



From the Emmy-winning writer of

THE SOCIAL DILEMMA

and the producer of the Sundance Grand Jury Prize winner

PORCELAIN WAR

COMPARSA

a film by Vickie Curtis & Doug Anderson



CIUDAD PERONIA is a cliffside shantytown on the outskirts of Guatemala City.



Life in Peronia is dangerous, especially for kids. With no access to clean water, nutrition, healthcare, or education, deprivation and brutal violence have become the norm.



Despite their circumstances, a group of young women is changing the story of Peronia, using street theatre to foment a joyful and powerful movement.



LOGLINE

In a so-called “red zone” on the outskirts of Guatemala City, two lionhearted teenage sisters use fiery street performance as a Trojan horse for political protest, igniting a youth movement as they transform trauma into power and purpose.



PROJECT SYNOPSIS

Intrepid teen sisters Lesli and Lupe live with their mother and siblings in a one-room tin dwelling in Ciudad Peronia, Guatemala. Though they have seen their share of violence and trauma, they radiate exuberance and contagious laughter. Neighborhood kids flock to them and adoringly call them *Las Bestias*—The Beasts. Lesli and Lupe wear the moniker with pride.

Our film follows Lesli and Lupe in the wake of their friend Siona's murder. Siona was among 41 girls killed in a fire at a state-run "safe house." The girls had been locked in a room after protesting sexual abuse at the facility. When the fire broke out, the guards chose to keep them locked inside. No one has ever been held responsible. It is not lost on the sisters that a slight change of fate could have placed them in the flames.

The notorious tragedy has become a symbol of the lack of value placed on women's lives, and it fuels the girls of Peronia to action. Traditional protest is too risky, so they begin by deploying Lesli's charm and Lupe's quiet warmth to gather a group of teen girls to join their fight. Their aim is to produce a massive **comparsa**—a carnival street parade resplendent with Latin percussion, stilt walkers, and fire breathers—as a subversive protest and call for justice. It will be a crowning achievement if they can pull it off amidst a pandemic and corresponding surge in murders and abductions.

With comparsa preparations underway, Lesli and Lupe endure an episode of gun violence right outside their front door, and they receive devastating news that two more girls from the community have been found murdered. Fueled by protective outrage, they escalate their efforts to mobilize youth of all genders, and it's easy to see their influence spreading. In the end, they train dozens of stilt walkers, drummers, dancers, and puppet masters. More kids show up from nearby communities to participate and parade through town. Bodies are painted, torches are lit, and the performance begins.

Their comparsa blooms into an ecstatic spectacle of fire and acrobatics, swirling with colors and characters. An insistent drumbeat calls people out of their homes, and soon throngs of community members watch in awe. The community comes together, rehearsing a new way of coexisting. The sisters have ignited a movement, standing tall to deliver their message.





DIRECTOR'S VISION / TONE & STYLE

After nine years of writing documentaries such as *The Social Dilemma* and *Chasing Coral*, I am taking a deliberate, collaborative approach to my first turn as director. While those previous projects relied heavily on expert interviews to unpack complex topics, *Comparsa* relies on intimate scenes with our characters to paint a picture of a place and a group of people working to transcend the traumas of a racist, sexist, extractive system.

Comparsa is born entirely from personal connection and a shared theory of change. My longtime friend and *Comparsa*'s producer, Anna Hadingham, has spent over ten years living in Guatemala and working alongside our film's subjects to produce public performances as a method of self-expression and grassroots organizing. After nearly a decade of hearing about Anna's exceptional artistic conspirators in Guatemala, Doug and I decided to follow her to Peronia.

We believe the collaborative process that shaped *Comparsa*'s production will bleed into the style and tone of the film itself: a cross-cultural troupe of

theater nerds, some of us now filmmakers, gathering each day to decide what to film, united in our belief in the transformational power of art.

The trust born from long-term friendships has allowed our small film team to capture intimate situations and emotional revelations since day one. One of our DPs, Edgar Tuy, is a lifelong friend of Lesli and Lupe, an indigenous Mayan man who grew up alongside them in Peronia. His insider knowledge and easy banter on both sides of the camera reinforce the friendly, fluid nature of the film- and art-making process.

