

PRESS RELEASE

Screen Cuba: Films to change the world

Festival of Cuban Cinema

15-28 March 2026 London & beyond

TICKETS ON SALE NOW



“Cuban cinema was created by the Revolution. Looking back over the decades, one of the striking things about it is that the vitality and iconoclasm of its first brave years remain inspirational for subsequent generations, who bring their own concerns but do not repudiate its aesthetic heritage, which is on display in this festival.”

- Michael Chanan, film director and author of *Cuban Cinema*

Screen Cuba Returns for Third Festival Celebrating the Island’s Cinematic Heritage

Screen Cuba returns this March for its third annual festival, celebrating outstanding films from Cuba spanning 1959 to the present. This year the diverse selection of films in the festival programme engages with the themes of ‘love and resistance’. Already a hit with audiences, the festival confirms that Cuban cinema has a growing following in the UK. Each year, Screen Cuba has reached larger audiences, across more venues in London and other cities.

The Garden Cinema in central London remains the festival’s home, joined by the Institute of Contemporary Arts, Birkbeck University Cinema, and, for the first time, the Barbican. Together, these venues will host a programme of features, shorts, documentaries and animations that showcase the creativity, resilience and international significance of Cuban filmmakers.

Screen Cuba is honoured to welcome two distinguished guests from Havana, Mirtha Ibarra and Eslinda Nuñez, to this year’s festival. Highly acclaimed actors in Cuban cinema, both women have appeared in many films across their careers spanning more than five decades.

Mirtha and Eslinda feature in several films in this year’s programme.. Mirtha, an actor, director and screenwriter, entered the international stage with her performance in the Oscar-nominated *Strawberry and Chocolate* (1993) which we screened in 2024. Eslinda Nuñez has appeared in many of Cuba’s most iconic films, including *Memories of Underdevelopment*, which we screened in 2025. In *Lucía* (1968), a major highlight of this year’s festival, she plays the role of Lucía during the years of resistance to the Machado dictatorship in the 1930s.

Lucía (1968) is arguably the most emblematic work in the history of Cuban cinema. The film recounts the stories of three women from different eras and social classes, united by their search for freedom. One of the most acclaimed films in Latin American cinema of all time, *Lucía* is nevertheless rarely screened in the UK, making this a rare opportunity to experience it on the big screen.

Another pivotal film with a feminist theme is *Up to a Point* (Tomas G Alea, 1983), featuring festival guest Mirtha in the lead role as a dockworker. An incisive and inspiring exploration of machismo across Cuban society, the film was set in the present day and clearly aimed to challenge the Cuban public about their own behaviour in the workplace and outside it, encouraging women to call out sexism and stereotypes. *Up to a Point* will be screened as part of the festival’s **Gala Reception** on 18 March at the Garden Cinema.

Twenty Years (2009) by Bárbaro Joel Ortiz, an animated short film, also features the tribulations of women. Its soundtrack is the well-known Cuban song *20 Años* sung by Omara Portuondo and it tells the story of a woman who endures humiliation by her husband until finally her love is put to the test. This multiple

award-winning short marked a new stage in the techniques of animation production on the island to create a realism rarely achieved in stop-motion.

Tales of Another Day (2021) is an innovative work comprised of six independent short films by young emerging directors, four of them women, under the general direction of renowned filmmaker, Fernando Pérez. Set during the anguish and uncertainty of the COVID pandemic, the films share the common theme of love as feelings of sadness, loneliness, fear, anger and hope are explored, and the persistence of the human spirit.

Our celebration of Cuban cinema includes ***Twelve Chairs*** (Tomas G Alea,1962), the first comedy produced after the Revolution—a madcap tale following the search for family jewels hidden inside a set of chairs as revolutionary change sweeps the country. ***House Swap*** (Juan Carlos Tabío,1983) is another comedy which captures everyday life in the 1980s, portraying social reality through the lives of Havana’s inhabitants as they become entangled in a complicated chain of house exchanges.

