

Interview: Founder/Director Pepe Vargas of 34th Chicago Latino Film Fest, April 5-19, 2018

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on April 4, 2018 - 4:10pm

- [2018](#) [2]
- [34th](#) [3]
- [AMC River East Theatre](#) [4]
- [Brazil](#) [5]
- [Chicago](#) [6]
- [Chicago Latino Film Festival](#) [7]
- [Chile](#) [8]
- [Columbia](#) [9]
- [Columbia College](#) [10]
- [Cuba](#) [11]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [12]
- [International Latino Cultural Center](#) [13]
- [Interview](#) [14]
- [Opening Night](#) [15]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [16]
- [Pepe Vargas](#) [17]
- [United States](#) [18]
- [Venezuela](#) [19]

CHICAGO – One of the great cinema festivals of the Windy City is run by Pepe Vargas, the Founder and Executive Director of the Chicago Latino Film Festival. The 2018 edition will be the 34th annual, and Vargas has shepherded the film celebration since its beginnings. Opening Night is on Thursday, April 5th, at the AMC River East Theatre in Chicago, with a Puerto Rican themed night, with the films “From Now On” (short) and the feature film “Broche De Oro: Beginnings.” For more details, [click here](#). [20]

Pepe Vargas was born in Columbia, and became a lawyer who worked in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In the next chapter of his life, he moved to Chicago and studied Broadcast Journalism at Columbia College. It was there he developed his love for film and filmmaking, and founded the Chicago Latino Film Festival in 1985. He has been Executive Director ever since, and has evolved the Festival into one of the best and largest of its kind in the United States. He also directs the International Latino Cultural Center of Chicago, which branches out from film to other artistic expressions of Latino culture.



Tear Down the Wall: The 34th Chicago Latino Film Festival

Photo credit: ChicagoLatinoFilmFestival.org

In an interview from last year, and coinciding on the eve of Opening Night, Pepe Vargas spoke with HollywoodChicago.com about the Chicago Latino Film Festival (CLFF) and its contribution to the arts in the Windy City.

HollywoodChicago.com: What specific part of the Chicago Latino Film Festival can you point towards that makes it the biggest and the best of its kind in the U.S.?

Vargas: We work hard to make sure our festival doesn't look like anything else, we want our own identity, and to be a reflection of what is happening in cinema within the Latino community of countries. We emphasize cultural values and cinematic artistic expression in the films we choose. We have a range of film types – thrillers, comedies, dramas – and they are all exciting. This becomes a unique opportunity for the audience to experience this cultural value, and really get involved in the countries that the films represent. We feel the festival is a bridge to all that, right here in Chicago.

HollywoodChicago.com: Which Latino country do you feel is doing great work in film right now?

Vargas: The Argentinian cinema is strong, but Brazil and Columbia are not far behind. Columbia in particular is producing more films that ever, and the government is investing in them. There was a short film called 'Los Nadie' from Columbia, that won the Venice Film Festival's Critics' Week prize in 2017, and it was made for only \$2000. This is the kind of thing that can happen if there is a government commitment to making films.

HollywoodChicago.com: What type of movie stories are your favorites?

Vargas: I like films that are saying something about the countries they come from, and is relevant from a historical perspective. I want them to be an instrument of truth, to reveal something to the audience that is experiencing them.

HollywoodChicago.com: Since you didn't start out pursuing a career in movies, what was your early experience with them in Columbia? Did

you love movies back then, or did you get serious with them once you came to America?

Vargas: I have to say I got serious about them once I came to Chicago. In Columbia, it was all about westerns, Mexican films and comedies. I was a lawyer in Bueno Aires, and like everyone I liked to go to movies for entertainment. But that's also when I got into international films from Vietnam, Cuba and classics like 'The Battle for Algiers.' I also liked the political films, that depicted what was happening in Cuba and Nicaragua at the time.

When I came to Chicago, I went back to Columbia College here to study broadcast journalism. I was also lucky that I had a roommate who was making amazing films, so I could study it from that angle. I fell in love with making movies, made a couple of documentaries when I was at Columbia, and started this film festival... and here we are, 34 years later.

HollywoodChicago.com: One of the offshoots of the CLFF is the International Latino Cultural Center of Chicago, which you founded. How does this Center promote all arts, beyond just movies?

Vargas: The film festival is the main focus, just because of the number of years it has been around, but that is not the only thing we do. We sponsor Latino poetry, dance, theater, music and visual arts programs. That was my thing, how could we expand from film to the other arts? We been doing Latino Classical Music Festival for 12 years, and after supporting theater for years we're about to do the first Latino theater festival. Any type of art that promotes something artistically valuable, we want to share it, and show how valuable the Latino culture can be.

We are the only organization in this country that embraces the Pan-Latino ideal, and we put the emphasis on our differences, and find the power in those differences. We also find the richness in those differences, and even as we are sometimes divided, this great diversity gives us the possibility to enjoy everything about each other.



The Man and His City: Pepe Vargas, Founder and Executive Director of the Chicago Latino Film Festival

Photo credit: ChicagoLatinoFilmFestival.org

HollywoodChicago.com: When you first came to this country, what was the biggest challenge for you in adjusting to the U.S. culture and the way things are done here?

Vargas: I had a challenge in how we are stereotyped. People generally think Latinos are good at doing laundry at a hotel, cutting the grass, babysitting, picking fruits and doing construction, but they think those are the only type of jobs we do. That is a menial view, both of perception and pay, and that was hard. It created a feeling of 'that's all we get,' and I've been there.

But the arts and our festival allows non-Latino people to see how we really are, how we contribute to culture. When people get a taste of anything Latino, they usually get a totally different sense of who we are. Whenever we all enhance a sense of ourselves as human beings, a respect naturally follows. I feel I'm doing something that is necessary with the International Latino Cultural Center and the film festival, and I feel good about fulfilling that need.

HollywoodChicago.com: What is most magical for you about your love and promotion of films through the festival, and how do you think it is reflected in how you lead the festival?

Vargas: One of the things I'm always grateful for is the opportunity to actually do this job. I view film as a powerful medium to entertain, educate and create awareness. It energizes me because I see the results after a screening when people are happy, clapping and wanting more.

I am optimistic about evolving and moving the festival forward, and I'm blessed with the opportunity to bring it to Chicago. I value that opportunity, and I respect the film work that have been entrusted to us. That recognition fuels our spirit to keep this going. So far it's so good, and I look forward to many more festivals.

The Opening Night Films of the 34th Chicago Latino Film Festival is the short film "From Now On" and the feature "Broche De Oro: Beginnings." and will screen on Thursday, April 5th, 2018 (5:30pm), at AMC River East 21, 322 East Illinois Street, Chicago, with a reception to follow. For more general information on the 2018 CLFF, [click here](#). [21]



[22]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [23]
Writer, Editorial Coordinator
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [22]

© 2018 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

Source URL (retrieved on *Mar 28 2024 - 7:12am*):
<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/28397/interview-founderdirector-pepe-vargas-of-34th-chicago-latino-film-fest-april-5-19-2018>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/2018>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/34th>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/amc-river-east-theatre>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/brazil>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/chicago>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/chicago-latino-film-festival>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/chile>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/columbia>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/columbia-college>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/cuba>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/international-latino-cultural-center>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/interview.html>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/opening-night>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/patrick-mcdonald>
- [17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/pepe-vargas>
- [18] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/united-states>
- [19] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/venezuela>
- [20] <https://chicagolatinofilmfestival.org/opening-night-gala/>
- [21] <http://chicagolatinofilmfestival.org/>
- [22] <mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [23] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT>