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Features

In the Works: Silva & Peirano's "Old Cats," Gaza Love, Havana to Miami, Crematory & Rubberband Music

iW By Brian Brooks and Bryce J. Renninger (July 1, 2010)

This week, *indieWIRE*'s in-production column tackles the new project from the star and director of last year's Golden Globe-nominated "The Maid." We put the spotlight on four projects currently being churned through the IFP labs, from life in Gaza, to children headed from Cuba to Miami, to a Georgian crematory, to a Brooklyn-based rubberband musician. New projects from Sean Penn and Paul Reubens are also "in the works"....

EDITORS NOTE: "In the Works" is a weekly column taking a look at upcoming films, in addition to projects in production. It spotlights films in development, as well completed films that are taking creative paths towards distribution and occasionally ventures away from films to look at other types of projects, such as interesting new film distribution, funding, or exhibition mechanisms.

"Old Cats"

Chilean-born director Sebastian Silva made a splash at the Sundance Film Festival with "La Nana" (The Maid), picking up the World Cinema Dramatic Grand Jury Prize and a Special Jury Prize for its star, Catlina Saavedra, as well as a host of other fest prizes in addition to a Spirit nomination for best foreign-language film. Now, Silva, along with directing/writing partner, Pedro Peirano, are in post-production with their latest, "Los Gatos Viejos" (Old Cats), which like "The Maid," was filmed in the South American country's capital, Santiago.

"I was originally afraid that people here [in the U.S.] wouldn't get 'The Maid' because it's so Chilean, but 'Old Cats' is universal," Silva told *indieWIRE* this week. "It deals with aging parents and their relationship with their child. I'd be surprised if people don't relate to this film."

"Old Cats" revolves around elderly couple, Isidora (Bélgica Castro) and Enrique (Alejandro Sievking), who live a comfortable life. They have a modest yet elegant apartment in Santiago's old downtown district, complete with a lovely terrace and mountain views. Well into their 80s, they both maintain their independence and live happily with their books, their eclectic art and, most of all, with their beloved two fat cats. One day, however, the building's elevator breaks and, unable to descend the ten flights down, Isadora is left a prisoner in her own home. At the same inconvenient time, Isadora's passionate "wild child" daughter, Rosario (Claudia Celedon), and her butch female lover, Hugo (played by Saavedra), come for a visit with a new scheme of how to make them all rich. The one glitch is that the elderly couple must sign over the lease to their apartment, and the tug of war between mother and daughter escalates when Isadora begins to show signs of senility...

"It's an aggravating [story] no matter where you're from," added co-producer Kim Jose of Elephant Eye Films, which distributed "The Maid" last year in the U.S. "I think this film speaks a lot to everyone's culture."

Both Silva and Peirano - a veteran Chilean television and film screenwriter, director, journalist and cartoonist - were inspired to write a screenplay involving a real-life elderly couple who are veterans of the Chilean cinema. "They're a super funky old couple and we like them," said Silva. "We wanted to make something with them."

"[Bélgica Castro] is a very clever and fabulous woman," added Peirano. "We used to go there and drink whiskey with them and we made up this story about them and their cats because they're also old and very fat. That was the beginning - it was fun."

Both Silva and Peirano did a short based on the feature around the same time "The Maid" was shot two years ago, highlighting the onset of Alzheimer's. "We wanted to show the mind's fragility," said Silva. The feature was shot in February in Santiago in the real-life couple's 8th floor apartment in the capital. Silva added that similar to "The Maid," the style is "natural filmmaking" and "natural acting." The filmmakers used hand held Super 16, though this project is shot on film. "It's looking really beautiful," said Silva. "We based the color palette for the film on [the 15th century Dutch artist Hieronymus] Bosch."

Post-production on "Old Cats" is nearly complete, and the filmmakers are now finishing up the sound mix. Silva, Peirano, as well as producers Kim Jose and David Robinson plan to submit the film to upcoming festivals. Its run-time is 85 minutes.

"We fell in love with the idea of making the characters lovable for their faults - their mediocrity and selfishness," concluded Silva about "Cats." Added Jose, "It's very human [and] the ending is incredible."

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A scene from Sebastian Silva and Pedro Peirano's "Old Cats" (Gatos Viejos). Image courtesy of the filmmakers.