Another film sure to leave audiences smiling is the very contemporary, award-winning ***Life Is Dance*** (Eirene Houston/Hugo Rivala, 2025). Bursting with colour and music, the documentary follows six protagonists, across three generations. Ordinary Cubans with one thing in common, their passion for dance.

This joyful spirit is also captured by the late Sara Gómez in her innovative short documentary ***I will go to Santiago*** (1964). With a soundtrack celebrating busy markets, cafes and the music of carnival , it draws connections to a history of slavery and resistance. Another short by this outstanding Black director, ***Guanabacoa: Chronicles of My Family*** (1966), uses photographs and musical recordings to create an intimate family archive, brought to life through the voices of women.

A further thematic strand of the Festival focuses on resistance to racism and slavery. ***The Last Supper*** (Tomas G Alea, 1976) is a subtle and ironic fable about a plantation owner who invites twelve enslaved men to reenact the Last Supper. An award-winning satire of colonialism, religious hypocrisy and slavery, the film is also noteworthy for its striking cinematography. While ***The Last Supper*** is set in the 1790s, shortly after the Haitian Revolution, ***El Benny*** (Jorge Luis Sanchez, 2006) also explores racism, but in the first half of the 20th century, through the life of the legendary Cuban singer and bandleader Benny Moré (d. 1963). Celebrating Benny’s extraordinary musical talent, this warts-and-all but compassionate biopic also illuminates the broader context of music-making by Black musicians in pre-revolutionary years.

A moment in the life of another personality revered by many Cubans, the brilliant chess player Raúl Capablanca (1888-1942), is the inspiration for ***Capablanca*** (Manuel Herrera, 1987) a stylish drama set in 1925, part sports pride, part tragic love story. Beautifully restored by Russian and Cuban specialists.

As well as providing Cuban cinema with a rare platform in the UK, Screen Cuba seeks to build on last year’s success in countering the effects of the US blockade and the resulting scarcity of resources and distribution opportunities. Proceeds from the Festival will once again support a dedicated fund for projects of the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC), including the restoration of classic films held in Havana’s archives.

For the past two years Screen Cuba has helped fund the restoration of several of animation director Juan Padron’s early cartoons and some will be screened at the festival.

Festival posters by two brilliant young Havana designers Dayron Giro and Roberto Pérez Curbelo (aka Potto), will be on sale to raise funds for restoration projects.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Venues (London)

The Garden Cinema, 39-41 Parker Street, London WC2 5PQ; Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), The Mall, London SW1Y 5AH; Birkbeck University Cinema, 43 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PN, Barbican Cinema 2, Beech Street, London EC2Y 8DS

Beyond London:

Broadway Cinema, Nottingham; Hyde Park Picture House, Leeds; Ultimate Picture Palace, Oxford; HOME, Manchester; Yma Cinema, Pontypridd Check website for details.

Cinema Tickets: £11 -15 on sale from venues. See all links at: <https://screencuba.uk>

Reception Tickets: Only at: <https://screencuba.uk>

Short description: Screen Cuba celebrates Cuban cinema by presenting films rarely shown in the UK, including inspiring short films, ground-breaking feature films, and documentaries, with the participation of Cuban film specialists. Including Humberto Solas' iconic feminist trilogy *Lucía* (1968), Tomás Alea's anti-colonial masterpiece, *The Last Supper* (1976) as well as the first comedy of the revolution *Twelve Chairs* (1962) by the same director. And further - a brilliant deconstruction of machismo in *Up to a Point* (1983), the superb music biopic *El Benny* (2006) plus powerful short films from the 1960s by the outstanding Black director Sara Gómez. And much more.

Images for press: Contact us

Further information about the Festival, the Cuban film specialists, interviews with specialists or curators, the Gala Reception, and for images contact Trish Meehan and Dodie Wepler, Festival Coordinators.

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More about the Festival at <https://screencuba.uk> Follow us on Instagram/Facebook @screencuba.uk

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