



MIKE LEIGH'S CHOICES

I Am Cuba

Mikhail Kalatozov's epic about the Cuban Revolution is breathtaking both for its scope and the audacity of its cinematic experiments, including the legendary floating tracking shot at the cigar factory. Four separate stories, bound together by a female narrator, the voice of Cuba. A feast for an audience, and a bumper harvest of inspiration for a filmmaker.

Mike Leigh

Made in 1964, *I Am Cuba* has been described as Communist kitsch. But from the first shot it is characterised not so much by ideology as by the 'formalism' of which Soviet director Mikhail Kalatozov (*Cranes Are Flying*, 1957) had been accused in his own country since the 30s. The camera drifts slowly over palm trees mysteriously drained of life by the high-contrast black-and-white photography. A voiceover repeats Russian poet Yevtushenko's portentously poetic script in both Spanish and Russian, while the soundtrack blends Cuban percussion and male voices more suited to the 'Volga Boat Song'. Floating on a canoe in the next shot, we are treated to a repertoire of Kalatozov's techniques which will be obsessively repeated in the next two hours: distorting fish-eye lenses, extreme low and high angles, and a restlessly mobile camera, constantly plunging down into the vegetation or up over the streets and palms.

You can see what worried the Soviet authorities who funded this co-production and sent the crew and equipment to Cuba. Kalatozov clearly aestheticises poverty. The peasant farms of the second and fourth episodes are gardens of Eden, the sugar cane (shot from below once more) a great shining forest stalked by giant peasants. Here the exotic paradise of Cuba gets to play Virgin Nature to the Marxism that promises industrialisation amongst its other benefits. Moreover the camera is clearly consumed by the urban decadence it so stylishly documents. Much of the first episode seems to have drifted in from the David Bailey photo exhibition that was showing at the Barbican during *I Am Cuba's* run. Bikinied beauties jive atop skyscrapers and the camera even follows them into their rooftop pool to get a closer view. The impossibly glamorous prostitutes, wasp-waisted and beehived, embody a Caribbean cool the revolutionaries, however romantically unkempt, can hardly rival. When Afro-Cuban Betty cuts loose on the dancefloor, the camera gyrates with her, lost in ecstatic but problematic abandon.

It is perhaps not surprising that, according to critic-historian Michael Chanan, such co-productions were not much loved by audiences on the island at the time. But one unexpected pleasure for European viewers today is the glamour of Kalatozov's *mise en scène*. The film's Havana is not the now-ruinous dereliction of the old city, but a sleek vision of modernity worthy of *Wallpaper* magazine. The students drive fast cars along wide highways or scale angular high rises, all concrete, glass and steel. The beachfront Malecón is eerily pristine. Shot just a few years after the Revolution, the film inadvertently reminds us that, in spite of appalling inequality and corruption, Cuba had been more developed than its island neighbours. So the predictable heavy handedness of Kalatozov's propaganda (including the theft of a crucifix by a stereotypically Jewish tourist) is undercut by the uncontrollable aesthetic delight of its visual style. Sugar, intones the voiceover, is sweet; but it is harvested with bitter tears. Entranced with the tropics, Kalatozov swoons over the sweetness and can bring himself only to trudge dutifully through the tears. This means that in the second, more-didactic half the film falls flat. Political pedagogy, however flashily shot, remains uncinematic; and the anonymous characters (students and peasants but curiously not workers) are too crudely schematic to embody historical process with the dynamic 'typicality' recommended by theorists such as Georg Lukács. But even here inexplicable moments of unmotivated lyricism irrupt: the initially jolly US sailors ('Here come the Navy, hurrah!') seem to be have been drafted in by Busby Berkeley while a snowstorm of revolutionary leaflets spiral down against a darkened sky, a strangely haunting image. If the Revolution's promise of work and freedom now rings unbearably hollow and if the theme of prostitution is uncomfortably relevant today, then *I Am Cuba* remains, Communist kitsch or not, a memorably eccentric and lyrical hymn to the transformatory powers of cinema.

Paul Julian Smith, *Sight and Sound*, August 1999

I AM CUBA (SOY CUBA)

Director: Mikhail Kalatozov

Production Companies: Mosfilm,

Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos

Production Managers: Simyon Maryachim, Miguel Mendoza

Production Assistants: M. Volovich, O. Zernov,

L. Garcia, R. Brutes, S. Miguel

Production Crew: L. Obregon, L. Carrillo, J. Cruz,

J. Varona, K. García, E. Musteler, M. Trabas,

M. Noah, F. Labrador, A. Fonseca, R. Farinas

2nd Unit Directors: J. Rouko, K. Ctenkin, T. Vargina

Assistant Director: Bella Friedman

Continuity: B. Trabkin, A. Vinokurov

Screenplay: Yevgeni Yevtushenko, Enrique Pineda Barnet

Photography: Sergei Urussevsky

Lighting Crew: V. Mikhailob, G. Cantero

Camera Operators: Alexander Calzatti, Boris Brozhovsky

Assistant Cameramen: M. Orpesa, K. Shipov, M.A. Ramirez

Stills: R. Dovo

Pyrotechnics: V. Pugachev, E. Fong, B. Sukharetzky

Editor: N. Glagoleva

Montage Assistant: Lida Turina

Production Designer: Yevgeny Svidetelev

Artistic Consultant/Costumes: Rene Portocarrero

Make-up: V. Rudinoy, L. Caceres

Music: Carlos Fariñas

Orchestra Directors: Emin Khachaturian, M. Duchesne

Choreography: A. Suez

Sound: V. Sharun

Sound Assistant: Rodolfo Plaza

Senior Translator: Pavel Grushko

Cast

Sergio Corrieri (*Alberto*)

