

LÍMITE

A FILM BY GEORGE NICHOLAS



INSPIRED BY REAL EVENTS

GUSTAVO CRUZ EDUARDO GÓMEZ JORGE DOMÍNGUEZ CERDÁ CARLA CULEBRO ZONI MEDINA LEAH FINITY MOSES

MUSIC BY PENKA KOUNEVA DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY JULIAN AMARU DFP CASTING BY ISAAC BROWN EDITED BY BOHOS TOPAKBASHIAN

PRODUCTION DESIGNER CYRUM AYTANA RAMIREZ ASSOCIATE PRODUCER CARLOS FERNANDO CARRILLO CO-PRODUCED BY VIKRANT SHARMA

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER JOHN CAPPETTA PRODUCED BY GEORGE NICHOLAS ELIZA BONEV WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY GEORGE NICHOLAS



SYNOPSIS

Sixteen-year-old Manuel lives in Tijuana, Mexico with his grandfather while his mom works in the United States. When he meets a girl, he sees an opportunity to assert his independence, but what he doesn't know about her will push him to the limit. Inspired by real events.

DIRECTOR STATEMENT

"Límite" is my creative reaction to a real event. On the evening of November 18, 2013, a 16-year-old boy from Mexico attempted to enter the United States with two bottles of unidentified liquid. When questioned by the U.S. border patrol, he claimed it was apple juice. Suspecting the true contents, the agents demanded he prove it was apple juice. One of the agents made a motion with her hand – "Drink it."

This story reminded me of my own teenage experiences. Growing up in a poor country with a lot of crime and corruption, I know first-hand the pressures at play for a teenager in that kind of environment. I thought of the many times I got myself into more trouble than I could handle. I also recalled the roles adults played in my life and my desire to prove them wrong. Luckily, no one dared me to a deadly game of chicken, as I likely would have accepted.

I felt compelled to tell this story because I knew that teenager could have been me.



ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Being a foreigner and shooting this film on location in Tijuana presented many challenges, as well as opportunities. I was conscious that we were operating in the context of a different culture and that required extra care and consideration.

Thankfully, we found brilliant Mexican actors who worked with me on the translation of the screenplay and brought the authenticity we needed by making the dialogue their own. We assembled an international crew—our director of photography is from Peru; our production designer, casting director, make-up, and costume designers, as well as associate producers are from Mexico; our first camera assistant is from Poland; and our producer, composer, editor, and sound designer are from Bulgaria. Everyone else in the production was a local hire from Tijuana. This mix of cultures enriched the project by bringing a global sensibility to an international topic.

We decided to film in Super 16mm for the added authenticity and heightened sense of realism. This came with its own set of challenges, including a leaking film magazine that destroyed some of our footage, but despite these setbacks, the added risk and effort paid off visually.



We had decided early on to pay very close attention to gender parity on our crew while still hiring the best people for the job. This sounded like a challenge but was merely an invitation to be conscious of our own biases. The women on our team include our production designer, producer, composer, make-up and costume designers, production manager, and many others below the line. Additionally, one of our supporting actors is a member of the LGBT+ community, as are three people on our crew.

We shot for 7 days +1 in and post-production was completed in Bulgaria. While our film is small, at a length of 38 minutes, its ambitions are big. We hope to highlight the human side of stories that go unnoticed and to pay homage to victims of circumstance who are often dismissed as criminals deserving of their fate.

The film aims to contribute to the conversation started with the erection of the first border fence in 1918 and the founding of U.S. Border Patrol six years later. Today, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is the largest law enforcement agency in the country. It has been called the most dangerous police force in the United States.

Millions of children are criminally exploited every year. Children who are coerced into criminal activity are often treated as criminals by government agencies rather than as victims of exploitation.



Q & A WITH DIRECTOR GEORGE NICHOLAS

What inspired this story?

