



**An idea by Gianni Minà**

<b>subject, screenplay</b>	Gianni Minà
<b>Photography (a.i.c.- imago)</b>	Roberto Girometti
<b>Camerman</b>	Giovanni Stivali
<b>Live sound</b>	Boris Herrera Allende
<b>Editing</b>	Giovanni Stivali
<b>Post production</b>	Novacom Srl
<b>Executive producer</b>	Loredana Macchietti
<b>Director</b>	Gianni Minà
<b>Produced by</b>	G.M.E. PRODUZIONI SRL
<b>Nation</b>	Italy
<b>Year of production</b>	2011
<b>Duration</b>	2 parts of 135 minutes each
<b>Format</b>	Digital - color
<b>Sound</b>	stereo

Cuba is a controversial country which, for the past fifty years, has managed to survive the embargo imposed upon it by the United States –the most powerful Nation in the world. This is a historical time, as Barack Obama– the first US President ever with African roots –has declared his intention to change the US policy not only for Cuba, but also for all of Latin America, which his predecessors had always considered their country's backyard and that is now truly experiencing a democratic rebirth.

Moreover, contrary to what we may think, although the Revolution overthrew dictator Fulgencio Batista fifty years ago, Cuba has always had to adapt to the United States' political actions. Before that time, the Country was governed by Batista with the blessing of the Governments in Washington and the mafia's complicity. Then, due to the embargo and more recently to the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, with which the Country had allied in order to survive, Cuba has always had to adapt its own policies to circumstances and situations that were often distant from its history. This still happens today, although the scenario has changed, since Fidel Castro, the leader of the Revolution, had to exit the scene due to health problems, leaving the government of the Country to his brother Raul – now the destiny of the island does not depend only on its pride and on its vocation for independence.

In these circumstances, travelling through Cuba for one thousand kilometres, from Havana to Guantanamo, and after getting back to Havana, meeting cultured and hopeful young people who is preparing to succeed the old fighters of the *Revolución*, is a way to try and understand the possible changes the anomalous island might experience. Cuba has far too often been interpreted with prejudice because of its choice of socialism, without trying to live it from within.

The documentary *Cuba in the age of Obama* is an attempt to carry out this experiment, as we stated in the first part, travelling from Havana to Santa Clara, to Bayamo, to Santiago de Cuba, all the way to the contradiction of a US naval base on Cuban territory, in Guantanamo. Although the naval base is no longer useful strategically, in 2002, in relatively recent times, it was chosen by former US President Bush Jr. as the detention and even torture site for his contradictory war on terrorism, and his successor the democrat Barack Obama did not manage to change this state of affairs.

In this attempt, it is symptomatic that the symbol of this road trip across the country –a scene that repeats itself time after time– are the difficulties citizens encounter with transportation, always precarious, always full of woes and troubles, but which, in the end, are always solved.

It is definitely a novelty that the tale of this unprecedented version of Cuba, in the second part of the documentary, is told with the words of its youth – practically unknown to Western media, and hardly ever explained.

These are the voices of the young people who meet at Che Guevara's mausoleum in Santa Clara, of the adolescents of the Bayamo Art School, one of five such schools in the country, and of the young people who have chosen the voluntary military service in the area of Guantanamo facing the US naval base. The choice of narrating Cuba's contradictions through the hopes –and, at times, the rhetoric– the sacrifices, the disappointments and the dreams of its youth, including those of the Latin American School of Medicine, of the Film School of San Antonio de los Baños (schools which are also open to other students from the South of the world) and those of the University, is the feature that characterizes Cuba in *the age of Obama*. And it is not by chance that the film's captions are often interspersed with the verse of singer-songwriter Silvio Rodríguez, Gerardo Alonso, and of Pablo Milanés, the voice of many of the Country's generations. This documentary in two parts (135 minutes each) also includes the memories and reflections of three magnificent old glories, the living examples of the fifty-year old resistance: Roberto Fernández Retamar, a poet who year after year is amongst the candidates to the Nobel Prize for Literature; Alicia Alonso, the étoile of world ballet, who presently –at ninety– still directs what has become the most prestigious ballet school in the world; and Harry Villegas, nicknamed *Pombo*, a retired Brigadier General who fought alongside Che Guevara through the Revolution, in Africa and in Bolivia, where he outlived him in the last battle, together with four other fellow army men.

There is also a reflection and some self-criticism by Abel Prieto, a writer, poet and Cuba's current Minister of Culture.

In other words, it is an unprecedented trip that takes a direct approach to a country which -as the author Eduardo Galeano wrote- at this point in history is what it could be, rather than what it would have wanted to be.

*Cuba in the Age of Obama* is presented at Venice Days of the Venice Film Festival 2011.

In order to tell of a surprising and anomalous Country, as I intended to do with my documentary film *Cuba in the age of Obama*, one must try to reveal it from within, keeping in mind its history, aversions, successes, mistakes and contradictions, as well as other trivialities, as, for instance, the poor condition of many roads and hence the travelling and shooting difficulties. One must forget prejudice and respect the people's ways of life and laws. One must accept to belie all the certainties that the documentarist often nurtures about a people's habits and customs, their way of being and thinking.