Comparsa mixes intimate vérité and interview moments with more ethereal sequences that highlight the magical, mythical nature of Lesli and Lupe's art. Woven with passages of our characters' original poetry, these sections underscore the surreal way their lives fluctuate between joy and sorrow, providing backstory and a reminder of the danger inherent to their artist-activism. By sharing their written words directly with the film's audience, Lesli and Lupe maintain agency over their story.

We intend the substance and style of *Comparsa* to resonate with international Gen Z audiences that are hungry for a joyful model of changemaking. Unlike films about the developing world that stay mired in harsh problems or posit external solutions from foreign savior figures, *Comparsa* highlights local youth artists forging a better future through their own creative action. Ultimately, we envision *Comparsa* as a visually stunning, poetic, character-driven film with the unique power to illuminate and inspire changemakers.





PROSPERIDAD
CIUDADANA

LESLI & LUPE'S HOME



DOWNTIME ON A SHOOT: TUY, LESLI, ANNA, & LUPE



BACKGROUND

Long written off as a “red zone” by the government and media, Ciudad Peronia is a crowded, colorful labyrinth of tin and cement shacks perched on the edge of a crumbling cliff. Growing up here means teetering on the brink of survival; the streets are the only playgrounds and hangout spots, but they are also dangerous environments where free expression and critical thought can be met with guns, knives, abduction, or murder.

Deep within this violent context, a stronghold of youth activist-artists risk their safety to mend their community. The story of this film belongs to them: young people who cultivate effective practices for positive transformation through community connection and art.

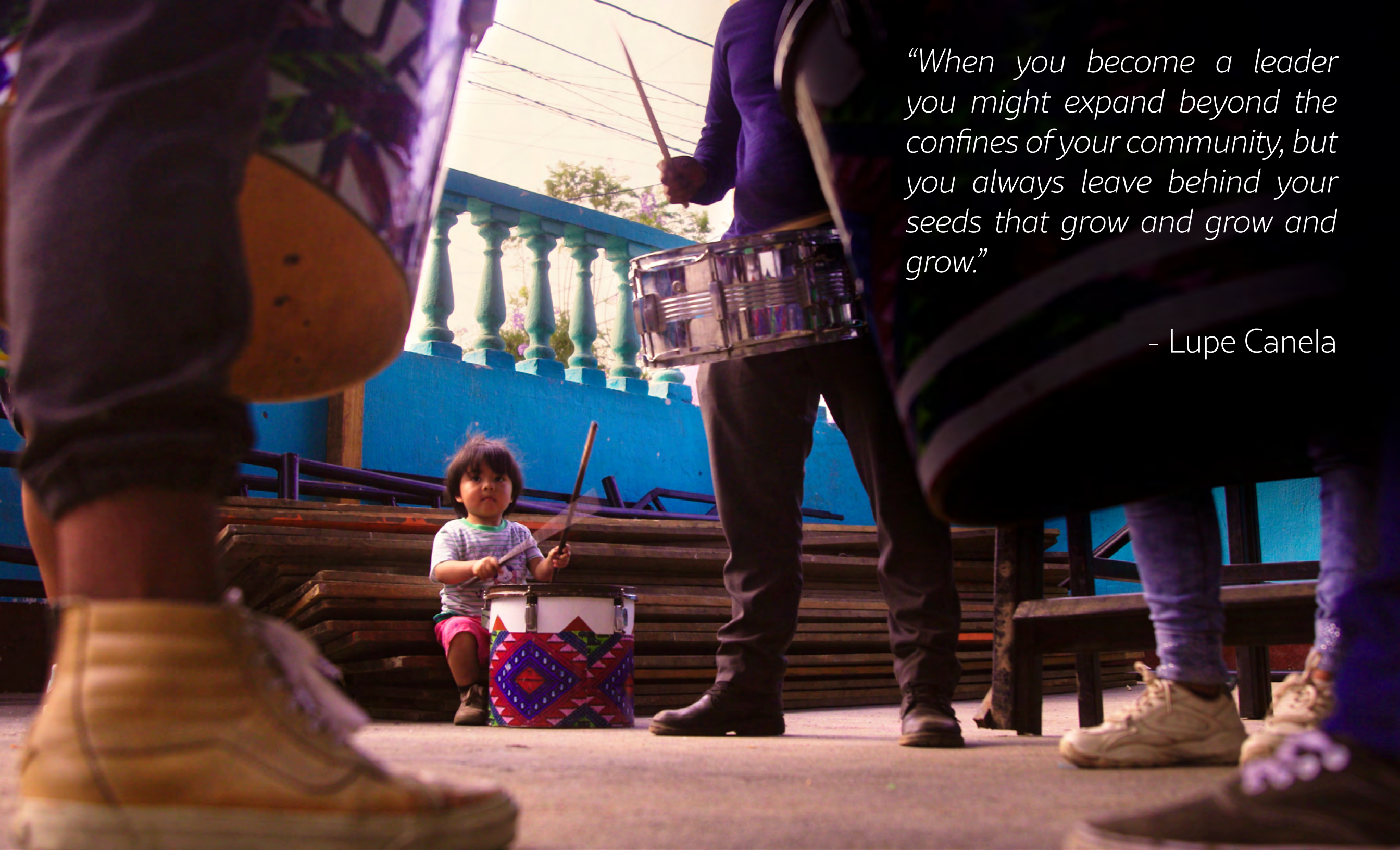
At the heart of their work are raucous public performances called *comparsas*—massive street festival-parades for the whole community to attend, rejoice, and imagine a new future together. In a community where traditional protest is too risky, these youth-led events resplendent with stilt walkers, fire breathers, and giant puppets serve as a Trojan horse for resistance and rebirth.

