

MY FATHER'S PRISON

A FILM BY
IVÁN SIMONOVIS PERTIÑEZ



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MY FATHER'S PRISON

Venezuela, 2023, 81 min.

PRESS NOTES

A film by
Iván Simonovis Pertíñez

World premiere
Visions du Réel 2023
International Feature Film Competition

Press materials can be downloaded [HERE](#)

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

The son of a Venezuelan political prisoner tells the story of his father's 15 year long imprisonment. Shot during house-arrest, father and son try to recover the stolen time through home-movies and challenging conversations. As both family and country fall apart, the father plots a risky escape.



LONG SYNOPSIS

Iván Simonovis was Chief of the Caracas Police on the day Venezuela changed forever. On April 11, 2002, millions of Venezuelans marched in the streets of Caracas to demonstrate against then-president Hugo Chavez and his plans to extend the presidential term indefinitely and nationalise the oil industry. As protesters approached the presidential palace, unidentified snipers opened fire. Dozens were injured and nineteen people killed. Chavez remained in power and cracked down the opposition: critical broadcasters and newspapers were expropriated, military and civilian opponents were jailed, tortured, executed and exiled. Iván Simonovis became the perfect fall-guy for the violence of April 11.

Father of two Simonovis is arrested along with other police officers and tried for the killings. With no one willing to represent him, his wife Bony steps in to act as his lawyer. But despite her best efforts, he is given the maximum sentence: 30 years in 'El Helicoide', an infamous prison and headquarters of Venezuela's secret intelligence police. But this is just the beginning of the family's nightmare.

Prison visits become a painful, humiliating ritual. Under intense public scrutiny, the strains on the family start to tell. Held in solitary confinement and without access to sunlight for ten years, Simonovis develops osteoporosis, prompting Bony to intensify her efforts to rally support and campaign for his release.

After years of legal and international pressure, Simonovis is transferred to house arrest. His son Ivan Jr. sees his father daily for the first time since he was twelve, and starts making this documentary. The father's return disrupts the family dynamic and aggravates tensions between Bony and their daughter Ivana, who is tormented by incessant media attention. Surrounded by armed guards, constant surveillance and more media attention, what was once a joyful family home becomes a prison for them all.

Ivan Jr. enlists the help of old home-movies to learn more about his father, and perhaps also about why this tragedy unfolded.

The paranoia in the home/prison reaches a climax when three black SUVs arrive and eight men with machine guns jump out. The intelligence police want to take Simonovis for a medical checkup to prove he's not sick, so he can go back to prison. Bony films them with her phone as they take him away.

Fortunately, they bring him back. Was it intimidation? A threat? Simonovis is certain he can be returned to prison at any time, and takes a drastic decision. They have to escape. Simonovis watches from the window as his wife and children leave the house, never to return.

Then, one moonless night, Simonovis cuts off his electronic tag and jumps out of the window. He records episodes from his subsequent hair-raising escape by boat and plane on a cellphone.

Living in exile, Ivan Jr. still grapples with his father as a fallen hero and the harrowing fate of the countless others who have fled Venezuela, or remain behind in its prisons and graves.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

All the people involved in the making of this film are members of the Venezuelan diaspora community. This is a new community as most Venezuelans who migrated did so in the last 10 years. In 2023, it is expected that the number of displaced Venezuelans will surpass those of Syrians. Our crisis is a very complex one, we are collectively struggling to articulate it and the world is struggling to understand it. Adding to the usual difficulties all migrants experience, Venezuelans also face unique struggles, such as being denied our human right to identity because Venezuelan consulates won't renew our passports, not being able to vote in our own consulates abroad, receiving the least international funding for the refugee crisis despite being the second largest, etc.

Us storytellers are having to compete with the government's own version of the truth, and outright censorship. Changing history and Venezuelan identity has been part of their long-term agenda and is a key as to why they're still in power — Chavez and Maduro changed the name of our country, our flag, our currency and even the time-zone. These are just a few examples, but the sad truth is that they instilled so much hate in Venezuela, promoted corruption and violence, and sunk a once prosperous nation into ruins. This is why we are here. We are making films because we need to set things straight, and set ourselves straight in the process of making films about home and family.



Director Iván Simonovis Pertíñez (right) and his father

We are telling the story of one family, my family, and speaking about Venezuela through our experience. Venezuela can't be explained with our film, we rather want to portray an honest search for true human connection between son, father, mother, and sister - through our fight for justice, one in which we ultimately fail. But we are redeemed by having stayed together after we fled the country.

Almost every Venezuelan has been affected by the migration crisis—some left, some stayed behind. We have all experienced what this separation means and feels like, what it means to leave it all behind and start over, and we think this is something any human can relate to.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Iván Simonovis Pertíñez

Iván Simonovis Pertíñez is a Venezuelan filmmaker exiled in Berlin. His work focuses on political persecution and exile. He has a degree in Communication Sciences from the University of Marburg and a Masters in Film from the Free University of Berlin. His documentary shorts for the web *A LA DERIVA* (2015), *DESDE EL EXILIO* (2017), and *CARACAS 9 DE ENERO* (2018) have appeared in international media outlets such as *El País* and *Jungle World*. His first feature documentary *MY FATHER'S PRISON* has been selected for the main competition at *Visions du Réel 2023*.



CREDITS

MY FATHER'S PRISON

Venezuela, 2023, 81 min.

Director & Camera	Iván Simonovis Pertiñez
Editor	Juan Soto Taborda
Editing Consultant	Joelle Alexis
Sound Editing & Mixing	Luka Šuto / Studio Beep Prague
Colour Grading	Ernie Schaeffer
Producer	Anonymous

