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***LAS MARTHAS PREMIERES ON INDEPENDENT LENS  
DURING WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY WEEK,  
ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2014 ON PBS***

**A Behind-the-Scenes Look at the Modern Mexican American Debutante Reveals  
Power, Privilege, and Legacy with a Touch of Make-Believe**



(San Francisco, CA) — The film *Las Marthas* enjoys unprecedented access to an exclusive border celebration in honor of George Washington, where Mexican American debutantes dress as American Revolutionaries. Every February, one of the largest celebrations of George Washington's birthday in the world takes place in the border town of Laredo, Texas. This 116-year-old tradition has evolved into an entire month of inventive reenactments

and bicultural celebrations, many of them involving Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, their sister city across the border. The most preeminent event of them all, however, is the invitation-only Colonial Ball hosted by the elite Society of Martha Washington.

Society daughters, most of them Mexican American, are invited to debut in elaborate Colonial gowns representing iconic figures from America's revolutionary history. Their goal: to recreate a party hosted by Martha Washington, but this time set on the US/Mexico border. *Las Marthas* follows two of the young debutantes — one a prominent member of Laredo society and the other a newcomer from Mexico — as they prepare for this extraordinary rite of passage. Produced and directed by Cristina Ibarra, and produced by Erin Ploss-Campoamor, *Las Marthas* premieres on *Independent Lens*, hosted by Stanley Tucci, on Monday, February 17, 2014 (the week of George Washington's birthday), 10:00-11:00 PM ET on PBS ([check local listings.](#))

Laurita, the 13th young woman in her family to make her debut in the Washington's Birthday Celebration, reminds us that South Texas used to be part of Mexico: "We didn't

cross the border. The border crossed us.” Like many landowners in Laredo, she can trace her lineage back to the original Spanish land grantees; yet, uncomfortable with the rigid class system the debutante ball perpetuates, she constantly wavers between embracing and questioning the ritual.

Rosario, on the other hand, is the first in her family to debut. Raised in Mexico, yet educated in the U.S., Rosario is one of only two “guests” invited to present at this year’s Ball. She represents Nuevo Laredo, Mexico — the other half of a bi-national community nicknamed “Los Dos Laredos” or “the Two Laredos.” At a time when conflict and crime typically dominate all discourse about the border, Rosario’s inclusion reflects the Society’s desire to stitch together a community that the media, politics, and history have tried to divide. Yet despite Rosario’s previous success as a beauty queen, she remains a Society outsider; she yearns to understand the unspoken rules that all of the other girls seem to have so easily inherited along with their legacy.

A year in the making, each girl’s dress can weigh up to one hundred pounds and cost up to \$30,000 — nearly the median family income of Laredo. Many of these spectacular creations are made by highly coveted dressmaker Linda Leyendecker Gutierrez, an oil heiress who designs her dresses with “heavenly inspiration from God.”

A fascinating look at a world barely known outside of Texas, *Las Marthas* unravels the origins of the celebration and explores why a town like Laredo, with such deep Mexican roots, feels such affinity for America’s Founding Father, and how despite all odds the Washington’s Birthday Celebration has managed to persevere and even flourish, thanks to the Mexican American girls who continue to wear the gilded burden of tradition.

Visit the *Las Marthas* companion website (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/las-marthas>) which features information about the film, including an interview with the filmmakers and links and resources pertaining to the film’s subject matter. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film, and more.

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## **About the Filmmakers**

### **Cristina Ibarra (Director/Producer)**

Cristina Ibarra is an award-winning Chicana filmmaker from the U.S./Mexico border between El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico. Her critically acclaimed documentary, *The Last Conquistador*, had a national broadcast on PBS’s *P.O.V.* Her short narrative film, *Dirty Laundry: A Homemade Telenovela*, won multiple awards at festivals and was broadcast nationwide on the PBS television series *ColorVision*. Ibarra wrote and directed the narrative minifilm *Wheels of Change* for the New York International Latino Film Festival to play before every feature film screening. Latino Public Broadcasting funded her comedic interstitial *Grandma’s Hip Hop*. She is a founding member of Fulana, a Latina interdisciplinary collective, where she created award-winning satirical shorts. She is the recipient of numerous fellowships from, among others, the Rockefeller Foundation,

the New York Foundation for the Arts, CPB/PBS Producer's Academy, NALIP's Latino Producers Academy, and Creative Capital. Ibarra is also the writer/director of the feature film-in-development, *Love & Monster Trucks*.

**Erin Ploss-Campoamor (Producer)**

Erin Ploss-Campoamor was born in Canada to American parents and raised all over North America in an extended multicultural family, speaking English, Spanish, and French. She is the producer of Pablo Proenza's feature film, *Dark Mirror*, which received rave reviews and an Imagen Award nomination. Erin is the writer/director of the semi-autobiographical short film *La Americanita (The American Girl)*, which was loosely inspired by the years she spent living with her stepfather's Cuban-American family in Miami. It won two Best Short Film awards and was a semifinalist for the Angelus Film Award. She wrote and directed another short film, *April in the Morning*, which was nominated for an Eastman Kodak Award and was the showcase piece in her successful bid for the Jacob K. Javits Fellowship. Erin is the producer and co-writer of *Love & Monster Trucks*.

**CREDITS**

Producer/Director	Cristina Ibarra
Producer	Erin Ploss-Campoamor
Director of Photography	Edwin Martinez
Cinematographers	Natalia Almada Craig Marsden Ray Santisteban
Editors	Carla Gutierrez Sonia Gonzalez-Martinez
Music	David Majzlin
Sound	Ruy Garcia
Graphic Design and Effects	Prashant Bhargava

**About *Independent Lens***

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The senior series producer is Lois Vossen. More information at [www.pbs.org/independentlens](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens). Join *Independent Lens* on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/independentlens](http://www.facebook.com/independentlens).