



## **SYNOPSIS**

A modern-day odyssey, *I'M LEAVING NOW* follows Felipe—a charismatic, undocumented Mexican immigrant who has reached a crossroads: after 16 years in Brooklyn, working three low-paying jobs and sending the bulk of his earnings to his wife and children in Mexico, he's decided to return home to the family he hasn't seen in almost two decades. But when he informs them of his plans, he discovers that they've squandered the money, are deeply in debt and don't want him to return. They need him to stay in the U.S. and continue to earn.

Shot over two years in the heart of Brooklyn's immigrant community, *I'M LEAVING NOW* brings a warm humanity to one of the most pressing political issues of our time, without sentimentalizing or trivializing its protagonist. The film updates the traditional migration tale—at a time when Mexican net migration has fallen to zero, and more Americans are migrating to Mexico than the other way around—and subtly challenges our ideas of the American dream through the character of Felipe, a man looking for that dream back home.

In allowing the rhythms, emotions and sounds of Felipe's day-to-day life to drive the story, Cordero and Croda open an impressionistic, cinematic window onto a life that might otherwise remain unseen.

## **CAST & CREW**

Directed and Produced by Lindsey Cordero and Armando Croda

Written and Produced by Josh Alexander

Co-producer: J. Xavier Velasco

Cinematographer: Armando Croda

Editor: Armando Croda

Sound: Lindsey Cordero

Music: Leonardo Heiblum & Jacobo Lieberman

Music Supervisor: Jonathan Finegold

A MUmedia and Group Effort Films Production

A Cinema Guild release

## **BIOS**

New York-based Mexican filmmaker **Armando Croda** is co-director, cinematographer and editor of the Nat Geo Latino's documentary **FIRMES, MEXICANS IN THE BRONX** (2013), and co-director and editor of **VICTORIO** (2008), winner of the Best First Film Award at the Guanajuato Film Festival. As an editor he's worked in the Sundance NEXT Audience Award Winner **THE INFILTRATORS** (2019) by Alex Rivera and Cristina Ibarra, Stephen Wilkes' **JAY MYSELF** (2018), John Hoffman and Nanfu Wang's **OUT OF MANY, ONE** (2018) and Bent-Jorgen Perlmutter's **HAVANA MOTOR CLUB** (2015).

**Lindsey Cordero** is a Mexican filmmaker based in Brooklyn. She won the John Cassavetes Award at the 2019 FilmIndependent Spirit Awards for her work as producer on Jim McKay's acclaimed **EN EL SÉPTIMO DÍA** (2018). She is the co-director of the television documentary **FIRMES, MEXICANS IN THE BRONX** (2013). In 2015 she was recipient of the Princess Grace Film Award for **I'M LEAVING NOW**. She holds a B.A. in Anthropology and an MFA from the Integrated Media Arts program at Hunter College of The City University of New York.

**Josh Alexander** is one of the founders of Group Effort Films. He most recently wrote Stephen Wilkes' documentary **JAY MYSELF** (about the legendary NYC photographer Jay Maisel) and which premiered at DOC NYC and sold to Oscilloscope Films and he wrote and produced **I'M LEAVING NOW**. He co-Executive Produced **UNITED SKATES**, which won the Audience Award at the Tribeca Film Festival and was acquired by HBO. The film was recently nominated for the IDA Awards. Previous credits include CNN Films' **THE REAGAN SHOW** which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival and was released in theatres and broadcast on CNN. **THE REAGAN SHOW** was nominated for the 2017 Critics Choice Award for Best Political Documentary and the Cinema Eye Honors for Best Editing. He wrote and co-directed the documentary **PRESCRIPTION THUGS** which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival and was acquired by Samuel Goldwyn Films. He wrote and produced acclaimed photographer Gillian Laub's debut documentary **SOUTHERN RITES**, which premiered on HBO. He was nominated for The Humanitas Prize in 2016 for his writing on that film. He was a consulting producer on Michael Lessac's multiple-award winning documentary **A SNAKE GIVES BIRTH TO A SNAKE** and wrote and produced the award-winning, Sarah Jessica Parker executive-produced documentary **PRETTY OLD**. In the fiction world, Alexander co-executive produced the Alan Bates film **SINS OF A FATHER** and wrote, produced and starred in **BACKSEAT**, winner of the Audience Award at the Austin Film Festival and released by Truly Indie in 2008. He is currently writing Cara Jones' archival-driven film **BLESSED CHILD** about her childhood growing up in The Unification Church, more commonly known as "The Moonies." Alexander has written two screenplays with the noted novelist Beverly Coyle and has numerous other documentaries, fiction features and television projects in various stages of development.

