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In POV's "Ella Es El Matador (She Is the Matador)," Women Challenge Bullfighting's Male Image, Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2009, on PBS

Maripaz Vega and Eva Florencia Are the Latest in a Line of Women Who Have Taken to the Ring to Face Both Bulls and Prejudice

A co-presentation with Latino Public Broadcasting (LPB)

"When Vega stands in front of a bull, covered in blood, sword raised, staring the beast in its eye, it's impossible not to immerse yourself in the action." — Sarah Godfrey, Washington City Paper

Neither Maripaz Vega nor Eva Florencia is unique. As related in **Ella Es El Matador (She Is the Matador)**, the new documentary airing on PBS' **POV (Point of View)** series, there is a long and surprising history of women fighting in the Spanish bullring — and fighting to have the chance to do so. For all of Spain's traditional machismo and the image of the matador as a quintessentially male figure, women have never given up wanting to fight bulls. A 1908 law banning women from bullfighting is testament to women's determination to perform in the ring and not just shout "Olé!" from the stands.

But if not unique, Vega and Florencia remain rarities in the world of contemporary Spanish bullfighting. Vega, a Spaniard, is currently the world's only professional female matador and is on the verge of achieving top ranking. Florencia, a young runaway from Italy, is a neophyte driven by a childhood dream. Both women must deal with the legacies of sexism in Spanish bullfighting — condescending male colleagues, promoters who won't book them in the best arenas, audiences attached to the rich symbolism and pop-star status of the male matador. Yet the passions that propel Vega and Florencia are similar to those of male bullfighters — a drive to express themselves in a grand and peculiarly Spanish rite as theatrical as it is bloody and as integral to Spanish culture as it is mysterious to much of the rest of the world.

Gemma Cubero and Celeste Carrasco's **Ella Es El Matador (She Is the Matador)** has its national broadcast premiere on **Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2009**, at 10 p.m. on PBS as part of the 22nd season of **POV**. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, POV is the winner of a Special Emmy for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking. The series continues on Tuesdays through Sept. 22, and returns with special presentations on Nov. 11 and Dec. 30.

Is bullfighting sport, dance, theater or blood ritual? **Ella Es El Matador** reveals bullfighting to be all of these. Through interviews shot in vérité style interspersed with archival footage illustrating the history of women in bullfighting, the film offers a fascinating window on the highly choreographed and deadly match between bull and human that remains enormously popular in Spain, even as it is reviled by many in an age of animal rights. (Outside Spain, bullfighting is popular only in Portugal and Latin America and, interestingly, in those places it is more open to women matadors.) In explaining their motives, Vega and Florencia express the mystical hold that bullfighting has over

Spaniards, what Florencia calls “something beyond the cruelty . . . a connection between man and beast.”

Vega also speaks of a magical connection to the bull — and to death. “Without the bull there is nothing. . . . We all believe the bull is born to die in the ring. Keep in mind that you’re giving him a chance to fight for his life. It’s a fight between you and the bull. Either one can win the battle.” In fact, while the odds are stacked against the bull, the matador faces real danger. In the course of the filming of **Ella Es El Matador**, Vega is gored in the thigh — and it isn’t her first injury. She shows the stoic courage required of matadors at such moments. Later, she refers ruefully to a bullfighting tradition that says that with each goring, a little of the matador’s courage seeps out.

Vega is the daughter of a once-aspiring bullfighter, and each of her five brothers trained to be matadors. It was her brothers’ example that inspired her, at nine years old, to face her “first calf.” Yet like their father before them, her brothers failed to rise higher than apprentice bullfighters, while Vega has succeeded in becoming a matador and is poised to join the ring’s top ranks. “To be able to dominate the bull and create something beautiful and to see the people embrace your performance, that’s why I love being a matador,” she says.

For the young Florencia — and for her disconcerted family — bullfighting arrived like a bolt out of the blue, or “an arrow to the heart,” as she puts it. It struck the moment when, as a little girl from Tuscany who knew nothing of Spain, much less bullfighting, beyond what she saw in books and magazines, she was transfixed by “a picture of a bullfighter executing a beautiful pass.” She decided then and there to become a matador, a childish ambition her family naturally tried to dismiss.

When, at 16, Florencia asked her family to send her to Spain, they just as naturally refused. So she ran off to Seville to pursue the difficult life of an apprentice bullfighter. (It takes 25 sanctioned matches to qualify as a matador.) When her family finally accepted that Florencia’s passion was no whim, but “something that had profoundly entered my soul,” as she says, they began attending bullfights and learning about their daughter’s obsession. The recollections and musings of Florencia’s father, Domenico, reveal the struggles of an outsider to grasp the allure of bullfighting.

