arrangement in which the joke belongs entirely to the audience because nobody on screen will concede there is one. What distinguishes this film is the completeness of the commitment: each candidate arrives with a worldview fully formed and entirely wrong for the job, and the interviewer weighs each one as though against a rubric. The laugh lives in the gap, and the gap stays open only because nobody in the frame will close it. The reveal, that the baby is a spider monkey, is held to the last possible beat and quietly recontextualizes everything that preceded it.

That the location came with a resident spider monkey is the sort of luck independent production occasionally grants. To the team's credit, they built toward it rather than around it, and the house's eccentricity reads as character rather



IT'S A HAIRY SITUATION.

Written by Brian Kryszewski de Ybarrondo. Directed by Brandon Kafarela. Director of photography, Juan Rizo. Edited by Unies Gonzalez.

than as set dressing. If the compressed schedule shows anywhere, it is in how quickly the last two candidates arrive; the room is so alive by then that another thirty seconds with each of them would have been welcome. That is a compliment disguised as a note.

"Nobody in the frame is playing the comedy. That restraint is the whole machine."

VOZ LATINO FILM DESK

THE ENSEMBLE

Cast & Performance

FIVE CANDIDATES. ONE INTERVIEWER. NOBODY BREAKS.

EVELYN JUAREZ AS VICTORIA REYNOLDS

Juarez has the least showy assignment in the film and the one most capable of sinking it. As the room's only calibrated human being she is required to react rather than perform, and she resists the straight-man's standing temptation to editorialize. Watch her hands: a résumé folded, unfolded, and refolded across the length of the scene, a piece of business that charts her deterioration without a line of dialogue. Her strongest moment is a held beat in which she visibly decides whether laughing would cost her the job.

BRIAN KRYSZEWSKI DE YBARRONDO AS MICHAEL, THE INTERVIEWER

Kryszewski de Ybarrondo, who also wrote the script, succeeds here because of what he declines to do. He never signals the joke. His cadence stays uniform whether he is asking about references or about a candidate's comfort with climbing, so the audience is never told which line is the funny one and has to locate it unassisted. He also plays status correctly: he doesn't dominate the room, he simply never registers that it has gotten away from him, which is the harder and truer note. Deadpan of this kind is usually the first thing to crack under a compressed schedule. It never does here.

OMID RAMIREZ AS THE GYM BRO

Ramirez plays the character's confidence as sincere rather than parodic, which is the correct choice and a rarer one than it sounds. He treats infant care as a conditioning problem and delivers "cardio, tire 'em out, night-night baby" as practical counsel rather than as a punchline, letting the room's silence do the work. His

physicality, all forward lean and elbows on knees, gives the ensemble a kinetic counterweight to Juarez's stillness.

MATEO VALENTINO AS THE GOTH DRUMMER

Valentino works in the lowest register in the room and draws the film's most reliable laughs by underplaying against the escalation around him. His timing is built on delay: he answers roughly a beat later than the rhythm expects, which repeatedly resets the scene's tempo and buys the ensemble a reset it needs. His question about why the job involves changing diapers is the cleanest piece of dramatic irony in the script, and he throws it away rather than pointing at it.

ALEJANDRO RAMIREZ AS THE SOCIALLY AWKWARD CANDIDATE

Ramirez grades his escalation carefully, and the shellfish-and-cat allergy inventory arrives in stages rather than as a single dump, each one landing a little higher than the last. He is the candidate audiences quote on the way out, and the runtime is the only thing standing between this turn and a larger one. In a longer cut, this is the role that would run away with the film.

NATALIE LERNER AS THE METAPHYSICAL HIPPIE

Lerner takes the inverse approach to Ramirez: she plays serenity rather than panic, treating her communion with the "ether" as unremarkable domestic competence. The banana purée digression works precisely because she never asks the audience to find it strange. It is the most distinctive comic frequency in the room, and it leaves you wanting a second scene with her, which in a seven-minute film is exactly the right problem to have.