## **SELECT FESTIVALS & AWARDS**

Official Selection – Hot Docs, 2018

Official Selection – DOC NYC, 2018

Grand Jury Prize – DocsMX 2018

Special Jury Mention – Morelia International Film Festival 2018

## FILMMAKERS' STATEMENT

We met Felipe on the South- Side of Williamsburg, Brooklyn in 2013. He was wearing a faded velvet Mariachi hat with falling sequins, collecting bottles and singing popular Mexican songs. We were immediately captivated by his charisma and sense of humor. We would often hear him say he was going back to Mexico in the next month or so. Weeks, months and years passed and we kept running into Felipe. Eventually we asked Felipe what was delaying his return and this was the question that led to this project: Why is Felipe unable to go back to Mexico?

Timing one's departure from America is a precarious decision. For many undocumented workers, once you leave the United States, it's impossible to come back. Like other undocumented immigrants working abroad, Felipe talks about his return to Mexico as a kind of afterlife, a joyous retirement, an endless celebration where he will finally be able to enjoy the rewards of his sacrifice. But in reality, Felipe is confronted with difficult questions: will the family he left behind accept him when he returns? How does Felipe confront loneliness and absence of companionship in New York? What is his long-distance relationship like with his family in Mexico? Is Felipe a respected father figure or is his family exploiting him by squandering the money he sends? These are questions that will be highly relevant to many in Felipe's situation who find themselves suspended between two worlds, unable to leave behind their old lives but unable to build satisfying lives in a country they've adopted. Economic progress is possible, but what is the emotional toll that must be paid in return?

As filmmakers we strive to be open, honest, observers, to respect the long process of acquiring information and building trust with the characters we collaborate with. The most important aspect of our work is immersing ourselves in a world in order to better understand and express complex realities. Through the intimate and personal struggles of the characters we follow, we want to raise questions and provoke conversations about the universality of their stories and issues being addressed.

But capturing reality is an incredibly complex process, especially the realities of life for many Mexican migrants living undocumented in the United States. Because of the liminal space many of these migrants must inhabit -- where threats of deportation and the adversities of living on the outskirts of civil society are deeply felt and real - it is a community that has historically been reluctant to be portrayed in film. The dangers have often been just too great. Because two of us are Mexican-Americans living in New York City, residing in the same community as the characters this film portrays, there was a possibility for contact and close cultural connection that we would never have been able to achieve otherwise.

It took years to build trust and to be let in. And we understood immediately the enormous responsibility inherent in the invitation Felipe ultimately offered us to observe his life.

*I'M LEAVING NOW* was shot in an observational style, allowing events to unfold in front of the camera (and characters to speak for themselves), which is often not the case in documentaries about big social justice issues. Since Felipe's relationship with his family is over the phone, we spent years recording many of these conversations. Allowing those conversations with his wife, children to find their own place in the film was paramount – since they show the profound state of suspended animation that governs Felipe's life - unable to truly be at home in Mexico or the US. His daily engagement in the mundane minutiae of family life is conducted entirely through the telephone and this is juxtaposed to the lonely hardship of his daily working existence in NYC. He is truly a man suspended intolerably between two worlds, present in both and yet at home in neither.

It was also Felipe's hope that this film could provide his family with the truest picture of what his life of sacrifice for them has looked and felt like. And unlike the migration story that many audiences are used to hearing in the news - of migrants desperate to come to the US -- Felipe's story is of a migrant desperate to get home. This is an important corrective and more nuanced way of looking at the reality and sacrifice of others in Felipe's position.

We hope that this film allows the audience to immerse themselves fully in Felipe's story – putting a very human face on an often overly politicized issue.

–Armando Croda, Lindsey Cordero, Directors/Producers; Josh Alexander, Writer/Producer