



S U R I R E

A FILM BY BETTINA PERUT + IVAN OSNOVIKOFF

80 mins / Color / 2015 / Spanish, Aymara, English Subtitles / Chile



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AWARDS

- 2015 Silver Nanuk for Original Artistic Solution – IDFF, Flahertiana International Documentary Film Festival, Russia
- 2015 Best Chilean Film - SANFIC Santiago International Film Festival, Chile
- 2015 Film Comission “Kinema” Award - SANFIC Santiago International Film Festival, Chile
- 2015 Fethi Kayaalp Grand Award for Best Film – BIFED Bozcaada International Festival of Ecological Documentary, Turkey
- 2015 Best Direction, Best Photography, Best Sound – FECICH Chilean Film Festival, Chile
- 2015 Jury Special Mention – *Ventana Andina* (Andean Window) International Film Festival, Argentina
- 2015 Jury Special Mention – FEDOCHI Chiloé Documentary Film Festival, Chile
- 2016 Best Film – FECIPA Patagonian Film Festival, Chile

FESTIVALS

- 2015 Visions of Reality International Film Festival, Switzerland
- 2015 IDFA International Documentary Film Festival (IDFA), Amsterdam, Netherlands
- 2015 SANFIC Santiago International Film Festival, Chile
- 2015 Astra Film Festival, Romania
- 2015 IDFF, *Flahertiana* International Documentary Film Festival, Russia
- 2015 BAFICI Buenos Aires International Independent Film Festival, Argentina
- 2016 International Festival of the New Latin American Cinema, Cuba
- 2015 Doc Buenos Aires, (Panorama), Argentina
- 2015 BIFED Bozcaada International Festival of Ecological Documentary, Turkey
- 2015 Antofadocs- Antofagasta International Documentary Film Festival, Chile
- 2015 BLED Film Festival, Bled Slovenia International Competition, Bled Slovenia
- 2015 *Ventana Andina* (Andean Window) International Film Festival, Argentina
- 2015 *Arica Nativa* International Film Festival, Chile
- 2015 FECICH Chilean Film Festival, Chile
- 2015 FEDOCHI Chiloé Documentary Film Festival, Chile
- 2015 *Transcinema* Festival, Perú
- 2016 Trento Film Festival, Italia
- 2016 FIFE International Environmental Film Festival (France)
- 2016 IFF District Film Festival, Focus, Mexico
- 2016 *Planeta* Cinema Official Selection, México
- 2016 DocPoint Helsinki Documentary Film Festival, Finland
- 2016 FECIPA Patagonian Film Festival, Chile
- 2016 EDOC Encounters of the Other Cinema, Ecuador

SYNOPSIS

The Surire Salt Flat is located in the Chilean high plateau 4,300 meters above sea level and on the border with Bolivia. Extending for 28,000 acres, it forms part of Lauca National Park which was designated a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1981. Its lagoons and wetlands are home to flamingos, llamas and vicuñas, a protected animal related to alpacas.

A handful of Aymara elders still live in this desert. They are the last survivors of the local indigenous culture. Scattered among them in this beautiful and isolated region are a handful of springs, animals and are the trucks and machines that mine borax from an important deposit.

Bettina Perut's and Iván Osnovikoff's film reveals the region's beauty and solitude, the cultural decline of the Aymara and the development of the region. Surire documents the coexistence of the disparate elements that inhabit it and captures the places, customs and living things, as they evolve over time.



SURIRE - Interview by Roberto Doveris, CINEMACHILE

“Surire” is the new work by documentary filmmaking couple, Bettina Perut and Iván Osnovikoff, about a distant and forgotten salt flat, portrayed through the sharp eyes of these two directors who will be present at Carte Blanche in Locarno. Today they talk to CinemaChile and tell us details about their new production.

To begin, we would like to know what motivates you to travel north to make this documentary about the “Surire” salt flat?

We arrived for the first time in Surire while location scouting for “Noticias”. It was like reaching the moon because of the landscape, oxygen shortage, altitude sickness, and a strong sensation of disconnection. In two days, we realized that it was the perfect location for a movie that would contemplate in deep observation, this remote place distant from what we call the world; it was another world. It also relates to the fact that we had just finished making “Welcome to New York” and we were very excited about the idea of a new adventure in a foreign land. Despite the hardships of shooting at 4,300 meters, in extreme climatic and financial conditions, we were fascinated to discover that in this place where no one seems to live, a complex universe exists in connection to a millenary past that is in constant evolution.