THE VERDICT

The Interview is a small film that knows exactly what it is. One premise, one location, and an ensemble willing to play absurdity as though it were procedure, and it extracts more from that arrangement than most shorts manage with considerably more. If it leaves you wanting more time with two of its candidates, that is the honest cost of a seven-minute runtime and a two-day clock, and it is the only thing standing between this and a longer version worth financing. Watch it for a script that builds a reveal you can't see coming and can't unsee afterward, and for a cast that understands the comic value of not knowing they're in a comedy. It should play strongly for programmers assembling a comedy block, for producers scouting first-time collaborators, and for anyone who has sat across a table from someone asking questions they clearly didn't write. Among independent shorts, and particularly among competition entries, which usually announce their deadlines in every frame, this one holds up on its own terms.



RATING: 4.5 OUT OF 5

FESTIVAL OUTLOOK

Two structural facts make this an easy programming decision: a single location and a runtime that slots into any block without forcing a re-cut. The reveal is also audience-dependent in the useful sense, building on collective recognition rather than on a private punchline, which means it will play considerably better in a room than on a laptop. The likeliest homes are regional comedy shorts blocks, the 48 Hour Film Project's own circuit, and Latino-forward programs looking for ensemble work that isn't trading on trauma. Comedy shorts that can close a block on a genuine laugh are rarer than the submission numbers suggest, and this one closes hard.

ON THE BILLING BLOCK

RUNTIME	Approx. 7 min.	COUNTRY	United States
LANGUAGE	English	ASPECT RATIO	1.78:1
GENRE	Workplace Comedy · Short	PREMIERE	Houston, Texas · August 2026
ORIGIN	48 Hour Film Project, Houston	FORMAT	Digital
DIRECTED BY	Brandon Kafarela	WRITTEN BY	Brian Kryszewski de Ybarrondo
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER	Mateo Valentino	CINEMATOGRAPHY	Juan Rizo
EDITOR	Unies Gonzalez	SOUND DESIGN	Jeremy Lane

STARRING

Brian Kryszewski de Ybarrondo · Evelyn Juarez · Mateo Valentino · Omid Ramirez · Alejandro Ramirez · Natalie Lerner · Blanca Lopez

FESTIVAL BEAT

SAN ANTONIO • JULY 21-26, 2026

DISPATCH

Inside the 32nd SAFILM

A triumph of independent storytelling, from a low-rider bike in 1994 to more than two hundred films across the heart of Texas.

BY THE VOZ LATINO FESTIVAL DESK

As the lights dim across the heart of Texas, the 32nd Annual San Antonio Film Festival has once again cemented its status as a vital anchor for independent cinema. Running July 21 through 26 across premier venues including the Radius Center, the historic Gunter Hotel on the Riverwalk, City Base Cinema, and the Carlos Alvarez Theater at the Tobin Center, this year's lineup showcased a fierce dedication to boundary-pushing narratives, regional grit, and global perspectives. More than two hundred works screened across the week.

The scale is worth measuring against the origin. San Antonio College alum Adam Rocha founded SAFILM in 1994 after a short film of his was selected for the San Diego Latino Student Film Festival; the first edition ran a dozen movies and handed a low-rider bike to best picture. Three decades later the festival is chasing something larger than local pride, and the 2026 slate showed it.



THE TOBIN

The Tobin Center for the Performing Arts, home of the Carlos Alvarez Theater, where SAFILM staged its marquee screenings, panels, and the annual Awards Ceremony.

PROGRAMMING

Cultural Anchors and Local Roots

True to its Southwestern home, SAFILM 2026 put cultural identity front and center. Programming blocks like *Latinos y las luchas* and *OGs y Orígenes* at the Radius Center offered explorations of heritage, community struggle, and generational resilience. Outdoor screen-

ings, including the community favorite pairing of *A Special Blend* with *Nacho Libre* at The Rock at La Cantera, brought cinema directly to the people under the Texas sky.

The festival also leaned heavily into industry development, opening with the San Antonio Film Commission Coffee Talk Mixer alongside special guests from the Texas Film Commission, and later addressing the money question head-on with panels such as *Getting Your Film*

Made: Financing Strategies for Today's Industry. For regional filmmakers, that programming is not garnish. It is the part of the week that determines whether next year's slate exists.