The film is inspired by real events from 2013 when a Mexican teenager was recruited to smuggle liquid meth across the border. While attempting to cross, the U.S. border agents interviewing him instructed him to drink the liquid he was carrying to prove that it's not drugs. The kid took four sips and died an hour later.

I first read about the story in 2017 when the family received a \$1 million settlement from the U.S. government. This is also when surveillance footage of the incident was released, and you could see what happened. It was unnerving to say the least. Seeing those images made me think about how that teenager could've been me. I remember all the times I barely escaped danger as a kid growing up in a so-called third-world country. So, I decided to make a movie as a way of dealing with my own feelings on the subject and hopefully raise awareness of what's going on at the border.

How does a Bulgarian-American connect with the story about Mexico immigration?

I think of it more as a coming-of-age, loss of innocence type story. It's universal in that regard. I connected with the kid, because I had been in situations that could've gone terribly wrong, which of course you only realize after the fact. Strangely, those situations were mostly here in the U.S., not in my home country where you would imagine it's more dangerous. Why was this kid smuggling drugs in the first place?



Keynes' Law states that demand creates its own supply, and I would agree. If our society demands drugs, people will find a way to get them. In this case, the victim of our addictions is a teenager from a different country who didn't know any better. So, to summarize, I connected with the story because I was once a teenager from a poor country, but also because I recognize our role as Americans in these tragedies involving the drug trade.

What was it like filming the border and immigration scenes. How difficult were they to shoot?

I knew the interview at the border would be the most difficult to shoot. Also, it is the most important scene in the movie. For that reason, I decided to shoot it first, although it is the last scene in the movie. I wanted our energy levels and focus to be optimal, because if that scene didn't work the whole movie doesn't work. And I'm glad we did that, because having the most difficult scene behind us made the rest of the shoot a breeze.

Many people who watch the movie ask me afterwards — how did U.S. Customs let you shoot there? That's a testament to our amazing production designer, Cyrum Aytana Ramirez, and her crew. The location is the Cultural Center in Tijuana, but you wouldn't guess it by looking at the film. They did such a great job. The exteriors are at the real border, which was tricky, but the interior was designed by us and I'm happy with how it turned out. That location was also the only place that worked, and it took a lot of persuasion to get it. But I wouldn't have shot without it.



You use stylized editing and lighting. Why was the choice made to use this style versus a more traditional editing style? What inspired the look of the film?

We're dealing with a story inspired by real events, but at the same time we're making a piece of art. I wanted to strike a balance between the two. This required elevating reality to create something bigger than just a reenactment or a documentary-style film. For that reason, my cinematographer Julian Amaru and I decided to shoot on Super 16mm. It gave us a stylized, classic look, which you can only get from film. In addition to that, Julian is an amazing cinematographer in general, so his ideas work on any medium.

As far as the editing — all the post-production was done in Bulgaria. I spent a month with my editor, Bohos Topakbashian, after we developed and scanned the film. At first, we assembled it chronologically and it stayed like that for a while, but it didn't quite work. The tension wasn't there, and you didn't know what kind of story was being told, which should be clear from the first shot, especially in a short. One evening, I went to a performance of *The Son* in the National Theatre in Sofia. I loved the play, but what stood out to me were the transitions they were using between the different scenes. They added tension and cohesiveness to the whole piece, which I felt was missing from our film. So, we added the walking throughout the film, which helped give the film a dream-like quality — until we finish the walk, and we get to the interview.



What did you see in Gustavo that made you cast him as Manuel? How did you find him?

Gustavo is the gem of our film. I wouldn't have shot the movie without him. I thought that finding him would take months or even years, but his was one of the first five auditions we received. He is the only Mexican actor in our film who is not from Tijuana. He is from Monterrey, Nuevo León, a three-hour flight from Tijuana. All credit for finding him goes to our casting director, Isaac Brown, who helped us immensely with finding our amazing cast.

What did he bring to the role that was not on the page prior to casting him?