As Oliver Stone stressed, this effort was made just a few times in what regards Cuba, despite the fact that the Revolution has now governed for more than fifty years, contradicting all forecasts over its capacity to survive. Therefore, I chose to travel over one thousand kilometres eating up roads inside the Island, bound to the Oriente Province, from Havana to Guantanamo, as I believed this to be the best way to read Cuba more in depth than I had done in forty years.

In the first part of my documentary I improvised a film with a plot but without a prearranged line, with a small crew and two cameramen, Roberto Girometti and Giovanni Stivali, tough enough to face the trip, and a Chilean audio-engineer, Boris Herrera Allende, who knew Cuba already, having attended its San Antonio de los Baños School of Cinema. At times, I was led by events, as in Santa Clara, where the Che's myth was born, or at the Art School of Bayamo, the Island's first proud capital city, or in Santiago, where the mystic of the Revolution rose, or even at the Havana Convention Building, during the sixth Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, when the difficult task was announced to start "updating the economic model", not in order to recover capitalism, however, but to guarantee "the irreversible features of Socialism in Cuba". Many considered it to be the nth utopia of the Revolution. On the other hand, this is Cuba's all-time anomaly.

In other cases, particularly in the second part of my film, the shooting technique was not marked, as in the first part, by motion, as I wanted to avoid being involved in events I had not planned. We chose to visit the Havana University, the School of Medicine, the Art School, the School of Cinema (where Nobel Prize winner Gabriel García Márquez teaches creative writing), and the Ballet School of legendary Alicia Alonso: there, we met the young Cuban and Latin American students who are preparing to inherit a unique experience, which the *Revolución*, in spite of its contradictions and mistakes, incontrovertibly knew how to create and pass on to many Countries of the South of the world.

In these instances, the shooting was more meditated, careful to show an overall view, a sociological and anthropological picture to help understand an Island which is often misunderstood and certainly unique. The Cuban Minister of Culture Abel Prieto, a writer and poet, speaking about the problem of corruption, that hasn't spared his Country – though not at the levels of Latin America, knocked down by the neo-liberal economy – told me: “Cuba cannot compare with other Nations. It can only compare with its own ethical paradigm, and Cuba's is very, very demanding”.

## GIANNI MINÀ

Born in Turin in 1938, he has been for forty years one of the most esteemed correspondents for RAI, the Italian state television, telling by images the social realities and usages of the U.S.A. and Latin America.

In particular, he produced a *History of Jazz*, a *History of Central and South American Music*, as well as a history of boxing (titled *Punched Faces*), an epoch-making production.

In 1981, President Pertini awarded him with the Saint Vincent Prize as the best TV journalist of the year. From 1981 to 1984 he was the author and leader of *Blitz*, a very successful TV program, which hosted one-thousand-four-hundred guests, Federico Fellini, Eduardo De Filippo, Muhammad Ali, Robert De Niro, Jane Fonda, Gabriel García Márquez, and Enzo Ferrari amongst them.

In 1987, Minà produced a historic documentary interviewing Cuba's President Fidel Castro for 16 hours. Three years later, in 1990, he again interviewed him for a report on the end of communism. He later published two books based on these reports. Minà also published: *Marcos e l'insurrezione zapatista (Marcos and the Zapatist Insurrection)*, *Un continente desaparecido (A lost Continent)*, *Il Papa e Fidel (The Pope and Fidel)*, *Storie (Stories)*, *Un mondo migliore è possibile (A better world is possible)*.

Some of his best known documentary films: *Muhammad Ali, una storia americana (Muhammad Ali, an American story)* 1980; *C'era una volta il cinema: Sergio Leone e i suoi film (Once upon a time there was cinema: Sergio Leone and his films)* 1984, a unique production with the participation, among others, of Clint Eastwood, Robert De Niro, Claudia Cardinale and Ennio Morricone; and furthermore *Un giorno con Fidel (One day with Fidel)* 1987; *Fidel racconta il Che (Fidel speaks about El Che)* 1987; *Cuba 30 anni dopo (Cuba 30 years later)* 1990; *Il Che 40 anni dopo (El Che 40 years later)* 1992; *Rigoberta Menchù, una donna maya per la pace (Rigoberta Menchù, a Mayan woman for peace)* 1993, in two parts; *Immagini dal Chapas (Images from Chapas)* 1996, *Il Papa e Fidel (The Pope and Fidel)* (1998, in two parts); *Diego Maradona: non sarò mai un uomo*

*comune* (*Diego Maradona: I'll never be a common man*) 2001; *Marcos: aquí estamos* (*Marcos: here we are*) 2001, dealing with the long march of the Zapatist people through Mexico; *In viaggio con Che Guevara* (*Travelling with Che Guevara*), that has won the Festival of Montreal in 2004 as well as the Nastro d'Argento (Silver Ribbon) of Italian critics.