The Maverick

Andrew McCarthy at SAFILM, where he accepted the festival's annual Maverick Award, with Voz Latino managing editor Brian Kryszewski de Ybarrondo.

THE HONOREES

A Master, a Maverick, and a Patron

THREE AWARDS, THREE DIFFERENT ARGUMENTS ABOUT WHAT A CAREER IS

The 2026 honors made the festival's priorities legible. Gregory Nava, director of *El Norte*, *Mi Familia*, and the perennial San Antonio favorite *Selena*, received this year's Lifetime Achievement Award. Nava was born in San Diego of Mexican and Basque heritage and took his MFA at UCLA in 1976; *El Norte* earned him and Anna Thomas an Academy Award nomination for the screenplay and entered the National Film Registry in 1995. Placing that body of work at the center of a Latino-forward festival in South Texas is not ceremonial. It is a statement about lineage.

Nava's presence was echoed in the Sunday panel *Bringing El Norte Home: The Cinema of Gregory Nava and Latino Stories in American Film* at the Carlos Alvarez Theater, a session that did what the best festival programming does: it connected foundational representa-

tion to the wave of emerging talent filling the shorts and feature blocks, and let the two speak to each other in the same room.

Andrew McCarthy arrived on July 26 to accept SAFILM's annual Maverick Award, and the choice was sharper than the marquee value suggested. The star of *St. Elmo's Fire*, *Pretty in Pink*, and *Less Than Zero* has spent his second act as a television director and an author, and his 2024 documentary *Brats* is the reason the award reads as earned rather than nostalgic.

That film traces the June 1985 *New York* magazine cover story by David Blum that named the Brat Pack and, in the view of many of its subjects, narrowed what the industry would let them become. McCarthy crossed the country reconnecting with Emilio Estevez, Rob Lowe, Demi Moore, Ally Sheedy, Jon Cryer, and Lea Thompson

to ask what the label actually cost them, and then, unusually, sat down with Blum himself.

The San Antonio conversation turned on the same question the documentary poses, and it is a question with real utility for a room full of emerging filmmakers: what happens when someone else writes the story of your career before you do. McCarthy has described the film as a meditation on the passage of time and on how the truth changes with perspective, and the reflection landed

with an audience that skewed a generation younger than the era under discussion. His own line from the film, that the group's not really existing does not even matter, drew the biggest response of the session.

The third honor went local. Robert Tatum, the San Antonio artist behind many of the festival's posters, was named 2026 Patron of Cinema Arts, a recognition that the visual identity of a festival is part of its cultural work rather than an afterthought to it.

"What happens when someone else writes the story of your career before you do."

THE QUESTION UNDER THE MAVERICK AWARD

2026 SAFILM HONOREES

Gregory Nava

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

El Norte · *Mi Familia* · *Selena*

Andrew McCarthy

MAVERICK AWARD

St. Elmo's Fire · *Pretty in Pink* · *Brats (dir.)*

Robert Tatum

PATRON OF CINEMA ARTS

Festival poster artist, San Antonio

THE SLATE

New Voices, and the Week's Close

From psychological thrillers and regional documentaries to deeply personal memoirs like *Bird of Four Hundred Voices: A Mexican American Memoir of Music and Belonging*, the 32nd edition proved that San Antonio remains an indispensable launchpad for creators who refuse to play it safe. The documentary *On Firm Ground*, following two people living with Parkinson's disease, and the short *Fat*, directed by McCarthy's wife Dolores Rice, sat in the same program blocks as first-time regional

work, which is the kind of adjacency a festival has to earn.

The energy culminated in the annual Awards Ceremony at the Carlos Alvarez Theater, celebrating the year's standout voices before the festival wrapped its official slate, with a final encore screening extension at La Cantera. For filmmakers weighing where to submit next year, the takeaway is straightforward: SAFILM programs across scale, it pays attention to the region, and it puts new work in front of people who can move it.