The language used to approach what happens in the area is noteworthy. The silent observation and careful visual composition was already present in your previous works, like “Noticias”. What drives you to set the stage in such way?

Almost from the beginning of our work, we have been motivated by the challenge to explore, grow and progressively come to own a consistent visual language. We have continually attempted to give a less privileged position to the word and to the more conventional human representations; to observe more and talk less, creating images that suggest readings and films that provide the viewer with a chance to experience. Shoots that are an experience and a search and not an errand to illustrate something already defined on paper. The language in the film is the result of the way we face our work.

It seems that between the long shots and the meticulous detail something is missing: mid-shots, full-shots, and the standard documentary approach. What would there be in that gap for you? Why not resort to that?

Not quite so, we do resort to that gap, we just don't abuse it, and maybe that's why it creates that impression. Our experience of the world exists at every level: when we have our heads on the pillow and we wake up, we see a close-up of the mouth, nose and eyes of the person we slept with; if we are on a rooftop and see the horizon we see the world on a great wide angle long-shot. Either scale can make sense, create sensations, etc. So we have no reason not to take full advantage of the range, especially if it turns into a tool that enhances the language, and at the same time, the way of thinking about what is being watched.

On the same line of thought, the sound is very independent from the shots, although sometimes it's synched, it also leaves and appears in off in close-ups and long shots. What can you tell us about the editing of "Surire"?

Just like visually we don't like to abuse the human scale in conventional frames, sound-wise, the overrepresentation of dialog is another recurrent style we try to avoid. In Surire's editing, meaning comes from observation and the relationship of the characters, who don't need to be talking to be so. When we think, we are not talking, we are looking, and what we try to do is to capture that stare onscreen, to suggest what this reality creates in us when we experience it. It's also about a world in which silence prevails, and therefore, to convey that, it's necessary to resort to silence.

Regarding the relationship between sound and image, especially as they relate to dialog, another expressive advantage of close-ups and open-shots is that they free us from slavery to lip-syncing. From there on, we can explore new ways of relating sound and image in every audible dimension, which allows us to work creatively with the material. It's not about pasting something with anything else; in that regard we are very self-demanding.

Just like in your previous work, we could see that approximation to the portrayed bodies is uncomfortable; there's a direct appeal to the limits of what we are used to, or want to see. However, those shots speak and confront. What is the process of approximation to that blurred image for you? How do you deal with the morbidity of wanting and not wanting to see that which is offensive?

It's very stimulating to be able to move in the limits between what is conventionally shown and what's not, not only for the taste of provocation, but because it offers an almost virgin field for audiovisual exploration. To approach a character from the point of view of observing his feet, to narrate a situation in reference to a dead body, or framing the mouth while the character is talking, are not only interesting challenges, but it also allows building readings about those things that escape traditional human narratives. For us, talking heads are to film what geocentrism is to astronomy. Every time we face work, we begin by demanding of ourselves some audiovisual exploration that avoids convention, because it's the only way to turn the shoot into an exploration, and finally what we show or don't show is determined at the editing table in relation to the internal world of the film and not about absurd external rules that become dated overtime.



08/04/2015 Perut + Osnovikoff, the return of the Chilean documentary terrible duo

*Their films are a point of reference for before and after the history of Chilean documentary filmmaking, throwing into crisis traditional forms of registry, the moral compass and the humanists that were at the core of local filmmaking. This duo formed by **Bettina Perut** and **Iván Osnovikoff**, will premiere their seventh film “**Surire**” as part of the official selection at **Visions du Réel**. Today we talked about the documentary and their long trajectory in filmmaking.*

– **Let’s start at the beginning... how did you end up working together, coming from such distant and different cities?**

Bettina: When we met we were both living in Santiago.

Iván: Bettina was working on her thesis about Chilean filmmaking from the 60s to the 90s and she wanted to interview Silvio Caiozzi. I was working with him and that’s how we ended up working together in a documentary about the return of Martín Vargas.

– **Are you referring to “Chi, chi, chi, le, le, le, Martín Vargas from Chile?”**

Iván: Yes, a few days after we met we were recording. David Bravo did the photography, Bettina worked the journalistic aspects and I worked on sound... but since Silvio wasn’t able to be part of the shoot, I also had to take on the director’s role for the first time, Bettina, David and I ended up directing the whole process.

