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ESTO NO ES BERLIN

24/01/2019, **Out.com**

The 28 Queer And Queer-Friendly Films At Sundance, Tre'vell Anderson

<https://www.out.com/movies/2019/1/23/28-queer-and-queer-friendly-films-sundance#media-gallery-media-5>

The 28 Queer And Queer-Friendly Films At Sundance

By Tre'vell Anderson

In the middle of awards season, film enthusiasts are breaking out our parkas, snow boots, and ear muffs to head to the annual Sundance Film Festival this week. While the Park City, Utah gathering will screen 112 features from 33 countries Jan. 24 to Feb. 3 — including projects starring Hollywood heavyweights Viola Davis, Allison Janney, Jake Gyllenhaal, Julianne Moore, and Mindy Kaling among others — we've got you covered on everything queer.

Below are all the titles — shows, films, virtual reality experiences, and shorts — by LGBTQ+ filmmakers or with queer themes. And check out the ones I'm particularly excited about, listed as "Editor's Picks."

This Is Not Berlin

Editor's Pick

Set in a 1986 Mexico City, 17-year-old Carlos doesn't fit in anywhere, not in his family nor with the friends he has chosen in school. But everything changes when he is invited to a mythical nightclub where he discovers the underground nightlife scene: punk, sexual liberty, and drugs. It stars Xabiani Ponce de León, José Antonio Toledano, and Roma's Marina de Tavira.

14/01/2019, [Remezcla.com](http://remezcla.com), by Manuel Betancourt

<http://remezcla.com/lists/film/latino-movies-sundance-film-festival-2019/>

Esto no es Berlín

Director Hari Sama

Country Mexico

Production Year 2018



Synopsis

As Mexico anticipates the 1986 World Cup, 17-year-old Carlos is less interested in soccer and more interested in listening to his record collection and admiring Rita, the older sister of his best friend, Gera. Carlos and Gera's suburban, juvenile monotony is interrupted when Rita's goth band introduces them to an underground nightclub—the Azteca. The teens are instantly seduced by the Azteca's regulars and their exhilarating world of performance art, sexual fluidity, and prescription drugs. Carlos and Gera's friendship is tested as the two explore new identities and face the consequences of adult decisions. Infused with a post-punk soundtrack and brimming with enchanting performances from a promising young cast, *This is not Berlin* delivers an energetic portrait of a clandestine sanctuary propelled by youth fleeing the societal repression of their time.

16/01/2019, **Noticine.com**

“Así es "Esto no es Berlín", la película mexicana que competirá en Sundance”, Matilde Hellín:

<http://noticine.com/festivales/28510-asi-es-esto-no-es-berlin-la-pelicula-mexicana-que-competira-en-sundance.html>

Así es "Esto no es Berlín", la película mexicana que competirá en Sundance

Por Matilde Hellín

La única apuesta mexicana de ficción en el próximo Festival de Sundance, que tendrá lugar del 24 de enero al 3 de febrero en Park City, Utah (Estados Unidos), es la nueva realización de Hari Sama, "Esto no es Berlín", que competirá en la categoría internacional. La cinta, ambientada en el México de los años 80, resulta, en palabras del director, "totalmente autobiográfica".

El próximo Festival de Sundance contará entre la participación iberoamericana con "Esto no es Berlín", cuarto largometraje de ficción de Hari Sama y única película mexicana seleccionada este año. El film, sigue la historia de unos chicos que "crecen en Satélite, son de clase media y viven un ambiente muy conservador, pero violento, y se ven impulsados a ir a la Ciudad de México. Ahí conocen a un grupo de artistas que desde la clandestinidad hacen una revolución en el arte y la música" según explica Sama.

La película presenta el ambiente contracultural de los años 80, en el que jóvenes artistas intentaban emular lo acontecido en Berlín o Londres, especialmente a través de la música. El director, que experimentó el fenómeno de primera mano, ha declarado que "La juventud mexicana necesitaba reapropiarse de los espacios públicos porque Echeverría nos los robó a los jóvenes. No había a dónde ir, vivíamos una dictadura de aparente izquierda, llena de contradicciones, que arrojó a los jóvenes a sus casas y a la absoluta clandestinidad".

En relación a los personajes el director comentó a You Rocket que "lo que querían era 'salir del clóset' en el sentido más profundo. Con el cambio de gobierno, poco a poco, los jóvenes empiezan a salir más, a ir conciertos, a andar de la mano, incluso si son del mismo sexo".

Sobre la experiencia autobiográfica que aborda la película, Sama declaró que la película era: "Muy arriesgada al revisar mi adolescencia, mi propia familia, mi relación con toda esta gente, con estos espacios, y ha sido súper fuerte".

El reparto del film cuenta con Ximena Romo ("Todos queremos a alguien") Xabiani Ponce de León, José Antonio Toledano y Mauro Sánchez Navarro ("Como te ves, me vi"). Sama indicó que se sentía privilegiado de trabajar con ellos al considerar que son actores mágicos y les pidió al comenzar el rodaje que dieran "sus emociones con toda profundidad" debido al compromiso personal que la película suponía.

El cineasta ganó el Premio Cinépolis en el Festival Internacional de Cine de Morelia 2018, que garantizó la distribución nacional de "Esto no es Berlín" este año. En su filmografía destacan "El sueño de Lu" y "Sin ton ni Sonia", esta última ganadora del Premio del Público en el Festival Internacional de Cine de Guadalajara en el año 2003.

Las otras tres películas iberoamericanas que competirán en la categoría internacional de ficción con "Esto no es Berlín" son la uruguaya "Los tiburones", de Lucía Garibaldi; la brasileña "Divino amor", de Gabriel Mascará, y la colombiana "Monos", de Alejandro Landes.

17/01/2019, **SAGINDIE**

SAGindie's SUNDANCE 2019 Movie Picks

<https://www.sagindie.org/event-coverage/sundance-2019-movie-picks/>

Eliza's Picks:

THIS IS NOT BERLIN

(World Cinema Dramatic Competition, Directed by Hari Sama. 1986, Mexico City. *Seventeen-year-old Carlos doesn't fit in anywhere — not in his family nor with the friends he has chosen in school. But everything changes when he is invited to a mythical nightclub, where he discovers the underground nightlife scene: punk, sexual liberty, and drugs.*)

18/01/2019, **CINE OCULTO**

15 Grandes estrenos de Sundance 2019, Luis Alberto Hernández

<https://cineoculto.com/2019/01/15-grandes-estrenos-de-sundance-2019/>

15 Grandes estrenos de Sundance 2019

Por **Luis Alberto Hernández**

2. ESTO NO ES BERLÍN

Ambientada en el México de los años ochenta, cuenta la historia de Carlos, de 17 años, quien no encaja en ningún lugar. Todo cambia cuando lo invitan a un mítico hoyo fonky donde descubre música, libertad sexual, drogas y otros excesos.

21/01/2019, **Variety**

See the First Trailer for Hari Sama's Sundance Premiere: 'This is Not Berlin' (EXCLUSIVE), Jamie Lang

<https://variety.com/2019/film/global/orange-studio-serial-bad-weddings-2-city-hunter-1203113291/>

Writer-director Hari Sama's fifth feature, "[This is Not Berlin](#)," is set to world premiere at this month's Sundance Film Festival. New York-based Cinema Tropical, a leading presenter of Latin American cinema in the U.S., has granted Variety exclusive access to the first trailer for the coming-of-age drama set in 1986 Mexico City.

Sama wrote, directed and his company Catatonia produced the semi-autobiographical feature, which impressed in works in progress sections at Impulso Morelia in October – where it scooped the Cinopolis Distribución Award and a special mention from the Jury – and Ventana Sur's Copia Final in December.

The film boasts an ensemble cast led by two newcomers Xabiani Ponce de León and José Antonio Toledano, along with "Roma" star Marina de Tavira and popular Mexican TV actress Ximena Romo. Sama himself makes an appearance as well.

In the trailer, we see the drug and art-fueled world of political and socio-economic protest revolving around the 1986 World Cup which consumes the film's two young protagonists. Tasked with mending a broken synthesizer, Carlos receives an invitation to the Aztec, a downtown "everything bar" where his best friend Gera's sister is playing a gig with her electric-punk band.

Identity can be a rough subject for a teenager under the best of circumstances, but confronted by a rapidly changing world, drugs, disease, art and politics, we see Carlos and Gera lost in a haze. Their discovery and affirmation of something like their first true selves forms the story.

The heart of the film is Sama's own experiences growing up in the Mexico City suburbs, and the art and music, hinted at in the trailer, come from the filmmaker himself, and artists, musicians and friends from that world.

U.S. sales on the film are handled by New York's Cinectic Media, world sales by Madrid's Latido Films.

25/01/2019, goldenglobes.com

Hari Sama: "Sundance para mi es un sueño hecho realidad", Gabriel Lerman

<https://www.goldenglobes.com/articles/hari-sama-sundance-para-mi-es-un-sueno-hecho-realidad>

iene una carrera como director tan diversa como su propia vida, porque aunque su primera película fue la comedia Sin ton ni Sonia, que firmó con su nombre de nacimiento, Carlos Sama, a la que siguió el drama El sueño de Lu con el que Úrsula Pruneda se llevó el Ariel a la Mejor actriz, y premios similares en los festivales de Málaga y Shanghai. Más tarde hizo otro drama, Despertar el polvo y después un documental, Sunka Raku: alegría evanescente, para seguir con una versión de Pinocho en la serie televisiva Érase una vez. Ahora Hari Sama regresa al cine con Esto no es Berlín, un retrato autobiográfico sobre su transformación de estudiante de escuela conservadora en músico y artista. La película que representa a México en el Festival de Sundance es también un retrato de ese país en 1986, cuando se jugó allí el mundial de fútbol y cuenta en su elenco con la recién nominada al Oscar Marina de Tavira, aunque el papel principal recae en Xabiani Ponce de León. Pocos días antes de llegar a la nieve, hablamos con quien también tiene un papel de reparto en el filme sobre este nuevo logro en su carrera.

¿Qué significa para ti que te hayan seleccionado para Sundance?

Sundance para mi es un sueño hecho realidad. La verdad que es un festival que admiro y respeto profundamente como espectador, como cinéfilo de toda la vida. Siento que es un festival joven, con garra, un poco como con el espíritu de mi película. Es un festival muy joven que en estos pocos años de vida está prácticamente al nivel de los festivales europeos de primera. Me parece el festival más lógico para estrenar una película como Esto no es Berlín.

¿Cómo surge esta nueva película tuya?

Es una película que tiene que ver con mi adolescencia, que fue fuerte, prematura, como heredera de esta generación de divorcios masivos con familias muy conservadoras que de pronto no supieron muy bien cómo acomodar toda esta revolución que les estaba ocurriendo. A los que nos tocó vivir en los '80, algunos venimos de esos hogares rotos, deprimidos. A mí particularmente me tocó la bendición de que en esa enorme necesidad de conexión con algo me encontré con un grupo de jóvenes mayores que yo que estaban haciendo una microscópica revolución,

porque esto no fue la movida madrileña, esto fue una cosa que ocurrió en un circuito pequeñísimo, en un país que si bien la dictadura mexicana nunca ha sido oficial como la argentina, nunca ha estado tan claro. En el México de los '80 había rezagos de lo que ocurrió en el 68 y en los 70. Estaba todo prohibido, no había conciertos, realmente a los jóvenes nos habían robado el espacio público, pero a mi me toca conocer a esa gente que poco a poco van recuperando espacios a través de la absoluta clandestinidad. Estos artistas plásticos no tenían donde exponer, no tenían donde mostrar sus performances y entonces empiezan a tomar departamentos del centro, fábricas abandonadas, y un lugar que además tuve el privilegio de filmar en él que era la casa de unos adolescentes, unos jovencitos, que sus padres le dejaron en el icónico barrio de Coyoacán y estos jóvenes empiezan a rentar la casa para artistas, para fiestas, incluso para grupos de rock, donde empiezan a exponer instalaciones y un arte como mucho más rudo. A mí me toca crecer al lado de toda esta gente loca, maravillosa, muchos de ellos ya no viven por los excesos, el sida y tal, y siempre supe que había que hacer una película de eso.

¿El título Esto no es Berlín es una queja o es una declaración de principios?

Yo creo que está todo eso incluido en el título, creo que los jóvenes en este universo post-moderno tenían un enorme interés por lo que estaba sucediendo en Nueva York, Londres y Berlín, y que de alguna manera vivir en un país en el que había esta dictadura, donde no había lugares donde ir, donde escuchar esta música, de repente había una sensación de desamparo y decir ¡esto no es Berlín! Por otro lado son los mismos jóvenes que piensan eso tratando de hacer un arte muy influenciado por lo que estaba ocurriendo en Europa en ese momento. La música jugaba un rol importantísimo, incluso lo era disfrazarse para salir en la noche. Era casi una postura ideológica vestirse de sacerdote, pintarte los ojos, levantarte el pelo, teñirlo de rojo, todo ese cuento era una posición ideológica pero también había esta búsqueda de convertirlo en una cosa mexicana y decir "Esto no es Berlín, esto es Chilangolandia, esto es el D.F.". Muchos de estos chicos se fueron a Nueva York, como Gabriel Orozco. Es curioso porque muchos historiadores del arte en México no tienen mucha información de los 80, no la buscan cuando en realidad en este circuito del que te hablo estaban naciendo artistas como Francis Alÿs, Gabriel Orozco, Damián Ortega, Rubén Ortiz, gente que después se volvió súper famosa pero fuera de México.

Para poder mostrar todo este desenfreno del que me hablas tuviste primero que hacer una pintura de otro México, de esta escuela privada católica donde los estudiantes van en uniforme. ¿Qué fue lo más difícil de la película, crear este mundo conservador del principio o poder mostrar cómo era la explosión artística de la segunda parte de la película?

Creo que lo difícil para mí sinceramente fue empezar a darme cuenta muy pronto que la película me estaba afectando emocionalmente mucho más de lo que yo pensaba, como que son asuntos que he trabajado muchísimo a nivel personal en mi vida porque pienso que las cicatrices más importantes, las que nos definen como seres humanos y que nos van acompañar casi toda nuestra vida vienen o de la infancia o de esta época adolescente. Las más vienen muchas de ahí entonces estar viendo a esta madre ahí en su cuarto deprimida y tan cerca de donde yo crecí me empezó a mover mucho y me pasa lo mismo en la parte conservadora, complicada, de la desconexión familiar como con la parte de la fiesta porque también tiene su costo, te cobra los excesos, te cobra la indecisión sexual, te cobra muchas cosas. Hubo momentos en los que yo sentía que estaba reviviendo pasajes de mi vida de una forma muy potente y eso sí fue muy fuerte emocionalmente. Creo que eso fue lo más difícil: la obsesión de poder recrear esos momentos de una manera verosímil y dotada de la profundidad que me parecía que se requería. Yo mismo me convertí en un personaje que está inspirado por un tío pero que realmente fue una influencia más musical, este tío es la figura masculina que me hubiese gustado tener.

¿Hasta qué punto es autobiográfica y en qué punto se despegó de tu propia experiencia y se fue construyendo otra historia?

