



For Immediate Release

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P.O.V.'s "Al Otro Lado" Chronicles U.S.-Mexico Border Culture and Conflicts Through the Tradition of *Corrido* Music, Tuesday, Aug. 1 on PBS

**Songs, Drugs and Dreams Collide as Young Musician Faces Harsh Choices
In Search of a Better Life**

"A lyrical and beautiful account of border culture. . . . humane, visually exquisite and resists simple descriptions." - Robert Koehler, *Variety*

Al Otro Lado (To the Other Side) tells the human story behind illegal immigration and drug trafficking between the U.S. and Mexico through the eyes of Magdiel, a 23-year-old fisherman and aspiring composer who dreams of a better life. For people south of the border, the "other side" is the dream of an impossibly rich United States, where even menial jobs can support families and whole communities that have been left behind. For people north of the border, **Al Otro Lado** sheds light on harsh choices that their neighbors to the south often face because of economic crisis.

As movingly chronicled in **Al Otro Lado**, Natalia Almada's debut feature documentary premiering on PBS's P.O.V. series, the border is a place where one people's dreams collide with another people's politics, and the 200-year-old tradition of *corrido* music vibrantly chronicles it all. In fact, if you really want to understand what is happening on the U.S./Mexico border, listen to the *corridos*, troubadour-like ballads that have become the voice of people whose views are rarely heard in mainstream media.

Natalia Almada's **Al Otro Lado (To the Other Side)**, an Official Selection of the Tribeca Film Festival, has its national broadcast premiere **Tuesday, Aug. 1, 2006** at 10 p.m. on PBS as part of the 19th season of public television's P.O.V. series. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television's premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films.

In **Al Otro Lado** the fantasy of the "American Dream" and the economic crisis that drives thousands across the border looking for work has landed Magdiel at an impossible crossroads in his life. A fourth-generation fisherman with aspirations for a home of his own, a car, and an education for his younger sister, he must pick a road if he is to realize his goals—to become a drug trafficker like many of his friends, or to cross the border illegally to the United States. Magdiel lives in Sinaloa, the drug capital of Mexico, where he can no longer subsist on the shrimp that have been depleted by global demands and poor fishing practices. He is also a self-taught composer. Reflecting the life around him, Magdiel sings of fishermen who have turned their *pangas* (fishing boats) into drug-running boats and made the treacherous journey to deliver the merchandise to the "gringos."

In all of this, Magdiel is a true son of Sinaloa, the heartland of drug trade and the birthplace of the *corrido*'s most celebrated performers, the legendary Chalino Sanchez and the group Los Tigres del Norte. The *corrido* has always been a classic folk art, a "musical newspaper" of raucous, soulful ballads that typically extol outlaw virtues and express popular resistance to both homegrown and

Yankee authority. Chalino Sanchez began writing *corridos* in prison in California and went on to become a troubadour for the Mexican drug traffickers. (“He sang for the Mafia, but he did it with class,” notes Pepe Garza of Los Angeles’ biggest Mexican radio station, La Que Buena.) His murder in 1992 turned this Sinaloan *corrido* composer and singer into a legend that spawned a *corrido* craze on the streets of Los Angeles where a new generation of rap-raised Mexican and Chicano youth returned to their musical roots.

The wildly popular Los Tigres Del Norte brought a more overt political sensibility to the *corrido*. With such songs as “La Jaula de Oro” (“The Golden Cage”) and “Tres Veces Mojado” (“Three Times a Wetback”) about the difficulties and injustices of immigrant life and deaths along the border, they are the declared “voice of the immigrant people.” Having sold over 30 million records and garnered three Grammy Awards, their popularity is likened to that of the Rolling Stones and Willie Nelson combined. But the Tigres are no strangers to the immigrant struggles they sing about—they crossed the border as young teenagers and had to create new lives for themselves.

With heroes such as these, Magdiel doesn’t lack for models. And with the outlaw life engulfing Sinaloa, he doesn’t lack for inspiration. Magdiel’s music is good enough that when he toys with the idea of drug smuggling, the traffickers tell him to forget it, to keep composing *corridos*. Yet even to pursue his musical dreams, he must—like his heroes Chalino and Los Tigres—make a record in the States. But Magdiel is denied a visa and to cross the border with a reputable *coyote* (an illegal border crossing guide) costs \$2-3,000 – more money than he feels he’ll ever see. When Magdiel meets a *coyote* who offers to cross him to the other side for free in exchange for a song about his journeys, Magdiel begins composing.