Bettina: Yes, Silvio decided not to direct the film because he was focused on the shoot of

“Coronación”, and we were in charge of the project. We never discussed it, but in the end it was clear that we would sign as authors of the documentary.

– **How lucky, so you came together by chance?**

Iván: More or less... we were very lucky to have a good crew, a good editing process, funding, but we specially had freedom. Silvio being a fiction director, we never felt obligated to stick to traditional documentary norms.

Bettina: That’s right, we didn’t know there were things that we couldn’t do, our first approximation to the story was aesthetic, from the beginning we knew that the documentary had to tell itself, we didn’t want talking heads or using the typical report-like documentary rhetoric.



– **When did you decide to continue on as a duo and film your next movie “Un hombre aparte”?**

Iván: It was while we worked on the Martin Vargas documentary.

Bettina: That’s when we discovered Ricardo Liaño and began shooting the film very quickly. We were very clear on wanting an observational approach.

Iván: By observational we don’t mean to sit and wait for things to happen, we can provoke situations, even “Surire” for example, which is one of our most observational films, we still intervened in some details.

Bettina: The objective is to always take advantage of the characters’ space, intervening it’s not modifying, is to note things that are dormant, the idea is to do it in the most subtle and elegant way possible.

– **Nowadays this approach it’s fairly accepted, but at the time it generated controversy with the public and within documentary filmmakers’ circles. Do you believe that filmmaking in Chile comes from a conservative tradition?**

Bettina: Yes, today it has decreased but there is still a lot of it left I wouldn't be that optimistic. At the time, Ricardo's choice as the character was criticized, it was also criticized that the documentary was not a decriing film, or that it didn't touch on social issues in a frontal manner. They also criticized the fact that we paid the character during the shoot, to them, we crossed a line when we showed Ricardo's misery

Iván: But by showing that mystery we were able to make evident the humanistic film speeches that were popular at that point. I believe now, after many years, that such conservative approach was half blind, because our story was not only about Ricardo, but also about humanity in general. We as filmmakers also identified with him, only those that were paternalistic and believed themselves to be morally superior, were not able to empathize with the story.

Bettina: To us the character's richness was his polarized human dimension, his complexities and his delusions.

Iván: He was endearing and hateful at the same time. It was a guy with whom you could have a very interesting conversation, but he could also take advantage or swindle you at the same time.

– It's a curious fact, that this documentary, on the long-term is seen as a critique of documentary forms in general.

Iván: Yes, it ended up being a critique to human being's representational patterns, so dopy, humanistic, conciliatory... it was a way to tell documentary filmmakers "this is how you represent people".

– How did you decide for Ricardo to write a fiction script about his life within the documentary?

Bettina: Ricardo had ideas about everything... he thought about making the script for the documentary. We told them no and it was very awkward, during the shoot he would direct the team, he would tell them which camera to use and we ended up recording him while he played director. In that sense, this dimension appeared from the reality at hand and in the end we had to include it. With started with a film student, a very young scriptwriter, but Ricardo overwhelmed him up and it didn't work out. We wanted for him to have someone with whom he could dialog at the same level and that's when we found Samir Nazal. Although he was to some extent our voice within the image, he also spoke of himself and the dynamic between them was very interesting.

Iván: Yes, they built a relationship and that was completely real.

Bettina: For Samir, Ricardo's delusions were evident, he wanted to make an epic film about his life, being that he was very old, poor and lonely... that's when common sense played a role. If you ask me if Ricardo is a looser the answer is no. Furthermore, even Samir has something that resembles Ricardo, he's a writer without works and his only achievement is his own biography. After his death we learned that some of the details in his stories were not true, in some way, that makes him resemble Ricardo very much.

Iván: That is the type of film we like to do. It's like a chemical experiment that generates its own forces, it's not documentary or fiction, it's filmmaking nothing more.



– **These dynamics today are very interesting, they have yielded good results in Chilean contemporary filmmaking, like in “Naomi Campbell” for example, did you see it?**

Bettina: I saw it and I loved it.

Iván: It’s powerful when Yermén records herself it’s brilliant.

– **Do you believe your work has influenced younger filmmakers?**

Bettina: We can’t know for sure but I believe we have.