Our intimate access brings audiences deep into Lesli and Lupe’s world as they share a strategic way to overcome marginalization and organize youth around a cause. While their comparsa is

impactful for bystanders, it’s downright transformative for the young people who participate. Throughout the film, we witness this transformation as Lesli and Lupe become feisty, open-hearted, and inspirational community leaders worthy of emulation.

Their example offers an exuberant blueprint for young people anywhere seeking to organize their community and arm themselves against despair and resignation.





“When you become a leader you might expand beyond the confines of your community, but you always leave behind your seeds that grow and grow and grow.”

- Lupe Canela





TEAM BIOS

Vickie Curtis (director, producer) *Comparsa* is Vickie's directorial debut after nine years of writing nonfiction films. She was the recipient of the 2021 Primetime Emmy Award for nonfiction film writing for Netflix Original *The Social Dilemma* (Sundance). Vickie is drawn to stories that reveal the inhumane systems behind our existential crises, as well as stories about activated artists who work to transform and transcend those systems. Her work as a writer and story architect also includes the Emmy-winning film *Chasing Coral* (Sundance, Netflix), The Highly Flammable/Appian Way film *We Are Guardians* (HotDocs), *Greener Pastures* and *Island Soldier* (POV), *Anbessa* (Berlinale), and *Frame By Frame* (SXSW, Cinema Eye Nominee).

Doug Anderson (director, producer, sound recordist) is a filmmaker, producer, and sound engineer living in New York. Under the documentary production collective Paper Moth Media, Doug and his partner Sophie Luo have directed and produced work for social justice organizations and causes including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's history-making 2018 campaign. Recent cinematography credits include *To The End* (Sundance 2022) and *The Providers* (Independent Lens). Sound credits include *Knock Down The House* (Netflix), *Pride* (FX), *Class Divide* (HBO), and *Bonding* (Netflix).

Anna Hadingham (producer) is a theater artist and youth advocate who spent an unforgettable decade working with youth in Ciudad Peronia, Guatemala, where this film takes place. In Guatemala, Anna worked alongside the film's protagonists in the grassroots organization Peronia Adolescente, coordinating programs for youth leadership, social justice and community building through art. Anna now directs youth programs at La Colaborativa, an organization dedicated to economic justice and empowering the largely Central American community of Chelsea, MA. Anna continues to uplift the efforts of Peronia Adolescente, directing international fundraising efforts. Her initiative has allowed the organization to purchase their own building and achieve increased stability. In both Guatemala and the US, she has devised and directed over a dozen original theatrical works on topics including human rights, environmental justice and gender equality.