STUDIO JOURNAL

PRESENTED BY LEGACY STUDIO ORIGINALS

PRODUCTION

Inside The Interview

Forty-eight hours in Houston: the draw, the draft, the shoot, and the constraint that wrote the film.

BY THE VOZ LATINO FILM DESK

Constraint is the oldest tool in independent production, and the 48 Hour Film Project turns it into a formal discipline. Teams draw a genre from a hat on Friday evening, receive a set of mandatory elements, and deliver a finished film by Sunday. Most entries wear the deadline openly. What makes *The Interview* worth taking apart is that its central idea is not a workaround for the rules but a direct product of them.

FRIDAY

The Draw

7 PM BRIEFING · 10 PM FIRST DRAFT · 11 PM CALL SHEETS OUT

The Houston team drew at a 7 PM briefing and inherited a fixed list: the workplace comedy genre, a character named Victoria Reynolds, a balloon as required prop, a line of dialogue ("Hot or humid, we're gonna sweat"), and the occupation of pet-sitter. That last item deserves a pause, because the script's entire misdirection is constructed out of a competition requirement. The constraint didn't limit the premise. It generated it.

After a twenty-minute conversation, Kryszewski de Ybarrondo delivered a first draft by 10 PM. Call sheets, wardrobe, and sides went out by 11. Principal photography began at 8 AM on August 11, 2026 and wrapped at 6:30 PM, a single-day schedule in a single location, which is the only shape this story could have taken inside the window.

THE CRAFT

What Forty-Eight Hours Bought

Juan Rizo's photography is the most consequential technical decision in the film. He shoots the interview in clean, evenly lit wides and medium two-shots that borrow the visual grammar of a corporate conference room, flat and symmetrical and unthreatening, and the choice does double duty: it lends the interviewer's absurdity institutional authority, and it protects the reveal by simply never panning where the audience wants it to go. It is a disciplined choice rather than a default one, and it holds

the frame long enough to let the ensemble work inside it.

Unies Gonzalez cuts by holding rather than trimming. The film's best laughs are given room, the edit consistently staying a beat past the line so the silence can land, and the reveal is timed to arrive after the audience has stopped waiting for it. Comedy is lost in the trim far

more often than it is found there, and this cut knows the difference.

Jeremy Lane's sound design is doing quieter and more important work than it will be credited for. The room tone is scrubbed to an unnatural corporate hush, and that hush is what allows the pauses to read as pauses rather than as dead air. The music, sourced from a production library, does its job without drawing attention, and a commissioned score is the single upgrade that would take an already polished cut further still.

Production design was, by necessity, found rather than built, and the film turns that into an asset. The marble, the tufted armchair, the studied neutrality of a room nobody appears to live in, all of it supplies the comedy's most useful contradiction: an interrogation conducted in a living room. Blanca Lopez's appearance and the celebration sequence assembled from family and friends lend the final movement a warmth the interview room deliberately withholds. Later pickups and a finished mix moved the piece past its competition cut without sanding off its rough intelligence.

"The constraint didn't limit the premise. It generated it."

STUDIO JOURNAL

THE CONSTRAINTS

What the Draw Required

GENRE

Workplace comedy

CHARACTER

Victoria Reynolds

PROP

A balloon

LINE

"Hot or humid, we're gonna sweat"

OCCUPATION

Pet-sitter

THE CLOCK

Forty-Eight Hours

FRI 7:00 PM

Briefing and draw

FRI 7:20 PM

Concept locked

FRI 10:00 PM

First draft delivered

FRI 11:00 PM

Call sheets, wardrobe, sides

SAT 8:00 AM

Principal photography begins

SAT 6:30 PM

Wrap

SCREENPLAY SPOTLIGHT

AWARD-WINNING FEATURE SCREENPLAY

BEST FEATURE SCREENPLAY · 32ND SAN ANTONIO FILM FESTIVAL

They Call Me Elena

*The nurse who built a neutral cross in the middle of a civil war,
and the city that made her decide.*

BY THE VOZ LATINO FILM DESK

Disclosure: They Call Me Elena was written by an affiliate of Legacy Publishing Agency.