In the period documented by **Ella Es El Matador**, the greatest threat to the women, or at least to their dreams, turns out to be not the bulls and their horns, but the patriarchal regime that guards bullfighting’s masculine image. Vega’s real challenge, despite all her success, is getting the chance to fight in the prestigious arenas that would vault her to prominence; Florencia’s challenge is simply getting the 25 official matches she needs to realize her dream.

“Bullfighting is the quintessential symbol of masculinity and bravery in Spanish culture,” say filmmakers Cubero and Carrasco, both born and raised in Spain. “Making this documentary about female matadors means changing this symbol and shifting the gender roles that have been defined for centuries. We want to open a window for viewers to enter into a unique world without judgment, while exploring the universal struggle of our two protagonists.”

Ella Es El Matador (She Is the Matador) is a production of Talcual Films. www.talcualfilms.com and is distributed in North America by Women Make Movies (WMM), www.wmm.com.

About the Filmmakers:

Gemma Cubero, Director, Producer, Executive Producer, Writer

Ella Es El Matador marks Spanish filmmaker Gemma Cubero’s directorial debut. Previously she worked as associate producer and researcher on Lourdes Portillo’s award-winning POV documentary **Señorita Extraviada**, about the killing of women in Juarez. Cubero also produced, with Julio Medem, the feature-length documentaries “What’s Under Your Hat?” and “One Percent: Schizophrenia.” In 2006 she founded Talcual Films, an independent production company based in the United States and Spain. Now living in San Francisco, Cubero received a bachelor’s degree, cum laude, in journalism from Elon University in Elon, N.C.

Celeste Carrasco, Director, Producer, Cinematographer, Editor, Writer

Celeste Carrasco is a native of Barcelona, Spain. Her film credits include first assistant director on Marta Ballebò-Coll's "Honey, I've Sent the Men to the Moon," production manager on Lourdes Portillo's **Señorita Extraviada** and producer on Lisset Barcellos' "Both." Previously, she received sponsorship from the Smithsonian Institution to conduct research at the Film and Media Department of the Exploratorium in San Francisco. Carrasco currently works in the technical department of the Madrid Opera House, combining her film work with theater.

Credits:

Co-directors/Producers: Gemma Cubero, Celeste Carrasco
Executive Producers: Sheila C. Johnson, Suzanne LaFetra, Gemma Cubero
Cinematographer: Celeste Carrasco
Editors: Carla Gutiérrez, Vivien Hillgrove, Jennifer Chinlund, Celeste Carrasco
Music: Michael Galasso, Todd Boekelheide, Martirio

Running Time: 56:46

Awards & Festivals:

- Tribeca All Access Creative Promise Award for Documentary, 2008
- Independent Film Week Spotlight on Documentaries, 2008
- World premiere, 24th Guadalajara International Film Festival, 2009
- U.S. premiere, SILVERDOCS AFI/Discovery Channel Documentary Festival, 2009



Created in 1998 by Edward James Olmos and Marlene Dermer, Latino Public Broadcasting (LPB) is a nonprofit organization funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. LPB's mission is to support the development, production, post-production, acquisition and distribution of non-commercial educational and cultural television that is representative of or addresses issues of particular interest to U.S. Latinos. These programs are produced for dissemination to public broadcasting stations and other public telecommunications entities. Mr. Olmos is presently LPB's Chairman of the Board of Directors. For more information please visit www.lpbp.org.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and beginning its 22nd season on PBS in 2009, the award-winning POV series is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today's best independent documentary filmmakers. Airing June through September, with primetime specials during the year, POV has brought more than 275 acclaimed films to millions nationwide and has a Webby Award-winning online series, *POV's Borders*. Since 1988, POV 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 is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

POV's award-winning Web department produces special features for every POV presentation, extending the life of our films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. POV Interactive also produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *POV's Borders*. In addition, the *POV Blog* is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss and debate their favorite films, get the latest news and link to further resources. The POV website, blog and film archives form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

POV Community Engagement and Education

POV works with local PBS stations, educators and community organizations to present free screenings and discussion events to inspire and engage communities in vital conversations about our world. As a leading provider of quality nonfiction programming for use in public life, POV offers an extensive menu of resources, including free discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. In addition, POV's *Youth*

Views works with youth organizers and students to provide them with resources and training so they may use independent documentaries as a catalyst for social change.

Major funding for POV is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, The Educational Foundation of America, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, The September 11th Fund and public television viewers. Funding for POV's *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Special support provided by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. POV is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.amdoc.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, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | POV.

DVD 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.



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