Yo creo que tiene un punto de partida muy autobiográfica. El protagonista se llama como es mi nombre original, pero finalmente sí hubo que despegarla para poder convertir en una ficción funcional. Nosotros somos 3 hermanos y en la película solo hay 2 porque así me convenía, que fuera solo el hermano pequeño y el mayor, si bien nosotros tenemos una hermana en el medio. Quizás la depresión de mi madre no fue tan grave como la del personaje de la película, pero yo me permití llevar las cosas a un extremo. Mi madre está de hecho aterrada, no sé si va a poder ver la película, cada vez que sale el tema la veo que tiembla por debajo de la mesa...

Estás estrenando esta película en medio de un fenómeno único en la historia del cine mexicano que se llama Roma...

Ya sé, es insólito que les esté ocurriendo eso como está ocurriendo, ya Cuarón era un fenómeno mediático antes de Roma, creo que ni él mismo se esperaba los alcances que ha tenido.

Si bien a nivel de tiempos la historia no coincide por un par de años el mundo que recrea tu película no es demasiado lejano al de Cuarón. Incluso en tu filme también trabaja Marina de Tavira como la madre del protagonista...

Te decía hace un rato de esta casa que tuvieron estos chicos que fue un espacio muy importante para nosotros que crecimos en los '80, ese lugar estaba en las afueras de Coyoacán, este barrio icónico de la ciudad de México. En ese lugar tuvo su oficina durante años Carlos Cuarón, el hermano de Alfonso. Íbamos a las mismas fiestas, venimos de las mismas escuelas. Yo fui amigo de Carlos cuando estábamos estudiando cine. En este movimiento de artistas muchos venían de la clase media del Distrito Federal a los que le interesaba el arte, la música, el post-punk y toda esa cosa que estaba sucediendo en Europa, pues éramos un grupo de gente de clase media y no había muchos lugares adonde ir, entonces tú te ibas enterando que había una exposición clandestina en un departamento del centro y llegabas a esa exposición clandestina con una performance y tocaba una banda y seguramente en la banda tocaba un amigo de Alfonso y todos éramos los mismos.

Tienes toda otra carrera como músico, pero has hecho muy poco como actor, ¿por qué?

He hecho poco porque no invitan. Hice mucho teatro siendo muy niño y he querido actuar, yo me he dado personajes chicos en mis películas, este es el más grandecito que he hecho y tengo la esperanza perversa de que esta película sirva para convencer a algunos directores de que me pueden ofrecer un papel y que yo voy a trabajar muy bien con ellos porque a mí me gusta mucho actuar. Lo disfruto inmensamente. Lo intenté hace un tiempo en México pero como no tenía tanto que enseñar, no funcionó. Sinceramente no tengo mucho tiempo de ir a hacer muchos castings, pero por supuesto pero si alguien ahora me ve y siente que lo puedo hacer, siento que tengo alma de actor. Me apasiona la construcción de personajes y el trabajo con los actores.

26/01/2019, **Screendaily**

'This Is Not Berlin': Sundance Review, Wendy Ide

<https://www.screendaily.com/reviews/this-is-not-berlin-sundance-review/5135594.article>

Dir Hari Sama. Mexico. 2018. 115mins

This fourth feature from director Hari Sama is a semi-autobiographical odyssey through a little-acknowledged period of Mexican creative rebellion. It's a sensual coming of age story, with the foal-eyed Carlos (Xabiani Ponce de León) drifting into Mexico City's mid-80s sexually fluid counter-cultural underworld. But perhaps just as satisfying is the way Sama's film captures the quicksilver sparks of an artistic moment – the point at which a loose bohemian community collectively finds its voice and forces the mainstream to take notice. A soundtrack of post punk art rock, smashed glass and attitude adds to a thrillingly confrontational sense of time and place.

This Is Not Berlin arrives in Sundance having already won two prizes at Impulso Morelia, and it also screened at Ventana Sur at the end of last year. Festival interest should be keen, and LGBTQ events in particular will likely take an interest. There is arthouse theatrical potential too for this is a handsomely put together period piece, which captures its moment eloquently but also may chime with a new generation which is raising its own voice in dissent.

Carlos is rail-thin and poetically under-nourished-looking. He peers through a tumbling mop of curls at the ritual inter-school battle that unfolds around him – he's in the middle of the ruck, but, as with so much else in his life, he's also slightly apart from it all. With an absent father and a mother who is medicating away her disappointment with knockout doses of rohypnol, Carlos constructs a support system from his best friend Gera (José Antonio Toledano) and his cool, motorbike-straddling uncle Esteban (director Hari Sama doing double duty in front of the camera as well as behind).

But when a gift for fixing broken synthesisers buys Carlos and Gera entry into the Azteca, a hip alternative club where hedonism and drugs abound, Carlos swiftly finds himself adopted into a new family. Nico (Mauro Sánchez Navarro), his spiritual guide, has smokey goth eyeliner and cheekbones which can be read as either a threat or a promise. Nico's inner circle is a Factory-style smorgasbord of sexual availability, performance art and punk poetry.

For a 17-year-old who is too shy to admit his crush on Gera's cool Patti Smith-quoting older sister Rita (Ximena Romo), this fast track into a world in which, finally, he feels at home is as thrilling as it is dangerous. But as Carlos embraces the alternative lifestyle, the school acquaintances who tolerated his weirdness now use it as a weapon against him. All except Gera, who, feeling abandoned, seeks his own route into the art punk underworld.

Using restless handheld camera and scrappy black and white super 8 footage, Sama captures an assault of ideas and opportunities. The artwork ranges from Dadaist provocations, techno-fetishist erotica and anti-consumerist industrial performances using drills and cars to an art terrorist takeover of a football game. Music, which is central to the world that Sama creates, is impeccably sourced, bringing both energy and authenticity to the picture.

There's a certain inevitability in the narrative trajectory – impressionable teens living fast before they have worked out how to use their brakes tend to end up in a crash. But although Carlos gets his fingers burned, he also emerges with his eyes open, and with a direction in life which he didn't have before.

Production companies: Catatonia

International sales: [Latido Latido@latidofilms.com](mailto:LatidoLatido@latidofilms.com)

Producer: Ale García, Antonio Urdapilleta, Hari Sama, Verónica Valadez P.

Screenplay: Rodrigo Ordóñez, Hari Sama, Max Zunino

Production design: Diana Quiroz Ennis

Editing: Rodrigo Ríos Legaspi, Hari Sama, Ximena Cuevas

Cinematography: Alfredo Altamirano

Music: Max Oldham, Hari Sama

Cast: Xabiani Ponce de León, José Antonio Toledano, Ximena Romo, Mauro Sánchez Navarro, Klaudia García, Marina de Tavira

26/01/2019, **Vulture.com**

The Movie That Will Make You Want to Become a Pansexual New-Wave Performance Artist in 1980s Mexico by Nate Jones

<https://www.vulture.com/2019/01/sundance-2019-the-performance-art-of-this-is-not-berlin.html>

Life is pretty boring for Carlos (Xabiani Ponce de León), a teenager in mid-'80s Mexico City in Hari Sama's semi-autobiographical *This Is Not Berlin*, which just had its U.S. premiere at Sundance. After-school activities are limited to pointless macho rumbles with boys from neighboring schools, his father is pressuring him to become an engineer, while his mom is drugging herself to sleep all day. (Mom is played by brand-new Oscar nominee Marina de Tavira, but that's small consolation.)

Luckily, Carlos has two things going for him: 1. he's a mechanical prodigy, and 2. with his enormous eyes, elfin features, and flowing mane, he's essentially an anime character made flesh. After fixing a synth for a local New Wave band, Carlos and his pal Gera (José Antonio Toledano) are granted entrance into a club called Azteca and its exciting new world of polyamory, eyeliner, and confrontational public art stunts. ("Is this a gay bar?" they ask. The answer: "It's an everything bar.") As in *Sing Street*, our hero's journey through the '80s alternative scene is symbolized by his changing hairstyle — first an unruly mess, then a chic lob, finally an asymmetrical undercut — and he only gets more beautiful with each one. The only characters in this movie who do not want to fuck him are blood relatives, and honestly, even they might make an exception.

Films like *This Is Not Berlin* often have to deal with what I call the Boogie Nights conundrum: It's hard to get invested in all the madcap hedonism of the first half when you're simultaneously dreading the inevitable comedown in the second. But Sama — who does double-duty as Carlos's shaggy biker uncle — brings the attractions of the scene to life so well I briefly considered quitting my 9-to-5 to become a pansexual New Wave performance artist, too. Whether they're stripping naked, dousing themselves in blood, and chowing down on hearts; stripping naked in soccer jerseys to mock Mexico's 1986 World Cup team; or stripping naked and coating themselves in flour, it's easy to see the appeal their of bold, unapologetic queerness. They feel free in a way everyone else does not. There's a bit of trouble in that Carlos might not actually be gay, but who's counting? The scene is not about being popular, he tells one of his many romantic interests near the end of the film; "it's about doing things and finding people that make you feel less alone." That he's a little bit full of shit only makes it more fun.

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Inevitably, the music has to end sometime, and there are the obligatory overdoses, broken friendships, and nods to the AIDS crisis. But Sama doesn't dwell on it. Like *Roma*, these are the personal reminiscences of a filmmaker who turned out pretty okay, one who can look back on his youthful foibles with clear eyes, but no small amount of warmth.

29/01/2019, EFE NEWS

El mexicano Hari Sama lleva a Sundance los rebeldes y "agridulces" años 80 BY David Vilafranca

<https://www.latimes.com/efe-3880850-15070215-20190128-story.html>

El mexicano Hari Sama lleva a Sundance los rebeldes y "agridulces" años 80

Años de rebeldía juvenil pero también de ingenuidad, de espíritu contestatario a la vez que de inocencia y temeridad. Así retrata el mexicano Hari Sama la década de los 80 en "Esto no es Berlín", una cinta que se ha estrenado en Sundance y que explora el legado "agridulce" de aquella época.

"Que ahora veas en Ciudad de México a parejas del mismo sexo besándose o tomándose de la mano es impensable sin lo que pasó en los 80 y después. Ahí empecé un esfuerzo de recuperación del espacio público que había sido, literalmente, ultrajado desde el movimiento de 1968. Como que había quedado una atmósfera de dictadura, en especial contra jóvenes y estudiantes", explicó a Efe.

"Yo viví esos años de manera muy intensa. Y también me pasé, como muchos. Hubo momentos de demasiados excesos de todo. Y me siento muy afortunado de estar vivo, de ser de los que quedaron y de poder reflexionar sobre lo que pasó", admitió.

Autor de otras películas como "El sueño de Lu" (2012), Hari Sama (Ciudad de México, 1967) presenta estos días en el Festival de Sundance, la cita más importante del cine independiente del país, su filme "Esto no es Berlín", que protagonizan Xabiani Ponce de León, Ximena Romo y José Antonio Toledano.

En esta película, Carlos (Ponce de León) es un joven de una familia de clase media de la capital mexicana que se adentra en el agitado y excitante ambiente de la contracultura en los años 80, donde se enamora del post-punk, el arte provocador y político, las drogas o la experimentación sexual.

En una película con un gran componente autobiográfico y con una puesta en escena muy dinámica y realista (se contó con público real para algunas "performances" y conciertos), el director explicó que la adolescencia, para lo bueno y lo malo, genera "las cicatrices que te definen".

"Empiezas a reaccionar a los estímulos de la vida a partir de esas cicatrices (...). Para mí fue una época muy significativa por las cicatrices que se generaron a nivel familiar, humano o de percepción de mí mismo", afirmó.

"Y también por haber tenido la fortuna de conocer a ese grupo de locos que estaban buscando en el arte, las drogas y la investigación de la brutalidad una forma de decir 'esto es lo que yo soy'. A mí eso me transformó para siempre", añadió.

En este sentido, el realizador contó que el rodaje fue una experiencia ambivalente.

"De pronto, estaba filmando en este bar que era como una cosa muy romántica pero, al mismo tiempo, tenía unos recuerdos súper dolorosos de cosas que me habían pasado. Era una búsqueda personal muy atormentada", indicó sobre un filme que no esquiva terribles realidades como el sida o las sobredosis.

Sama dijo, además, que para esos jóvenes que se refugiaban en espacios de libertad como la Zona Rosa, en Ciudad de México, ciudades como Londres o Nueva York representaban "un anhelo".

"Allá estaban pasando todas esas cosas. De repente recibíamos un poco de la movida madrileña, porque venían Alaska y Miguel Bosé y reventaban, pero veíamos con mucho romanticismo a Bowie viviendo en Berlín, a Nueva York con un momento de creatividad y como una ciudad muy peligrosa con artistas súper interesantes", describió.

Esa mirada, sin embargo, dio paso a una reflexión personal y colectiva.

"Si esto no es Berlín o Nueva York, ¿entonces qué es? Somos mexicanos, ¿pero qué mexicanos somos?' Creo que había una enorme confusión en ese sentido: no entendíamos muy bien cuál era nuestro lugar", aseguró.

De la misma forma, "Esto no es Berlín" también muestra la aparente paradoja de esta rebeldía juvenil, cuyos integrantes provenían de familias blancas y muy acomodadas.

"La insatisfacción no es una cuestión económica: es una cuestión humana. Lo que cambia un poco es quizá el estilo o nivel de descontento", opinó antes de recalcar que

México "es un país de contradicciones sociales y raciales aunque a los mexicanos no les guste hablar de ello".

En una película que acaba lanzando un elogio de la amistad y una aproximación no moralista a la adolescencia, Sama subrayó la entrega y el compromiso de su joven y talentoso reparto.

"Me interesa conocer las cicatrices de los actores, no por morbo, sino para saber qué es lo que podemos usar. A lo mejor a no todo el mundo le gusta, pero ellos se dejaron entrar a la aventura", finalizó.

29/01/2019, **The Current News**

<https://www.thenewcurrent.co.uk/this-is-not-berlin>

SUNDANCE Film Festival | 2019

Hari Sama

Writer/Director

THIS IS NOT BERLIN

WORLD PREMIERE

World Cinema Dramatic Competition

This is not Berlin delivers an energetic portrait of a clandestine sanctuary propelled by youth fleeing the societal repression of their time. A unique take on adolescent insecurities, awakenings, and maturing, writer/director Hari Sama elevates the classic coming-of-age story in fresh and unexpected ways.

Hi Hari thanks for talking to TNC, you all set for the festival?

It's a privilege to talk to TNC, I am all set for the festival it's very exciting, really a dream come true. I've always loved Sundance and even as an audience member I've always been in love with the idea of this very independent, very young festival that quickly became one of the five or six major festivals in the world.

Do you ever get any nerves ahead of a festival screening?

Yes, of course, I'm nervous. I feel very happy with the film, we think it's a very strong and solid creative outburst let's say, but of course I'm nervous and I still have many questions in regards of how the public will understand this film over there in the US, but we are also very excited about sharing (the film). There is a lot of people that are very excited about the invitation to Sundance and many of them are coming so it will be very interesting to share the experience with them. It's really great.

THIS IS NOT BERLIN is nominated in the World Cinema Dramatic Competition, what does it mean to be nominated?

Wow, to be nominated. As I was just saying it is a dream come true. I think we are competing against very very interesting films from around the world and I also understand that the films that are showing this year at Sundance were chosen from around 14,000 films, documentaries and short films, so it's such an honour to be there. I am very grateful, and it's very special for me to be able to share this story which is very autobiographical.

With this being a World Premiere does this add any additional pressure for you?