A feature screenplay inspired by true events, *They Call Me Elena* is adapted from *White Cross: Daughter of the Revolution*, the historical fiction narrative written by Brian Kryszewski de Ybarrondo and published in 2025. Its subject is Elena Arizmendi Mejía, granddaughter of General Ignacio Mejía, and the screenplay takes the position that her erasure from the standard account of the Mexican Revolution is itself the story.

THE STORY

A Republic, a Grandfather's Journals, and a Decision

Elena inherits a name before she inherits a purpose. Her grandfather served the Republic under Juárez, and the journals he leaves her, filled with battle maps, arguments against centralism, and a conviction that a nation excluding its mothers is only half born, function less as a keepsake than as a set of instructions.

In 1907 she arrives in San Antonio with two suitcases. At the School of Nursing at Santa Rosa Hospital she learns to hold a scalpel and steady a heartbeat, and she also learns to disappear: Mexican students seated nearest the kitchen doors, names skipped in chapel, hands trusted with wounds but never with names. In the spring of 1909 the Revolution walks into her life through a convent garden, where Francisco I. Madero speaks to her as an equal and his wife, Sara Pérez, tells her the Republic may have more need of her needles than of its guns.

The decision comes in April 1911, still in San Antonio. A smuggled letter carries word that the Mexican Red Cross will treat only the loyal, refusing the wounded on the insurgent side. Elena packs the journals, a worn

stethoscope, and one pair of boots, and boards a train south.

What she builds is *La Cruz Blanca Neutral*, the Neutral White Cross: a white cross bearing no national emblem, stitched over the heart, and a promise to treat any wounded body regardless of the flag it fell under. Brigades deploy to the front; a crude eight-page bulletin carries the argument to a public the government would rather not have informed. Neutrality in a civil war is not a soft position, and the organization is marked for it almost at once.

Then the cost. A love affair with José Vasconcelos ends with Elena in exile and Vasconcelos in the histories. She lands at Ellis Island in 1913 with two trunks and thirty pesos and tells the official her purpose is to heal. Out of church basements and laundry backrooms she assembles a League of Latin American Women, founds a magazine, and writes for women the record was not keeping.

The screenplay closes in 1944, at Chapultepec Castle. An old woman in a white shawl climbs the hill and finds the Hall of Heroes. Her grandfather's portrait hangs near the far end, his name carved in gold. Hers is nowhere in the

building. That confrontation, between a Republic that remembered the general and forgot the granddaughter who healed its sons, is the film's final image and its whole argument.

"A republic that excludes its mothers is not a nation. It is a half-born thing."

FROM THE GRANDFATHER'S JOURNALS

THE SAN ANTONIO CONNECTION

Where the Story Was Decided, Where the Script Was Honored

The San Antonio material is not a detour in this screenplay. It is the hinge. Four of Elena's formative years, 1907 through 1911, unfold in the city: the nursing school at Santa Rosa, the segregated dining hall, the convent garden where Madero speaks to her as a colleague, and the rented room where a smuggled letter turns a competent nurse into the founder of a wartime medical organization. The Cruz Blanca is conceived in Mexico, but the decision to build it is made in Texas.

Which gives the screenplay's honor a symmetry worth naming. *They Call Me Elena* took Best Feature Screenplay at the 32nd San Antonio Film Festival, in the city where its protagonist trained, was condescended to, met the man whose revolution she would serve, and finally chose the harder road. Awards are usually a matter of geography by accident. This one is not.

THE FILE

TITLE	They Call Me Elena	FORMAT	Feature Screenplay
WRITTEN BY	Brian Kryszewski de Ybarrondo	GENRE	Historical Drama
ADAPTED FROM	White Cross: Daughter of the Revolution (2025)	SUBJECT	Elena Arizmendi Mejía
PERIOD	1907–1944	SETTINGS	Oaxaca · San Antonio · Mexico City · New York
HONOR	Best Feature Screenplay	FESTIVAL	32nd San Antonio Film Festival

LATINO VOICES

EMERGING TALENT · NEW PERSPECTIVES

PROFILE

Vannessa Vasquez

Championing stories that matter, on both sides of the camera.

