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[i]NDEPENDENTLENS 

## MIRROR DANCE STORY OF CUBAN TWINS FOREVER LINKED THROUGH BIRTH AND DANCE BUT SEPARATED BY A REVOLUTION

To Air on PBS's "*Independent Lens*," the Emmy Award-winning Series  
Hosted by Edie Falco, on Tuesday, November 15, at 10:30 PM  
(Check Local Listings)

(San Francisco)—Two sisters. One passion. Romance. Revolution. **MIRROR DANCE** is the story of Cuban-born identical twins Ramona and Margarita de Saá, who become estranged through politics when one moves to the United States and the other remains behind. Though separated for almost 40 years, both continue to share a passion for dance. Shot in the United States and Cuba over a period of four years, the film reveals some of the complexities of the sisters' relationship: the worlds in which they live, the choices each has made and the conflicts each has endured. Set within the context of the turbulent dynamic between the two countries, **MIRROR DANCE** focuses on the twins' story of division, difference and ongoing efforts at reconciliation. It is a universal story that speaks to the personal pain, loss and waste that can result from international hostilities. **MIRROR DANCE** will be broadcast on *Independent Lens*, hosted by Edie Falco, on Tuesday, November 15, at 10:30 PM (check local listings).

Ramona and Margarita knew they wanted to be ballerinas. At age 11, they were dancing with Alicia Alonso and were being mentored by master teacher Fernando Alonso. Enter the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Fidel Castro pledged a strong commitment to the arts, especially ballet, a commitment that continues to this day.

Margarita flourished in the system, rising through the ranks from corps de ballet to prima ballerina. She married John White, an American who was recruited by Alicia Alonso to dance with the newly formed National Ballet of Cuba. Ramona married Santiago Bello, one of Castro's close associates.

Using old family photographs and archival footage of their days as young dancers in Havana, including footage of Margarita performing in Enrique Pineda Barnet's film *Giselle*, **MIRROR DANCE** introduces viewers to the sisters and their worlds. In addition, archival and Super 8 footage recalls Havana in the turbulent '50s and early '60s when the twins were growing up, during their respective courtships and marriages and through the political events leading up to their dramatic separation. A soundtrack that mixes original music composed by Cuban-born Elio Villafranca with traditional ballet music further evokes the era.



Following their marriages, the twins began to grow apart. In 1964, concerned about the changing political environment, Margarita, her infant son and her husband—now a ballet master—made the painful decision to leave their life, careers and family in Cuba. Ramona remained in Havana. A self-described “revolutionary woman,” she was dismayed by her twin’s lack of commitment to the revolution. Believing Margarita was a traitor, Ramona refused to have contact with her.

In the 40 years since the sisters’ separation, Margarita and John opened a small dance academy in Narberth, Penn., near Philadelphia, where they remain committed to helping young dancers pursue their dream. Ramona became director of the Cuban National Schools of Ballet. It was not until 2000, after being approached by the filmmakers, that Margarita began to think seriously about returning to Cuba.

In the film, Margarita reflects, “When I left Cuba I didn’t just lose my biological family, I lost something very special to me—the National Ballet of Cuba. I lost two families.” Despite pouring her heart into her work and trying to create a new ballet family in the United States, she remains haunted by memories and loss.

In Cuba, the film follows Ramona in her routine as the sole woman who determines the fate of every aspiring dancer in the country, and viewers experience the all-encompassing, government-endowed National School of Ballet.

Finally, on February 28, 2004, Margarita, her husband, John, and her daughter, Melinda, depart for Havana. In a touching scene at José Martí Airport, Margarita, Ramona and their brother, Jovito, are finally reunited.

Still, the short visit between the twins remains guarded. On Margarita’s last day in Havana, a visit to their parents’ grave helps the twins put the loss of the past 40 years into some perspective. The desire to recover their past relationship exists, but as Margarita reflects, it will be work. “The ice has been broken to continue this relationship. But we have to work at it, in person.”

But once again, politics intervene in the twins’ relationship. In June 2004, the U.S. government tightened travel restrictions to Cuba. Now Margarita must wait until 2007 to see her sister again. Like the ongoing political situation between the United States and Cuba, the twins’ story still awaits an outcome.

The companion website for **MIRROR DANCE** (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/mirrordance/>) features detailed information about the film, including exclusive filmmaker interviews, filmmaker and cast bios, and Learn More links and resources pertaining to the film’s subject matter. The site also features video previews and a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions.



**CREDITS**

Directors/Producers	Frances McElroy and María Teresa Rodríguez
Editor	Ann Tegnell
Videographer	David Sarasti
Additional Videography	Juan Nuevo and María Teresa Rodríguez
Sound Recordists	David G. Rainey Juan Nuevo Andy Wenrich Diego Javier Figueroa Emily Zeitlyn-Morillo
Composer	Elio Villafranca
Piano	Iris Bianco
Clarinet	Ole Mathisen
Cello	Benna Shelanski
Violin	Maura DiBerardinis
Bass Violin	Matthew Roberts

Funding for **MIRROR DANCE** was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Philadelphia Foundation, the 5-County Arts Fund and the Montgomery County Foundation.

**MIRROR DANCE** was produced by Shirley Road Productions and Pata de Perro Productions for Independent Television Service (ITVS), in association with Latino Public Broadcasting.