I don't know, really. It's a very very exciting moment because it is the first time it's gonna be shown so it's the initial energy, the initial moment. It is a being born sort of situation, you know? I feel the moment when a film is actually born is when you show it to the public. It [the film] was shown in Morelia and Ventana Sur but it wasn't finished, and it was shown to people from the industry. This time it's real public, and it feels like we are holding our hearts in our hands, I know it might sound exaggerated but that is what it is, we are standing with our naked hearts in front of all these people, just like that. And I am full of questions of how people are going to understand and react to this. And given that it is the initial moment I feel that everything else will sort of align with this.

Tell me a little bit about This Is Not Berlin, how did the film come about? What was the inspiration behind your screenplay?

THIS IS NOT BERLIN is an autobiographical film, it has to do with my pre-adolescence, with the sort of family I grew up with, the sort of region in Mexico City I grew up in and the group of artists that I came to know during those years when I was a lot younger. Actually, I was a recent teenager when I met this group of young people, very extreme artists that were doing this crazy, free, radical work in the complete underground because in those years in Mexico City you couldn't do it any other way. Young people were not allowed to exhibit their work in museums or galleries or anything. We couldn't get together in the public space, there were no rock concerts, everything was forbidden so there was a very energetic, enthusiastic movement; very little, very different from what they call the "movida madrileña" which was a big thing and open, in public. This was all clandestine, it was all happening in the darkness, but in a way that made it more interesting. So all the young artists interested in this more radical wave doing art, people interested in rock music and electronic punk, poets writing in a whole different way, everyone was getting together in these very dark, underground places that you really needed to know about to get to.

So I was lucky enough to know these people and be there at the right place and the right time when this happened. Actually, there was a very important house where I shot in my film, "La Quiñonera", where a lot of people like Gabriel Orozco, Damian Ortega and even Francis Alÿs that had just arrived at the beginning of the '90s, where exhibiting their first art and their first reflections on art. I think that the actual pre-birth of all these artists is something that not a lot of people talk about, maybe because most of the art historians don't see the 80's in Mexico as important, given that most of these artists went abroad before becoming famous, Gabriel Orozco went to New York and Rubén Ortíz went to L.A., so all of this, all of this movement, and all of this gatherings, all of this craziness is something that is still very clandestine and I always thought it was important for me, considering that I lived it firsthand, to talk about this in a film.

And of course this was opposed to everything else that was happening in the neighbourhood I was growing up, you know, depressed families, conservative households, where violent divorces were happening and perhaps the people from that generation didn't know what to do with the idea of being a divorcee and not having a lot of money or not really knowing what to do with the energy and time they had, so we grew up in the streets and all that middle-class thing. There was a lot of violence too, and I think it was important for me to talk about the age in which you get your most important scars, maybe even the ones that make you who you are. At least that is the way I see it right now. So that is where the idea for the screenplay came and that is where the idea for the film came, of course, I changed a lot of things and made it a little more extreme but it's all based in things that happened during those years around 1986.

Is Carlos inspired by anyone you know?

Carlos is basically inspired by myself and all those things that I faced during those years. So that is why I named him Carlos because that is my legal name, which I don't use, of course.

What was the biggest challenge you faced bringing This Is Not Berlin to life?

Probably two challenges, one that I had a very clear idea in terms of how I wanted the photography to look like and let's just say that there were production difficulties in

achieving the look I wanted for things and the amount of extras I needed, and how the robot should look. Many things that were a little beyond budget so I had to work really hard to obtain what I really needed. So there were a lot of logistical things regarding the art that appeared in the film, I invited a lot of people to participate in the film so I had to deal with that and work with the actors, so just being completely concentrated and mindful of everything that needed to be done 4 months before shooting. Because there were many things that I did, like the musical supervision with other friends, we were designing how we were going to work with the music and how “Manifiesto”, the band that appeared on the film, should sound. We wanted to do multitrack on them and not do playback, so the rehearsals and the composing of the music and all that. I just wanted to be part of all that but my ultimate goal was to not lose compass in terms of the most important thing and probably what ultimately gives depth to the film which is probably the pain, disconnection and authenticity of these characters. All my previous films, which production-wise were a lot simpler, yet very deep and with a lot of preparation with the actors allowed me to really be mindful of the construction of these characters trying to be authentic, real and deep.

Have you always been interested in filmmaking?

I've always been interested in film and music, ever since I was young my parents realized that I was interested in rock music, I even tried to get piano lessons, but I was never good at school so I was prohibited from taking those lessons at a particular point. On the other hand I owned a super 8mm camera and in junior high school I was shooting a lot of crazy experimental films with my school friends. I remember a particular one in which a guy we called... There are so many nicknames in Mexico, everyone has a nickname, especially in the outskirts of Mexico City, and we called this guy death, “El muerto”, and I remember him wearing a hat and us asking him to throw up milk so he had this white thing coming out of him and covering him while this other guy wearing a set of chains around him so... We were working around this dark imagery and crazy stuff, I also wrote a lot of small drama pieces for Christmas at home so I was always interested in telling stories and shooting films. Then I lived in Paris when I was 17 years old and I tried studying film (filmmaking) but I didn't have the money and I wasn't old enough, also at that time if you wanted to study at La Femis you needed to have a previous career so it just wasn't possible. I started playing the clarinet over there, I was taking lessons in Denmark, then I came back to Mexico and tried to study film, and everyone told me it was impossible to make films in Mexico unless you have a crazy rich uncle or something, so I went into music and had a very dark band called Eurydice's death in the 80's... it's a long story but the excess of those years had us break up before making a record, luckily I was able to get into film school just after that. But those have always been my two pleasures and deep desires, my two loves.

As a filmmaker how important is the collaborative process for you?

I love to collaborate, and it is a pain/love situation, and I say this because you never know if it's going to work, it's like marrying people all the time without knowing if I'm going to be too neurotic, which I sometimes am, or how my craziness is going to be received, how others' craziness is going to be received but for me collaboration is magical, and I love doing film and music because you need to collaborate with people, especially the things I do. It's just wonderful. All those creative energies colliding together for one particular goal achieve the most impressive work.

How much has your approach to your work changed since your debut short film?

I think my approach to filmmaking has changed a lot since the beginning, obviously. I think I pretty much discovered a new way of communicating with myself and others and the universe, I guess. With "The Dream of Lu " I found it is important for me to become vulnerable and fragile, even if that made the process painful. At some point, it also sublimated things that were important for me and from there I could pretty much communicate with more honesty with everyone else, so I started working from that new sense of depth if you will. I kept exploring that in the films that followed, "Awakening Dust" and "Sunka Raku" and "Berlin" is sort of the juxtaposition of that search of deepness with music and with an interest for pop culture as a means of relating to others. I've always been interested in pop culture, I like the underground and the countercultural manifestations of all different countries, and that is possibly something that I will continue searching. Also larger productions that allow me to build powerful images whilst continuing my search of the characters' processes of introspection motivated by pain but normally I have a very personal interest in the possibilities of space within ourselves, even in the most painful processes and I believe that I will continue to search around pain and light and space and all of those questions within films, even in bigger productions. So these things continue to be obsessions and will continue to be recurring in my films, I think.

Do you have any advice or tips for a fellow filmmaker?

My advice to filmmakers would be to keep working with the mind of a beginner, the beginner's mind is the most important thing, keep learning and keep open to surprise and keep on trying. Don't let anything or anyone tell you that you are not good

enough. Or that “If such and such you will never be such and such”. Always trust that the universe has your learning experience designed for you and that if you continue to search you will surely find a way to sublimate whatever makes you who you are and if you have painful scars you will be able to use those scars to communicate others. So beginner’s mind and trust in the universe that conveys trust unto yourself. Never stop.

What are you currently working on?

I am currently writing my new film, which is my sixth film. It’s called “Ballast”. It’s a film that searches or rather makes questions around the idea of this painful, sometimes tremendous heritage that is delivered from one generation to the next. It’s basically the story of three men within a family in which a painful and obscure way of relating to sex and relating to themselves has been continuously passed from one generation to the next. It is a very powerful and painful film, and I a very excited, I am still working on the screenplay but hopefully, you will very soon hear more about this film.

And finally, what do you hope people will take away from This Is Not Berlin?

I think pretty much THIS IS NOT BERLIN is a film about disconnection, disconnection with ourselves, our family, our friends. People are always desperately searching for a connection, through both positive and very negative offers. So they try not connecting and the drugs and then they try sex maybe so there is this continuous search to connect, because to be disconnected makes us feel incomplete and sometimes incompleteness is very painful, especially when the scars, the ones that make us who we are, the ones from our childhood and adolescence, like the ones we see in THIS IS NOT BERLIN make the disconnection feel like incompleteness and it’s very painful. So I think that at some point we understand that art is one of the most important ways to connect to a greater mind and to ourselves and that opens up a dialogue with other people, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly. The abstract that is sometimes more powerful than directly, so it is my hope that people will get the idea of this possibility within pain in art and also the necessity that we always have of finding a voice and finding a space within. We are going through an important political change in Mexico, also there is a possibility for change in the US so I think that this more radical view of art and life will open up again a space for introspection and the possibility of looking differently at politics. This film reminds us of a very specific time in politics in Mexico and how the lack of space during the ’80s demanded a more direct and violent way of expressing. So maybe there will be a time when we no longer have to be violent and we can finally be able to form a community of respectful and inclusive individuals.

29/01/2019, Chicago Tribune - HOY (Spanish version)

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/hoy/entretenimiento/ct-hoy-entretenimiento-esto-no-es-berln-o-el-retrato-de-los-rebeldes-y-agridulces-aos-80-en-mxico-20190129-story.html>

'Esto no es Berlín' o el retrato de los rebeldes y 'agridulces' años 80 en México

Años de rebeldía juvenil pero también de ingenuidad, de espíritu contestatario a la vez que de inocencia y temeridad. Así retrata el mexicano Hari Sama la década de los 80 en "Esto no es Berlín", una cinta que se ha estrenado en Sundance y que explora el legado "agridulce" de aquella época.

"Que ahora veas en Ciudad de México a parejas del mismo sexo besándose o tomándose de la mano es impensable sin lo que pasó en los 80 y después. Ahí empezó un esfuerzo de recuperación del espacio público que había sido, literalmente, ultrajado desde el movimiento de 1968. Como que había quedado una atmósfera de dictadura, en especial contra jóvenes y estudiantes", explicó a Efe.

"Yo viví esos años de manera muy intensa. Y también me pasé, como muchos. Hubo momentos de demasiados excesos de todo. Y me siento muy afortunado de estar vivo, de ser de los que quedaron y de poder reflexionar sobre lo que pasó", admitió.

Autor de otras películas como "El sueño de Lu" (2012), Hari Sama (Ciudad de México, 1967) presenta estos días en el Festival de Sundance, la cita más importante del cine independiente del país, su filme "Esto no es Berlín", que protagonizan Xabiani Ponce de León, Ximena Romo y José Antonio Toledano.

En esta película, Carlos (Ponce de León) es un joven de una familia de clase media de la capital mexicana que se adentra en el agitado y excitante ambiente de la contracultura en los años 80, donde se enamora del post-punk, el arte provocador y político, las drogas o la experimentación sexual.

En una película con un gran componente autobiográfico y con una puesta en escena muy dinámica y realista (se contó con público real para algunas "performances" y conciertos), el director explicó que la adolescencia, para lo bueno y lo malo, genera "las cicatrices que te definen".

"Empiezas a reaccionar a los estímulos de la vida a partir de esas cicatrices (...). Para mí fue una época muy significativa por las cicatrices que se generaron a nivel familiar, humano o de percepción de mí mismo", afirmó.

"Y también por haber tenido la fortuna de conocer a ese grupo de locos que estaban buscando en el arte, las drogas y la investigación de la brutalidad una forma de decir 'esto es lo que yo soy'. A mí eso me transformó para siempre", añadió.

En este sentido, el realizador contó que el rodaje fue una experiencia ambivalente.

"De pronto, estaba filmando en este bar que era como una cosa muy romántica pero, al mismo tiempo, tenía unos recuerdos súper dolorosos de cosas que me habían pasado. Era una búsqueda personal muy atormentada", indicó sobre un filme que no esquiva terribles realidades como el sida o las sobredosis.

Sama dijo, además, que para esos jóvenes que se refugiaban en espacios de libertad como la Zona Rosa, en Ciudad de México, ciudades como Londres o Nueva York representaban "un anhelo".

"Allá estaban pasando todas esas cosas. De repente recibíamos un poco de la movida madrileña, porque venían Alaska y Miguel Bosé y reventaban, pero veíamos con mucho romanticismo a Bowie viviendo en Berlín, a Nueva York con un momento de creatividad y como una ciudad muy peligrosa con artistas súper interesantes", describió.

Esa mirada, sin embargo, dio paso a una reflexión personal y colectiva.

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De la misma forma, "Esto no es Berlín" también muestra la aparente paradoja de esta rebeldía juvenil, cuyos integrantes provenían de familias blancas y muy acomodadas.

"La insatisfacción no es una cuestión económica: es una cuestión humana. Lo que cambia un poco es quizá el estilo o nivel de descontento", opinó antes de recalcar que México "es un país de contradicciones sociales y raciales aunque a los mexicanos no les guste hablar de ello".

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29/01/2019, **College Movie Review**

<http://www.collegemoviereview.com/featured/this-is-not-berlin/>

Sundance Review: This Is Not Berlin

By Kip Mooney

Score: B+

Director: Hari Sama

Cast: Zabiani Ponce de León, José Antonio Toledano, Mauro Sánchez Navarro

Running Time: 115 Minutes

Rated: NR

"The only true currency in this bankrupt world is what you share with someone else when you're uncool."

This is the sage advice rock critic Lester Bangs (Philip Seymour Hoffman) shares with aspiring writer William Miller (Patrick Fugit) in *Almost Famous*. I couldn't help but be reminded of Cameron Crowe's film throughout the vibrant coming-of-age film *This Is Not Berlin*, especially in scenes where Carlos (Xabiani Ponce de León) learns the ways of the world from his hip-but-grounded uncle Esteban (director Hari Sama).

Much like that film, a teenager finds himself immersed in a very adult world, only this time the setting is 1986 Mexico instead of 1973 California. And instead of rock music, it's the world of avant-garde art. *This Is Not Berlin* is also a lot more frank about sex, sexuality and drug use. In fact, it's one of the most free, least judgmental films about the choices people make that I can recall seeing.

Carlos and his best friend Gera (José Antonio Toledano) do things a lot of teenagers do: get in fights, sneak peaks at their dads' porn collections, smoke near windowsills so their parents won't find out. And they desperately want to be cool. But the only cool person they know is Gera's sister Rita (Ximena Romo, who reminds of every girl who was too cool for me in high school). She's in a punk band and can sneak them into the bar they frequent.

And that one night changes both of their lives, as Carlos joins an anarchist art collective run by Nico (Mauro Sánchez Navarro) and Gera falls under the spell of a predatory drug dealer (David Montalvo). And they both quickly experience the highs and lows of their new experiences as their friendship falls apart.

This Is Not Berlin also pulls off the rare feat of being about pretentious people without being pretentious itself. The film even takes time to critique its own characters, with an art historian chastising the group for shamelessly ripping off European artists and partying endlessly while their friends are dying of AIDS. And it subtly critiques the absentee parents of Carlos, Gera and Rita, blinded by their own privilege and addictions to see their kids struggling.

The film also features an incredible soundtrack, providing an effective snapshot of a city, country and kid growing up and moving forward.

