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6/4 | Semanario MINKA

El Sillón MINKA : David Mortara talks with Mitch Teplitsky

Over the next few weeks, MINKA will be inviting various personalities to lie back on its interview "couch", and share their experiences.

This week, MINKA interviews Mitch Teplitsky, a film-maker from Manhattan who is producing a documentary entitled Soy Andina <http://www.soyandina.com>, telling the story of Nelida Silva and Cynthia Paniagua, two Peruvian women living in New York, and a journey they make to Peru to "discover and reappraise" their own culture and identity.

MINKA: Hello Mitch, the subject of your documentary sounds very interesting and relevant to readers of MINKA, many of whom are Peruvians living outside Peru. What was your first encounter with the Peruvian community in New York, and what was it that attracted you to tell this story on film?

MITCH: Hello MINKA, I guess the first encounter I had with Peruvians in New York was the Andean groups playing El Condor Pasa on the streets and subway. But the first real connection happened in the late 1980s, when I was volunteering as an English teacher at The International Centre, near Times Square. I was looking for someone to practice Spanish with, and I met Nelida, an immigrant from Ancash and Lima who had arrived in New York the previous year. We became friends, and she would invite me to performances of her folkloric dance group, and later, to peñas in Peruvian enclaves in New Jersey (where there is a large Peruvian community). I had no idea what I was getting myself into, of course! [laughs] Oh, and for the sake of accuracy, I should say we are telling this story on video, not film - because if we were shooting on film, I d have to fundraise in my role as Producer for about 50 more years!

MINKA: Hmmmm, fascinating... So have you found that your own approach to life, and perhaps how you see yourself, has changed as a result of your contact with Peruvians and Peruvian culture?

MITCH: Well, in the sense that I gave up a safe and comfortable "9-to-5" job to try making an independent film, yes. Because I have a much more of a "live in the moment, let s get by this week" mentality. That s more to do with the life of a documentary film maker than being with Peruvians, but for me they are intertwined. And I suppose Peruvians can relate to that more than Americans. As for how I see myself, I see certain "American" aspects of myself much more clearly when I live in Peru.

MINKA: Really! Tell us what you truly love about Peru, and what your best experience has been during the making of your film.

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Editorial

MINKA

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Editores Juan Figueroa e Isaac Bigio

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Minka significa según el diccionario: "servicio; sistema de trabajo"



MITCH: What I love most about Peru are the warmth of the people and, of course, the music and dance. Oh, and the food. But don't ask me to choose my favourite dish, everyone does and I can never decide! Although, yesterday I might have voted for chupe de camararones... As for the best experience during the making of the film... Um, it's like the food question... too many choices! I think overall it has been the opportunity to really see and be accepted by another culture "from the inside". Drinking chicha and dancing huaynos in the homes of my Andean friends. Swinging axes at the yunza fertility ritual in El Carmen [a rural community south of Lima] at 2 a.m. under a moonlit sky... Most of all, meeting people who have become friends and, well, almost family.

MINKA: Aha! So you have a Peruvian girlfriend! What one tip would you give MINKA readers regarding how to promote greater integration with Peruvians?

MITCH: You do know how to read between the lines! You are right about my girlfriend - I met Doris two years ago, interviewed her actually at a Fiesta Patronal in Ancash. As for the tip - you mean in the context of having a Peruvian girlfriend? I was hoping MINKA readers could help me on that one!

MINKA: Will people living in the UK and Europe, as well as the USA, get to see your film?

MITCH: Of course, and I'm counting on MINKA to spearhead the publicity effort! We plan to show Soy Andina in Europe in several ways. First, we will submit Soy Andina to film festivals. Second, we want to sell the broadcast rights to television. And third, we want to present the film - with live dance and discussion whenever possible - at schools, cultural events and other community-based settings. The best way to keep track of all this is to go to our web site <http://www.soyandina.com> and sign up for the free e-Newsletter.

MINKA: Have you set a release date for Soy Andina?

MITCH: We have set July 2005 as the release date.

MINKA: Thanks Mitch, and don't forget to drop us a line at MINKA when the film is showing, so we can alert our readers!

MITCH: Send your readers my regards. As they say in Peru, "¡Salu con tu!".

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