

# MOSQUITO

A Short Film by Jeremy Engle



## PRESS KIT



A Riverside Drive Production Writer/Director: JEREMY ENGLE Starring: ALEJANDRO POLANCO  
Cinematography: FERNE PEARLSTEIN Editor: ERNEST LEIF BOYD Production Design: GINO FORTEBUONO  
Score: TORBITT SCHWARTZ Produced By: JEREMY ENGLE, FERNE PEARLSTEIN & AMANDA PLATNER

[WWW.MOSQUITOMOVIE.COM](http://WWW.MOSQUITOMOVIE.COM)

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## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT:**

I was born and raised in NYC and have been a public school teacher and educator for over 10 years, teaching history and documentary video making to teenagers and adults.

I drew upon my teaching experience to write and direct my first film, *MOSQUITO*, which tells the story of kids growing up in the dynamic graffiti and garbage-filled New York City of the early 1970's. I collaborated closely with award-winning documentary cinematographer Ferne Pearlstein to capture NYC in economic and moral decay— using a kinetic, free camera style and a loose, improvisatory ensemble of young actors.

In both *MOSQUITO* (and my feature film screenplay *HALF-LIFE*) I explore how kids are shaped by their environment and history – specifically, NYC during the early 1970's – that period between the optimism of the civil rights movement and the glitz and glamour of the disco era. I wanted to tell the story of the kids who grew up in this often adult and authority-free landscape and how it presented kids with enormous freedom and possibility but also danger and disillusionment.

Half of the fun and challenge of making *MOSQUITO* was getting the period details right – finding graffiti writers from that era, young actors with long hair and big Afros, locations in NYC that still look foreboding and speak of neglect and despair. The project was a truly collaborative effort, and I am forever grateful to the cast and crew, and the parents of all the young actors.

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**Running Time:** 12:00  
**Class:** Narrative Short  
**Genre:** Drama  
**Screening Format:** HDCAM, DIGIBETA  
**Aspect Ratio:** 16:9  
**Audio Format:** Stereo Mix  
**Completed:** January 2010  
**World Premiere:** January 25th, 2010  
**Slamdance Film Festival**  
**Country:** USA

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*Halloween 1974  
New York City*

*Graffiti and garbage  
are everywhere*

*The city is bankrupt*

*And 13 year-old Cesar - nicknamed Mosquito  
by the kids in the neighborhood - will fight to win  
the respect of his teenage tormentors*

## SYNOPSIS (Long)

MOSQUITO is about humiliation and redemption - the coming of age story of Cesar, a 13-year old Dominican boy whose awkward bravado and fanciful imagination have earned him the nickname Mosquito. On a memorable Halloween night in 1974, Cesar fights to win the respect of his teenage tormentors. MOSQUITO captures the gritty look and feel of NYC in the 70's through the documentary lens of Sundance Cinematography Award winner Ferne Pearlstein (*Imelda*, 2004). Alejandro Polanco, star of the critically acclaimed film *Chop Shop*, leads the ensemble cast.

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## PRODUCTION NOTES:

### PRE-PRODUCTION

Recreating the look of NYC in 1974 was critical to the success of MOSQUITO. Jeremy Engle (Writer/Director/Producer) along with Gino Fortebuono (Production Design) and Ferne Pearlstein (Director of Photography/Producer) did extensive visual research into the period drawing heavily on the work of photographers such as Bruce Davidson, Jon Naar and Helen Levitt. Together with Ian Bell (Art Direction) and Nancy Lippincott (Costume Design), the Production team was able to make the city itself a character in each scene. Garbage and graffiti are ever present; the sets and wardrobe are filled with vivid and vibrant details of the seventies.



Creating Cesar's Halloween costume – a vest and hat made out of hundreds of the old swirl-shaped soda can pop-tops – presented a particular challenge. After extensive searches, Engle and the production team found a seller of 1970's soda cans on E-Bay who agreed to hand-remove over 1,000 pop-tops - which Gino Fortebuono and Nancy Lippincott assembled into Cesar's costume.