Olivia Ahnemann (producer) has been producing award-winning documentary films for over 20 years. She produced *Porcelain War*, which won the 2024 Sundance Grand Jury Prize. Other producing credits include *Youth v Gov* (Doc NYC, Jackson Wild Grand Teton Award); *The Human Element* (San Francisco International Film Festival, SCAD Savannah Film Festival's Best Feature Documentary Award); *Under the Gun* (2016 Sundance Film Festival), which was distributed by Epix/Lionsgate; and *Racing Extinction* (2015 Sundance Film Festival), which was distributed by Discovery. In 2016 Ahnemann was nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award for Exceptional Merit in Documentary Filmmaking. She co-produced the Oscar-winning feature documentary *The Cove*, which garnered over 70 awards globally, including the PGA's Best Documentary award.

Edgar Efrain Julajuj Tuy (director of photography) is a Kaqchikel Mayan filmmaker born in Sololá, Guatemala, who migrated at an early age to Ciudad Peronia, where he began his development in the visual arts. Tuy has studied cinematography in El Salvador and at Casa Comal in Guatemala. He has worked on feature and short films, national and international documentaries, Kaqchikel translation of Netflix documentaries, music videos and experimental film. He is currently presenting his documentary *Regalito de Dios* and is in production on his next documentary, *Mónica*, a film about an indigenous trans woman fighting for human rights in her rural community.

Sebastián Lasaosa Rogers (director of photography) is a Spanish-American cinematographer and filmmaker based in Brooklyn, New York. The most recent feature documentary he lensed, *The Art of Making It* (2021), won the audience award in the Festival Favorites category at SXSW 2022. Sebastián's documentary short *Esquilas en la montaña / Bells in the Mountains* (2017) was officially selected for the New Orleans Film Festival and the San Francisco Documentary Festival. Recently he has been shooting *On Tap*, directed by academy award-winning documentary filmmaker Karen Goodman and academy award nominee Kristi Zea. Sebastián is currently making a short documentary about an indigenous Chuj-Mayan aunt and uncle on a journey to liberate their niece, Juanita, who was illegally detained for over seven years after being coerced into signing a false confession.

Lesli Canela Pérez (co-producer) is a youth organizer, circus performer and community leader from Ciudad Peronia, Guatemala. Lesli came of age in the grassroots community organization Peronia Adolescente, where she began stilt walking, fire-breathing and facilitating workshops to her peers at a young age. Lesli is a powerful mobilizer and has rallied young people in her community to stand up for their rights, transform a clandestine dump into a playground, and bring art and joy into the streets. Over the past nine years, Lesli has performed in and begun producing dozens of comparsas, street performances and workshops for her community. Through shaping production and writing original poems and text for Comparsa the film, her storytelling is a central feature of our filmmaking process.

Lupe Canela Pérez (co-producer) is an educator, community organizer and tattoo artist from Ciudad Peronia, Guatemala. Lupe got involved with the community organization Peronia Adolescente as a young teenager and began practicing stilt-walking and muralism in the streets of her community. Lupe now works as an educator and mentor at Peronia Adolescente, reaching hundreds of young people with academic support and creative expression projects. Lupe has closely collaborated as a member of the Comparsa team both in production and by contributing writing to the film.

Carolina Siraqyan (editor) has had a long-standing career as an independent film editor, working on documentaries, fiction, advertising, music videos, and trailers. Her recent editing credits include the documentary *The Infinite Memory*, which won the Sundance World Cinema Grand Jury Prize in 2023; the Amazon Originals feature film *Sayen*; and the documentary *The Mole Agent*, which was nominated for Best Documentary at the 2021 Academy Awards and Best Editing at the 2021 Latino Entertainment Film Awards.



331815

CEL. 4785770

REPARACION DE ELECTRODOMESTICOS

SABAN
a
A 0888

WE
LOVE
LOVE

CURRENT STAGE

While the seeds of this project were planted 15 years ago, we began filming in Peronia in 2019. We wrapped principal photography in March 2022 and dedicated the rest of that year to fundraising efforts, translation, organizing footage, and building out our post-production team. We recently wrapped a pickup shoot in Guatemala, and we are currently editing a rough cut of the film. We plan to submit a fine cut to festivals in the Fall of 2024.

