



La Lupe documentary

She kicked off her shoes, hit her musicians, and burst on stage in an emotional frenzy. Her life, as she sang in one of her signature songs, was without a doubt, "Puro Teatro."

But despite what the lyrics suggest, in La Lupe's case there were no well-rehearsed fakes or studied simulacrum. While Madonna was still in diapers, this Cuban singer was already shaking up show business.

Because Guadalupe Victoria Yoli Raymond, La Yiyiyi, was one of the most dramatically and viscerally real performers ever on stage. Or off. That much is clear from the new documentary *La Lupe, Queen of Latin Soul*, in world premiere at the Miami International Film Festival and later showing in conjunction with *Carnaval Miami 2007*.

La Lupe's outsize personality seemed like a perfect fit for the Cuban American filmmaker known for her quirky short films *Once Upon a Time in The Bronx* and *Carmelita Tropicana*, and for the feature *Latin Boys Go To Hell*.

"In 1993, I tried to do something on La Lupe, but I couldn't," remembers Ela Troyano, director of the roughly hour-long documentary that will air on June 5 on PBS. "But by 2000 I had the archival material and a bit of money."

Troyano managed to see La Lupe in person in 1987, near the end of her life (she passed in 1992), when she had renounced the entertainment world to dedicate herself to the spiritual world. Troyano came home one night and heard an ad for a talk that the one-time star was giving at a women's society.

"I knew La Lupe was famous, but I didn't know what she was like," the filmmaker continues. "So I went to this event with my recorder and there was La Lupe, standing at an altar, giving her blessing and talking about her life. What I saw was an incredible person who I didn't understand. On the one hand, she seemed like a scam artist, but on the other her presentation seemed so real. I didn't know exactly what to think about her."

La Lupe has confused her admirers and detractors in equal measure ever since she abandoned her little town of San Pedrito in the Santiago region of Cuba for the stage. But after 1959, there was no room for La Lupe in revolutionary Cuba. She left for New York in 1962.

First she took up with her countryman Mongo Santamaría but it wasn't until she joined forces with the Puerto Rican timbalero Tito Puente that she made history. After their relationship was strained, Lupe continued on her own and scored more hits.

But change was coming in the Latin music industry; with the rise of the Fania All Stars, La Lupe lost her place as the premiere woman singer of tropical music and passed her crown to the guarachera of Cuba, Celia Cruz.

"When Lupe was in her most problematic stage, in the 70s and 80s, it was hard for her to get shows," says Troyano, whose interest in the singer is so strong that she hopes to make a full-length feature about her.



“I have other projects, and I’m a little tired,” the director admits. “But I’d like to do something more with La Lupe. Something in fiction. I’ll have to figure out what to do.”

La Lupe screens at:

3:30 pm on Saturday, March 10

7:30 pm on Sunday March 11

Tower Theater

1508 SW 8 Street

www.miamifilmfestival.com