For the main schoolyard scene, Director Engle exhaustively scouted nearly 100 locations in Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx in order to find one on the Lower East Side largely untouched by time. With permission from the Mayor's office, graffiti artists from the 70's – FREEDOM, STAY HIGH 149, and SPAR 1 – recreated authentic 1970's pieces featuring simple bubble letters on the handball court where more than half of the film takes place.

In casting the film, Engle scouted dozens of schools for boys 8-21 in order to put together a talented, energetic and diverse cast, many of whom had little or no prior acting experience. Building on the energy and physicality of the young actors, the rehearsal process began with loose improvisations until the kids began to feel more comfortable with each other and less self-consciousness. As rehearsals progressed, we added specific characters and actions, and later, dialogue from the script, which grew to incorporate some of the improvised action and dialogue from the rehearsals. By the end, the young group of actors had developed great chemistry and camaraderie, while achieving the period look and feel of their parents and grandparents' generation.

### PRODUCTION:

MOSQUITO was shot over 2 successive weekends in October 2008 using the Panasonic HVX 200A camera with 35mm film lenses.

The original storyboards became more of a guideline than a blueprint as we moved towards a more free-flowing, documentary style allowing Ferne Pearlstein (Director of Photography) to follow the action as she saw fit. For the young cast, this approach gave them a better sense of the meaning of each take and freed them from having to hit their exact marks every time. Pearlstein's balance of sure compositions with fluid movement gives MOSQUITO much of its energy and style.

The strong ensemble is anchored by Alejandro Polanco, whose performance as Cesar captures the imagination and naiveté of an odd outsider. And by James Cartwright's performance as Troy, the leader of the older teenage kids, which balanced charm and menace. The cast worked hard but they always had fun and their parents and families were incredibly supportive.

### POST-PRODUCTION.

Editing was done on Final Cut Pro HD. Ernest Leif Boyd (Editor) -- coming from a more traditional narrative background -- greatly enjoyed the opportunity to edit in a more documentary style, without the usual shot-reverse shot structure. Boyd adeptly put together a final story that is both clear and dynamic – capturing the spontaneity and energy of NYC in the 1970's.

Post-Production was greatly enhanced by the critical contributions of Ferne Pearlstein (Editing Consultant), Alexa Zimmerman (Sound Editing), and Hermes Marco (Color Correction). Lastly, Torbitt Schwartz, a knowledgeable and versatile musician, created a score that merges the sounds of salsa player Eddie Palmieri and funk-masters the JB's. Heavy on flute and congas, the score perfectly evokes the fun, freedom and peril of the era.

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## ABOUT THE CAST:

The primary cast ranges in age, and for most of them, MOSQUITO is their first film experience.

**Alejandro Polanco (Cesar)** was 15 years old during the production of MOSQUITO and now in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade at East Side Community High School in NYC. His prior role in *Chop Shop* (2007) earned him nominations for both Gotham Independent Film and Youth Artist awards. Alejandro loves playing football and baseball and hopes to pursue a career in acting when he is older.

**James Cartwright (Troy)** was 17 years old during the shoot and is now a senior at Essex Street Academy on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. James has numerous interests and talents such as capoeira, dance, and theater. He said he liked acting in a period movie but doesn't know how the big Afros and turtle-necks could ever be considered cool.

**Reymond Wittmann (Johnnie)** was 10 years old during the shoot and is now attending Middle School at IS 77 in Queens. Reymond is the most experienced of the cast - a veteran of commercials (Bing.com), short films (*Hero the Great*), and television shows (*Law and Order* and *Electric Company*). His favorite scene in is when he got to throw eggs at other kids.

**Marion Matthias (Kyle)** was 10 years old during production and is now in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade at Institute for Collaborative Education in NYC. He enjoyed all aspects of making the movie but says that the biggest challenge was having to scream really loudly when the Little Kids got attacked. Marion's sister Myles makes a cameo as a trick-or-treater dressed as a princess.

**Gustavo Valdes (Gustavo)** is the youngest actor in MOSQUITO and was 9 when production began. He was really happy when he found out he was cast in the movie and enjoyed everything about making the film although he said the night shoot in the park got really cold. MOSQUITO was his first acting experience, but since then he has been taking lessons on the weekend.