Between 1996 and 1998 Minà produced a TV program, *Storie* (*Stories*), in which he interviewed, among others, the Dalai-Lama, Jorge Amado, John John Kennedy, Martin Scorsese, Isabella Rossellini, Bernardo Bertolucci, and Luis Sepúlveda. In 2004 he produced, with Surf Film, *Travelling with Che Guevara*, that has won at the Festival of Montreal and at the Festival of Valladolid.

In 2007, with Rai Trade and *Gazzetta dello Sport* Minà produced *Maradona: I'll never be a common man*, the story of the Argentine football player, in ten instalments. This work was a record for sales in Italy: 1,300,000 copies.

In the same year, Gianni Minà was awarded the "Berlinale Kamera" to his career at the 57th Berlin Festival.

For ten years Gianni Minà has been publishing and editing the quarterly review *Latinoamerica e tutti i sud del mondo* (*Latin America and all the souths of the world*) for which the most eminent intellectuals in the continent write their articles.

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<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Gianni-Min%C3%A0/25109809795>



**G.M.E. PRODUZIONI SRL** is an independent audiovisual production society established in 1984 by journalist and writer Gianni Minà, in order to direct high-quality features and documentary films for TV news programs as well as for historical examinations and reconstructions.

**G.M.E. PRODUZIONI SRL**, in almost thirty years, has produced interviews, stories and accounts with prestigious players of society, culture and politics, such as *Fidel Castro*, who told about himself in two long and fascinating encounters, in 1987 and 1990.

Particularly in the 1987 interview, the Cuban leader recalled for over one hour his friendship with Ernesto Che Guevara, for the first and only time in his human adventure, while in the second one he spoke about his cold war relationships with the former Soviet Union and about the end of the Communist utopia. In two other documentaries produced by G.M.E. under the title *The Pope and Fidel*, Castro analyzes from his personal point of view John Paul II's visit to Cuba in 1998, a momentous event. The 1987 and 1990 encounters have also been the subject of two books, published in over ten different Countries and prefaced, respectively, by Nobel Prize winner García Márquez and by the great Brazilian writer Jorge Amado.

**G.M.E. PRODUZIONI SRL** has told of Latin America also with documentaries reflecting the Continent's recent history. From Ernesto Che Guevara's epic deeds, to the life of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú (a work which was awarded a prize at the Vienna Human Rights UN Festival), to the encounters with subcommander Marcos (spokesman of the resisting Maya Populations of Chiapas) in two different opportunities: one at the village of La Realidad, on the border between Mexico and Guatemala, and the other one at the School of Anthropology of the Mexico City University, at the end of the march of the Zapatista National Liberation Army through twelve Mexican States.

Among the G.M.E. productions there are also films and accounts of great artists and sports champions such as Muhammad Ali, Tommy Smith, Pietro Mennea, Michel Platini, Roberto Baggio, Alberto Juantorena, Ana Fidelia Quirot and Diego Armando Maradona, the controversial soccer champion: **G.M.E. PRODUZIONI SRL**, together with Rai Trade and the sports daily *La Gazzetta dello Sport*, published his story in ten DVDs (*Maradona: non sarò mai un uomo comune*) that in 2007 was a bestseller in Italy, with one million three-hundred thousand copies sold.

Three years before, in 2004, **G.M.E. PRODUZIONI SRL** (together with *Surf Film*) realized the two-hour long documentary *Travelling with Che Guevara*, where Alberto Granado, the old Argentine revolutionary's friend, together with Minà's crew, traced that adventure which marked their youth and led Che to discover his revolutionary vocation.

In 2004, *Travelling with Che Guevara* won the Montreal and Valladolid Festivals.

The **G.M.E. PRODUZIONI SRL** reportages are journalistic rarities, offering touching stories and, in the case of the Latin American protagonists, unquestionable analyses of the history of infringed human rights, of political contradictions, of the hopes and utopias lost, in that Continent and throughout the world.

That is why the G.M.E. productions have been awarded, in 2007, in the person of Gianni Minà, the "Berlinale Kamera", the Berlin Festival Prize for fundamental contributions offered to the audiovisual world.

## PRODUCTIONS

*Un giorno con Fidel* (One day with Fidel) 1987

*Fidel racconta il Che* (Fidel speaks about El Che) 1987

*Cuba 30 anni dopo* (Cuba 30 years later) 1990

*Il Che 40 anni dopo* (El Che 40 years later) 1992

*Rigoberta Menchù, una donna maya per la pace* (Rigoberta Menchù, a Mayan woman for peace) 1993, in due parti

*Immagini dal Chapas* (Images from Chapas) 1996

*Il Papa e Fidel* (The Pope and Fidel) 1998, in due parti

*Diego Maradona: non sarò mai un uomo comune* (Diego Maradona: I'll never be a common man) 2001

*Marcos: aquí estamos* (Marcos: here we are) sulla lunga marcia del popolo zapatista attraverso il Messico, 2001

*In viaggio con Che Guevara* (Travelling with Che Guevara) 2004

*Cuba nell'epoca di Obama* (Cuba in the age of Obama) 2011 in due parti

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