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I am Cuba

Soy Cuba/Ya Kuba, Cuba/U.S.S.R., 1964

Director/Producer: Mikhail Kalatozov
Production Co.: Mosfilm/ICAIC
Screenplay: Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Enrique Pineda Barnet
Camera: Sergei Urusevsky
Camera operators: Alexander Kaltzaty, B. Brozhovsky
Editor: N. Glagoleva
Choreography: A. Suez
Music: Carlos Fariñas

141 minutes/B&W/35mm

Festivals: Telluride, 1992. San Francisco, 1993.

Presented in association with The New Zealand Film Archive. Print courtesy of Gosfilmofond of Russia. In Spanish and English with Russian voiceover. Live translation.

Impossible to see in Cuba (where it was called *I am NOT Cuba*) and scorned in Russia as agitprop kitsch, *I am Cuba* was made in 1962 as an act of Soviet-Cuban friendship. Yevgeny Yevtushenko gets credit for the film's poetic structure – a loose series of choreographed tableaux in praise of the revolutionary spirit. It is also a deliriously one-of-a-kind movie, wildly schizophrenic in its bizarre mix of Slavic solemnity and Latin sensuality. – *Tom Luddy*
What director Mikhail Kalatozov (*The Cranes Are Flying*) has engineered is an epic hymn to romantic Communism, a living agitprop mural more deliriously choreographed than *1900*. It moves from one unrelated narrative to another, linked by a female voiceover portraying the soul of a Mother Cuba despoiled by capitalist pigs, then rescued by its intellectuals and peasants. The first episode shows the titillating decadence of Havana nightlife in a *La Dolce Vita* nightmare. Aged caneworker Pedro is seen setting fire to his fields rather than turn them over to United Fruit Co. Back in the city student radicals attempt a cop's assassination, then combat government troops in a harrowing riot... *I am Cuba* is fascinating enough as a time piece... but its textural brilliance would be astounding in any context. Shot in shimmering deep-focus, high-contrast B&W, the movie is one gorgeous image after another. Some of the endless shots defy belief – especially an incredible early track through a bikini-cluttered party that ends up literally underwater... Sergei Urusevsky's work remains a high water mark for the possibilities of cinematography. Taken as either historical footnote or a mad aesthetic flight, *I am Cuba* is remarkable. – *Dennis Harvey, Variety, 17/5/93*

Feature only