Remezcla

“TRAILER: ‘This is Not Berlin’ is a Coming-of-Age Story Set in Mexico City’s 80s Art Punk Underworld” by Kristen Lopez:

<http://remezcla.com/film/trailer-this-is-not-berlin-sundance/>

TRAILER: ‘This is Not Berlin’ is a Coming-of-Age Story Set in Mexico City’s 80s Art Punk Underworld

By Kristen Lopez

The Sundance Film Festival is in full swing and we’ve got you covered, listing all the Latino movies, series and shorts being shown. One of the features debuting at the festival is from Mexican director Hari Sama and it looks to be intense. This is Not Berlin is the story of a seventeen-year-old boy who finds a new sense of identity in an underground nightclub. The first trailer has dropped and you can prep for drama, angst, and ’80s club vibes.

The trailer starts in slow motion, introducing Xabiani Ponce de León’s Carlos. He’s standing stock-still in the midst of a chaotic throng of students in school uniform fighting, almost in suspended animation before he’s jostled to the ground. Based on the New Wave music, boxy shoulder-padded blazers and references to AIDS that follow, it’s safe to assume This is Not Berlin takes us back to the ’80s. After fixing someone’s synth piano keyboard, Carlos is given access to a mysterious underground club known as el Azteca – an uninhibited space described as not “gay bar” but an “everything bar.” Dancing, sex, and drugs are easily obtainable in this neon-tinged world, and soon Carlos is wrapped up in a rapid-fire series of events that leaves his mother – played by Roma star and Oscar nominee Marina de Távira – alarmed. Teen rebellion ensues: he shaves off half his hair, gets in trouble at school, and fights with a close friend – events which are interspersed with scenes of chaos in the street, showing that the life in Mexico City suburb Lomas Verdes is suffused with its own drama.

Sama’s film looks slick and in-your-face. The mix of synth music and extreme violence is poignant, and the main character of Carlos seems cool and detached on the surface, but it’s clear there’s more going on underneath. The movie promises to be a coming-of-age drama capturing Mexican youth struggling against society’s norms.

This is Not Berlin premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and does not yet have a wide release date.

30/01/2019, **Jumpcut Online**

<https://jumpcutonline.co.uk/sundance-2019-this-is-not-berlin/>

SUNDANCE 2019: This Is Not Berlin

Jessica Peña

Politically fearless, individual, and deliciously subversive, Hari Sama's fifth feature film *This Is Not Berlin* showcases a period of Mexico's society, more specifically from its adolescent perspective, that's in a state of wayward angst and yet finds the energy to make its case. It's entirely a riveting, sensual darling of a film, pulling pansexuality and identity into a fold where the anger against the country's hierarchy lies.

Sama's film has a charismatic and magnetic cast of rising actors, making sense of each of their worlds and navigating it in full, screaming confidence. His direction is hungry, pointed, and truly the avant-garde portrait of youth finding their people. It's a coming-of-age for the underrepresented, the "weird," and the outliers. When we're introduced to our main character, Carlos (Xabiani Ponce de León), he's standing aimlessly amid a horde of classmates clashing and brawling with rival school boys in the dusty air as they intend to prove some sort of machismo upper hand. It's 1986, the World Cup tournament is here and for Carlos this marks the time in which the world will suddenly shake to evolve him. He enjoys simmering in boredom with his best friend Gera (José Antonio Toledano), gawking at his friend's older, much cooler, sister Rita (Ximena Romo). His mother (Oscar-nominee Maria de Tevira) medicates herself daily and is more of a background role, although commanding every scene she's in. When Carlos uses his homegrown engineering abilities to fix a synthesizer for Rita's punk band, the two friends are suddenly granted passage into the underground venue *Azteca*, a smoky, gender-liberated joint where drugs, sex, and alcohol are alive and well. Soon Carlos and Gera are tantalized by the underbelly culture scene that will define who they are.

From the striking performance art sequences, to the electrifying, energetic music, the film comments on forms of repression, that of the weak, the forgotten, and the tired. That coupled with the sexual awakenings of Carlos and Gera becomes a beast of a social stance. With this new social scene, Gera and Carlos are left on opposite sides of the orbit as one struggles with his identity while the other may just be looking to fit in, but isn't everyone? As Rita recites the poetry of Patti Smith in class, there's a demonstration forming in the narrative that's radical. She calls her own shots, her own battles, and her own devilishly cool lyrical outcries as a form of protest against the status quo. They're "the pretty ones," as a grungy local of a neighboring hood calls them. Fueled by eyeliner, alcohol, and music the likes of Joy Division, they're the pioneers of their own liberties in a time that so scornfully rejects them.

As Carlos continues to bear his body and mind to the open arms of the performance arts, stripping naked on the streets covered in red paint that reads “Gay!,” it liberates him in ways that only this closely knit group of friends would understand, which in turn causes tension with Gera, who’s equally longing to belong. For Carlos, it was his uncle (played by Hari Sama) who entertained his creativity while his dad wasn’t around. He’s a motorcyclist, probably a hippie in his heyday, and advises Carlos as a role model to live freely, with no regrets or contempt. What Carlos does with this urgency of identity is up to him but it comes with its own consequences. Hari Sama’s autobiographical film is told through lush moments of self reflecting overdose, fearless demonstrations, and electrifying music. The film is sexually promiscuous and over-the-top in its dissents, inviting only its true colors and queer identities to guide it. With an ensemble as beautiful as they are talented, *This Is Not Berlin* cements itself as a striking, colorful film competing in the Sundance World Cinema Narrative competition at this year’s Sundance Film Festival.

Sama is no stranger to the land of performance art and New Wave sound, reeling in the intricacies of his musical background (His band Eurídice has strong Post Punk Revival influences.) and introducing euphoric cinematography to create a truly effervescent film that wants to you to enrage with it. Sama relishes in the creativity of his actors and what they bring to the film, exploring the crevices of personal angst and the confidence of sexual prowess. *This Is Not Berlin* may be slightly unnerving to some, but if you’re here for the arsty, sexual deliverance in revolt, it’s a wild take on the coming-of-age tale that demands your attention.

My Rating

★★★★

Directed by: Hari Sama

Starring: Xabiani Ponce de León, José Antonio Toledano, Ximena Romo, Mauro Sánchez Navarro, Klaudia García, Marina de Tavira

30/01/2019, **The Film Stage**

<https://thefilmstage.com/reviews/sundance-review-this-is-not-berlin-is-a-drama-of-rebellious-power/>

This Is Not Berlin

Sundance 2019 Review

Independent; 115 minutes

Director: Hari Sama

Written by Jared Mobarak on January 30, 2019

It opens in slow motion with teenage bodies wrestling and punching inside chaotic dust swirls, one boy (Xabiani Ponce de León's Carlos) caught isolated in the middle of the frame. He's not looking to hit any of the others. In fact he's barely dodging out of the way when they come too close. It's almost as though Carlos isn't even there, his mind and body separated as two halves of the same conflicted whole. He knows he should be present with his friends to show his machismo and do Mexico proud like the soccer team soon to hit the 1986 World Cup pitch, but something is calling him in the distance that he can't quite see. It's punk metal versus new wave blues, hetero-normative conformity versus queer counter-culture.

Director Hari Sama's opening scene to This Is Not Berlin is the perfect prologue for its rebellious themes. Rather than let the boys in chokeholds be the rebels, however, it's Carlos removed from the violence who proves the true soldier of this culture war. The fact he ends up fainting only to wind up in the backseat of his friend's car as they drive away only cements him as an outlier dragged around more than someone trying to fit in. The latter's imperative is a motivating factor merely as a means to remain involved in his gendered age group's highest social circle. So when best friend Gera (José Antonio Toledano) says he's never going to another brawl, they know it's out of their control.

Enter the Aztec: the coolest downtown club these suburban offspring of out-of-touch middle class parents could hope to sneak into. Gera and Carlos want to go without having any clue as to what to expect. They just know that the former's sister and latter's crush Rita (Ximena Romo) often plays onstage with her band. One huge favor later and they're being ushered through the door on her arm as fresh, baby-faced meat to bear witness to a synth rock orgy of sex, drugs, and political art. When asked whether their eye-opening experience has occurred at a gay bar, Rita replies, "It's an

everything bar.” And she’s not wrong. It’s a melting pot of gender fluidity and intellectual discourse these boys simply can’t receive from their sheltered upbringings.

While I know nothing about Mexico of the mid-80s, I do understand the formative qualities of walking into a new world you couldn’t have imagined on your own. And for two kids like Carlos and Gera who were already questioning their place within the prison of comfort their respective depressed (with good reason) and bored folks have provided, there’s no turning back. The setting alone becomes their addiction before they even try a drug stronger than beer. Suddenly Gera is no longer the little brother Rita yearns to leave behind and Carlos is no longer a pariah standing at the fringes. Sama and cowriters Rodrigo Ordoñez and Max Zunino focus upon the latter boy the most, his artistic sensibilities readily absorbing the enigmatic Nico’s (Mauro Sanchez) radical ambitions.

Because they’re awakened beyond internal desires, however, allows the film to be one that possesses more than a few similarities with today. It’s much like the realization made by teens two or three generations removed from boomers too self-satisfied and delusional to realize their continued refusal to get out of the way like their parents via retirement is what’s keeping our youth from finding their full potential (not laziness). By insulating their kids in “a better life,” parents have the tendency of filtering out realities they feel their success has erased. More than sexuality, these boys are being stripped of their rose-colored glasses of privilege. Who’s dying? The AIDS-afflicted contemporaries Carlos endears himself towards. Who’s “pretty?” Gera’s prejudiced ilk working tirelessly to be “better than.”

This isn’t some devolution to squalor or self-righteous soapbox reappraisal of who they are, though. That privilege is something they carry with them regardless of what new worlds allow them entrance. It’s the difficult truth that will ultimately save them when their new friends in similar positions would be left to rot in their place. There’s still that chip on Carlos and Gera’s shoulders of entitlement, a trait carrying through like it’s embedded in their DNA. It’s what allows Carlos to still fight his mother (Marina de Tavira) for what she became to give him that better life rather than acknowledge how alike she might have been at his age. It’s why Uncle Esteban (Sama) can be trusted as an equal for pushing aside conformity as a necessity.

And yet we look at Carlos’ trajectory and still see compliance. We watch him lie by omission about being attracted to Nico because it allows him a seat at the table of crazy performance art protests supplying him a personal escape as much as delivering an important message. When Gera finds himself left behind — holding onto his “pretty” status too steadfast — he reacts by going further down the rabbit hole than caution recommends. The Aztec and its inhabitants are a white-hot flame of life incarnate, a live wire that risks burning them all alive if they aren’t careful to curb their excess. What they do is necessary for their quests to unearth their true identities, but you cannot ignore the safety net they’re so quick to reject.

It's this blindness that creates the most interesting moments since Sama refuses to simplify the complexities of adolescence at a time of rebellion (something you could argue is adolescence by definition). This whole adventure starts as a way for Carlos to get closer to Rita and yet it's Nico, Maud (Klaudia Garcia), and Ajo (David Montalvo) — characters she knows to keep at arm's length and implores him and Gera to follow suit — who give him the literal and figurative drugs to bring into focus that which was blurred during the opening scene. Visual and narrative connections such as this are plenty throughout *This Is Not Berlin*, but none seem contrived thanks to the raw performances from de León, Toledano, Romo, and Sanchez. They captivate us completely.

Their outcasts from “civilized” society are what every generation needs to wake itself from the doldrums of complacency and the oppression of a political and economical hierarchy dictated by race, gender, and sexuality. And while what occurs may seem familiar to the countless cinematic accounts of post-punk coming-of-age dramas set against neon strobes and rock music of European pedigree, this is very much about Mexican history and that nation's participation in an international culture shift still being fought today. The events onscreen are semi-autobiographical for Sama and thus a document of the turmoil those his age at the time faced when external expectations and internal hopes clashed. At its center: love. The power it has to bring us together opposite its potential to tear us apart.

This Is Not Berlin premiered at the Sundance Film Festival.

30/01/2019, **Slug Magazine**

<https://www.slugmag.com/film-reviews/sundance-this-is-not-berlin/>

SUNDANCE FILM REVIEW: THIS IS NOT BERLIN

BY ALEXANDER ORTEGA

January 30, 2019

THIS IS NOT BERLIN (ESTO NO ES BERLÍN)

SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

Director: Hari Sama

1980s Mexico City punks subvert the trope of “sex, drugs and rock n’ roll” in *This Is Not Berlin*. Artsy post-punk kids intrigue Carlos (Xabiani Ponce de León) and Gera (José Antonio Toledano) with their dangerous-feeling scene at the club they long to get into, Azteca. It’s the venue at which Gera’s older sister, Rita (Ximena Romo), fronts her Patti Smith–meets–Asylum Party band night after night. After school, their futbol-player clique seeks out fights with gangs of rival high schools and bump heavy metal in the car, blowing off the steam of wayward machismo. But Carlos has a thing for Rita, and the people they want to be around are the queer, youth-culture, avant-garde vanguard of Azteca. *This Is Not Berlin* unfolds Carlos’ coming-of-age tale, which is a loosely autobiographical representation of that of director Hari Sama (according to his Sundance 2019 SLC pre-screening remarks on Jan. 29, 2019).

This Is Not Berlin introduces Carlos as an aspiring engineer of sorts. Under the tutelage of his cool uncle Esteban (Sama), he learns how to fix and build small machines, and repairs Rita’s surly boyfriend’s synth. This earns them entry to Azteca, where they throw back beers, network with the hip kids and, for Carlos, bask in Rita’s allure as she weaves through singing and prose poems with a political bent atop coldwave instrumentation. Nico (Mauro Sánchez Navarro), the relatively older but still young proprietor of the club, first wants Carlos’ and Gera’s first dalliances with Azteca to be their final ones because they’re underage. The best-friend pair keeps returning, however, and they endear themselves to the crowd of Azteca, integrating themselves into a lifestyle of sex-driven art, hard drugs, queries of their own sexualities and political activism. Herein, the question is whether they can balance their growth into their new, volatile selves—especially Carlos.

Where Alfonso Cuarón’s 2018 success *Roma* takes root in the tumultuous zeitgeist of late-’60s Mexico City, *This Is Not Berlin*, by contrast, celebrates the (sexual and artistic) counter-cultural liberation that this permutation of the punk scene heralded in the ’80s. (Also note the coincidences of the two films’ respective autobiographical inspirations and the casting of Marina de Tavira as the mother role in each film.)

Sama's storytelling is extraordinary and transcends the trappings of typical rite-of-passage films by way of its content's extremities. For some, Carlos' journey may be relatable—but even so, the film's sexy and salacious scenes conjure excitement about its anarchic spirit, considerably so when coupled with the characters' ardor in creating and executing performance art.

I think that the full extent of how transgressive the non-normative sexuality of *This Is Not Berlin* is perhaps understated in the film. Amid the conservative climate of Mexico in the '80s, homosexual acts and queer signifiers were quite risky, which Sama acknowledged in the SLC Q&A. He also asserted, however, that the way this film depicts its punky group is how the people on which it is based expressed themselves in real life. There are also tacit indicators in the film of '80s-Mexican attitudes toward queerness via Carlos' and Gera's peers in the futbol crew, who refer to Azteca as a club for "putos." When Carlos comes to school with a buzzed side of his head and half-washed-off makeup on his face after a night at Azteca, jocks' and schoolteachers' ostracization of Carlos effectively communicates not only institutional scorn but patriarchal expectations of how a man should rebel. And Carlos' new friends and he, as provocateurs, don't relent in the face of dogma.