In 2023, we began the editing process with **Alexandria Bombach** (*On Her Shoulders*), who joined the project for a limited engagement. Our subject-collaborators Lesli and Lupe continued to write and share poetic material that will serve as voiceover.

Native Spanish-speaking editors have been in unprecedentedly high demand, and we have been extremely fortunate to bring onto our team one of the greatest documentary editors working today: **Carolina Siraqyan** has edited two Oscar-nominated features, *The Mole Agent* and *The Eternal Memory*, for which she won the International Documentary Association's Best Editing Award in 2023. Carolina took over the edit in August 2023, and she will continue to be on the project until picture lock. She is assisted by fellow Chilean editor **Javiera Veloza**, who is an award-winning editor in her own right.

We are now at a rough cut. We anticipate a steady editing clip continuing through the summer, proceeding through rounds of revisions until a fine cut is ready for submissions by September 2024. **Right now, closing our funding gap to support our post-production crew is our highest priority.**

We have engaged Emmy-nominated composer **Mark Crawford** to begin building out an original score for the film, and we are connecting with Guatemalan musicians to collaborate on the score.

By Spring 2025, we will have developed and published a free curriculum and action toolkit in order to deploy the film as part of a project-based education impact campaign, currently in development with program managers at Girl Rising.



IMPACT

Our Expertise

Comparsa's director and producer both have backgrounds as educators and trainers in arts-focused, project-based learning and engagement. Building on years of experience teaching high school at interdisciplinary schools in Massachusetts, Vickie developed an arts- and film-based curriculum for the Sundance/Netflix film *Chasing Coral*. In her role as director of youth programming at La Colaborativa in Chelsea, MA, Anna has already piloted a *comparsa*-inspired curriculum with great success.

We will partner with our collaborators in Ciudad Peronia—Marta, Lesli, and Lupe—to design the impact campaign. We are developing partnerships with other youth-focused movements and organizations throughout the Americas in order to connect *Comparsa* with youth audiences and maximize the film's impact.

Prioritizing Education

Inspired by Lesli and Lupe's work, we plan to develop a long-term education impact campaign that uses the film to catalyze more young people's artist activism. To this end, we have partnered with Girl Rising, an international organization that promotes the education and activation of girls around the world with programs in Guatemala and 10 other countries. We are also planning to partner with the Ixcanul Foundation and are in talks with organizations like Doc Society, Glasswing, and Docs for Schools to ensure the film's distribution among young audiences.

Inspiring Youth Arts & Activism

We will co-create a methodology and toolkit that encourages young people to investigate issues their own communities face and to take action. Through our impact partners, we aim to distribute the film far and wide, with a special focus on Central American audiences who can see themselves in Lesli and Lupe's story, and US-based audiences for whom the film may serve as a positive narrative disruption to overwhelmingly negative media coverage of Latin America.

Screening the film will help to kick off youth-driven, local projects. We'll connect participants to one another, so creative collaborations can flourish beyond our reach. We imagine students tackling economic inequality, climate crisis, gun violence, gender equality, and the human-environment relationship. Lesli and Lupe have expressed a desire to see more centers like Peronia Adolescente open and receive support throughout their region. We believe this is possible with *Comparsa* positioned as a calling card for their movement.

PROJECT TIMELINE

Summer 2019 - Pre-production

Fall 2019 - Begin principal photography and fundraising

Spring 2022 - Principal photography completed, begin to recruit impact campaign partners

Summer & Fall 2022 - Organize footage, complete translations, ongoing fundraising

Spring 2023 - Begin edit

Spring 2024 - Additional photography shoot. Complete rough cut, ongoing fundraising

Summer 2024 - Complete fine cut, begin score composition & festival submissions

Summer-Fall 2024 - Grow network of impact campaign partners

Fall 2024 - Finish color, score, sound design and mix

Early 2025 - Festival premiere, launch education impact campaign

2025 & Beyond - Secure distribution, film festival tour, ongoing education impact campaign





LINKS

- [trailer](#)

- [a video message from Lesli & Lupe](#)



CONTACT

vickie.curtis@gmail.com | +1 508 320 3329
doug@papermoth.media | +1 774 270 1388