

THE DEVIL'S MINER

a documentary film by Kief Davidson & Richard Ladkani

82 Minutes, Color, 2005



FIRST RUN FEATURES

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WORLD PREMIERE – Rotterdam International Film Festival 2005

WINNER- Tribeca Film Festival - Emerging Filmmaker Special Mention

WINNER – Hot Docs Film Festival - FIPRESCI Award &
Best International Documentary – Honorable Mention

WINNER – Jerusalem Film Festival – Best International Documentary

WINNER- Chicago Film festival – Silver Hugo Award- Best Documentary

WINNER – Woodstock Film Festival- Best Documentary

WINNER- Mexico City Film Festival- Humanitarian Award

OFFICIAL SELECTION: AFI Los Angeles Film Festival

OFFICIAL SELECTION: Edinburgh Film Festival

SYNOPSIS (158 words)

“The Devil's Miner” is the story of 14 year-old Basilio Vargas and his 12 year-old brother Bernardino, as they work in the Bolivian silver mines of Cerro Rico, which date back to the sixteenth century. Through the children's eyes, we encounter the world of devout Catholic miners who sever their ties with God upon entering the mountain. It is an ancient belief that the devil, as represented by hundreds of statues constructed in the tunnels, determines the fate of all who work within the mines.

Raised without a father and living in virtual poverty with their mother on the slopes of the mine, the boys assume many adult responsibilities. They must work to afford the clothing and supplies vital to their education. Basilio believes only the mountain devil's generosity will allow them to earn enough money to continue the new school year. Without an education, the brothers have no chance to escape their destiny in the silver mines.

THE FILMMAKERS

Richard Ladkani and Kief Davidson have been collaborating on film projects since 1997. Intrigued by the history and culture of the Potosi Miners, they traveled to Bolivia on a research trip, beginning the groundwork for “The Devil's Miner”.

Kief (American) and Richard (Austrian) raised money from various international sources, began production in 2004, and effectively worked as a team, co-directing and co-producing. Drawing on their unique skill sets, they also designated key positions for production and post-production...Richard assuming the role of cinematographer and Kief as the film editor.

With the completion of “The Devil's Miner”, Kief and Richard are developing several future projects.

HISTORY OF THE CERRO RICO SILVER MINERS

In the 16th century, when the Spanish conquistadors invaded the South American highlands, they discovered a treasure so valuable that it financed the Spanish wars for centuries. It was a cone-shaped mountain they named Cerro Rico, the Rich Pinnacle. Cerro Rico turned out to be the largest silver find in the history of the Americas. The mountain provided over two thirds of the world's silver demand and funded the rise of one of the richest cities in its time - Potosi. But the splendors of Potosi came with the price of human misery. The Spanish enslaved the local Indios, and forced them to dig for minerals under inhumane conditions. Over the last four centuries, it is believed that over eight million workers perished in the mines.

Today, 9,000 Potosi miners - often referred to as the "Scavengers of Cerro Rico"- continue the job daily with primitive means of protection and equipment. At an average altitude of 15,000 feet, breathing is labored, fatal accidents are frequent and most miners fall victim to the black lung disease by age forty. Working in a maze of over 20,000 tunnels, the miners make it their mission to find any remaining valuable minerals overlooked during the Spanish rule. Many families participate in the infinite search, with hundreds of children working inside the mountain. Sadly, Cerro Rico has been depleted of most of its silver abundance, and Potosi's wealth has long vanished.

Seeking safety in the dangerous conditions, the miners honor the devil. They call him "Tio" or "Uncle" and fervently believe he is the sole ruler of the underworld with the power to protect and destroy. He is the true owner of the minerals. The miners have constructed hundreds of devil's chambers enshrining statues in his image complete with bullhorns, teeth made of shattered glass with some standing as high as ten feet. They make continuous offerings of alcohol, coca leaves and cigarettes to Tio, who if treated well, may reveal a silver vein of wealth and security.

With the Spanish missionaries came the successful introduction of Catholicism. The Potosi miners today remain devout Catholics, and there are over forty churches and convents surrounding Cerro Rico. Inside the Devil Mountain however, the miners fear Christianity could cost them everything, including their lives, so they sever ties with God at the mine entrances. Frustrated yet sympathetic priests watch them "double their armor" by praying to God on one day as they worship the devil the next.