The ending of *This Is Not Berlin* is one that only the throes of real life could inspire. The dark, artistic ethos of the characters' environment leaves an indelible impression, a vampire bite. The ebbs, flows and fluctuations of Carlos' relationships with those around him engulfed me—you'll care about him, Gera and Rita through the end. Sama, his cast and his crew have created a spellbinding story of urban magic, individualism and lust with a driving noir drumbeat. *This Is Not Berlin* demands to be seen. –
Alexander Ortega

01/02/2019, **Sweet Smell of Success**

These 10 films stand out in Sundance festival lineup

<http://sweetsmellosuccess.tumblr.com/>

These 10 films stand out in Sundance festival lineup

Number of Films: 3

Best Movie of the Day: This is Not Berlin

This is Not Berlin: At an underground club in mid-'80s Mexico City, a young woman is talking to the best friend of her younger brother about the ephemeral aspect of life: "A month ago, I was with that guy, and you were still a kid." At a certain age, a lot can change in a super-compressed period of time. Take Carlos (Xabiani Ponce de León), a sweet-faced engineering-focused kid, who likes messing around with his friends, hitting the arcade and pining after the sister, Rita, (Ximena Romo), of his best friend, Gera (José Antonio Toledano). One night, Rita allows Gera and Carlos to join with her band entourage to a cutting edge club downtown called the Azteca. The boys' experience, being introduced to the art scene (reminiscent of the Factory), and booze and drugs, and sexual freedom, catches hold and almost overnight they transform into club kids, even as they drift apart. Carlos hooks up with Nico (Mauro Sanchez), the de facto leader of the Azteca artist/drug collective, hanging around their installations and establishing a more androgynous look, while Gera, greatly wounded at his friend's apparent disavowal, haunts the place desperately wanting to find his own place to fit in. Hari Sama's film is filled with telling, specific period detail, from the black fingernail polish and eyeliner, to the soundtrack, which hits everything from Patti Smith to Joy Division, only adding to the verisimilitude. The film has to do with that specific time of life where identity is as elastic as taffy, and, with the deposing of your family as you come more into your own, the prospect of feeling like you fit in somewhere overpowers almost everything else in your life. Every generation has their rituals of youth and rebellion, for a certain segment of kids growing up in the '80s, this was ours.

02/02/2019, **Variety**, Sundance Film Review: 'This Is Not Berlin'

<https://variety.com/2019/film/reviews/this-is-not-berlin-review-1203123253/>

by Dennis Harvey

Sundance Film Review: 'This Is Not Berlin'

Hari Sama's autobiographically inspired feature is a joyfully edgy dive in the Mexico City punk/New Wave underground of the mid-80s.

There have been a lot of coming-of-age-in-the-punk-scene movies, not least because indie cinema really took off in the years immediately following the heyday of punk and New Wave, when the kids raised on that music were fresh out of film school. Still, Hari Sama's fourth feature as writer-director is something special, and one of the best of its particular subgenre.

"This Is Not Berlin" deploys the wisdom of the director's now-middle-aged perspective to provide what's not just a portrait of adolescent liberation, but a snapshot of a moment in middle-class Mexican life whose larger sociopolitical context is both present yet mostly kept in the background (as in Alfonso Cuarón's recent "Roma"). In the foreground is a vivid, often giddy, but also perilous world of hedonism for art's sake in which the emerging threat of AIDS is seldom openly addressed yet omnipresent. With a coolness factor off the charts, this musically and otherwise seductive drama is likely to appeal to audiences who lived through the era as well as those who wish they had, both straight and gay.

Long-haired, androgynous-looking Carlos (Xabiani Ponce de Leon) is introduced as a gazelle amid butting rams, indifferent to the titanic fistfights between rival high schools that preoccupy most of his classmates in 1986 Mexico City. He lives with a younger brother and a mother so depressed she barely gets out of bed (dad's whereabouts are left unmentioned).

His best friend is Gera (José Antonio Toledano), whose domestic situation is more stable, and who earns money "renting" dad's girly-magazine collection to their prep-school brethren. His older sister is the awesomely hip Rita (Ximena Romo), who has a band with her intimidatingly attractive boyfriend Tito (Americo Hollander). Despite his preference for "hippie" music, as developed by shaggy Uncle Esteban (Sama), he thinks she's da bomb. She of course barely notices him, at least until his knack for tinkering with electronics salvages their broken keyboard. As thanks, underage Carlos and Gera are snuck in for what's intended as a one-time-only visit to the pretentious art-noise band's next gig, at underground club Azteca.

"Is this a gay bar?" Carlos asks, spying two men kissing. "It's an everything bar," Rita deadpans. It's also utterly intoxicating to the two wide-eyed 17-year-olds, as they take in not just the air of cutting-edge musical and polysexual sophistication, but the avant-garde artwork and sense that everyone here is some sort of artist. As it happens, the

joint is owned by Nico (Mauro Sánchez Navarro), a photographer whose studio upstairs is where even more advanced artistic and sexual expressions take place — as well as more open drug-taking.

When they return the next night sans band chaperone for more, however, Carlos and Gera discover that their age is too much of a liability for entry. Worse, in the time it takes them to get turned away, the family car Gera borrowed without permission is broken into. As a result, Gera (and Rita, who still lives at home) are grounded for a month.

But that doesn't entirely stop them from being a part of the scene. It certainly doesn't stop Carlos, whose usefulness to the band is a plus, and whose attractiveness to Nico gets him full access, as well as inclusion in some of the family care Gera "borrowed" without permission is broken into's commingled art-making and political protest activities. He's not "into boys," but seems willing to project a certain ambiguity on that matter if it works to his benefit. His increasing insider status drives a wedge between him and Gera, who in terms of emerging sexual orientation might actually have a more rightful place in the club's homophilic milieu.

Still, the two boys are just that, juveniles, and quickly get in over their heads amid the Azteca regulars' grownup excesses. "This Is Not Berlin" is too fond of the adventurous subculture they fall into to become a simplistic cautionary tale. But it does capture both the exhilaration and disillusionment inherent in climbing aboard the kind of rollercoaster that leaves a fair amount of casualties behind. Our protagonists are lucky to emerge with just minor damage — but they wouldn't trade 95% of those experiences for anything in the world, and Sama's autobiographically inspired flashback makes it easy to share that sentiment.

"Berlin" is highly polished and assured while maintaining a boisterous rough edge appropriate for its subject. Anyone who actually participated in such '80s avant-gardism will admire the exactitude with which Sama and his collaborators re-create the general flavor and tropes of video, performance, and other underground multimedia art in practice at the time (much of which was, this film's humorously defensive title notwithstanding, heavily indebted to European and U.S. trends).

Alfredo Altamirano's widescreen cinematography amplifies the film's many moods in tactically resourceful terms. Of course, there's a great array of pre-existing soundtrack choices, from New Wave pop antecedents Roxy Music to the New York gallery vibe of vocal experimentalist Meredith Monk. Rita and Tito's band is a perfect encapsulation of the imitative, maximally angsty art-squawk you might have heard between poetry readings at off-night campus or downtown venues in the early-to-mid '80s.

Most of the characters here either have or are trying to conjure a striking "artistic" persona — with variable levels of actual depth below — and the thespians are well-cast, coiffed and costumed for that kind of immediate impact. They also do well conveying ordinary vulnerabilities when called for, particularly the young male leads. Sama provides a nice contrast as an uncle who still flies the freak flag of an earlier

counterculture. The only unsatisfying element in the otherwise complex screenplay he co-wrote with Rodrigo Ordóñez and Max Zunino is the underdeveloped thread of Carlos' mom, whose problems are a major issue yet get scant explanation.

Sundance Film Review: 'This Is Not Berlin'

Reviewed at Sundance Film Festival (World Dramatic), Jan. 26, 2019. Running time: 110 MIN. (Original title: "Esto no es Berlin")

PRODUCTION: (Mexico) A Catatonia Cine production. (International sales: Latido Films, Madrid.) Producers: Ale García, Antonio Urdapilleta, Verónica Valadez P., Hari Sama.

CREW: Director: Hari Sama. Screenplay: Rodrigo Ordóñez, Sama, Max Zunino. Camera (color, widescreen, HD): Alfredo Altamirano. Editors: Rodrigo Ríos, Ximena Cuevas, Sama.

WITH: Xabiani Ponce de Leon, Jose Antonio Toledano, Ximena Romo, Mauro Sanchez Navarro, Klaudia Garcia, Americo Hollander, Hari Sama, Marina de Tavira, Juan Carlos Remolina, Lumi Cavazos, Fernando Alvarez Rebeil.

02/02/2019, **Sundance Institute interview**

Interview with Hari by Eric Hynes:

<http://www.sundance.org/blogs/2019-festival/its-all-falling-apart-wendi-mclendon-covey-imaginary-order>

Sundance Institute

Friday, February 1st, 2019

Sundance.org is dispatching its writers to daily screenings and events to capture the 10 days of festivities during the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. Check back each morning for roundups from the previous day's events.

This Is Not Berlin

By Eric Hynes

It's true, the film is not about Berlin. Nor does it take place there. Instead, Hari Sama's fourth feature takes place in Mexico in 1986, where two best teenaged friends, Carlos and Geza, are itching to get out of the suburbs to experience new things. They find just that at the Azteca, a nightclub where the boys find sex, drugs, and post-punk. While Carlos gets deep into performance art and sexual disorientation, Geza struggles to adjust to greater distance from Carlos, and wrestles with his own emerging identity.

"I was pretty much like Carlos. I came from that suburb and I came from a middle class family, and I grew up listening to this music, and that's who I am. So it made sense to be honest and share that with you, and with myself," Sama said during an engaging post-screening discussion. He recounted how in his suburb outside Mexico City, "there was a lot of high School gangs. So you had to pretty much join one if you wanted to belong. And I didn't want to fight, so I had this persona that was like this guy that listened to 60s music, psychedelic stuff, and didn't wear any shoes and had long hair. And so I became a pacifist. That was my shield. I did not have to fight—they left me alone." Then he met people much like the ones depicted in the film, people involved with art and challenging the system and mores of society. "Suddenly I belonged somewhere. So this is the soundtrack of my life pretty much. And it's just amazing for me to sitting in Sundance and looking at a film of mine with Joy Division. Come on. I mean, for me that was so cool."

When asked why he named the film This Is Not Berlin, he said, "In a way it's [about] a longing that we had in this particular group in the 80s. We were looking at what artists were making in NYC or London or Berlin, and it was a longing for actively participating in what was going on in the world. But we couldn't because we were victims of a dictatorship that did not allow young people to gather, to be gay. We were longing to be somewhere else," he said. "And then at the same time this is not Berlin is a way of

saying this is Mexico, whatever that means. And that made us go inside and try to understand who we were, what kind of Mexicans were we, and what it meant to be Mexican at that time. Thirty years later I think we made a very cool thing.”

Since the young actors were playing people who lived in a much different time, young people who were taking serious chances in a culture more interested in the 1986 World Cup than they were avant-garde art or post-punk music, Sama had to break them in the hard way. “The first thing we shot with all the artists group was that performance piece when they were all naked with ‘queer’ and ‘fag’ written on their bodies,” he said. “And this is a real street in Mexico City, it’s a huge avenue. And they were freaking out. I thought that was really important for the process, for [Xiabani Ponce de Leon, who plays Carlos] especially. It’s important for the character and he understood that. Little by little the actors became very empowered by the act of being naked in the street. I wanted to be naked in the street. You get so much power out of your own vulnerability. So they had that. And when we started shooting everything else they had gone through the real emotion of vulnerability in terms of being an artist.”

The proof is in the final product, which strives to be entirely in the moment, despite transporting the viewer to a moment in the past. “I wanted the film to feel truthful, and not a theatrical recreation of what was the 80s,” he said.

04/02/2019, **Vulture**

More love from the Vulture... "15 Movies We Loved at Sundance" by Emily Yoshida, Nate Jones, Bilge Ebiri, and Rachel Handler (with a nice quote: "Sundance is not exactly lacking for coming-of-age tales, but few of them can match BERLIN's invigorating energy"):

<https://www.vulture.com/2019/02/the-15-best-movies-at-sundance.html>

15 Movies We Loved at Sundance

By Emily Yoshida, Nate Jones, Bilge Ebiri, and Rachel Handler

Sundance hype is real, and it's spectacular. Cut off from the outside world and quarantined on the side of a mountain in Utah, critics have a habit of going gaga for films that merit a collective shrug outside Park City. However, now that we've been back a few days and the reflected glamor of the Chase Sapphire Lounge has worn off, cooler heads have prevailed. Here are the 15 films from this year's offerings that we're convinced are actually good. (With apologies to Luce, Post, Hala, Brittany Runs a Marathon, and Clemency, all of which we did not get around to seeing, but we've heard good things about that we totally believe.)

This Is Not Berlin

Alfonso Cuarón isn't the only director who can make a semi-autobiographical film about growing up in a bourgeois Mexico City family during a time of social turmoil. But where Cuarón's *Roma* is a wide-screen epic about a '70s childhood, his contemporary Hari Sama's *This Is Not Berlin* is a portrait of an '80s teen exploring the era's glittering, fluorescent New Wave scene. Sundance is not exactly lacking for coming-of-age tales, but few of them can match Berlin's invigorating energy. As young Carlos (Xabiani Ponce de León, the festival's most beautiful newcomer) gets drawn into this world of sex, drugs, and queer performance art, we fall in love with the city's bright young things as heedlessly as he does. There's a small issue in that Carlos might not actually be gay, but as they say, nobody's perfect.

05/02/2019, **RogerEbert.com**

Sundance 2019: The Infiltrators, We Are Little Zombies, This Is Not Berlin, Knock Down the House” by Monica Castillo:

<https://www.rogerebert.com/sundance/sundance-2019-the-infiltrators-we-are-little-zombies-this-is-not-berlin-knock-down-the-house>

SUNDANCE 2019: THE INFILTRATORS, WE ARE LITTLE ZOMBIES, THIS IS NOT BERLIN, KNOCK DOWN THE HOUSE

by Monica Castillo

In a more conventional yet still thrilling vein, Hari Sama’s “**This is not Berlin**” is a clash of sex, drugs and punk music. In the movie, two best friends are introduced to Mexico’s burgeoning art scene in the 80s and are immediately hooked on the feeling of belonging. It was a place that allowed the boys to escape their macho high school trappings for something more experimental, a scene more permissive in terms of gender norms, sexuality and self-expression. “This is not Berlin” is a sexy misadventure through self-discovery and art that speaks directly to the misfits in the crowd who either went through a stage like this or wished such a place existed in their hometown.

05/02/2019, **Queerty**

Interview with Hari, "'This is Not Berlin' director Hari Sama on how getting naked in public inspired his actors" by David Reddish:

<https://www.queerty.com/not-berlin-director-hari-sama-getting-naked-public-inspired-actors-20190205>

'This is Not Berlin' director Hari Sama on how getting naked in public inspired his actors <<https://www.queerty.com/not-berlin-director-hari-sama-getting-naked-public-inspired-actors-20190205>>

By David Reddish <<https://www.queerty.com/author/david-reddish>> 1 hour ago

This article is part three of a series of interviews conducted at the Sundance Film Festival chronicling the best of indie film. Many of these films are still looking for distributors, and won't be viewable anytime soon.