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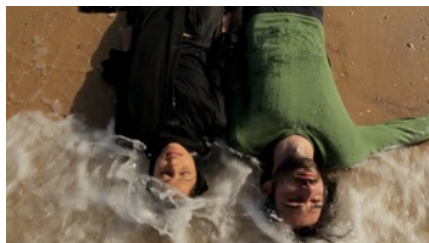
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Logline: “Habibi Rasak Kharban” (Darling, Something’s Wrong with Your Head) is a dramatic feature that tells the story of a forbidden love in Gaza. The film is a modern re-telling of the famous ancient Sufi parable “Majnun Layla” and is the first full-length narrative set in Gaza in over 15 years.

Production team: Writer/Director/Producer: Susan Youssef; Associate Producers: Laura Howard (“Marjoun and the Flying Headscarf”), Megan Gilbride (“Lovers of Hate”); Editors: Susan Youssef, Man Kit Lam; Cinematographer: P.J. Raval (“Trouble the Water.”); Cast: Kais Nashef, Maisa Abd Elhadi



An image from Susan Youssef’s “Habibi Rasak Kharban.” [Image courtesy of filmmaker.]

About the film: “It has taken me eight years to make ‘Habibi Rasak Kharban.’ I first visited Gaza in 2002 when I was shooting my documentary “Forbidden to Wander.” Gaza is flat, over-crowded, and on the Mediterranean Sea. Horses and people in full dress wade into the water. A cacophony of calls to prayer by mosques reverberate in the air. There are groves of palm trees in some parts, dirt-paved refugee camps in others, and hotels and restaurants on the beach in Gaza City luxurious enough to impress even me, a native New Yorker. In 2002, the Israeli army destroyed fields of homes and staged aerial bombings. The heat was overwhelming. But even in this atmosphere, everywhere I filmed kids who stopped by to give me their “hellos.” It was also at this time that Mohammed, a local theater director, joined me to help shoot my documentary. He took complete care of me while respecting my space as a woman. I didn’t pay him, give him a place to stay or even provide him with food. Unexpectedly, I fell in love with his kindness, his heroic commitment to art in a situation where most people are just trying to survive—that is to say, I fell in love with him. The experience of seeing the children’s performance of “Majnun Layla,” and of finding love in Gaza, compelled me to retell the legend in the setting of modern-day Gaza.”—Susan Youssef

Current status: The film is completely shot and is currently in post-production. “Habibi” has been supported by various foundations, from IFP to Cinereach to the Jerome Foundation and more.

For more information on this film: Visit the film’s website [here](#).

“Una Noche”

Narrative

Logline: In Havana the pressure is on. Desperate, Raul is forced to face the ninety miles of treacherous ocean that stand between him and his dream - Miami.

Production team: Writer/ Producer/ Director: Lucy Mulloy; Producer: Daniel Mulloy; Co-Producers: Yuniar Santiago, Maite Artieda Barroso, Sandy Perez; Cinematography: Trevor Forrest, Shlomo Godder, Lucy Mulloy; Art Directors: Laura Huston, Yinka Graves; Cast: Dariel Arrechaga, Anaylin De la Rua, Javier Nunez



An image from Lucy Mulloy’s “Una Noche.” [Image courtesy of filmmaker.]

About the film: “‘Una Noche’ really started when I went out to Havana eight years ago. I was struck by the city, just 90 miles from Miami, that felt like an eternity away. I met an eight-year-old boy on the Malecon, the sea front wall that runs along the city. He told me about some of his friends who tried to leave on a raft. It was the first of what would become many similar stories, but unique in that it was children [telling it]. His young experience of pain struck me. I have always liked working with kids, as they tend to be fresh and natural in their acting. I decided I wanted to tell the story of three kids and their journey.”—Lucy Mulloy

Current status: The team is currently refining the edit of their film. They are going back to Cuba to record sound and music, to document the vibrancy of the film’s setting.

For more information a nd to support this film: Visit the film’s site [here](#).

“Sahkanaga”

Narrative

Logline: A teenager in rural Georgia stumbles upon a body in the woods, a discovery that threatens to destroy his family, the community, and his first love. Inspired by true events.