Gustavo has a quiet intensity that I couldn't have described on the page. The camera locks into his eyes and it's all you see when he's on the screen. He has the presence of a star and I believe he will be one of Mexico's leading actors in the future.

How did you ultimately get the film made?

The film is self-financed. I think that's the definition of a passion project — would you put your own money in it to make it happen? It took me 5 years from the first screenplay draft until we wrapped post-production, and it would've taken years more if we had waited around for an investor to believe in us. At some point, you must believe in yourself.

The whole film is shot on location in Tijuana. We shot for 7 full days and had an extra day for pickup shots. There were one or two company moves every day, except for the first day when we did the interview. In total, I think there were around 15 locations, which is a lot for a short, but it is also what gives you a sense of really being in Tijuana.



Besides premiering at the San Diego International Film Festival, are there any specific connections to San Diego?

The story takes place within a stone's throw from San Diego. In one scene, Manuel points over the border and tells María, "Look, San Diego is right there." It's a reminder of how close we are to this foreign world that we often forget about. Another important connection to San Diego is our Executive Producer, John Cappetta. I sent the completed film to John, and he saw its potential and agreed to join the team right away. John is someone I wish we had when we were making the film. His involvement and commitment to the film at this stage is another sign that we've made something special.

Why do you feel this story needs to be told?

I needed to tell this story to process my own feelings about what happened to Cruz Vetázquez Acevedo and to continue the conversation around the inequities at our southern border. Foreigners do not have rights under the constitution and, as a result, our border agents operate with impunity. Far too often that authority is abused, and I hope that we can raise awareness of the lack of accountability.

If this is a story personal to you, was the making of this film cathartic for you?

The making of the film certainly felt personal, as I put a lot of my own teenage experiences into it. I didn't rationalize it at the time, but in hindsight, I wanted to put myself in the shoes of the kid and imagine how what happened to him could've happened to me. The story had weighed on my heart ever since reading about it in 2017 and, having made the film, I've felt like a burden was released.



What was your biggest obstacle, and how did you overcome it?

The biggest obstacle was when our equipment was almost confiscated by Mexican customs the day before we started shooting. Our first camera assistant, Marcin Szocinski, who is a successful cinematographer in his own right, had driven down from LA with a carload of equipment he owned, including the camera we were going to be using. Mexican Customs agents stopped him, made him unload everything and accused him of attempted smuggling. He explained that he owned all the equipment personally, but it didn't matter. The fee was 70% of the value of the equipment, which was impossible. They held Marcin and refused to return his passport until the fee was paid.

Our associate producer, Carlos Carrillo, escorted my producer-wife, Eliza Bonev, through customs to the holding location while I kept rehearsing with the actors. After some negotiation, we were able to bring the fee down to a reasonable amount and got Marcin and the equipment out of there. By the way, they refused to issue a receipt. There was no going back after that — we were making a movie.

What do you hope audiences will take away from having seen the film?

First, I hope audiences will consider the experiences of people outside of the U.S. who look to the country as an example for the rest of the world. Second, I hope people will show compassion to youth who might feel influenced to go down the wrong path.



ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

GEORGE NICHOLAS (Writer, Director, Producer) is a Bulgarian American filmmaker born in Slovakia in 1987. His short films include fiction as well as documentary work and have garnered awards from festivals in California, West Virginia, and New York. He has been living in Los Angeles with his wife and creative partner, Eliza Bonev, since graduating from Bulgaria's National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts in 2011.

ELIZA BONEV (Producer)

Eliza Bonev is a Bulgarian-born actress and producer. She was cast in "Undercover" - the most successful Bulgarian TV show, released on Netflix in 2014 and distributed in several countries. After completing her B.A., Eliza moved to California, where she married George Nicholas. Eliza shot her first feature film in Los Angeles in 2017 - "Reel Nightmare", and most recently appeared on "S.W.A.T." on CBS.