**Bryant Reis (Bryant)** is a happy-go-lucky child who had never acted before but thought it might be a fun thing to try. As it turned out, making MOSQUITO involved all of 10-year-old Bryant's favorite things: making friends, being part of an exciting group, and was fun. He felt it was such a rewarding and unforgettable experience that he hopes to pursue a career in acting.

**John Diaz (John)** was 16 during the production and is now a senior at Essex Street Academy. He has acted in several school musicals, including *Grease*. He was a vocal leader off camera and helped organize the older cast members to travel to and from the set, as well as to rehearse on their own. John hopes to pursue an acting career after high school.

**Xavier Pineda (Xavier)** was the oldest actor on the set, at 19. He works and attends Brooklyn College. Xavier speaks four languages and is interested in career in film, both in front of and behind the camera. Presently, he is at work on a short film as writer and director.

**Vaughn Bowman (Vaughn)** was 17 during the production and currently attends East Side Community High School. He was acting in school plays since childhood and enjoyed becoming good friends with the rest of the cast. Vaughn hopes that through acting, as well as through his rapping and poetry, he can deliver a positive message and motivate others.

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## CREW BIO'S:

### **Writer/Director/Producer: Jeremy Engle**

First-time director Jeremy Engle was a public school teacher for more than 10 years and has also consulted with teachers and school administrators across the country to help them develop interactive and youth-centered approaches to learning, often through the use of video and other media. He has taught documentary-making to both teenagers and adult educators. In workshops at the Educational Video Center in NYC, he helped young people become critical producers of media, using the video camera to conduct first-hand investigations into social issues like Immigration, Prison Reform and Sexual Identity. In film studies workshops, he helped students analyze different styles and approaches to filmmaking. As a student in NYC public schools, Jeremy was generally bored and unhappy, and he hopes his work has helped some of today's youth avoid a similar fate.

He recently completed the feature-length screenplay HALF LIFE – which is also told through the eyes of young kids growing up in the 1970's.

### **Cinematographer/Producer/Editing Consultant: Ferne Pearlstein**

Ferne Pearlstein is a filmmaker based in New York City. As a director, cinematographer, producer, and editor, she has worked on dozens of films that have won numerous awards and have been screened and broadcast around the world.

In 2004 Pearlstein won the Best Cinematography prize for documentary at the Sundance Film Festival for her work on *Imelda*, a feature documentary about Imelda Marcos. She directed, produced, edited and photographed the feature documentary *Sumo East and West*, which premiered at the 2003 Tribeca Film Festival, and screened at various other festivals including the Los Angeles Film Festival, Melbourne International Film, and the Hawaii International Film Festival for an audience of 8000 on Waikiki Beach. It was also shown nationwide on PBS's Independent Lens Series.

Prior to her work on MOSQUITO, Pearlstein edited the narrative feature *Land of the Blind*, starring Ralph Fiennes and Donald Sutherland, which premiered at the Rotterdam Film Festival in January 2006. She also served as associate producer and second unit director/director of photography on the film. Pearlstein is also one of only a handful of female cinematographers featured in Kodak's long-running "On Film" advertising campaign in the pages of American Cinematographer magazine.

### **Producer: Amanda Platner**

Based in NYC, Amanda Platner's experience in film ranges from assistant directing television commercials, to serving as associate producer of *Off Hollywood*, to coordinating filming of *America's Most Wanted* (100th episode) in Times Square. MOSQUITO is her producing debut.

Platner is a graduate of The School of Visual Arts in NYC, where she focused on screenwriting and developed skills and experience in the various aspects of film production. Platner's interest in the performing arts stems from her high school years at the Vermont Academy, where she helped create a film program that has become a lasting success.

### **Editing: Ernest Leif Boyd**

Ernest Leif Boyd is a Bronx born film editor who has worked in the industry for most of the twenty-first century. He has been an Assistant Editor on films such as *Margot at the Wedding* (2007), *Nights in Rodanthe* (2008), and *Soul Men* (2008). When not cutting, watching and thinking about movies he's proudly serving as a board member of Local 700, the Motion Picture Editors Guild.

