

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Award-Winning Independent Filmmaker From St. Croix Makes Foray Into LGBT Romance With Short Drama Film

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ST. CROIX -- St. Croix's award-winning filmmaker Johanna Bermúdez-Ruiz, above, creator of numerous impactful and award-winning documentaries, short films, music videos and other visual projects, will showcase her first foray into fictional drama at a Gala Premiere screening of her short film "Soléne" at Caribbean Cinemas, 7 p.m. on Thursday, May 17, according to a recently issued release.

"This beautiful and romantic film is our first fictional film that delves into a love story between two people who are fearless in their love for each other, Bermúdez-Ruiz said of

the film.” The special showing is invite only.

It tells the story about an actress who is returning to her Caribbean home on a quest to rekindle her past love with a Stand-Up Paddle female athlete. The film was shot entirely on location in St. Croix, USVI, and captures the beauty of the scenic views of the island before the category 5 hurricanes struck last year.

"We worked with a production crew made up mostly of Virgin Islanders and we utilized the services of several small businesses. The co-stars of the film are young up-and-coming actresses from St. Croix and Puerto Rico. "We are proud that Vanessa Ayala and Natalia Villarejo chose our film as their first, along with seasoned actor Michael Baiamonte" Bermúdez-Ruiz said. "Soléne" also features the music of local band Marisol y Los Drunk Dumplings and Latin artist Yako LaPauta.

"The musical score is as beautiful as the film. I'm really proud to have collaborated and worked with all the talented individuals from the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico who without them this work could not have been possible. I am just as humbled for the generous contributions that individuals, small business, and non-profits, as well as the Department of Tourism, have made towards the making and Gala Premiere of "Soléne". I am, also, very thankful to the Caribbean Cinemas for supporting local films, and hosting this special screening of my short film, "Soléne."

Bermúdez-Ruiz has been invited to submit "Soléne" to American and international film festivals, and currently has been invited to show in Denmark, the Dominican Republic and the United Kingdom. She said she is proud to debut her first directorial fictional short film on her native home, St. Croix.

"Besides it being an enriching experience for all who love independent films, I think that it would be uplifting for Virgin Islanders to see how the film captures the beauty of our island, and the love of the characters," she added. "It also demonstrates that St Croix, and the Virgin Islands as a whole is perfectly suited for creating beautiful, cinematic films, and at the same time provide work in the local film industry. My intent is to produce high quality film production and create jobs for those living in the USVI."

Bermúdez-Ruiz has written, directed and produced several award winning documentaries and short films delving into important subjects impacting the lives of Virgin Islanders, Puerto Ricans and those living on the mainland. Bermúdez-Ruiz has been meeting with producers in Puerto Rico, Los Angeles and New York to slate her next directorial debut on her feature suspense film. Additionally, she has begun the groundwork to collaborate with Mix Film Festival, Copenhagen, and European Documentary Network to soon launch an International Film Festival on St. Croix. "My mission is to make the Virgin Islands a film hub, where I can produce high quality films, and attract off-island productions companies to produce their films here."

She studied filmmaking at Antioch College in Ohio, where she received her bachelor's degree. Beginning her film career, Bermúdez-Ruiz gained first-hand experience in feature film production while working on sets throughout New York City. She worked closely with renowned acting coach, producer, and writer Susan Batson and her son Carl Ford of Susan Batson Studio, LLC. This mother and son duo, have worked with diverse talent such as Nicole Kidman, Oprah Winfrey, Tyler Perry, Kerry Washington, and

Rihanna. During her time at the Susan Batson Studio, Bermúdez-Ruiz had the privilege to work on film projects as writer, producer, and assistant editor. She has worked directly with actors including Luna Lauren Vélez, well known from "How to Get Away with Murder;" David Zayas of the HBO series "Dexter" and Guillermo Diaz of the hit show "Scandal".

"It was important to me that the actors in "Soléne" work with the tools I learned from working with Susan and Carl. These actors worked really hard to understand and utilize the Susan's tools to get into character, and part of their work process was to read Susan's book, "Truth: Person, Needs, and Flaws in the Art of Building Actors and Creating Characters", stated Bermúdez-Ruiz.

Her awards and accolades include nomination for Best Female Film Director of Color at the African Diaspora Film Festival, Best Short Documentary (the Pitirre Award) at the San Juan Cinema Festival, Best Short Documentary at the Maffa Film Festival, and Special Jury Mention Award at the Imagenation Film Festival. She has received a proclamation from New York State Assemblyman Adam Clayton Powell IV, for her contribution to preserve the culture and history of Vieques through her film "Vieques: an Island Forging Futures".

She is one of the founding members of New York City's Chapter of the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP), a member of the International Documentary Association (IDA), and a recent member of European Documentary Network (Denmark), as well as a former Adjunct Professor at Hunter College.

Bermúdez-Ruiz currently resides in St. Croix where her film company, Cane Bay Films, LLC, is based.