JOHN CAPPETTA (Executive Producer)

Mr. Cappetta spent two decades as a successful investment banker in New York and Connecticut. In 2006, he returned to his native Southern California whereupon he became active as a private equity and real estate investor and advisor. Through Planet 9 Productions, Mr. Cappetta provides Producer and Executive Producer services in connection with the production of major motion pictures. Notable Planet 9 Productions include Tyson's Run (2022) and A Snowy Day in Oakland (2023).

JULIAN AMARU (Director of Photography)

Julian is a member of the Peruvian Society of Cinematography (DFP) since 2014 and currently serves on its Board. He earned an MFA in Cinematography from AFI Conservatory and did postgraduate work at EICTV, Cuba and NFTS, UK. He has shot fiction, documentary, and advertising all over the world. His films as a DP have gone to festivals such as Sundance, Guadalajara, and Sitges and has shot ads for worldwide creative agencies. He has directed two music videos and is developing his first feature film as a director and screenwriter.

CYRUM AYTANA RAMIREZ (Production Designer)

Cyrum Aytana Ramirez, originally from Cancun, Mexico, began her career in Vancouver, Canada where she studied visual arts and design. She earned a BFA in filmmaking from the New York Film Academy and an MFA from the American Film Institute Conservatory. Based in Los Angeles, Ramirez is a student member of the Set Decorators Society of America and has been the production designer for short films, two feature films, commercials, and music videos. Her work has been part of multiple film festivals, including Telluride and most recently the Academy Awards.

BOHOS TOPAKBASHIAN (Editor)

Bohos Topakbashian is one of the most sought-after film and television editors in Bulgaria. He is a member of the Union of Bulgarian Film Makers since 2018 and an active Board member of its editor's guild. Editor of 11 feature films and 9 television series.

PENKA KOUNEVA (Composer)

Penka Kouneva is a Bulgarian-American composer, orchestrator, and soundtrack producer. In 1999, she began working in film and television and in 2009 began to score for videogames. Her music is a blend of Bulgarian influences, classical training, rock sensibility, and modern film and game soundtracks. Kouneva has released two award-winning concept albums: *The Woman Astronaut* (2015, on Varèse Sarabande / Universal Music Group) and *A Warrior's Odyssey* (2012, on Howlin' Wolf Records / Sumthing Else), both receiving 5-star press.

ISAAC BROWN (Casting Director, Associate Producer)

Isaac Brown is a Mexican filmmaker based in Tijuana. Since graduating from film school, he has worked in the local film industry as a production assistant, director, 1st assistant director and most notably as casting director. As principal of Brown Casting, Isaac has helped cast feature films, short films and music videos.

KAMEN ATANASOV (Sound Designer)

Kamen Atanasov is a Bulgarian sound designer. Involved with sound design and audio post-production since 2001. He has been a Sound designer, sound mixer, and SFX editor for over 4,000 TV and radio commercials, 20 independent feature films, short movies and video games. Designer of over 40,000 sound effects for world leading companies such as The Hollywood Edge, Sound Ideas, Soundelux, TM Studios, Omega Productions.

CARLOS FERNANDO CARRILLO (Associate Producer)

Over the past 25 years, Carlos Fernando Carrillo has worked on international feature films, short films, Mexican telenovelas, super bowl commercials and music videos produced in Baja California, Mexico. The documentary "Baja Taste", which he produced, was an official selection at the San Sebastián Film Festival in 2016.

ABOUT THE CAST



GUSTAVO CRUZ ("Manuel")

Gustavo Cruz is a Mexican actor born in Monterrey, Nuevo León. He graduated from the city's high school for the arts, CEDART "Alfonso Reyes". His first experience in acting was at age 14 in the film MUERTE AL VERANO (2019).



JORGE DOMÍNGUEZ CERDÁ ("Manuel Sr.")

Jorge Domínguez Cerdá is a Mexican actor, dancer, and choreographer, originally from Monterrey, Nuevo León and now living in Tijuana. He received the country's Premio Nacional de Danza José Limón in 2010.