**PARTICIPANTS  
(IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)**

**Alicia Alonso**, co-founder of the National Ballet of Cuba; former teacher and mentor to Margarita and Ramona

**Marta Bautis**, childhood friend of the twins and former ballerina; danced with the twins at the National Ballet of Cuba

**Ramona de Saá Bello**, subject of **MIRROR DANCE**, along with her twin, Margarita

**Miguel Cabrera**, historian of the National Ballet of Cuba; introduces Margarita to several young ballerinas during her visit to the National Ballet of Cuba in 2004

**Lois Carrozza**, reflexologist at the Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet

**Jovito de Saá**, Margarita and Ramona's brother, who lives in Havana

**Tanya Featherman**, ballet teacher and pianist at the Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet

**Linda Mintzer**, ballet teacher at the Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet

**Ernest Pendleton, Jr.**, grandson of Margarita and John White

**Melinda White Pendleton**, daughter of Margarita and John White; teacher and co-director of the Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet

**Anayansi Sánchez Rodríguez**, student at the National School of Ballet, Havana

**Jay Senker**, Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet volunteer

**Sara Vaaler**, student at the Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet

**Sara Aloma Viuda de Ochoa**, Jovito de Saá's mother-in-law

**John White, Jr.**, son of Margarita and John White

**John White**, husband of Margarita de Saá; dance master and co-director of Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet

**Margarita de Saá White**, subject of **MIRROR DANCE**, along with her twin, Ramona

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS



### **Frances McElroy** (Director/Producer)

McElroy began her career as an independent filmmaker in 1991, when she founded Shirley Road Productions, an award-winning nonprofit independent production company in Philadelphia. She is especially drawn to subjects that relate to the arts, community development and social change, often with an international perspective. Recent production credits include *Ballycastle*, a documentary she produced and directed, which tells the story of Stuart Shils, a Philadelphia painter of Jewish heritage whose infatuation with a remote Irish village changed his life. The film won a 2004 CINE Golden Eagle Award, and national distribution by American Public Television is being planned. *An Angel in the Village*, a documentary McElroy produced about Chinese-born community-based artist Lily Yeh, was supported by ITVS and premiered nationally in 1999. It received a regional Emmy Award, First Prize for Documentary Excellence from the Society of Professional Journalists, Greater Philadelphia Chapter, and a Gabriel Award.

Before becoming an independent filmmaker, McElroy was director of Program Development and an Emmy Award-winning producer/director at WHYY (PBS affiliate in Philadelphia). Her credits there include *Philadelphia's Ed Bacon*, a documentary about renowned city planner Edmund Bacon, and *Who Is Red Grooms?* a documentary about the beloved American artist. In 1987/1988, she directed INPUT 1988, the International Public Television Screening Conference.

### **María Teresa Rodríguez** (Director/Producer)

Rodríguez is an award-winning producer/director whose work has screened both nationally and internationally. She is drawn to subjects that explore family, memory and community, often in a cross-cultural context. Her previous work includes *Under New Management*, which was commissioned by WYBE's *Philadelphia Stories*, and *From Here to There/De Aquí a Allá*, which received a First Place Award for Short Documentary at the XVII International Film Festival of Uruguay, played at the Smithsonian Institution and was acquired by WGBH's (PBS affiliate in Boston) *La Plaza*. Rodríguez also directed six half-hour programs on literature and the arts for *GED Connection*, a PBS educational series that premiered nationally in 2001. She has facilitated community media projects through Scribe Video Center and is the recipient of numerous grants and fellowships, including a Pew Fellowship in the Arts.

## ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS

A film festival in your living room, *Independent Lens* is an Emmy Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. Hosted by Edie Falco, the acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of independent producers, which has prompted *Television Week* to call it "entertaining as hell and better than any other documentary series around."

Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites and community engagement campaigns. Further information about the series is available at [www.pbs.org/independentlens](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens). *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.

## ABOUT ITVS

Independent Television Service funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web, and the Emmy Award-winning weekly series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since ITVS's inception in 1991, its programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing television audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting [itvs.org](http://itvs.org). ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people.

## ABOUT PBS

PBS, headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, is a private, nonprofit media enterprise owned and operated by the nation's 349 public television stations. Serving nearly 90 million people each week, PBS enriches the lives of all Americans through quality programs and education services on noncommercial television, the Internet and other media. More information about PBS is available at [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org), the leading dot-org Web site on the Internet.

The images found in this release and more are available to the press as high resolution downloadable photos with captions and credits at [www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos/](http://www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos/)

### PAGE 1:

**Left:** Margarita and Ramona, young twins, Havana, Cuba.

Photo: Courtesy of Ramona de Saa Bello/ITVS

**Center:** Margarita and Ramona

Photo: Courtesy of Ramona de Saa Bello/ITVS

**Right:** Margarita and Ramona on tour with the National Ballet of Cuba.

Photo: Courtesy of Ramona de Saa Bello/ITVS

### PAGE 2:

**Left:** Ramona de Saá, director of the National School of Ballet, Cuba.

Photo: James Wasserman/ITVS

**Center:** Margarita de Saá White, co-founder of the Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet.

Photo: James Wasserman/ITVS

**Right:** Maria Teresa Rodriguez (Producer/Director) & Frances McElroy (Producer/Director) of MIRROR DANCE.

Photo: James Wasserman/ITVS



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