BY THE EDITORIAL STAFF

Disclosure: La Patria es Primero is in development with an affiliate of Legacy Publishing Agency.

Daytime Emmy Award-nominated actress, producer, and writer Vannessa Vasquez has built a career defined not only by memorable performances, but by a commitment to telling stories that reflect the richness, complexity, and authenticity of Latino experiences. From television to independent film, she has consistently sought projects that elevate culture without relying on stereotypes, choosing characters who are ambitious, resilient, and deeply human.

THE PATH

Galveston to Stella Adler

Born in Galveston, Texas, Vasquez earned degrees in Psychology and Theatre from the University of Houston before receiving a full scholarship to study at the Stella Adler Acting Conservatory in Los Angeles. Her breakthrough came with Hulu's acclaimed drama *East Los High*, where her portrayal of Camila earned a Daytime Emmy Award nomination and established her as one of the most recognizable Latina actresses working in independent and streaming productions.

Her career has since spanned television and film, including appearances in *Walker*, *MacGyver*, *The Brave*, *National Treasure*, and *Divorce Bait*. Beyond acting, Vasquez has built a résumé as a producer and writer, reflecting a passion for shaping stories both in front of and behind the camera.

THE WORK

A City as a Character

SAY A LITTLE PRAYER · SET AND FILMED ENTIRELY IN SAN ANTONIO

That commitment to meaningful storytelling was on full display in *Say a Little Prayer*, the romantic comedy starring international music icon Luis Fonsi in his feature-film acting debut. Directed by Patrick Perez Vidauri from a screenplay by Nancy De Los Santos-Reza, the

film was set and shot entirely in San Antonio, and it celebrates friendship, family, faith, and community while showcasing the city's cultural landscape.



SAY A LITTLE PRAYER

Vannessa Vasquez with Luis Fonsi and the creative team on the red carpet for the San Antonio-set romantic comedy. [Full identifications to confirm.]

Vasquez stars as Adela, a gallery owner and one of three lifelong friends whose search for love unfolds with humor, heart, and unmistakable South Texas charm. It is a leading role built on comic patience rather than on punchlines, and it anchors a film that moves between broad comedy and something closer to affection.

Before its theatrical release, *Say a Little Prayer* received a special red-carpet advance screening at San Antonio's historic Charline McCombs Empire Theatre, where Vasquez joined Fonsi, Vivian Lamolli, filmmaker Nancy

De Los Santos, and the creative team to celebrate a production that embraced San Antonio not simply as a filming location, but as an essential character in the story. Familiar ground appears throughout the picture, from the Westside gathering spot Jaime's Place to the Centro de Artes gallery and San Fernando Cathedral. The evening underscored the growing importance of Texas as a destination for Latino filmmaking and independent production.

"Authentic storytelling can be both deeply personal and universally resonant."

THE WORKING PHILOSOPHY

WHAT COMES NEXT

History, Brought Forward

Today, Vasquez continues to expand her creative influence through projects that celebrate Latino history and culture. Among those is the historical dramatic series *La Patria es Primero*, inspired by one of the most transformative periods in Mexican history. The series explores the lives, sacrifices, and ideals of the leaders who shaped a nation while bringing overlooked historical figures to contemporary audiences. Public announcements surrounding the project have identified Vasquez as one of the collaborators helping bring the ambitious histor-

ical drama to life, reinforcing her continued commitment to culturally significant storytelling.