Hari Sama sounds a bit like a kid on Christmas morning: teeming with excitement and out of breath.

He greets me on the phone just ahead of a special screening of his latest film This is Not Berlin at Sundance <<https://www.queerty.com/watch-sundance-film-fest-edition-sex-fyre-vice-hedwig-20190124>> . Set in Mexico City in the 1980s, it follows two teenage best friends, Carlos (Xabiani Ponce de Leon) and Gera (Jose Antonio Toledano) as they stumble into the underground club scene of radical queer artists, drugs, sex and rock music. Right away, the scene causes the two to begin asking questions about the nature of their friendship, and themselves.

Sama took a few minutes to speak with Queerty about the film and its themes of sexual exploration. (This is Not Berlin is currently seeking distribution, so you'll have to wait to see this terrific film. Sorry.)

This is a wonderful story, one I've not seen done before. What was the inception for you? I'm guessing this is autobiographical...

It is. That is absolutely true. It's autobiographical. It's basically my adolescence, my teenage years.

Wow.

Obviously, I had to change many elements to be able to put it in a screenplay. But they all come from the time I was growing up in Mexico City, very close to where we shot. My friends all went to that Catholic [school](https://www.queerty.com/gay-graduate-racist-catholic-school-says-hes-not-surprised-native-american-elder-video-20190123), and at some point in my life I got thrown into a gay bar called The Nine; Le Neuf in French. The owner was French. Then I met all these people that are very closely related to the characters you see in the film. Some of those characters are actually inspired by friends I had during those years, some of which aren't alive anymore. So, yeah, it's pretty much inspired by things I actually saw. It's funny: That garden where they exhibit all the art installations and paintings and sculptures and so forth—that's the actual house that actually had those exhibits. All the pieces in the scene are either real or recreations of real pieces that actually were exhibited in those years in those exhibits.

So to be clear, did you film on location at the actual school as well?

Yeah, that school is there from the 80s. I didn't go to that school, but my friends did. It's a private Catholic school.

The film is set in the 1980s, and borrows tropes from 1980s comedies, like *Weird Science* or *Sixteen Candles*. It uses the same devices: characters steal a car. Characters go clubbing underage. Somebody falls in love with his best friend's sister. The big difference is that it treats them as real problems, with seriousness. Was that something you were conscious of when you were writing?

No, actually. It's very funny you bring that up. I remember those films from that time. Perhaps I'm fonder, maybe you know that episodic [series] *Freaks and Geeks*? [It has that same quality in that they are all real people. They are all these youngsters growing up. Even though it was a dramedy, it had that quality of truthfulness. You could see their pain through very obscure moments. But it was truthful. Sometimes you have pain in relation to this that, if you look at them from a distance, they don't seem as painful, but in the moment, they are. They're life-changing, even.](https://www.queerty.com/photos-freaks-and-geeks-gather-for-gay-times-in-chicago-20151229)

So I was not aware of any of that, to tell you the truth.

I got grounded many times. It was a whole thing. We normally stole the cars of our parents, and then it became a whole issue. I was grounded forever. Things like that were all the time happening. We were all crazy.

The difference is that the comedies of the 80s ignored gay people, or made a joke of them. In your film, they're treated with respect. Through most of the film, it's unclear if Carlos and Gera are attracted to women, men, both or just the scene. How much does that reflect your own experience?

Let me explain: I'm not gay. When I arrived at this bar I was talking about, I was a very shy kid from the suburbs. I was very self-conscious and I suffered incredibly because it was so hard for me to approach girls...or anyone. But I got to this bar and I felt incredibly comfortable there. I started having family—a gay family. I became super confused. I really didn't know what I was anymore. I started loving these people. I grew up with these crazy artists that were mostly gay and that treated me incredibly well. Every time I went to the bar there was a guy buying me drinks, and I felt incredibly comfortable there. It came to the point where I just wanted to be gay. I needed to be gay!

Wow.

So there's no way I cannot treat that with respect. I love those guys. They were people I admired. They were older than me, obviously. And I admired them and they gave me the love I was not receiving anywhere else. So I really wanted to be gay to belong there. At some point, they started realizing. I mean, this was the 80s and things were very extreme. I started having sex with all these girls, and they started noticing. They were saying, "Oh my god, what's going on here?" At some point, things got complicated. I stopped seeing [my gay friends]. I went to rehab. But I guess that's where all the respect you talk about is coming from. To this day, many of my best friends are gay. I cherish that time of my life when I really wanted to be gay because I felt so incredibly comfortable.

This is a queer story, but it's also not a queer story. You also play gay Uncle Esteban in the film. What made you want to play the role? Were you concerned about directing yourself?

I was very concerned about directing myself. I thought about it many times, and when I was growing up I had this uncle. He was crazy. He drank a lot. He used a lot of drugs. But he did show me the music. He gave me that—the 60s music. He was in love with all those crazy psychedelic bands from the 60s. I adopted that. At a certain point [I said], "I will never listen to music that was recorded past 1972." Which was sort of weird, according to my friends.

Related: How 'Halston' director Frederic Tcheng uncovered the world of a lost queer hero
<<https://www.queerty.com/halston-director-frederic-tcheng-uncovered-world-lost-queer-hero-20190203>>

So I wrote my perfect uncle, the perfect male that I needed in my life and did not have. So it was inspirational for me to play that role so I could really give that to my boy that is still there somewhere. That was beautiful. I had my friend Max Zunino who co-wrote with me help me and watch my scenes. But I felt very, very comfortable playing that role. I was really excited to do it.

Your lead actors, Xabiani Ponce De Leon, who plays Carlos, and Jose Antonio Toledano, who plays Gera were inexperienced. Was that a choice?

No. I didn't have anything deliberately done. I just looked for the right people. Jose Antonio appeared in the casting. Xabiani was suggested by my producers. Fortunately, I knew he came from the Disney world. But the truth is I found the right people. I looked for them, and I found them. Ximena [Romo] was incredible casting. She comes from a very different kind of film. Then Mauro [Sanchez], I had worked with him, and I said, "This guy is Nico." When I found them, we really worked very, very hard. We worked for months before shooting doing a lot of very deep work. I tend to work in a therapeutic way where I really need to know where they are coming from and their scars so that we can see which of those scars work for a character. I talk to them very openly, like I'm talking to you right now, which was a very interesting process because coming out is not specifically gay. I think it's human in the deeper sense of the word. It's a life-long process. I think it's great to be able to come out and say, "This is me." In the end, that's what the film is about.

I'm also curious. There is a lot of frank, frontal male and female nudity, some of which is staged in public areas, or in groups. I realize in the US we tend to be a bit uptight about nudity, but my mind was blown. How do you prepare your cast to do that?

You know what? The first scene we shot with the group of artists was the scene where they are naked on the street with those words written on them.

Words like "queer" and those really offensive words. They were like, "Oh my God." Xabiani was in complete shock. We had shot the previous parts with the school and all of that. But when the time came when he needed to get nude and work with everyone else in that scene he was like, "Oh no, this is tough." And it was a real street. But the magical things was that when they started doing it, shouting and all of that, they became super empowered. To feel all that power they were feeling, at some point they didn't even want to wear their robes. I even wanted to go naked.

[Laughter]

It was so empowering, the whole thing. I think that's the magic of coming out in the deeper sense we were talking about. It gives you that very well-understood sense of power.

Self-confidence?

Exactly. And I have to say that [scene], the idea came from Mauro, the actor who plays Nico who is gay. We did a lot of research and we had wonderful artists and art historians giving us a lot of history of contemporary art and radical artists groups. I wanted them to have their own voice. At a certain point, Mauro understood what he wanted to do as an artist, and he told me. He designed this performance, so it was double powerful. It was magical.

What did the neighbors think when they saw it?

That was great, man! We actually asked permission from the Mexican Film Commission. We never said there would be naked people. So we got permission to close the street. Then we closed the street, but they told us we had to open it periodically at some point. So we closed the street and then all these naked guys started shouting. The film commission guy was there, and his eyes started opening wide and he was saying, "Oh my God, what is this?" So eventually he said, "I'm not going to watch this. Just shoot quickly."

So that was it.

This is Not Berlin is currently seeking distribution.

06/02/2019, **V Magazine**

“A punk rock Roma” says V Magazine in his mention of the film in his Sundance wrap up “Notes from Sundance’s Class of 2019’ by Gregg Krelenstein:

<https://vmagazine.com/article/notes-from-sundances-class-of-2019/>

NOTES FROM SUNDANCE’S CLASS OF 2019

Let us break it down for you.

February 5, 2019

TEXT: GREG KRELENSTEIN

The Try Sexual Generation

For the kids in the club redefining sexuality, gender, and everything in between, they can reference Adam, This Is Not Berlin, and Now Apocalypse. Adam, starring newcomer Nicholas Alexander, tells the story of a cisgender male teen impersonating a trans male with the hopes of winning over the affections of a lesbian woman, played by Bobbi Salvör Menuez, who doesn’t know his secret. Taking place in the LGBTQ scene of 90s New York, the film has the charm of past Sundance hits like Party Girl (which made Parker Posey a star) and Trick (which legitimized 90210’s Tori Spelling.)

This is Not Berlin takes place in the Mexico City New Wave underground scene of the mid-80s, and follows the journey of an androgynous 17-year-old boy navigating an exciting new art scene and his own difficult family dynamics. This coming of age drama comes off like a punk rock Roma and captures the energy of this subculture perfectly.

06/02/2019, **The Week**

<https://theweek.com/articles/821597/biggest-trends-from-second-half-sundance>

The biggest trends from the second half of Sundance

Noel Murray

For the past two years, nearly every public screening at the Sundance Film Festival has been preceded by a one-minute reel of the previous day's highlights: clips from the Q&As, the red-carpet strolls, the music events, and so on. This year, one of those daily montages kicked off with a cheery hello from newly elected Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.), the primary subject of the Sundance documentary *Knock Down the House*.

I saw four films that day, so I saw Ocasio-Cortez's greeting four times. Every time — every time — the audience gasped in awe when her face filled the screen.

Sundance films and filmmakers have never shied away from being political, but in 2019, the energy of many of the agitprop films and social dramas felt ... well, different. Perhaps because of the festival's ongoing efforts to diversify its line-up — or perhaps because of a general feeling of youthful restlessness and frustration in the air, around the world — many of the movies this year expressed an unmistakable disgust with the status quo and a sympathy for the troubles facing our emerging generations of artists and leaders.

The kids may or may not be all right

It's not really a modern critique, but the depiction of the 1986 Mexico City underground politics and arts scene in director Hari Sama's excellent slice-of-life *This Is Not Berlin* is unusually clear-eyed about both the allure and the limitations of an outré lifestyle. The film follows a typical middle-class teenager, who gets drawn further and further into the creative freedom, excessive drug use, and pansexual explorations happening in the back rooms of a local punk club. The question the movie keeps asking is: Is this kid being exploited by the older artists, or is he being initiated into a more vital world?

A common refrain these days is that "the youth will save us" — presuming that all the old culture clashes and prejudices are on the wane, generation by generation. *This Is Not Berlin*, along with several other films at Sundance this year, scrutinized this whole idea, by jumping from country to country and era to era, to consider what's timeless and what's changing about coming of age.

07/02/2019, Amos Lassen,

Reviews by Amos Lassen

<http://reviewsbyamoslassen.com/?p=68948>

“THIS IS NOT BERLIN” —Mexican Society from an Adolescent Point of View

Amos Lassen

Hari Sama’s “This Is Not Berlin” is a politically fearless, individual, and subversive film that showcases a period of Mexico’s society from an adolescent perspective. The film pulls pansexuality and identity into the anger of those dissatisfied with the way things are. The director is hungry, pointed, and gives us an avant-garde portrait of youth finding their people. It’s a coming-of-age for those who are marginalized, underrepresented, “weird,” and outliers.

We meet Carlos (Xabiani Ponce de León) when he’s standing aimlessly amid a horde of classmates clashing and having a brawl with rival school boys as they mean to prove some sort of machismo upper hand. It’s 1986, the World Cup tournament is taking place and for Carlos this marks the time in which the world will suddenly shake to evolve him. He enjoys simmering in boredom with his best friend Gera (José Antonio Toledano), staring at his friend’s older, much cooler, sister Rita (Ximena Romo). His mother (Marina de Tevira) medicates herself daily and is the background although she walks away with every scene she’s in. When Carlos uses his homegrown engineering abilities to fix a synthesizer for Rita’s punk band, the two friends are suddenly allowed to enter the underground venue Azteca, a smoky, gender-liberated dive where drugs, sex, and alcohol are alive and well. Soon Carlos and Gera are tantalized by the underbelly culture scene that will define who they are.

The striking performance art sequences, and the electrifying, energetic music, the film looks at forms of repression, that of the weak, the forgotten, and the tired. When this comes together with Carlos and Gera’s sexual awakenings, we see what happens. The new social scene leaves Gera and Carlos on opposite sides of the orbit as one struggles with his identity while the other may just be looking to fit in. When Rita recites the poetry of Patti Smith in class, there’s a demonstration forming in the narrative that’s radical. She calls her own shots, her own battles, and her own devilishly cool lyrical outcries as a form of protest against the status quo. They’re the pioneers of their own liberties in a time that so scornfully rejects them.

As Carlos to use his body and mind in the performance arts, he strips naked on the streets covered in red paint that reads “Gay!,” it liberates him in ways that only this closely knit group of friends would understand, which in turn causes tension with Gera, who really wants to belong. For Carlos, it was his uncle (Hari Sama) who entertained his creativity while his dad wasn’t around. He’s a motorcyclist and was probably a hippie in his heyday. He is a role model to Carlos and tells him to live freely, with no regrets or contempt. What Carlos does with this urgency of identity is up to him but it comes with its own consequences. The film is told through moments of self-reflecting overdose, fearless demonstrations, and electrifying music. We see sexual promiscuity and over-the-top dissents allowing only its true colors and queer identities to guide it. With a cast that is both beautiful and talented, we get a colorful, literate and enjoyable film.

Director Sama loves the creativity of his actors and what they bring to the film, exploring personal angst and sexual prowess. The film will likely be unnerving to some, but if you like “artsy, sexual deliverance in revolt”, this is a movie you do not want to miss. This is a wild take on the coming-of-age story.

We meet Carlos as an aspiring engineer of sorts. Under the tutelage of his cool uncle Esteban (Sama). He learns how to fix and build small machines, and repairs Rita’s surly boyfriend’s synthesizer. Nico (Mauro Sánchez Navarro), the relatively older but still young proprietor of Azteca wants Carlos’ and Gera’s first dalliances with the Azteca to be their final ones because they’re underage. The best-friend pair keeps returning, however, and they endear themselves to the crowd, integrating themselves into a lifestyle of sex-driven art, hard drugs, queries of their own sexualities and political activism.

“This Is Not Berlin” celebrates the (sexual and artistic) counter-cultural liberation of the punk scene in the ’80s. Sama’s storytelling is extraordinary and transcends the trappings of typical rite-of-passage films by way of its content’s extremities. For some, Carlos’ journey may be relatable—but even so, the film’s sexy and salacious scenes conjure excitement about its anarchism.