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**Production Design: Gino Fortebuono**

Gino Fortebuono currently resides in Philadelphia and has worked in the art department of television, commercial, and film productions for the past three years. He began his career as set dresser on *Explicit Ills* (2007) and has since progressed to serve as property master, art director, and production designer on films including *Another Harvest Moon* (2009), *Jihad* (2009), *Oasis* (2009), and *Mayor Cupcake* (2010). MOSQUITO is his first period design piece.

**Costume Design: Nancy Lippincott**

Nancy Lippincott graduated in 2006 with a Bachelor's degree in Anthropology from Temple University. She has worked on various short films assisting in the wardrobe and art departments. MOSQUITO was her first undertaking as Costume Designer. Nancy currently resides in Philadelphia and plans on pursuing graduate work in Anthropology.

**Score: Torbitt Schwartz**

Torbitt Schwartz is a versatile musician, skilled in over a dozen instruments. He is a member of the Brooklyn-based group Chin Chin as well as a DJ and a producer. Raised in both Brooklyn and Louisville, Kentucky, Torbitt studied jazz performance and composition at the New School of Jazz and Contemporary Music. He has played or recorded with Bernard Purdie, TV On the Radio, Peanut Butter, Wolf, Matthew Shipp, and Reverend Vince Anderson, among others. Under his DJ persona, Lil Shalimar, he has held residencies at some of New York City's most happening clubs (Good World, Black Betty, Pianos, Union Pool) and parties (Rubulad). He has produced music for documentaries and independent films, and commercials for CNN, Nike, and the Sundance Channel.

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## CAST & CREW

### CAST:

Cesar - Alejandro Polanco  
Johnnie - Raymond Wittmann  
Kyle - Marion Matthias  
Gustavo - Gustavo Valdes  
Bryant - Bryant Reis  
Troy - James Cartwright  
Vaughn - Vaughn Bowman  
Xavier - Xavier Pineda  
John - John Diaz  
Cesar's Brother - Joshua James  
Cesar's Sister - Anjely Marine  
Cesar's Mother - Jesenia Hernandez  
Trick-or-Treater - Sollana Brown-Irvin  
Trick-or-Treater - Indra Brown-Irvin  
Trick-or-Treater - Nellie Otter Engle  
Trick-or-Treater - Lateef Fall  
Girl as Witch - Clara Greider  
Girl as Princess - Myles Matthias  
Angry Mother - Lalou Dammond  
Teen on the Street - Miles Alicea  
Woman with Candy - Maria Yolanda-Davis  
Man with Candy - Wilson Garcia

### CREW:

Writer/Director - Jeremy Engle  
Cinematography - Ferne Pearlstein  
Editor - Ernest Leif Boyd  
Production Designer - Gino Fortebuono  
Score - Torbitt Schwartz  
Producers - Jeremy Engle, Ferne Pearlstein  
& Amanda Platner  
Art Direction - Ian Bell  
Costume Designer - Nancy Lippincott  
Key Makeup Artist - Stephanie Wise  
Key Hairstylist - Chansopheak Tong  
Script Supervisor - Laurifer Abrams  
1st Asst Director - Tom Graves  
Gaffer - Dan Choy Boyar  
Key Grip - Freddy Cintron  
Sound Recording - Rick Lombardo  
Boom - Kellon Innocent & Eva Duarte  
Editing Consultant - Ferne Pearlstein  
Sound Editor - Alexa Zimmerman  
Color Correction - Hermes Marco  
Graffiti - Freedom  
Graffiti - Stay High 149  
Graffiti - Spar One  
Storyboards - Hoge Day  
Producers Assistant - Flonia Telegrafi  
Production Manager - Melissa Levins  
1st Asst Camera - Sam Friedman  
2nd Asst Camera - Jennifer Bunting  
2nd Asst Camera - Jared Ames  
Camera Intern - Kellon Innocent  
Camera Intern - Billy Feldman  
Best Boy Electric - Holly King Hosman  
BB Electric - Danya Abt  
BB Electric - Olivia Kuan  
BB Grip - Joe Olandese  
BB Grip - Johnny Lu  
Stunt Coordinator - Manny Siverio  
Publicity - Sheila Aminmadani  
Titles - Rahum Brown  
Graphic Design - Sam Wilson

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for it's support and fiscal sponsorship.*



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# Mosquito

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## FILM STILLS