Iván: Some directors have mentioned to us how our films inspired them.

Bettina: It’s great when that happens. As a matter-of-fact, talking about whether we paid a character or not, or if we crossed some lines or not, I don’t believe that they are important matters or something worth talking about.

Iván: Yes, they are silly things. The movie process is a perspective on reality, any objections to our methods go against its purpose and what is the base of our documentaries. I remember when Patricio Guzmán asked a member of FIDOCES jury; what did she think about us paying a character and she reacted very poorly... I think that it was a way to avoid the issue; they would rather discuss technical details than to confront the density of the films offer.

– **Let’s talk about “Welcome to New York”. I believe there is a noted change from the style that you were working on...**

Bettina: To me a film is always an experiment, in “Welcome...” I believe the decision of where to place the camera was a constant exploration exercise. That is where for the first time appeared our fixation with wide takes, contrasting with close ups and focus to detail. We always start from zero and I believe the films shape up during the shoot, each experience teaches you new things, each film is a form of schooling.

Iván: It was also an option, we were not interested in specializing in any given style or subject. For example, now we’re making a film about skaters with a GoPro.

– **How do you go about searching for the style that a given film will have?**

Bettina: Sometimes it's the films that set the limitations. For example in "Welcome..." we traveled to the United States without knowing very much English, it was like being half blind in a new place. Then we went into the streets and we discovered elements, gestures, things that spoke about themselves without much dialogue. We were forced to tell it that way and the question, was whether through the image we could share our own point of view about New York. We went to a Democrats club for example and we didn't understand much, but we observed what is usually not shown. Bush's reelection was in the framework as another matter, but is not what the film is about.

Iván: In "Un hombre aparte", there would be no film without the dialogue, but in "Welcome..." we searched for visual and sound elements to build on the idea, which is about the senselessness of political speeches.

– **In practical terms, how do you lead the technical crew? How do you explain to the camerographer to get a non-traditional frame, to get only fragments of the characters faces or to get long shots to describe a wider action field, etc.?**

Bettina: There is no "the camerographer" his name is Pablo Valdes and there is no other.

Iván: He is part of the team it's the three of us and nobody else.

– **It must be hard.**

Bettina: No, it's awesome. It's more work, but we don't like the structure of the assistant of the assistant.

Iván: Smaller teams have a better impact in reality.

Bettina: There's also not a great deal to produce, our process is very long and that gives us enough time to coordinate everything between shoot and shoot. To meet reality you must be silent and stay for a long time until becoming invisible. For us the shoot it's not just an errand as it is in fiction, instead it's part of the process.

Iván: of course. This logic is completely opposite to that of Laboratories, where tutors want you to have everything clear...

Bettina: Film construction and getting to know the characters, the learning, and the definition everything comes from the shoot.

Iván: The research stage is essential to us, in comparison to the shoot.

– **How long did it take you to make "Surire"?**

Iván: 5 years. We had to adapt to the place aspects first.

– **How did you find that place?**

Bettina: When we recorded "Noticias" we were looking for a salt flat and we found Surire. It wasn't what we needed at the time, but we immediately thought of doing something there.

– **Iván:** Then we discovered some characters; we would travel there often, until we became closer to them. The advantage of being able to extend our stay, allowed us to experience something organic with the place, there are clear symbols... so prolonged observation is what made it possible to extract Surire's nuances.

– **There is part of the film in which Aymará is spoken, how did you manage?**

Iván: we did not understand Aymará, so we recorded our characters very patiently. Later on, at

the editing table we discovered a few dialogs that we captured, and it was a great surprise, they were very interesting. Since we didn't understand their language, I think the characters had a lot more intimacy.

– When did the fire take place?

Iván: We were riding on the truck towards the location, just Bettina and I; suddenly we saw a huge smoke cloud. When we got closer we realized that the house was on fire and we had to go help. Bettina went to get the police and in between, she was able to install the camera and push record.

Bettina: It was pure luck, but we used it because it gave the story such power, when you write grants for funds, you use elements from the film to foster its development, but *Surire* is not a film that denounces mining, nor do we want to say that few animals are left in the region, or that the place is being destroyed. We see co-existence between these elements.

Iván: Indeed, the film is a space for thought and despite is not decrying anything, it can be observed in the layers of the space of things ending. Denouncement is always one sided, this film is exactly the opposite.