Whether portraying contemporary women navigating life's complexities or helping develop stories rooted in history, Vannessa Vasquez has become part of a generation of artists redefining Latino representation on screen. Her work demonstrates that authentic storytelling can be both deeply personal and universally resonant, a philosophy that continues to shape the next chapter of her career.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Vannessa Vasquez

- Daytime Emmy Award-nominated actress
 - Actress, producer, and writer
 - Graduate of the University of Houston, Psychology and Theatre
 - Stella Adler Acting Conservatory, full scholarship
 - Breakthrough role: Camila in Hulu's *East Los High*
 - Star of *Say a Little Prayer* alongside Luis Fonsi
 - Television credits include *Walker*, *MacGyver*, *The Brave*, and *National Treasure*
 - Collaborator on the historical drama series *La Patria es Primero*
-

INDUSTRY VOICES

PERSPECTIVES FROM WORKING CREATORS

GREGORY NAVA

Why Selena Still Matters

Three decades after Selena Quintanilla-Pérez's death, the filmmaker behind one of the most important Latino films ever made reflects on legacy, identity, and the power of authentic storytelling.

BY THE EDITORIAL STAFF

Few filmmakers have done more to shape modern Latino cinema than Academy Award-nominated writer and director Gregory Nava, honored this year with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 32nd San Antonio Film Festival. Long before Hollywood embraced multicultural storytelling, Nava was bringing Latino families, immigrant experience, and bicultural identity to the screen through landmark films such as *El Norte* and *Mi Familia*. When the Quintanilla family sought someone to tell Selena's story after her death, they believed only a Latino filmmaker could authentically capture her world, her family, and the culture that shaped her.

THE FILM

A Biopic That Became a Benchmark

The path to Nava began with another of his films. *Mi Familia* was in wide circulation in the months after Selena's death, and it was that portrait of a Mexican American family, watched at home by the Quintanillas, that convinced them they had found the register they wanted for their daughter's story.

Released in 1997, two years after Selena Quintanilla-Pérez was killed in Corpus Christi at twenty-three, *Selena* became more than a successful biographical film. It introduced millions of viewers to Tejano culture, made Jennifer Lopez an international star in her first major screen role, and gave Edward James Olmos one of his

defining performances as Abraham Quintanilla. It remains among the most enduring portrayals of a Latino icon in American cinema.

The film also has a claim on this magazine's home ground: much of it was shot in San Antonio. In 2021 it entered the United States National Film Registry at the Library of Congress, preserved as culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant. The nomination came from the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, then chaired by San Antonio's own Representative Joaquin Castro, who paired the recommendation with an argument that



ON THE CARPET

Honorees and guests at the 32nd San Antonio Film Festival, where Nava received the Lifetime Achievement Award. [Names to confirm.]

Latino filmmakers had been overlooked in the registry for too long.

Nava's own response to that nomination was characteristically direct: the community is growing, the contribu-

tion has been underrepresented, and the stories need to be told.

THE METHOD

Authenticity as a Production Decision

Reflecting on the film in 2025, on the thirtieth anniversary of Selena's death, Nava described a family that wanted a filmmaker who understood the culture, her ethos, and the world she came from. That understanding shaped every creative decision, from filming in Texas to interviewing Selena's family and friends in order to portray her life with specificity rather than sensationalism. Authenticity, in that account, is not a tone applied in the edit. It is a series of production choices made months earlier.

Nava has often emphasized that Selena's greatest achievement was not simply becoming the Queen of Tejano Music. She broke through in a male-dominated industry while preparing to cross into mainstream Eng-

lish-language pop without abandoning her Mexican American identity. "She was such a brilliant light," Nava has said of her, adding that he believes her spirit remains present.

Today *Selena* continues to instruct filmmakers because it demonstrates that culturally specific stories can travel. Rather than treating Latino identity as a niche subject, Nava presented a family's dreams, frictions, and triumphs as ordinary human material. Three decades on, the film remains a benchmark for authentic Latino storytelling and a reminder that representation carries furthest when it is made by artists who genuinely understand the communities they portray.

SELENA · THE FILE

RELEASED	1997	DIRECTOR	Gregory Nava
STARRING	Jennifer Lopez · Edward James Olmos	SUBJECT	Selena Quintanilla-Pérez
PRINCIPAL LOCATION	San Antonio, Texas	PRESERVED	National Film Registry, 2021
NOMINATED BY	Congressional Hispanic Caucus	ALSO BY NAVA	El Norte · Mi Familia

EDITOR'S NOTE

Gregory Nava's work reminds us that great cinema begins with authenticity. The most enduring films do not simply document history. They preserve identity.

