

# CIELO

**A Film by Alison McAlpine  
(Canada/Chile, 78')**

## **Press Notes - November 2017**

Cielo is a cinematic reverie on the crazy beauty of the night sky, as experienced in the Atacama Desert, Chile, one of the best places on our planet to explore and contemplate its splendour. Director Alison McAlpine's sublime nonfiction film drifts between science and spirituality, the arid land, desert shores and lush galaxies, expanding the limits of our earthling imaginations. Planet Hunters in the Atacama's astronomical observatories and the desert dwellers who work the land and sea share their evocative visions of the stars and planets, their mythic stories and existential queries with remarkable openness and a contagious sense of wonder. A love poem for the night sky, Cielo transports us to a space, quiet and calm, within which we can ponder the infinite and unknown.

### **RIDM Screenings:**

**Saturday, November 11, 6:00pm** - CINÉMATHÈQUE QUÉBÉCOISE - SALLE PRINCIPALE  
Screening presented with French subtitles

**Monday, November 13, 5:45pm** - CINÉMA DU PARC 3  
Screening presented with English subtitles

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

Cielo is a film born from the emotion of seeing the night sky in the Atacama Desert, Chile. I had never seen such beauty and felt a profound freedom inside, so many questions arose. I set off on a journey in this desert to explore and discover what we call sky. Few of us look above and pay attention to the stars or planets in our daily lives; what would it be like to live in this otherworldly landscape where even the earth is gazing upward?

Cielo is a conversation with the stars and an encounter with the desert dwellers and scientists I spent time with while journeying in this isolated region of Chile. Cielo is also an exploration of what a story can be. Traditional narrative notions of plot development, dramatic arc, character exposition etc hold no interest for me. The unfolding of our narrative is more associative than logical. We reveal with juxtapositions of image and sound- for instance, the intimacy of a human moment vis-à-vis the epic scale of the night sky. And the film's narration is like a poem, the voice and writing hopefully natural, working directly, emotionally like music. My wish is that Cielo allows us to lose our sense of time in the film sky and rediscover our world, offering fellow travellers an evocative space in which to think and imagine for themselves. Or even experience a moment of transcendence, what photographer Robert Frank calls, "the poetry behind the surfaces of things".

## **DIRECTOR'S TECHNICAL NOTES**

### Time-lapses and Cameras

How can you possibly capture the depth and limitless beauty of such a night sky within the limits of a picture frame?

We've seen so many time-lapses before and they are usually very fast, appearing like special effects or fireworks. There is no time to feel or enter the image. I wanted to re-invent time-lapses so that the rhythms and textures felt human, natural.

Shooting the night sky was a continual process of exploration. We photographed most often 5-7 days before or after the new moon or when there was an astronomical event, like a lunar eclipse. We shot short exposures of 4-6 seconds. I was after simplicity, images that felt raw and alive. I did not want dolly shots. Most often we used a tripod, at times we used a simple motion control head which slowly followed the moon or the milky way.

During the night we used a Sony A7s for shooting time-lapses or filming with characters. At times we also used an Atomos Shogun. When filming by day we used a Sony FS7.

## Sound and Music

How do you reveal the silence of the Atacama Desert, the driest desert in this world? Parts of the desert are like Mars, if there is life it's beyond the pick-up of any microphone. Yet this silence is an essential part of star gazing in the Atacama Desert, a profound silence which inspires contemplation, reflection and for me, extraordinary joy. And what are the sounds of the stars, of the universe?

Sound was extremely important throughout our process: the natural sounds of the desert; the different atmospheres of each locale; the wild and wonderful sounds in the observatories, howls and purrs as these giant beasts came to life at sunset. Vents and domes opening, telescopes sliding, grinding into position, opening upward, turning, photographing, searching, a dance until dawn. We used Schoeps and Neumann microphones, recording in mid-side.

Initially, I imagined the film without music, feeling the soundscape was rich and could carry the film. Yet when we came to our rough cut, we felt music was essential. I heard acoustic music, a grammar of sound distinct from the electronic world of the observatories. I wanted music which has its own narrative form, music that feels like part of our innermost being. "Film as dream, film as music", Ingmar Bergman says, "goes directly to our feelings, deep down into the dark rooms of the soul."