The filmmaker, Natalia Almada, whose family is native to Sinaloa, had already filmed a good part of **Al Otro Lado** when Magdiel called her in New York, telling her a *coyote* had offered to take him to the other side for free in exchange for a *corrido*. She immediately went back to Sinaloa to follow Magdiel on his journey. The result is a dramatic and revealing climax to Almada’s chronicle of the economic crisis in her home state that has forced so many to risk their lives immigrating illegally or trafficking drugs.

“My family has lived in Sinaloa for six generations, but it was my generation that saw how free trade with our wealthy neighbor changed our economy and culture,” says Almada. “For over 200 years *corrido* songs have been the musical underground newspapers, and today tell of drug traffickers and illegal immigrants – people who have beaten the system and provided jobs and much-needed infrastructure to rural communities in a struggling economy.

“I decided to use *corrido* music as a thread throughout the film because it provided culture, color, and texture,” she continues, “and it was also a way to hear the voices of the people most affected and least heard. Following Magdiel not only gave the documentary a narrative climax I never imagined, but it also changed and shaped my own views on the immigrant experience.”

Al Otro Lado was selected as part of the Tribeca Film Festival’s “All Access Program,” and had a week-long run at the Museum of Modern Art in 2006.

Al Otro Lado is funded by grants from the Sundance Documentary Fund, New York Foundation for the Arts, Arizona Humanities Council, and Latino Public Broadcasting. A co-production with American Documentary | P.O.V.

About the filmmaker:

Natalia Almada

Producer/Director/Editor

Al Otro Lado is Natalia Almada's first documentary feature. Her experimental short, **All Water Has a Perfect Memory**, was an Official Selection at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival and won awards at the Tribeca and Chicago International Film Festivals. In 2003, Almada was a Fellow for both the New York Foundation for the Arts and the NALIP Latino Producers Academy. She recently received a Creative Capital Grant for her new project, **El General**. A native of Mexico who spent her childhood on both sides of the border, Almada received an MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design. She lives and works in Brooklyn.

Credits:

Producer/Director/Editor:	Natalia Almada
Producers:	Kent Rogowski, Tommaso Fiacchino
Executive Producer for P.O.V.:	Cara Mertes
Cinematographer:	Chuy Chavez
Consulting Editor:	Sam Pollard

Running Time: 56:46

Awards & Festivals

- Cultural Voice Award, New York International Latino Film Festival, 2005
- Honorable Mention, Best Documentary, Morelia Film Festival (Mexico), 2005
- Best Documentary, Puerto Rico International Film Festival, 2005
- Best Feature Film, CineFestival, San Antonio, 2005
- Museum of Modern Art screening, March 2006
- Official Selection, Tribeca Film Festival, 2005
- Official Selection, Los Angeles Film Festival, 2005
- Official Selection, Los Angeles Latino Film Festival, 2005
- Official Selection, Margaret Mead Film and Video Festival, New York, 2005
- CineFestival, San Antonio, 2005

The **Al Otro Lado** companion website (www.pbs.org/pov/alotrolado) offers exclusive streaming video clips from the film, a podcast version of the filmmaker interview and a wealth of additional resources, including a Q&A with filmmaker Natalia Almada, ample opportunities for viewers to "talk back" and talk to each other about the film, and the following special features (available in Spanish and in English):

- **Book Excerpt:** *Narcocorridos*. Find out more about Sinaloa, Chalino Sánchez, the history of *corrido* music, *narcocorrido* (*corrido* songs that focus on drug smugglers) and the men (and women) who write them, in two excerpts from Elijah Wald's 2001 book, *Narcocorrido*.
- **Interviews:** Wald talks with radio DJ Ricardo "El Mandril" Sanchez, of Burbank-based "Que Buena" (KBUE-FM, the "mother of all *corridos*"), about *corrido* and *narcocorrido* music in LA, the recent immigration marches, immigration *corridos*, and the "Top 10" must-have *corridos*.

Meet Los Tigres del Norte in our exclusive Web interview with members of the band. Listen to their music and hear more from them about *corrido*.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and in its 19th season on PBS, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running showcase on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through October, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought nearly 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V is available online at www.pbs.org/pov.

P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. It also produces a Web site for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information and feedback on the issues. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov houses our unique *Talking Back* feature, filmmaker interviews and viewer resources, and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these originally produced materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders and general audiences nationally. P.O.V. also works closely with local public television stations to partner with local museums, libraries, schools and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films. *Youth Views*, P.O.V.'s youth engagement initiative, expands these efforts by working directly with youth service organizations.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Ford Foundation, PBS and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s Community Engagement activities and the *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston, and Thirteen/WNET New York.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.americandocumentary.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, on line and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback, to educational opportunities and community participation. Cara Mertes is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

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TAPE REQUESTS: Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.

