

Music



La Gata can't stop the music. Photo courtesy Julienne Gage

DOCUMENTARY

The Tango Blues

A Living Legend Refuses to Quit

By Rayme Samuels

Julienne Gage's debut documentary, *La Gata: The Nine Lives of a Tango Singer Called the Cat*, chronicles the life of a 79-year-old Argentine, tango-singing, world-traveling, buxom blonde who has experienced a lifetime of adventure. "My life is like a tango — sometimes funny, sometimes tragic, but always passionate," says La Gata, now the subject of her own movie.

By night the diva can be found on a stage, always with a glass of red wine in hand, belting out poignant songs from her homeland. By day she cleans offices with a resilient dignity to make a decent living.

This movie is a testament to the drive of an artist who has survived alone in the world. An orphan in a 1920s Buenos Aires convent, La Gata grew up and took South America by storm with only a third-grade education, good looks and an irresistible charm. After traveling solo throughout the continent, she found her way to Europe, and finally Miami.

Referring to her feline moniker, La Gata has already enjoyed seven out of her nine lives. But with each day, she identifies more with her inner youthfulness. La Gata refuses to hang out with people her age because she finds the lifestyle of most elderly people too comfortable. Instead, she prefers to party until 5 a.m. with 20- and 30-somethings who are often ready to go home hours before the movie's protagonist. Enjoyable and informative sound bites are taken from La Gata's youthful Argentine fan base in Miami.

"I was completely taken aback by her character because here was this glamorous, elderly woman hanging out with a bunch of young rockers and bohemian artists," said Gage, a Miami Beach resident and the director and producer of this captivating documentary. "Everything about her was perfect for an

audio-visual project. Her diva-esque appearance, her comical tango interpretations, and her endearing but sometimes cantankerous personality had 'documentary' written all over it," Gage continued. "As soon as I started talking with other journalists about Gata, I had cameramen and editors volunteering to donate their time to turn the project into a film." The Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs also supported Gage's project.

The movie takes a somber turn as La Gata describes the hardships of her daily life as an undocumented immigrant in Miami. She wants viewers to know that her tears are not a sign of dramatics, but rather the intensity of the bitterness she feels about her current situation. The scene dramatically shifts from an image of La Gata washing windows, to that of a proud woman decked in jewels and throwing her head back while wailing a beautiful tango song.

It serves as a tribute to South Florida's 200,000-strong Argentine community, whose immigration was largely a result of the economic crisis that exploded in the South American nation in 2001. Gage postulates, "The lyrics of the tango offer incredible insight into the lives of immigrants and the downtrodden because tango was created by immigrants in Argentina. The sung tango is melancholy, tragic, ironic and yet celebratory — just like Gata."

La Gata: The Nine Lives of a Tango Singer Called the Cat premieres Friday at the Miami Beach Cinematheque, 512 Española Way, Miami Beach. Admission is free. Arrive early to get a seat. Call 305-673-4567 or visit www.lagatadocumentary.com or www.mbcinema.com.

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