Bettina: More than increasing the trouble, the documentary reveals what's happening in that space.

Iván: This could also be appreciated within the indigenous population, on the last stage of their lives, in precarious conditions and without epic tales. Typical of documentary filmmakers that arrive asking for permission to record with the intention of "rescuing a culture"... and it's not that culture is not important, but they are also human beings and that is the dimension we are interested in. Our perspective is horizontal.

– However, within your film titles there is special attention paid to the 'ocaso', or the moment in which the show is over, the B-side of things.

Bettina: Yes maybe in "*Surire*" we will be asked to have a clear opinion regarding the miners' work, for example, but it's not a film about that. We have no intention of showing that, the process it's circumstantial, same as the old characters portrayed in the film... they're going to die obviously, but there's also a child. We didn't choose the characters in this film, we chose a place and that's where these characters are. There is solitude and decline, but our aim is not to generalize. A woman is going to die, but is not the end of the Aymara culture, its essence goes beyond the sense of belonging.

Iván: It has to do with setting your eyes in versions of reality that most representational systems avoid, because they are more idealistic.

Bettina: At some point we were interested in the image of the ugly, murky, miserable... we were interested because we saw beauty in it, it seemed like a potent aesthetic element.

Iván: of course, they are sanctioned by moral decisions that censor reality. Our films are human portraits banned by documentary standards. We want to challenge traditional ways to explore reality, that is why decline or death or decomposition are not interesting. We don't want drama, our limitations are different, and we don't want interviews or classic narratives.

Bettina: Within it all, I believe we offer plenty of humor, we play the card of the absurd many times, but I'd like to note that we believe that there's something beautiful in that, which is in a material sense, politically incorrect. These are images that we find enchanting, we have books, we look for points of reference, whether in the body fragmentation, human feet, which have always been very taboo, dead or alive, and we reach those images by setting the camera where

“you’re not supposed to”, discovering the world from that angle.

Iván: To me is to experience death in a friendlier way, to reconcile with it.

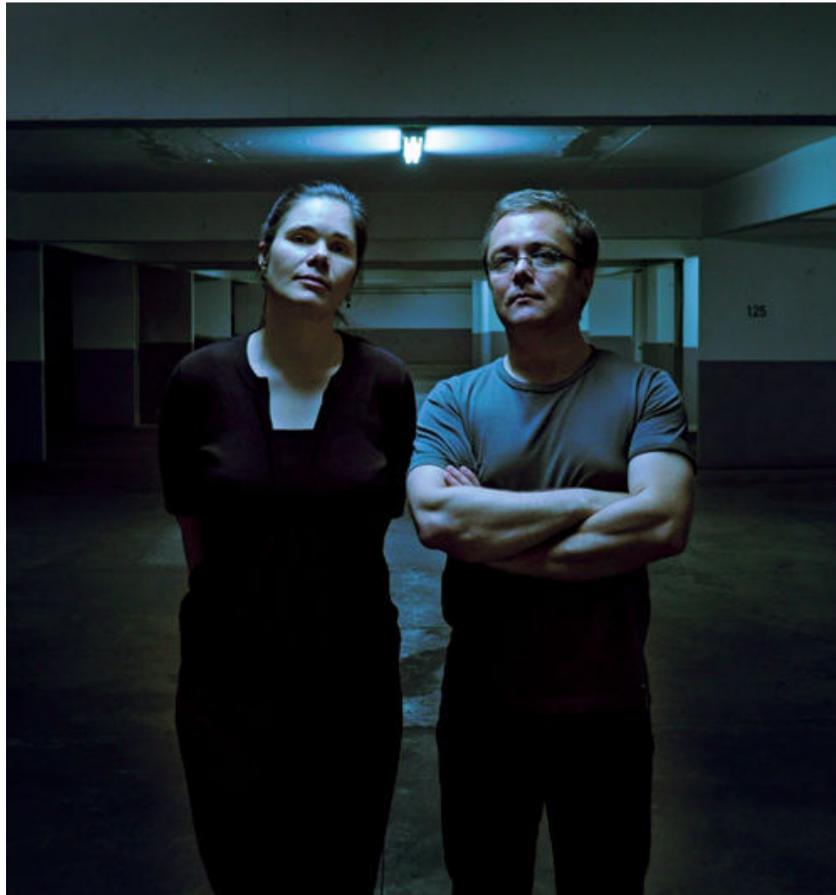
Bettina: In my case, I haven’t befriended death, but in approaching it, there’s undoubtedly something beautiful to be discovered.