## Organic Effects

As the film was evolving in the editing room, we began looking for imagery that evoked the stars and planets macroscopically. We looked at NASA images which are beautiful but familiar. CGI was unaffordable and not what I imagined anyway. "Tree of Life" became a reference for us. We'd create organic effects for "Cielo"! I watched the Vimeo segment about special effects legend Doug Trumbull's process. I did some research and went about, with complete innocence, gathering a crew to shoot the "creation of the world" in three days! The dream became a possibility thanks to the extraordinary generosity of Frédéric Chamberland, Steadicam operator and owner of a Phantom camera. We storyboarded and planned each set up precisely. We then arrived at Frederic's studio and improvised using studio lighting, glass, paints, ink, dust, all organic materials, shooting in 2000 and 1000 frames/sec to create the organic effects in Cielo.

In postproduction, we enhanced our imagery with a colour treatment, subtly adding visual effects, working towards an aesthetic that felt natural, non-digital, human. At times we added layers of star imagery we shot in Chile.

## PEOPLE/LOCATIONS

Roberto Garcia, storyteller, man who flies, Catarpe

Stéphane Udry, planet hunter, La Silla and Paranal Observatory

Mercedes Lopez and Néstor Espinoza, planet hunters, Las Campanas Observatory

Casiano Ardiles and Lilian Rojas, algae collectors, Los Pozos, Huasco

Raúl Adriazola , miner, Inca de Oro

Jorge Rojas, algae collector, young man cooking, Los Pozos, Huasco

Mario Salas Schered, photographer of UFOS, Requeña, Huasco

Cipriano Castillo and Gabriel Castillo, cowboys, Andean mountains Elqui Valley

Francisco Pepe, planet hunter who sings, La Silla Observatory

## CREATIVE TEAM

**Alison McAlpine (Writer/Director/Producer)** - Alison's roots are in poetry, which she began writing as a teenager, publishing in her early twenties. At a writing workshop in Banff the novelist Alistair MacLeod described her work as film poetry. Soon she discovered theatre in Ireland, writing highly visual poetic monologues which were performed in Dublin. In Canada, Alison formed a theatre company and wrote and directed plays that were presented at festivals in Canada, Ireland and France. She was encouraged towards cinema and received a commission to write a TV Opera based on a play she had written. The mid-length film *SECOND SIGHT* (2009), "a nonfiction ghost story," was screened at more than 35 international film festivals. She had two BBC Commissions, versions of "Second Sight". "Ghostman of Skye" was "Pick of the Day" or "Critics Choice" in every UK newspaper. *CIELO* is Alison's first feature film. [www.alisonmcalpine.com](http://www.alisonmcalpine.com)

**Benjamin Echazarreta (Director of Photography)** - Born in Paris and based in Santiago, Benjamin's work as a Director of Photography includes *A FANTASTIC WOMAN* (2017), *REY* (2017), *SEX LIFE OF PLANTS* (2015), *GLORIA* (2013), *EL CIRCUITO DE ROMAN* (2011), *MOZART'S SISTER* (2010), *NAVIDAD* (2009), *HINTERLAND* (2007, Tiger Award), 1,2,3 *WHITEOUT* (2007) and *L'EVANGILE DU COCHON CREOLE* (2004).

**Andrea Chignoli (Editor)** - Based in Santiago, Andrea has worked as a film editor since 1995. Her filmography includes *THE DESERT BRIDE* (2017), *THE BLIND CHRIST* (2016), *NO* (2012, Academy Award nominee, Best Foreign Language Film), *VIOLETA WENT TO HEAVEN* (2012,

Sundance World Competition Jury Award), CIRCUMSTANCE (2011, Sundance Audience Award, U.S. Competition), POST MORTEM (2010), THE GOOD LIFE (2009, Goya Award, Best Foreign Film) and TONY MANERO (2008).

**Phillippe Lauzier (Music Composer)** - Philippe Lauzier is a Montreal based musician dedicated to the art of improvisation. He has toured Europe, North America and Australia with groups like Saint Laurens, Quartetski, Toiture and Not the Music, as well as playing concerts with the musicians Alexandre St-Onge, Cléo Palacio-Quintin, Isaiah Ceccarelli, Martin Tétreault, Kim Myhr, Franz Hautzinger, Xavier Charles, Jim Denley, Tatsuya Nakatani among others. Phillippe also creates sound installations and music for films, contemporary dance and theatre.