The non-normative sexuality of the film can be seen as understated in the film. Amid the conservative climate of Mexico in the ’80s, homosexual acts and queer signifiers were quite risky yet the way this film depicts its punky group is how the people on which it is based expressed themselves in real life. The ending of “This Is Not Berlin” is one that could only be inspired by real life.

The outcasts from “civilized” society are what every generation needs to wake itself from. There is no place for complacency and for the oppression of a political and economic hierarchy dictated by race, gender, and sexuality. The events onscreen are semi-autobiographical for Sama and this is a document of the turmoil that he and others his age faced when external expectations and internal hopes clashed. At its center is love that can together oppose and/or tear us apart.

07/02/2019, **Park Record**

Positive mention in "Sundance lovers and tree huggers" by Jay Meehan ("Refreshing... Filmmaker Hari Sama and his team should feel proud"): by Jay Meehan:

<https://www.parkrecord.com/opinion/sundance-lovers-and-tree-huggers/>

Jay Meehan: Sundance lovers and tree huggers

Jay Meehan

February 6, 2019

"This Is Not Berlin" (Esto no es Berlin), a wonderful entry from Mexico in the World Cinema Dramatic Competition, proved to be a most refreshing film especially considering its dark coming of age thematic structure. Again, its use of the rock music canon of the '80's became a character every bit as much as the club habitués.

Identifying with a foreign culture and space-time has never been easier. Every moment of screen time, including the rampant, often ill-advised, consumption of drugs, added to the narrative. Filmmaker Hari Sama and his team should feel proud.

09/02/2019, **Arkansasonline** - Reviews by Amos Lassen

Mauro Sánchez Navarro is going to be thrilled, he was selected best actor of Sundance 2019 by critic Piers Marchant, writing for the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette:

<https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2019/feb/08/sundance-2019-he-left-his-heart-in-san-/?entertainment-movies>

Sundance 2019: He left his heart in San Francisco

by PIERS MARCHANT Special to the Democrat-Gazette | Today at 1:51 a.m.

Best Actor: Mauro Sanchez, *This Is Not Berlin*. If the category was most compelling, I might have to opt for Adam Driver in *The Report*, a film so dry (yet very strong) that his unique, forceful delivery is essential to keeping the audience engaged. The most poignant performance, however, is Sanchez, who plays the de facto leader of a Mexico City artist collective in the mid-'80s, all pompous and deliciously contemptuous, but underneath his mannered insolence lies the beating heart of a fragile romantic, very much in love with the film's protagonist. It's subtle and sterling work.

26/01/2019

"A 'Love Letter' to Mexico's Radical, Queer Culture in the '80s" by Manuel Betancourt:

<https://www.out.com/movies/2019/1/26/love-letter-mexicos-radical-queer-culture-80s>

MOVIES

A 'Love Letter' to Mexico's Radical, Queer Culture in the '80s

BY MANUEL BETANCOURT

JANUARY 26 2019 11:11 AM EST

The opening scene of Hari Sama's *This Is Not Berlin* (*Esto no es Berlin*) is a portrait of toxic masculinity. A group of young boys are fighting one another in a dusty field. Presented in slow-motion, their punches and bloodied faces are exaggerated. In the center of the shot stands a still Carlos (a striking Xabiani Ponce de León), a boy whose soft features and long brown locks set him apart from the chaos around him. It's no surprise he's knocked out; he barely puts up a fight.

The punk-scored film that follows builds on the themes and visuals of Sama's opening. What he's created with *This Is Not Berlin* is an urgent and refreshing queer take on the coming-of-age genre that doubles as an intoxicating snapshot of Mexico's countercultural scene in the late 80s.

It is Mexico in 1986 and 17 year-old Carlos is slowly finding his inner circle, these rabble-rousing guys who egg on rivals for after school brawls with taunts of "putos" (sissies, fags, pussies), to be wanting. His artistic and sensitive proclivities flare up when he and his best friend Gera (José Antonio Toledano) nab an invite to an underground nightclub called *The Azteca*. Gera's sister and her punk band are playing there and they begrudgingly bring the two boys along, warning them that it's a one-time thing. What the pair find within those hallowed walls is a world that both find impossibly seductive.

The Azteca is a counter-cultural hub. It's full of freaks and artists and musicians, and revolutionaries. The downstairs club looks like it could be an East Village dive bar ("Is this a gay bar?" they ask when they see two men openly kissing; "It's an everything bar," they're told); the upstairs a kind of Mexican Warholian Factory. That's where Carlos eventually ends up, enthralled by the free spirits that create radical art. Among them is Nico (Mauro Sánchez Navarro), who is drawn in by Carlos' softness, slowly turning him into his muse. *The Azteca* becomes a safe haven for Carlos, a place where he can experiment with his body, his urges, his ambitions. His oft-lethargic mother (who's self-medicating and all but absent at home) and his roughhousing schoolmates (who paint his desk chair pink one day after Carlos shaves the side of his head and begins wearing eyeliner) push him to embrace Nico's queer, punk world. He even starts letting go of his close bond with Gera, who finds it harder to fit among those at *The Azteca*.

Sama's period drama is most electric when it doubles as a kind of documentary of a bygone world. The performance happenings at Nico's studio, captured in 8mm silent shots and neon-tinted montages scored to a punk-fueled soundtrack, is a window into a community that

found the patriotic zeal of the impending World Cup taking over their city too pedestrian. The imperative to conform is what they most dislike. These artists and intellectuals (in themselves removed from the masses they so champion) rather spend their days discussing Patti Smith, Lacan, and German philosophy, using insights found there to push back against the bourgeois society they disdain.

The first time Carlos visits Nico's studio, he's treated to a live reading of 18th century French poetry delivered by a performance artist getting a blowjob by an equally naked young man. For a teen adrift at home and at school, these images spark newfound curiosities. Soon, that wide-eyed wonder turns to laconic insouciance as he eagerly begins taking part in these politically-engaged installations, stripping down and covering himself with the word "GAY" in red all over his body, for example, for a street-wide protest.

Sama's film may cover familiar ground in this coming-of-age tale, but the more Carlos becomes a part of the Azteca world, the murkier his intents appear. Is he actually drawn to Nico, who so obviously pines for his lithe body? Is he finding strength in his newfound androgynous look? Is this new community a way to find or to lose himself?

The answers to these questions are not as clear-cut as they initially appear. Sama mines them, instead, for all their complexity, constructing a portrait of radical queer culture that refuses to be reduced to a coming-out parable. This is not Berlin, much like its title suggests, is a potent love letter to a Mexico at a crossroads; to a community eager to make its mark; and to young men struggling to find their place somewhere between the two.

04/02/2019

Also included here: "The Best Films of Sundance Film Festival 2019":

<https://thefilmstage.com/features/the-best-films-of-sundance-film-festival-2019/2/>

The Best Films of Sundance Film Festival 2019

Written by The Film Stage on February 4, 2019

This is Not Berlin (Hari Sama)

It opens in slow motion with teenage bodies wrestling and punching inside chaotic dust swirls, one boy (Xabiani Ponce de León's Carlos) caught isolated in the middle of the frame. He's not looking to hit any of the others. In fact he's barely dodging out of the way when they come too close. It's almost as though Carlos isn't even there, his mind and body separated as two halves of the same conflicted whole. He knows he should be present with his friends to show his machismo and do Mexico proud like the soccer team soon to hit the 1986 World Cup pitch, but something is calling him in the distance that he can't quite see. It's punk metal versus new wave blues, hetero-normative conformity versus queer counter-culture. – Jared M. (full review)

13/02/2019, REMEZCLA

<http://remezcla.com/features/film/sundance-review-this-not-berlin-esto-no-es-berlin/>

REVIEW: 'This Is Not Berlin' Is an Explosive Look at How the Art World Was Fighting Homophobia in 1980s Mexico

By Carlos Aguilar

Hari Sama's *Esto no es Berlin* (This is Not Berlin) sets its sights on 1986's Mexico City: a year post-earthquake and gearing up for the nation to host its second World Cup. Long-haired teenager Carlos (Xabiani Ponce de León), a character inspired by Sama's own adolescence, attends an all-boys high school where hypermasculinity defines most social exchanges.

Ferocious fist fights with young men from rival campuses are a quotidian affair in Carlos' upper-middle class environment. He participates with minimal effort to maintain his status as one of the guys. Sports, of course, function as yet another opportunity for masculine posturing. Heated fútbol passion is not present here solely as a backdrop, but interpreted as a pillar of the machismo that has perpetuated the pervasive homophobia and use of slurs in Mexico.

Encouraged by his rebellious role model, uncle Esteban (played by the director himself), Carlos slowly develops an identity that sets him apart from the majority of his classmates – one marked by sophisticated musical choices and his aptitude for mechanical engineering.

Such countercultural inclination is only intensified when neighbor and best friend Gera (José Antonio Toledano), who grapples with greater insecurities, invites Carlos to *The Azteca*, a gritty club for intellectuals, musicians, and visual artists that serves as headquarters for their underground collective. There gestate provocative ways to denounce discrimination, the AIDS crisis, and unjust government policies.

The protagonist's still malleable mind is soon enraptured by these alternative worldviews, and takes on the role of a protégé to group's leader, Nico (Mauro Sanchez). Meanwhile at home, his estranged relationship with his mother (Roma's excellent Marina de Tavira), exasperates the feeling of isolation he is fighting.

'This is not Berlin' photo by Alfredo Altamirano. Courtesy of Sundance Institute.

More than a coming-of-age, Carlos' metamorphosis from wallflower to freethinking performance artist experimenting with his sexuality is a reflection of an entire generation of Mexicans, queer and otherwise, who for the first time decried the homogenizing status quo. In turn, the film operates as moving document of a bygone era rarely featured in official historical accounts, since only those who reveled in it firsthand can attest to its risky magic. Sama is one of them.

Although less preoccupied with a detailed recreation its time versus other Mexican period films, what *This is Not Berlin* exploits to its advantage are the inherently vibrant colors, outfits,

and wildly theatrical moments that come with the world it's portraying. Evocative shots of bare bodies moving in sync with music or the illicit substances they've ingested are enhanced by deliberate lighting choices giving *The Azteca* an ethereal atmosphere. The contrast between this safe haven for otherness and the world beyond its walls is stark.

In an effort to engage with what was taking place outside his suburban bubble, Sama inserts a sequence where Gera and his sister Rita (Ximena Romo), the vocalist of a politically minded band, attend a gig in Ecatepec – a low-income area in the outskirts of the city – and are exposed to a grungier musical expression than the polished, more *fresa* circles they are accustomed to. It's a small nod to the parallel universes that coexisted, and still do, in the massive metropolitan area divided along class lines.

For its emotional impact, *This is Not Berlin* depends on the fraternal bond between Carlos and Gera, and how this is affected by their disparate approaches to understanding the people they are becoming. Ponce de León and Toledano exude timeless youth and credible banter, enough to get across the notion that this friendship has been tried and tested. Not surprisingly, by delving into his intimate recollections, Sama, a director with several features to his name, has assembled his most laudable movie yet.

Esto no es Berlin (*This is Not Berlin*) premiered at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival.

19/02/2019, **Seventh-Row**

Positive mini-review by Alex Heeneey:

<https://seventh-row.com/2019/02/19/sundance-world-dramatic/>

ALEX HEENEY / FEBRUARY 19, 2019

SUNDANCE '19 WORLD DRAMATIC HIGHLIGHTS

This is not Berlin (dir. Hari Sama)

Mexican filmmaker Hari Sama's *This is not Berlin* is mostly interesting for the story it's trying to tell — the night life of subversive queer culture in 1980s Mexico. While most boys his age spend their hours playing soccer and obsessing over the world cup which will be played locally, 17-year-old Carlos (Xabiani Ponce de León) finds himself drawn into a group of queer artists and activists, joining them in their orgies and their anti-homophobia rallies. Painting this subculture is what Sama is most interested in: a rebellious group of punk-loving young people who want to be at the centre of change even as they're aware that Mexico City is hardly the legendary Weimar Berlin.

To the film's credit, it leaves Carlos' sexuality ambiguous: is he drawn to the queer, punk subculture because it's an escape from conventional masculinity or because of his sexuality? When we first meet Carlos, he doesn't quite fit in: he faints during the turf fight his friends get him into, and he has long, luscious curls that he has to pin back for school. The film dangles a conventional storyline for him: a boy-next-door pining after an older, unattainable girl, but she turns out to just be the MacGuffin. She introduces him to the alternative subculture that becomes his new home: a group of queer, punk, young male artists. It's a time when masculinity is policed by both institutions and Carlos' classmates; homophobic slurs and gay bashings are the norm. For Carlos, meeting people who are open and subversive, and aren't judgmental, is liberating. At times a bit clunky, *This is not Berlin* is a lot of fun most of the time, and Ponce de León is both a beautiful and a compelling presence.

Abril 17, 2019, **Impacto Latino**

“‘Esto no es Berlín’ de Hari Sama, tendrá su estreno en Nueva York en el Festival de Cine de Tribeca”:

<https://impactolatino.com/esto-no-es-berlin-de-hari-sama-tendra-su-estreno-en-nueva-york-en-el-festival-de-cine-de-tribeca/>

“‘Esto no es Berlín’ de Hari Sama, tendrá su estreno en Nueva York en el Festival de Cine de Tribeca

Después de su exitoso estreno mundial en el Festival de Sundance en enero pasado, Esto no es Berlín (This Is Not Berlin), el quinto largometraje del realizador mexicano Hari Sama, tendrá su estreno en Nueva York como parte de la programación inaugural de la Semana de la Crítica dentro del Festival de Cine de Tribeca, el cual se llevará a cabo del 24 de abril al 5 de mayo del 2019.

Una fascinante historia autobiográfica de transición a la madurez, la película cuenta con un fabuloso reparto encabezado por Xabiani Ponce de León y José Antonio Toledano, junto con la actriz nominada al Óscar y estrella de Roma, Marina de Tavira, quien fuera incluida por la revista Variety en su lista de “10 actores para ver”.

Ambientada en México en 1986 a la vez que el país se prepara para recibir el Mundial de Fútbol, Esto no es Berlín narra la historia de Carlos, un introvertido adolescente de 17 años quien no encaja en ningún lugar: ni en su familia ni con los amigos en la escuela.

Mas sin embargo todo cambia cuando es invitado al legendario club Aztec donde descubre la vida nocturna underground: el post punk, la libertad sexual y las drogas. El despertar de Carlos pone a prueba la relación con su mejor amigo Gera, el hermano de Rita, la chica que le gusta, a la vez que lo ayuda a descubrir su pasión por el arte experimental y su transición a la adultez.

Con una impecable dirección artística y una vibrante banda sonora, la película ofrece un revelador retrato de la Ciudad de México en los años ochenta, una era de profundos cambios políticos, sociales y culturales que marcaron al México de hoy en día.

La potente película de iniciación de Sama es la carta de presentación del consumado cineasta mexicano al público internacional, ofreciendo destreza artística y madurez en una sentida historia sobre la juventud y la autorrealización.

01/03/2019, **The Hudsonian**

“Artists are breaking barriers at Sundance” by Omonike Akinyemi:

<http://www.thehudsonian.org/2019/03/01/artists-are-breaking-barriers-at-sundance/>

Artists are breaking barriers at Sundance

By: Omonike Akinyemi

Contributing Writer

This year’s Sundance Film Festival sported several films that broke the mold in terms of content and daring looks at diverse cultures.