CULTURA

CINEMA · HISTORY · IDENTITY

THREE DECADES ON

Selena's Legacy Is Still Being Written

Why one young woman from South Texas became a cultural bridge between generations, languages, and nations.

BY THE EDITORIAL STAFF

For Texans, Selena Quintanilla-Pérez was more than a recording artist. For Tejanos she became a symbol of pride. For Mexican Americans she represented the possibility of holding two cultures without surrendering either. For millions across Latin America she proved that authenticity could cross a border without a translation.



STILL PAINTED

A Selena mural carrying her own words: the goal is not to live forever, but to create something that will. [Artist credit to confirm.]

THE BRIDGE

Bilingual, Bicultural, Unapologetic

Three decades after her death, Selena's influence reaches well beyond music. She helped redefine what it meant to be proudly bilingual and bicultural at a moment when many young Latinos felt pressured to choose between identities. She sang in Spanish while preparing to record in English. She embraced her Mex-

ican heritage while unmistakably representing Texas. In doing so she became a bridge between generations and cultures that still carries traffic.

That cultural weight explains why Gregory Nava's *Selena* has endured for nearly thirty years. The film was never simply about the tragedy of a young artist whose life

ended too soon. It celebrated a family, a community, and a distinctly Mexican American experience that had

rarely been portrayed with such warmth on a commercial screen.

"Culture survives because each generation chooses to tell the story again."

CULTURA

THE INHERITANCE

What Each Generation Chooses to Keep

In Texas, Selena remains woven into the state's cultural identity. Her music continues to fill dance halls, festivals, quinceañeras, and family celebrations. New generations discover her not because they remember 1995, but because parents and grandparents keep handing the music forward. Her legacy lives in classrooms, museums, documentaries, and streaming catalogs, which is the ordinary machinery by which cultural icons survive: someone decides the story is worth repeating.

Perhaps her greatest gift was showing young Latinos that they did not have to become someone else to achieve extraordinary success. She kept her language,

her family, her community, and her heritage without apology, and opened doors for the artists who followed, from musicians and actors to filmmakers and storytellers whose work continues to enrich American culture.

As *Voz Latino Magazine* celebrates Mexican Independence Month in its inaugural issue, Selena's story reminds us that culture is not preserved by monuments alone. It lives through music, literature, film, family tradition, and the stories each generation chooses to tell. That may be her most enduring legacy of all.

IN BRIEF

Selena Quintanilla-Pérez

BORN

April 16, 1971 · Lake Jackson, Texas

THE BAND

Selena y Los Dinos, formed 1981

KNOWN AS

The Queen of Tejano Music

DIED

March 31, 1995 · Corpus Christi, at 23

ON SCREEN

The Story, Retold

1997

Selena, dir. Gregory Nava

2021

Added to the National Film Registry

2022

Twenty-fifth anniversary theatrical return

2025

Selena y Los Dinos: A Family's Legacy, dir. Isabel Castro

VOZ LATINO MAGAZINE

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Nava, McCarthy, and a week of independent cinema in San Antonio.

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INSIDE THE INTERVIEW

Forty-eight hours in Houston.

SUBMISSIONS

Pitch the Film Desk

Reviews, festival dispatches, and essays on Latino storytelling in film, television, and media. Query first with a short outline and two clips.

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Best Feature Screenplay, 32nd San Antonio Film Festival.

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VANNESSA VASQUEZ

Championing stories that matter.

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Gregory Nava on legacy and authenticity.

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SELENA'S LEGACY IS STILL BEING WRITTEN

Three decades on.

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EDITORIAL

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Linda P. Garza

MANAGING EDITOR

Brian Kryszewski de Ybarrondo

CONTRIBUTORS

Writers, photographers, and illustrators are commissioned by assignment. Contributor credits appear with each article.

EDITORIAL & ADVERTISING

WEB

legacypublishing.agency

ENQUIRIES

contact@legacypublishing.agency

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