**Miguel Hormazábal (Sound Design/Supervision)** – Miguel’s numerous credits include THE DESERT BRIDE (2017), NERUDA (2017, Fenix Award Nomination, Best Sound), EL CLUB (2015, Fenix Award Nomination, Best Sound), NO (Academy Award nominee, 2013) (2014), Violeta se fué a los Cielos (2013); POST MORTEM (2010) , MACHUCA (2004, Ariel Award Nominee).

## CREDITS

Writer, Director, Producer	Alison McAlpine (Second Sight Pictures)
Executive Producer	Carmen Garcia (Argus Films)
Co-Producer	Paola Castillo (Errante Producciones)
Producer, Marketing and Distribution	Sean Farnel
Editing	Andrea Chignoli
Director of Photography	Benjamin Echazarreta
Music Composer	Phillippe Lauzier
Sound Supervision/Design	Miguel Hormazábal
Timelapses	Alison McAlpine Benjamin Echazarreta Cristian Valenzuela Diego Delanoe

Credits (Cont'd..)

Sound Recording

Andres Carrasco  
Rodrigo Salvatierra  
Carlo Sanchez Farías  
Claudio Vargas

Organic Visual Effects

Phantom® cameras by [frederic.ca](http://frederic.ca)  
Philippe Toupin - Supervision VFX  
Mathieu Laverdière - Director of  
Photography  
Alexander Storm- Asst

Drone Photography

Ariel Marinkovic, Martín Cruz, X-Cam.cl

Narration

Alison McAlpine

Narration Recording and Coaching

Catherine Van Der Donckt

Timelapses Consultant

Babak A. Tafreshi

Musicians

Philippe Lauzier  
Pierre-Yves MARTEL

Post-Production Sound

Re-recording Mixer, Editor of Direct Sound

Sound Editing

Foley

Post-Production Image

Colourist

On-line Editor and VFX

Filmo Studios

Mauricio López

Ivo Moraga

Sole Vargas, Ivo Moraga

Post-Moderne

Charles Boileau

Étienne Beaupré

Credits (Cont'd...)

a Second Sight Pictures production

in association with Argus Films

in association with documentary Channel

Bruce Cowley, Senior Director

Jordana Ross, Production Executive

in co-production with Errante Producciones

With the financial participation of

Consejo Nacional de la Cultura Y las Artes, Fondo de Fomento Audiovisual, Gobierno de Chile

La Sodec, Québec

Québec Credit d'impôt cinéma et télévision, Gestation Sodec

CORFO, Gobierno de Chile

Canada Coucil for the Arts

Conseils des Arts et des lettres Québec

This film could never have been completed without the support, generosity and enormous creative contributions of my collaborators. Please see full Credits: [cielo-thefilm.com](http://cielo-thefilm.com)



*"Cielo: A beautiful film!! Photography, sound, structure, subject matter - enough to lift the spirits out of any earthly trough. A moving film in all senses of that word." - Walter Murch*

*"Seen on a big screen, these images — photographed by cinematographer Benjamin Echazarreta — have a transporting power that comes close to approximating what it must be like to actually stand in Atacama, gazing up in awe." - Hollywood Reporter*

*"No planetarium could hope to replicate the awe-inspiring spectacle that is Alison McAlpine's Cielo, a documentary screening at the 2017 New York Film Festival." - Culture Trip*

*"This is the greatest biopic I've seen this year, Alison McAlpine's look at the Night Sky from the Chilean Desert. Fantastic. CIELO is like SAMSARA meets PARTICLE FEVER... It is very much my jam." - Jordan Hoffman*

*"The first feature from Alison McAlpine, director of the beautiful 2008 "nonfiction ghost story" short Second Sight, is a dialogue with the heavens—in this case, the heavens above the Andes and the Atacama Desert in northern Chile, where the sky "is more urgent than the land." McAlpine keeps the vast galaxies above and beyond in a delicate balance with the earthbound world of people, gently alighting on the desert- and mountain-dwelling astronomers, fishermen, miners, and cowboys who live their lives with reverence and awe for the skies. Cielo itself is an act of reverence and awe, and its sense of wonder ranges from the intimate and human to the vast and inhuman." - NYFF55*

For Media/Industry inquiries please contact: Sean Farnel: [sean.farnel@gmail.com](mailto:sean.farnel@gmail.com)