Salvador Wood

José Gallardo (*Pedro*)

Raúl García (*Enrique*)

Luz Maria Collazo (*Maria/Betty*)

Jean Bouise (*Jim*)

Alberto Morgan

Celia Rodriguez (*Gloria*)

Fausto Mirabal

Robert García York (*American activist*)

María de las Mercedes Diéz

Bárbara Dominguez

Jésus del Monte

Luisa María Jiménez (*Teresa*)

Mario González (*Pablo*)

Tony López

Héctor Castaneda

Rosandro Lamadris

Roberto Vilar

Roberto Cabrera

Alfredo Alvila

José Espinosa

Isabel Moreno

Manuel Mora

Raquel Revuelta (*the voice of Cuba*)

N. Nikitina, Georgi Yepifantsev (*Russian text readers*)

USSR/Cuba 1964©

134 mins

MIKE LEIGH

A COMPLETE FILM SEASON

Bleak Moments

Mon 18 Oct 20:40; Thu 28 Oct 18:00

Nuts in May

Wed 20 Oct 18:00; Sun 31 Oct 11:20 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Alison Steadman, Roger Sloman, Anthony O'Donnell, Stephen Bill and Sheila Kelley)

The Kiss of Death + The Permissive Society

Sat 23 Oct 12:50

Hard Labour

Sat 23 Oct 15:10

Happy-Go-Lucky

Sun 24 Oct 14:50 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Sally Hawkins, Alexis Zegerman and Kate O'Flynn); Mon 15 Nov 20:40

Meantime

Sun 24 Oct 18:00 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Marion Bailey and Phil Daniels); Thu 11 Nov 20:45

Secrets & Lies

Mon 25 Oct 14:30; Sat 6 Nov 19:00 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh); Sat 27 Nov 15:00

Abigail's Party

Tue 26 Oct 20:50; Sun 14 Nov 12:00 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh)

High Hopes

Thu 28 Oct 14:30; Tue 2 Nov 18:45 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Ruth Sheen and Phil Davis); Thu 11 Nov 18:00; Sat 20 Nov 20:30

Life Is Sweet

Tue 28 Oct 17:50 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh); Thu 4 Nov 18:15; Tue 23 Nov 20:50

Grown-Ups + The Short and Curlies

Sat 30 Oct 17:15 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh); Tue 30 Nov 14:15

Home Sweet Home

Mon 1 Nov 17:50 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh); Sat 6 Nov 11:45

All or Nothing

Wed 3 Nov 20:30; Wed 10 Nov 20:30; Sun 21 Nov 17:10 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Lesley Manville and Marion Bailey)

Career Girls

Fri 5 Nov 20:50; Fri 12 Nov 18:15; Tue 23 Nov 18:00 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh)

Vera Drake

Fri 12 Nov 20:40; Fri 26 Nov 17:40 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Imelda Staunton and Phil Davis)

Topsy-Turvy

Sun 14 Nov 17:30 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh and Jim Broadbent); Sun 28 Nov 17:40

Another Year

Fri 19 Nov 17:30 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Ruth Sheen and Lesley Manville); Mon 29 Nov 20:30

Four Days in July

Sat 20 Nov 11:50 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh and Bríd Brennan); Wed 24 Nov 14:15

Peterloo

Sat 20 Nov 16:20 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh); Mon 29 Nov 17:40

Mr. Turner

Sun 21 Nov 13:10 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Marion Bailey and Dorothy Atkinson); Sat 27 Nov 17:30

Who's Who + A Sense of History + A Running Jump

Sat 30 Nov 14:00

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Tokyo Story (Tôkyô monogatari)

Mon 18 Oct 20:20; Thu 21 Oct 14:30; Sat 13 Nov 14:10; Tue 30 Nov 14:00

Jules et Jim

Tue 19 Oct 20:50; Wed 10 Nov 14:30

The Tree of Wooden Clogs (L'albero degli zoccoli)

Wed 20 Oct 14:00; Fri 29 Oct 13:30; Sun 7 Nov 13:50

I Am Cuba (Soy Cuba)

Wed 20 Oct 14:30; Sat 13 Nov 20:10

Radio Days

Sat 23 Oct 13:20; Tue 16 Nov 18:10

H3

Mon 25 Oct 18:00 (+ Q&A with director Les Blair); Wed 24 Nov 20:50

A Blonde in Love (AKA Loves of a Blonde) (Lásky jedné plavovlásky)

Mon 25 Oct 20:40; Fri 19 Nov 21:00

The Story of Gilbert and Sullivan

Sun 14 Nov 14:40; Sun 28 Nov 14:50

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