The dual worship of God and Tio reaches a challenging climax during the annual Carnival when the miners stage a large ceremony in the devil's honor. Embodied by hundreds of miners dressed in lavish devil's costumes, Tio emerges from the mountain dancing the Diablada, the Devil's Dance. Once the dancers reach the main plaza of Potosi, they enter the ancient church of San Martin where they kneel down to be blessed by a Catholic priest. In full costume, they begin mass and ask God's forgiveness for their sins.

THE SHOOT

The challenge for “The Devil’s Miner” was finding a young boy who could carry and narrate a feature-length film. After interviewing 10 families, the filmmakers were introduced to Basilio Vargas, who captivated them with his positive energy, intelligence and articulate speech. Basilio, along with his younger brother Bernardino and sister Vanessa, were completely natural in front of the camera. The family enthusiastically agreed to participate and welcomed the crew into their home.

Filming in the mines was no easy task. The likelihood of tunnel collapses, toxic gases, runaway carts and dynamite explosions created constant anxiety. At an altitude of almost 15,000 feet, they relied on chewing coca leaves and chocolate bars to battle relentless headaches and fatigue. Joining the filmmakers on the shoot were Tobias Corts, multi-talented sound operator and 2nd unit cameraman, and two local mining guides. These expert operators were essential in navigating a virtual maze of over 20,000 tunnels; one wrong turn could drop you down a dark shaft with no hope for rescue.

In the claustrophobic tunnels of Cerro Rico, the filmmakers chose to shoot with a small format digital camera, as anything larger would have been impossible. The camera was wrapped in multiple layers of plastic bags to protect it from fine dust, but it was not enough to keep all the particles out. The miners’ open-flame carbon lamps were used as the main source of lighting. Just a few strategically placed lamps had the power to light an entire scene. These lamps could also detect poisonous gases; if the flame blew out, that indicated the need to leave immediately. Often the temperature changed within a matter of seconds. When it reached 110°F (40C), work became unbearable. Concern for the boys grew as they experienced their reality firsthand. The filmmakers tried to capture the unfolding drama without losing sight of the children’s safety.

POST PRODUCTION

Post Production for “The Devil’s Miner” took place in four countries. Kief and Richard began in Callian, France where they sifted through 60 hours of footage and several hundred pages of Spanish transcripts. They had Basilio tell the story through his own words in Spanish without a detached narrator to keep the film personal and character-driven. Three weeks later they assembled the first rough cut.

They continued the edit in Los Angeles from Kief’s studio. After a month of working 90-hour weeks, the fine cut was completed and screened for feedback. The composers sent drafts of the score, and recording took place in Mexico City. Final revisions, color correction and mixing were finished in Munich. Thanks to inexpensive technology such as SATA drives, Final Cut Pro software, G5 computers and a handful of frequent flyer miles, they completed a fully mobile film on a very tight budget.

THE DEVIL'S MINER CREDITS

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY

Richard Ladkani
Kief Davidson

FEATURING

The Miners of Cerro Rico
Basilio Vargas
Bernardino Vargas
Vanessa Vargas
Manuela Altica Vargas
Braulio Jancko
Padre Jesus
Saturnino Ortega

CINEMATOGRAPHY

Richard Ladkani

EDITOR

Kief Davidson

MUSIC BY

Leonardo Heiblum and Andrés Solis

SECOND UNIT CAMERA AND SOUND

Tobias Corts

CO-PRODUCER

Werner Vennewald

LOCATION MANAGEMENT

Raul Mamani

PRODUCTION MANAGERS

Anita Ragette
Kathleen Davidson

PRODUCTION COORDINATOR

Sabine Koziol

Production Assistants

Alfredo Revilla Fuertes
Obed Mainan Cayo
Oscar Gonzalez
Niki Bier
Evita Rasdeuschek

POST PRODUCTION SOUND SERVICES

Orange Sound – Munich
Gizmo Post – NYC

SOUND DESIGN

Sound Editor / mixer - Andy Rudroff
Sound Editor / mixer- Oliver Vorderbruegge
Sound Editor / mixer – David Glaser