The festival put diversity at its core, allowing indie filmmakers of all cultures, ethnicities and genders to shine. For example, Hari Sama’s “This is not Berlin” is a touching drama of youth in Mexico City.

These youth come of age in an 80s era riddled with social restriction and intolerance. Their only outlet into self-discovery, away from trifling high school gang fights and a sheltered suburban lifestyle, comes from diving into a gay scene filled with artists on the edge.

This young high school boy and his best friend make a journey into a world filled with drugs, punk rock music and fringe artists that awakens their senses and challenges the beliefs their parents have ingrained in them.

“There are moments in the film that just make you cringe,” said one audience member.

Another audience member, a documentary filmmaker, remarked that the film made him discover a modern Mexico far from the “sensationalized criminality” of popular media about Latin America.

The film director gave audiences a front seat into an underground world, one they intuitively felt may eat up the main characters before it implodes into itself.

“This is not Berlin” makes viewers question what it is to belong to a group. Does loyalty trump your own inhibitions? Is it only the people on the edge that can make a nation bend to re-examine its own inner self?

April 17, 2019, **Screen Comment**

“QUICK TAKES | “This is not Berlin,” playing at Tribeca Festival soon” by Ali Naderzad:

<https://screencomment.com/2019/04/berlin-marinadetavira/>

QUICK TAKES | “This is not Berlin,” playing at Tribeca Festival soon

A coming-of-age story in 1980s Mexico City

Xabiani Ponce de León, José Antonio Toledano and Ximena Romo

Directed by Hari Sama

ALI NADERZAD

After premiering at the Sundance Film Festival last January, “This is not Berlin” (“Esto no es Berlín” in the original Spanish), the fifth feature by writer-director Hari Sama, will have its New York premiere at the upcoming Tribeca Festival, as part of its inaugural Tribeca Critics’ Week slate. The festival takes place during April 24 – May 5, 2019.

A persuasive autobiographical bildungsroman, the film boasts a great ensemble cast headed by Xabiani Ponce de León and José Antonio Toledano, along with the Academy Award® nominee and “Roma” star Marina de Tavira.

Set in Mexico in 1986, as the country gets ready for the World Cup, the film follows seventeen year-old Carlos, an introverted young man who doesn’t fit in anywhere, whether with his family or at school. Everything changes when he’s invited to the Aztec, a buzzy Mexico City nightclub where he discovers the underground nightlife scene, post-punk, sexually fluid, and fueled by drugs. Carlos’s awakening will challenge his relationship with his best friend, Gera, the brother of his crush, Rita, while helping him discover his passion for experimental art and lead him into adulthood.

With notable art direction and a knockout soundtrack “This is not Berlin” provides an instructive portrait of Mexico City in the eighties, that is to say, in an era of deep political, social, and cultural change. Sama’s energetic film introduces the accomplished Mexican filmmaker to international audiences with this sincere story about youth, discovery and self-realization.

26/04/2019, **Indiewire**

“Tribeca Critics’ Week: How a New Sidebar Argues for the Role of Critics in Festival Programming” by Eric Kohn

<https://www.indiewire.com/2019/04/tribeca-critics-week-american-factory-in-fabric-1202128376/>

Tribeca Critics’ Week: How a New Sidebar Argues for the Role of Critics in Festival Programming

From an eye-opening Sundance documentary to a wild midnight thriller, the new section provides several recent festival gems another chance to find audiences.

Eric Kohn

While the entire planet finds out if the Avengers can save the universe, the Tribeca Film Festival provides the latest example of some alternatives. Festivals serve many purposes for the industry but, as a whole, they’re a collective reminder that cinema extends far beyond the narrow confines of the multiplex. This puts them more in league with film critics than some may realize, as many of us relish the opportunity to advocate for underappreciated gems. (While I have you: Check out the 3D Chinese noir “Long Day’s Journey Into Night,” which has more daring technology and storytelling ambition than anything in “Endgame.”)

Yet despite these common agendas, the arts of criticism and programming often exist in separate categories in America. This year, I served on a selection committee for a new sidebar at the Tribeca Film Festival designed to address this rift: Tribeca Critics’ Week is a concise program of five features picked by New York-based critics, and marks the first program of its kind in North America. To my mind, it exists as an argument for the value of critics as curators beyond the confines of criticism itself.

Of course, critics have put on their programmer hats on many occasions, and freelancers in particular tend to oscillate between both roles. But the concept of the Critics’ Week has flourished in Europe for decades, beginning with a sidebar in Cannes that launched in 1961 from the French Syndicate of Cinema Critics. Since then, Cannes Critics’ Week has evolved into a key aspect of the festival’s DNA, where filmmakers at early stages of their careers — from Ken Loach to Wong Kar-wai — have often launched to great acclaim.

Since then, both the Venice and Berlinale have launched Critics’ Week sidebars, where a selection committee unaffiliated with the larger festival programming offers a handful of options for discerning viewers. The Tribeca Critics’ Week isn’t a repudiation of other programming selections throughout the festival lineup, as audiences who want to attend flashy red carpet premieres, celebrity conversations, and other marquee events certainly have much to explore. This kind of programming strategy has taken root in New York before, including the old model of the New York Film Festival’s revolving selection committee, where various critics would serve two- or three-year terms before others would take their place. (In

recent years, the NYFF committee has gone in-house, though several staffers have roots in criticism.)

But Critics' Week has a unique identity. Two years ago, I served on the Cannes jury, and it was one of the most gratifying festival experiences of my life. It provided me with the excuse to watch films exclusively because they had been programmed in the section, not because they starred famous people, touted an A-list filmmaker, or might sell for a lot of money. This type of section should offer that opportunity for all audiences.

The Tribeca Critics' Week sidebar provided an opportunity for a few critics — myself, New York Magazine's Bilge Ebiri, Vanity Fair's K. Austin Collins, and BuzzFeed's Alison Willmore — to simply talk through our favorites from recent festivals and not worry about other factors. While festivals often chase world premieres, this programming process required the opposite approach: We were culling from the circuit to surface some of the highlights. The resulting five-movie survey provides a window into quality offerings from TIFF, Sundance, and Berlin that could use the extra attention.

None of them have won major awards at those festivals, and three of them have yet to secure U.S. distribution.

[...]

A similar quality elevates "This is Not Berlin," the punk rock memoir of Mexican director Hari Sama. A confident and wily look back on Mexico City in the mid-80s, when the filmmaker himself was coming up, the sprawling drama revolves around a pair of rebel teens from a middle-class background who gain access to an underground nightclub, where they're exposed to experimental art, sexual freedoms, and plenty of intoxicants to hold the whole package together.

A kind of spiritual sequel to the '70s vision of the same city in "Roma," Sama's ambitious ensemble piece takes its time crafting a fully realized world. On some level, it's a coming-of-age tale done many times before, but they rarely cut this deep, with cultural insight to spare — from the specter of AIDS to the threat of drug addiction, "This is Not Berlin" unearths a minefield of challenges as a generation of Mexicans push for a more liberated existence.

In an ideal world, these movies would become the most talked-about selections at any festival that screens them, but that's not a world we live in. Nevertheless, they belong on every committed viewer's must-see list for at least two reasons: Collectively, they provide glimpses of different cultural experiences and values as only cinema can convey them; individually, they offer unique snapshots of major filmmaking talent. Plenty of critics have endorsed them. Now it's the audience's turn to discover them.

Tribeca Critics' Week runs April 26 – May 5. The full lineup is available [here](#).

27/04/2019, **Latino Rebels**

<https://www.latinorebels.com/2019/04/27/notberlin/>

THIS IS NOT BERLIN Is a Tale of Teen Self-Discovery Set During Mexico's 1980s Punk Wave

Luis Luna

Directed by Hari Sama, *Esto No Es Berlín* (This Is Not Berlin) doesn't feel like your typical punk music-fueled coming-of-age story. The film starts with the following epigraph: "Our family hands down to us the ideas that keep us alive, as the illness that will cause our death." The line is from Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. A film about the revolution of the punk wave in 1980s Mexico City making a nod to the iconic French literary figure of the early 20th century? Yes, Sama does it, and it works.

Warning: Spoilers ahead.

Proust's line takes an even more complex turn in the film. For better or for worse, your ideals get passed on from generation to generation, but just like you inherit values, you also inherit traumas. In that sense, "family" has a twofold meaning: literally, it represents the bloodline; metaphorically, it stands for your country of origin, where you live, the place you call home. Sama constructs a tale where people try to define their identity, in spite of their constricting environment. Identity equals freedom. Freedom gives meaning to life.

Inspired by Sama's own adolescence, the autobiographical tale has slim and long-haired Carlos (Xabiani Ponce de León) having a hard time fitting in. Throughout the film, both the cinematography and composition help transmit that idea, and it's incredibly evident in the opening shot. While everybody surrounds Carlos, confusion sets in as he sees a violent fight between his classmates and a rival high school. Ponce de León stands in the middle of a literal battlefield. In slow motion, we see how everyone around him winces in pain or breathes out in ecstasy as their knuckles touch another boy's face, but Carlos doesn't participate. He's still... trapped in a world where boys his age exercise hyper-masculine behavior, and if you don't partake, the film suggests there's no room for you. Carlos knows this, but he still considers the boys his friends, because, well, he's 17 and where else could he go?

His life at home isn't any more promising either. He has a much younger sibling that he babysits quite often —we see Carlos feeding him multiple times— since his mother (played by a low key Marina de Tavira) self-medicates, clearly undergoing depression. As a consequence of his life at school and at home, his hunger for something more out of the ordinary reaches a boiling point.

But he has two people he can rely on. One is his uncle (played by Hari Sama himself), whom he confides in and sees as a role model because unlike everybody else in his family, he doesn't conform to an office job or a conservative outlook on life.

The other is his best friend, curly-haired Gera (Jose Antonio Toledano), who has a more traditional family dynamic at home—a stay-at-home mother, breadwinner-gruff for a father, and a cool, rebellious sister Rita (played by Ximena Romo). Perhaps because of the stifling nature of his home, Gera also feels like he needs to find himself. Though it's never addressed, which becomes part of the reason both Carlos and Gera are good friends: they acknowledge the void that exists within them.

The boredom that reigns their lives comes to a halt when Carlos, who's a mechanical genius, fixes the synthesizers Rita's band uses. As their reward —Gera tags along as the good friend he is— the band agrees to take them to the underground bar El Aztec.

Filled with young and eccentric society rejects, performance artists, intellectuals, queer, and all who embrace the subaltern, the bar puts Carlos and Gera in a trance. While drinking alcohol, they see two men kissing, patrons in a drug-fueled frenzy, and Rita's band play, morose and angry lyrics included. Both boys see themselves in the people at El Aztec. The next day they have a conversation about going back to the bar, but Gera seems to want to go elsewhere asking Carlos if he even felt comfortable there to begin there. Clearly, Gera is trying to suppress his fondness for the bar—he is gay (as we later discover) and is afraid to explore that part of himself.

Homosexuality is front and center in the film, although nobody ever explicitly talks about it. Carlos joins Nico's (Mauro Sanchez Navarro) exclusive circle. Owner of El Aztec and a photographer, he introduces Carlos to his friends and acquaintances, art performance collaborators, and people who refuse to put a label on all relationships and sexuality for the sake of freedom. Nico is undeniably attracted to Carlos, but the feeling isn't exactly mutual.

Perhaps the film's strongest showcase of its raging spirit manifests during the performance art scenes. Men and women get naked, douse paint all over themselves, write the word "Gay" on their bodies, take to the streets, and shout "gay" for everybody to hear. The protest is a direct call of action for the government to support the LGBTQ community in its worst time: the AIDS crisis. But also to make the public aware that while they go on about their lives, people lose their loved ones every day. Just like in the U.S., many gay men in Mexico died and the country —instead of caring for the ill— focused their attention on other matters, like Mexico hosting the 1986 World Cup, which plays a central part in the film.

Whether it's a street protest, taking over a soccer game by playing a gay pornographic movie for the fans to see, or staging a fake suicide scene, the artists push the homosexuality theme front and center. Nobody in the film claims a gay identity (yes, Gera does, but not until the film's final scene), and that's somewhat disappointing. But it's also the film's forte. The acts of transgression during the art performances speak volumes. And besides, Carlos, as we later learn, isn't gay, and neither is the director, so Sama respected the story and stuck with that he knows and that's impressive.

Having said that, one can't stop but wish the Carlos' mother character was more developed. A backstory would've given insight into her inner conflict. Despite De Tavira's best efforts, her character was very one-dimensional. Likewise, Rita's role is minuscule, which is a shame because she is quite stellar every time she's on screen.

Despite those shortcomings, the film does succeed in focusing on teenage ennui. And when that boredom evolves into adrenaline, what does a boy do? Is it ever that easy?

Carlos explained it well to his uncle: "Have you ever felt like you want something, but there's something inside you that won't let you do it? Like a voice that doesn't shut up and it's not even yours." What's that something inside you? How do you control it? How do you make it disappear? In *Esto No Es Berlín* (This Is Not Berlin), it happens the second you stop ignoring the other voice inside you that shouts to come out, the one that wants to be heard and free: your soul.

Esto No Es Berlín is set to have its New York Premiere at this year's Tribeca Film Festival on Sunday, April 28.

29/04/2019, **The Film Experience**

"Tribeca 2019: "This is Not Berlin" by Jason Adams:

<http://thefilmexperience.net/blog/2019/4/29/tribeca-2019-this-is-not-berlin.html>

Tribeca 2019: "This is Not Berlin"

Team Experience reporting from Tribeca 2019. Here's Jason...

Most of us never have the benefit of being at the right cool place at the right cool time. Or even if we do we don't really get to realize that while its happening. It's only in hindsight that we can shape that experience into a start and finish; that our lives can be packaged for proper consumption. It's always too messy to start with --the hair's gotta come down and the high's gotta wear off before you can see anything straight.

That whole tale's right there in the title of This Is Not Berlin. Hari Sama's fierce new coming-of-age film does indeed not take place in Berlin, but rather astride the post-punk burgeoning New Wave art-scene of Mexico City in the mid-80s...

It might not be Berlin but everybody there is trying to be Berlin, the idea of Berlin, a cool always-somewhere-else when you're unsure of your own identity. And as the teenaged Carlos (Xabiani Ponce de León) and his best mate Gera (José Antonio Toledano) try finding themselves in this scene, so too this scene begins finding itself and its own voice. Sama brilliantly charts the multiple courses as one, smashing them together perpendicularly like sparks. Somebody's gotta ignite and we're lucky enough to sit back and enjoy the fire.

Gera's sister Rita (Ximena Romo) is the lead singer in a band, and she somewhat reluctantly brings the boys along with her into the local queer club, all things to all people, where drinks and drugs and every in-over-your-head hedonism awaits. She thinks she can keep an eye out but like with most eyes they're easily attracted to the closest shiny thing -- she's got her own shit to stare at. Carlos finds a fast home among the mascara weirdos, his mountain of hair growing bolder by the moment, while Gera, feeling a little slighted, starts making his own friends in the club's free-for-all bathroom.

The film's perfectly aware of the downfalls nipping at the edges (AIDS is on everybody's minds and thick in everybody's art) but it thankfully never really allows itself to be a stern moral lecture about behavior. It is first and foremost laser-focused on Carlos & Gera's parallel paths through artful self-discovery and that hormone-drunk delirium of finding yourself before your "self" is even an actual thing.

"This is Not Berlin" screens tonight and Thursday 5/2 at the festival