

The Spool

Reeling 2020: “*The Whistle*” sings loud about New Mexico’s queer culture



Stormmiguel Florez searches for queer folk in 1980s Albuquerque, and highlights the invisibility of queer Latinx culture.

(This review is part of our coverage of the 2020 Reeling Chicago International LGBTQ+ Film Festival.)

“We are everywhere,” the bumper sticker read. This was the answer to director [Stormmiguel Florez](#)’s quest for other queers like them in 1980s Albuquerque, New Mexico. It was also the beginning of a new journey to find those queers who were hiding in plain sight.

Florez’s captivating ethnography *The Whistle* details their fascination with local queer folklore, particularly a [signature whistle used to recognize and communicate between lesbians and other queer folk](#). Florez interviews a diverse spectrum of people living in or around the city during the 1970s and 1980s who warmly share their experiences being queer at that time and how bits of folklore like the whistle, the codes, the meeting places all helped form a strong community across a city that had a significantly large queer population.

In its short fifty-seven minutes, Florez manages to tell an impactful story of a moment in queer history when invisibility was the norm, so codes and secret languages were used to covertly acknowledge and communicate with one another. This has been the queer way for centuries and has many regional variations. What makes Florez’s documentary so exciting is its localization, its immersive look at a specifically New Mexican queer culture.



The Whistle (Reeling 2020)

Not only was there a large and active population of queers, but it was also a nexus of ideas flowing back and forth over the border with Mexico. Without needing to call any intention to it, Florez has made an insightfully intersectional documentary that crosses gender, class, racial, and geographic boundaries. Learning about all these different intersections taking up the same folklore reaffirms a pride in the resilience of queer people who have found each other, even when it was criminal for them to do so. These people are “phenomenal now and [were] phenomenal then.”

The Whistle ends with a call toward the youth of today, whose visible queer lives have brought different struggles. It becomes its own whistle of sorts, letting us know that our elders have, “stood strong, are still standing strong, and are with [us].” They are everywhere and it’s immensely comforting to know.

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