TITLE DESIGN

Christian Krille

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Jonas Geissler

CAMERA RENTAL

Ludwig Kameraverleih – Munich

VIDEO FORMAT CONVERSIONS

GRS Systems – NYC

WEB DESIGNER

Robert Ladkani

LEGAL SERVICES

Spinak & Gray

TRANSCRIPTION

Rul Boeck

SCORE MUSICIANS

Ernesto Anaya - Guitars, Charango
Tomas Barreiro - Classical Guitar
Emiliano Motta - Flute
Carlos Garcia - Percussion and Flute
Rodrigo Duarte - Cello
Omar Guevara - Violin
Andrés Sanchez – Bass
Ma. Guadalupe Jiménez - Soprano
Gabriela Thierry Palomino - Mezzo
Oscar de la Torre – Tenor
Jorge Cózatl - Baritone

Composed music was produced, recorded
and mixed at Audioflot, Mexico City.

ADDITIONAL MUSIC BY

Inti-Illimani

“Bailando, Bailando” - studio recording
Written and Performed by Inti-Illimani
Courtesy of Int-Illimani, Xenophile and Green Linnet records ©2004

“Amores Hallaras” – studio recording
Written and Performed by Inti-Illimani
Courtesy of Inti-Illimani and Green Linnet records ©2004

“Alturas” – studio recording
Written and Performed by Inti-Illimani
Courtesy of Int-Illimani and Green Linnet records ©2004

“La Casa Del Nandu”
Written and Performed by Inti-Illimani
From the album – Lugares Comunes
Courtesy of Int-Illimani, Xenophile and Green Linnet records ©2003

HELP ORGANIZATIONS

CARE International
Kindernothilfe foundation

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FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

KIEF DAVIDSON – Director – Producer - Editor

Kief Davidson is an award winning feature film and documentary director born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. His current film, *The Devil's Miner* had its world premiere at the Rotterdam film festival in 2005 and won over a dozen awards including: Tribeca Film Festival – Emerging Filmmaker-Special Mention, Hot Docs – FIPRESCI Award, Chicago film festival – Silver Hugo Award, Woodstock film festival - Best Documentary. Kief also wrote and directed the dark comedy, "Minor Details", an independent feature film starring Peter Sarsgaard. In addition, he has directed and produced documentaries for The Discovery Channel, ABC News, PBS, and A&E. He is currently directing a feature length documentary with Brad Pitt's production company, Plan B Entertainment.

Kief began his filmmaking career in 1993 as editor on the Academy Award-nominated documentary, "Blood Ties: The Life and Work of Sally Mann." He is the recipient of two Emmy nominations for his work with National Geographic and on the journalistic film "What's News?", he earned an International Monitor Award for Best Editing. Kief currently divides his time between Los Angeles and New York City.

RICHARD LADKANI – Director – Producer - Cinematographer

Richard Ladkan's award-winning skills as director and cameraman have produced documentaries on topics ranging from wildlife in "Encounters With the Great White Shark, to political films like "Escape Over The Himalayas" a film about Tibetan refugee children that won 15 international awards. Richard has as a cinematographer on big-budget historical documentaries involving large-scale reenactments as well as character-driven personal stories shot on location in Uzbekistan, Vietnam and Mongolia. A 20-part series titled "Monasteries of the Danube River" earned him the Austrian cinematography award for best picture. Richard prefers to be the cinematographer on the films he directs as often as possible. *The Devil's Miner* is his first feature length documentary as a director.

LEONARDO HEIBLUM & ANDRES SOLIS
Composers

Since 1993, Leonardo Heiblum and Andres Solis have composed, recorded and produced music for a host of different projects, encompassing feature films, documentaries, advertising, dance and theater. As composers, feature credits include Joshua Marston's "Maria Full of Grace", Salma Hayak's, "The Maldinado Miracle", Eva Lopez's "De que Phe Lado Estas". Leonardo was also music supervisor for Julie Taymor's, "Frida". Leonardo and Andres co-own Audioflot, a state of the art recording studio in Mexico City.