CARLA CULEBRO ("Maria")

Carla Culebro is a Mexican American actress born in San Diego and currently based in Tijuana. When she is not working, she enjoys recreating cosplay characters. She is fluent in English and Spanish.



EDUARDO GÓMEZ (“Rodolfo”)

Eduardo Gómez is a Mexican American artist/actor born in Los Angeles and based in Tijuana. His first on-camera role was in the LGBT+ short film “Al Otro Lado” (2017). He is fluent in English and Spanish.



ZONI MEDINA (“Alfonso”)

Zoni Medina is a Mexican actor, director, writer, and producer. He was born in Tijuana on November 2, 1987. His short films have been awarded at Baja California, Humano and Rosarito Film Festival.



LEAH FINITY (“Officer Adams”)

Leah Finity is a Los Angeles-based actor and writer, originally from Appalachia. She starred in the 2021 Sundance action comedy FIRST DATE. In her free time, she enjoys practicing roadkill taxidermy.



MOSES (“Officer Rodriguez”)

Moses is a Los Angeles-based actor. He recently appeared in “Killer Siblings”, Season 3 (2021) on Oxygen Channel. A California native, he grew up in Wasco, a small town near the city of Bakersfield.

CAST

MANUEL
RODOLFO
MANUEL SR.
MARÍA
ALFONSO
OFFICER ADAMS
OFFICER RODRIGUEZ
MOM
GIOVANI
PLAYER #2
PLAYER #3
PLAYER #4
WOMAN ON TV
THUG
THUG #2
WOMAN ON BORDER LINE
K9 OFFICER
CBP OFFICER

GUSTAVO CRUZ
EDUARDO GÓMEZ
JORGE DOMÍNGUEZ CERDÁ
CARLA CULEBRO
ZONI MEDINA
LEAH FINITY
MOSES
SUSANA PRECIADO
BEN-HUR MONREAL
WALTER ARMENTA
MANUEL MARTINEZ
JAHYR GUARDADO
ELIZA BONEV
BETOZKY MENDOZA
ÀNGEL HERRERA
LYLIA CYRUM
PEDRO V. MADRIGAL
FRANCISCO CARDENAS

