

The scissor dance embodies centuries of tradition.



Danzak

From the mountains comes the story of the scissor dance

BY KEVIN DUNCAN

IN JUST 18 MINUTES, the film *Danzak* tells the intimate story of a deathbed wish, and the larger story of the tension between Indigenous mountain customs and urban life in 21st century Peru.

Danzak follows 10-year-old Nina, whose father Padre's dying wish is to dress in his colourful and handmade velvet costume, clutch two unhinged metal blades in one hand, and dance until "his breath returns to the Earth."

A migrant who moved from a village in the southern Peruvian Andes to the shantytowns of Lima, Padre has never lost his passion for the scissor dance, one of his hometown's oldest traditions. Determined to dance until his death, Padre is at odds with his wife who insists he go to the hospital and take medications to defeat the illness that threatens his life. Nina, who is drawn to the scissor dance, is forced to fight for her father's beliefs on his behalf.

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"This film explores how and why a specific Andean culture manifestation – the scissor dance – is passed on to younger generations in urban environments," says *Danzak* writer and director Gabriela Yepes.

This physically demanding dance involves a series of steps and leaps during which the dancer creates an intricate rhythm using two independent blades shaped like a pair of scissors. Anthropologists believe the scissor dance evolved from a 16th century Indigenous movement in the southern Peruvian Andes that resisted the Catholic faith imposed by Spanish invaders. Although the

rebellion was unsuccessful, the idea of resistance survived concealed in songs, dances, and music.

"Indigenous people account for a significant proportion of the Peruvian population," says Yepes. "However, Peruvian movies and mainstream media tend to depict Indigenous culture in racist and discriminative stereotypes. This film aims to create a non-stereotypical representation of the daily life and cultural practices inside a community of Indigenous artists."

Inspired by the story *The Agony of Rasu Niti* by Peruvian writer José María Arguedas, the film was shot in Peruvian



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neighbourhoods and highlands during the summer of 2007, following a year of preproduction, rehearsals, writing, and rewriting. Yepes used non-professional actors and incorporated the life experiences of the scissor dance community into the story.

“Over the years, I came to believe that in order to create social change I needed to look into who we are as a county, where we come from, and what our place is in the world,” says Yepes.

“I believe cinema could potentially fill our memory gaps, the amnesia suffered by all of us. On the other hand, when I make films I try to base my work on the principle that any art form can change the way issues are perceived and thought. This film intends to acknowledge one of the many Indigenous traditions Peruvian society cannot and should not be conceived without.”