– **Have your forms and styles been versatile?**

Bettina: Yes, we go through stages... as creators we have been arrogant and we have tried to impose a style, but the truth is that we went through many aesthetic forms to address the films. “Surire” is contemplative and with a fixed camera, but the handy cam and the interview can come back to us at anytime.

Iván: Yes, the film leads the way and it tells us how we have to make it.

Bettina: Yes, there are always those with interesting proposals in all reach of things... and I believe that exploration is the key. I am satisfied with our films and the fact that they can inspire someone, whether filmmaker or viewer. 10 years ago we would go crazy if we were ever selected in an important festival, or to have some public recognition, but today I realize that it was very ego oriented and it has nothing to do with the things that we seek now. I would be embarrassed to publish in Facebook every achievement of the film for example, maybe I’m just tired, but to finish the process and have the film made is very comforting and it should be an end in itself.



– Now that you will screen the film at Visions du Réel, what does that mean for you today?

Iván: we like this festival because it's small. Cannes o Berlin are like Viña FF and festivals like Visions du Réel are like Lollapalooza... therefore, Pato Guzmán would be like Arjona for us.

– When we saw each other in Berlin, you told me that you were doing the color postproduction and that you had to explain to the color editor that a deep job had to be done in your documentaries, another step beyond just “correcting”

Iván: Yes, it's well-established the idea that in documentaries, it's enough to correct the coloring, but in this one we had to do a lot more.

Bettina: It's very detailed work, we use all the tools that we have available. As a matter of fact, what led to making this movie, “Surire”, it's kind of a postcard, but disturbing...with that line of trucks in the back going towards the mine.

Iván: Luckily he understood and everything worked out perfectly.

– What is the film itinerary?

Iván: The international premiere will be on April 22 at Visions du Réel, and on the 23rd it will be screened at Bafici. Miradoc will take it to national venues in October.

– Overall, you've had good distribution. You have always screened in venues and have edited your films on DVD

Bettina: Yes, and they are very good editions. If at anytime someone wants to buy some, they're available online.

Iván: We have always done what's needed to screen in venues, because it's the space that provides the film visibility. Our best experience was with “La muerte de Pinochet”, which we premiered simultaneously on several cities. But it's very hard and that's why MiraDoc's work is excellent, they are generating an audience for documentaries and they are making it work, last year they brought almost 2000 spectators per film as average, and that is very positive. It's a huge help and a giant task.

By Roberto Doveris

DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHIES

Bettina Perut was born in Rome, Italy, in 1970.

Iván Osnovikoff was born in Puerto Montt, Chile, in 1966.

Bettina Perut and Iván Osnovikoff met in 1997 and co-directed **Chichichi Lelele Martín Vargas from Chile** (2000), an observational documentary film about the comeback of a fallen boxing idol and his impact on Chilean society. Between 2000 and 2002 they produced and directed **A Man Aside** (2002), the film is a deep and raw metaphor on the human condition, as it depicts the decline of Ricardo Liaño and his obsession to become a millionaire while in his eighties. During 2003 and 2004 they directed and produced **Clever Monkey Pinochet Versus La Moneda's Pigs** (2004), provocative experimental documentary, the film details the military coup of 1973 through children reenacting the historical events. In 2004 Perut and Osnovikoff moved to the United States for the making of **Welcome to New York** (2006), an inventive documentary in which the directors show their irreverent and sarcastic vision of the "Capital of the World." In 2006 they went back to Chile and began the production of **News** (2009), the documentary questions the methods through which a country creates the day to day reality through the media. Afterwards, the directors made **The Death of Pinochet** (2011), a sarcastic chronicle of the death and funerals of the former Chilean dictator.

CREDITS

Directors

Iván Osnovikoff
Bettina Perut

Producers

Bettina Perut Executive Producer
Iván Osnovikoff Executive Producer
Irena Taskovski Co-Producer, Executive Producer
Dirk Manthey Co-Producer , Executive Producer

With

Clara Calizaya
Florentino Nina
Juana Chamaca
Apolinario Castro
Dardo Aguilar
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Vanesa Zúñiga

Color Grading

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Post Production Sound Mix

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