



CANCELLERÍA



Embajada de Colombia en Australia

Presentation of “El Viaje del Acordeón”

24 August, 2015

National Gallery of Australia

By Ambassador Clemencia Forero-Ucrós

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Queridos amigos y amigas, good evening,

Today's exhibition is possible thanks to the program Plan de Promoción de Colombia en el Exterior -Plan for the International Promotion of Colombia of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, developed by the Embassy of Colombia with the invaluable support of COALAR,- Council on Australia and Latin America Relations- and the National Gallery of Australia. We wish to

Level 2, 40 Macquarie St

Barton ACT 2600

P. +61 2 62732090/91 – Fax +61 2 62732092

www.cancilleria.gov.co <http://australia.embajada.gov.co>

eaustralia@cancilleria.gov.co

Canberra – ACT – Australia



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acknowledge as well, the committed work of the team of the Embassy of Uruguay to arrange and coordinate the Festival this year.

Cultural exchange becomes wider and stronger when synergies are created. Today in our documentary we have an excellent example of such synergies: an Australian film director who falls in love with Colombian music and is curious about one instrument and two particular ways of playing it. The idea of this documentary started at a performance of the Hohner Accordion Symphony Orchestra to which both Rey Sagbini and Andrew Tucker –directors of the film– attended.

One instrument... two sounds: In one hand, the German city of Trossingen where the Hohner factory is based; on the other hand, across the ocean, accordion player Manuel Vega and his group... and then, across the Pacific, this opportunity to present in Australia a wonderful testimony of endless hope, great talent and music.

Canberra-born Andrew Tucker and Colombian Rey Sagbini studied together in Hamburg. “The Accordion’s voyage” is a Colombian-German co-production, produced with the support of the University of Magdalena, the Film Fund Hamburg / Schleswig-Holstein, the Ministry of Culture of the City of Hamburg and the film fund Rheinland-Pflaz. The filming process took over four years.

Andrew Tucker has lived in Australia, Jamaica, Germany, and Greece. At the moment, he is based in Bogotá – Colombia, with his Colombian wife. As a young director, he has been directing documentaries since 2001. “El viaje del acordeón”, “The Accordion’s voyage” is his first feature documentary. Rey Sagbini studied Audiovisual Communication in Germany. He is currently a professor at Universidad del Magdalena in Santa Marta, an emblematic city on the Colombian Caribbean Coast.

Many stories, full of imagination, refer to the way that the accordion was introduced in Colombia and how it turned to be the main instrument of the Colombian folk music “Vallenato”: Gypsies, super natural encounters with

devils, old traditions from both Spain and Africa, fill the minds and hearts of the people who try to understand how a traditionally German instrument ended up with a Festival in Colombia. Truth is that no matter where they live, the heart of Colombians beats with emotion when a vallenato is played.

Let me give you a glimpse on the “Vallenato” music, considered as one of the most popular rhythms of Colombia. The word “*vallenato*” literally means “born in the valley”. The valley influencing this name is located between the magnificent snow peaks of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and the Serranía del Perijá, in the northeast region of Colombia. The name also applies to the people from the city where this music originated: Valledupar. In 2006, Colombian rhythms vallenato and cumbia were added as a category in the Latin Grammy Awards.

The music originated from farmers who, keeping a tradition of Spanish minstrels (*Juglares* in Spanish), mixed with West African influence, travelled through the region with their cattle in search of pastures or to sell them in cattle

fairs. Because they travelled from town to town and the region lacked rapid communications, these farmers served as bearers of news for families living in other villages. Their only form of entertainment during these trips was singing and playing guitars or indigenous gaita flutes, and their form of transmitting their news was by singing their messages.

In its origins, vallenato was played with instruments such as gaita flutes, the “caja” or drum, and guitars. But soon they were influenced by Europe's instruments such as the accordion.

Every year by the end of April, Valledupar hosts the *Festival de la Leyenda Vallenata* (or Vallenato Legend Festival). During the festival a contest takes place in which the best vallenato interpreters fight for the title of “*Rey Vallenato*” (Vallenato accordion King). It is because of this Festival –one of the most important in Colombia, that this musical style became known through the region. The current “ambassador” of this music is multiple-time Grammy Award winner Carlos Vives, who has progressively helped vallenato in gaining

popularity worldwide by combining traditional vallenato music with pop/rock music.

Before the movie starts, the Embassy of Colombia wishes to present Carlos Vives latest video “La Tierra del Olvido” (The Land of Oblivion) which features a representative group of Colombian artists as well as emblematic places across the country and above all the feeling of longing, nostalgia and love that we Colombians feel for our motherland.

Please enjoy the music and the story of the accordion!