Production team: Writer/Director/Producer: John Henry Summerour; Executive Producer: Tara Anderson; Cinematographer: Damian Ward; Editor: Miky Wolf; Composer: Paul Damian Hogan



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About the film: "Sahkanaga is the Cherokee word for "Great Blue Hills of God." In the winter

An image from John Henry Summerour's "Sahkanaga." [Image courtesy of filmmaker]

of 2002, over 300 bodies were discovered strewn about the property of the Tri-State Crematory in the Appalachian foothills of Walker County, GA. I grew up only a few miles from the crematory, and in 2004, I began conducting interviews within the community to construct a fictional narrative that would explore issues of family, faith, love and grief, as experienced by one teenager who discovers the first body and then suffers the secret. In 2007, I shot a short film entitled 'Chickamauga' that served as the litmus test for the feature, casting all locals, none of whom had any experience in front of the camera. The success of the short gave me the courage to move forward with 'Sahkanaga' using the same creative team. We shot on Super 16mm, and we're the first narrative feature allowed access to shoot at the Forensic Anthropology Center (aka "Body Farm") at the University of Tennessee Knoxville."—John Henry Summerour

Current status: With all footage shot, the filmmakers are locking a cut this summer, before they move onto the score, sound mix, and color correct. They are submitting to festivals in anticipation of a 2011 premiere. The team is currently looking for funds to help them complete their post-production and festival submission/publicity.

For more information and to contribute to this project: Visit the film's website [here](#).

"A Rubberband is an Unlikely Instrument"

Documentary

Logline: An accomplished musician wrestles with navigating his family and artistic path amidst the daily trials of making ends meet in a rapidly gentrifying Brooklyn enclave. Artistically and philosophically situated on the fringes of mainstream culture, eccentric multi-instrumentalist Walter Baker grasps to bear the roles of family man, business owner and aspiring composer. An unexpected Texas family gathering triggers deeper conflicts that find him struggling to reconcile fractured roots in the South and at home.



A photo of the subject of Matt Boyd's "A Rubberband is an Unlikely Instrument." [Image courtesy of filmmaker.]

Production team: Director/DP/Editor: Matt Boyd; Co-Producer: Jason Ross; Editor: Michael Carter

About the film: "Leading up to the making of this film, I'd been shooting mostly documentary projects, a few commissions, but more often for others. I'd been looking for a project of my own, something where I could really make a personal stamp... I kind of knew what I wanted to say and how I wanted to say it, I just needed the right subject. Around that time, I met Walter through my neighbor and was initially drawn to him as simply an experimental musician. I was pretty blown away by his rubberband playing. Despite that initial interest, it took another year of getting to know him before I knew I should make a film about him. I was pretty methodical... I wanted to make sure I felt I had enough of a subject to take that step into the feature abyss."—Matt Boyd

Current status: The film is currently in post-production.

For more information: Visit the filmmaker's website [here](#).

Also in the works:

The annual Paul-Reubens-is-making-another-"Pee Wee"-feature news story got a facelift for this year's iteration. Reubens' career is on another one of its sporadic upswings, with his successful revival of "Pee Wee" on the stage in LA and the announcement that he will bring the show to New York. He also has roles in the upcoming Smurfs film and Todd Solondz's "Life During Wartime." But the big surprise in the "Pee Wee" announcement, [as reported by Variety](#), is that Judd Apatow is signed on!

Sean Penn is set to produce a biopic of surfer Dorian "Doc" Paskowitz, [Variety reports](#). Alan and Gabe Polsky, the producers behind behind "Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans," bought the life rights from the Paskowitz family. Paskowitz, who was known for leaving his medical practice to devote his life to surfing, was formerly the subject of Doug Pray's doc "Surfwise." Paul Feldsher is set to write the screenplay; Penn may star.

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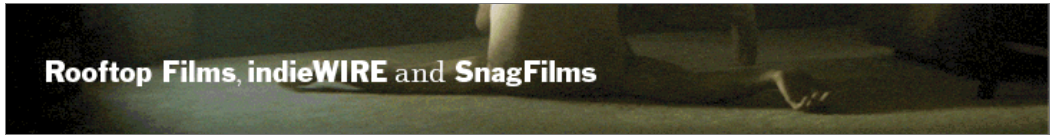
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