CREW

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY

GEORGE NICHOLAS

PRODUCED BY

GEORGE NICHOLAS, ELIZA BONEV

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

JOHN CAPPETTA

CO-PRODUCER

VIKRANT SHARMA

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS

CARLOS F. CARRILLO, ISAAC BROWN

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

JULIAN AMARU, DFP

PRODUCTION DESIGNER

CYRUM AYTANA RAMIREZ

EDITOR

BOHOS TOPAKBASHIAN

COMPOSER

PENKA KOUNEVA

CASTING

ISAAC BROWN

SOUND DESIGN

KAMEN ATANASOV

UNIT PRODUCTION MANAGER

NELY LUNA

FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

ORLANDO CORNEJO

SECOND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

CARLOS GODOY

LOCATION MANAGER

NELY LUNA

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR

ILYANA JIMÉNEZ

SOUND MIX

KAMEN ATANASOV

RE-RECORDING MIXER

HECTOR FERNANDE

SOUND RECORDIST

LIZETH OCHOA

SOUND RECORDIST

FULVIO CORTEZ

POST-PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR

BOHOS TOPAKBASHIAN

COLOR

BORIS TIVCHEV

FIRST AC

MARCIN SZOCINSKI

SECOND AC

JAVIER GONZÁLEZ

STEADICAM

NICK ALMANZA

LOADER

MARCIN SZOCINSKI

CAMERA ASSISTANT

DAYANA DIENER

GAFFER

RICARDO HERNÁNDEZ

G&E

ALFREDO RAMÍREZ

GRIP

CARLOS BUSTAMENTE

G&E RENTALS

STUDIO 3351

SET DRESSER

ÁNGELES RAMÍREZ

GRAPHICS

YATZARET URUCHURTU

SWING

ALEJANDRO ANTÚNEZ

ON-SET DRESSER

DAYANA HERNÁNDEZ

ART ASSISTANT

WALTER ARMENTA

PROP MASTER

PEDRO HUERTA

PROP ASSISTANT

LUIS FELIPE

FILM SCANNING TECH

JOSHUA CONTRERAS

VFX SUPERVISOR

NIKOLAY KIRKOV

DIGITAL CLEAN-UP ARTIST

PEHLIVAN IVANOV

DIGITAL CLEAN-UP ARTIST

BILLY STEFANOV

COSTUME DESIGN

JESSICA BLANCAS

COSTUME DESIGN

YHARID AVILA

MAKE-UP

RENNATA SEPÚLVEDA

PHOTOGRAPHER

LUIS OROZCO

LEGAL ADVISER

IVA DIMITROVA

CATERING

MARYFER

ADDITIONAL ARCHIVE
FILM PROCESSING
FILM SCANNING

ABC
SPECTRUM
COLORTIME 2020

CASTING ASSISTANT
PRODUCTION ASSISTANT
PRODUCTION ASSISTANT
PRODUCTION ASSISTANT
MOTORCYCLE INSTRUCTOR
ANIMAL WRANGLER
DRIVERS
LA DRIVER
SECURITY
MUSIC RECORDING
ORCHESTRA
CONDUCTOR
CONCERTMASTER
PRINCIPAL 2ND VIOLIN
2ND VIOLIN
VIOLA
PRINCIPAL CELLO
CELLO
CONTRABASS

JUDITH DELGADO
MARTIN CALDERÓN
ERICK HERNÁNDEZ
JIMENA HERRERA
RUBÉN G. BETANCOURT
JESUS DIAZ CARRERA
DAVID BELLO, JORGE RIVAS, RUBÉN ÁVILES
HRISTOMIR HRISTOV
RIGOBERTO RUEDA
FOUR FOR MUSIC
SOFIA SESSION ORCHESTRA
GEORGE STREZOV
YORDAN DIMITROV
PETYA DIMITROVA
IRINA STOYANOVA
VIKTOR MITZEV
IVAN LALEV
SOFIA RADILOVA
ILINA JABLENSKA

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

PLANET 9 PRODUCTIONS

“LIBRE”

WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY YME FRESH
LICENSED UNDER A CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE
[SOUNDCLOUD.COM/USER-445264460](https://soundcloud.com/user-445264460)

“TANTOS HUBIERAS”

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY ELIGIO BERTRAND
LICENSED UNDER A CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE
[SOUNDCLOUD.COM/ELIGIOBERTRAND](https://soundcloud.com/eligiobertrand)

“COMO YO TE AMO”

WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY ALEX BEATS & ZMF
LICENSED UNDER A CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE
[SOUNDCLOUD.COM/DECIMA_FLOW](https://soundcloud.com/decima_flow)

“MALA FAMA”

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY AXEL PASCAL
LICENSED UNDER A CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE

SOUNDCLOUD.COM/AXEL-PASCAL

“CHERUB SONG #6”

WRITTEN BY VLADIMIR FEINER

PERFORMED BY GAUDEAMUS ACADEMIC MIXED CHOIR

ACADEMY OF MUSIC, DANCE AND FINE ARTS, PLOVDIV, BULGARIA

CONDUCTED BY VESELA GELEVA

“CABO FRIO”

PRODUCED BY LE GANG

LICENSED UNDER A CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE

SOUNDCLOUD.COM/THISISLEGANG

“FIESTA LOCA”

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY MIKE LEITE

LICENSED UNDER A CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE

YOUTUBE.COM/MIKELEITE

“MONERO AFTERPARTY”

WRITTEN BY CRYPTO-BEAR

PRODUCED BY MALELDIL

LICENSED UNDER A CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE

SOUNDCLOUD.COM/CRYPTOBEAR

FOR MY GRANDFATHER

DIMITAR GENCHEV

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