



## **Cafecito Chat #1: Cafecito con Caridad de la Luz y Paloma Sierra**

**Link:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XRbWtEY5U0>

### **Recap**

In the first episode of *Cafecito Chat*, we have Caridad De Luz with Paloma Sierra, the winner of ¡Tú Cuentas! Cine Youth Fest 2021. Paloma Sierra is Puerto Rican originally from Cataño who specializes in writing, translating, and filmmaking. However, she currently resides in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Sierra graduated from Carnegie Mellon University with an MFA in dramatic writing and a BHA in creative writing and drama. Currently, she attends La Universidad de Buenos Aires. Sierra takes part in an all-girl emerging Poet Laureate of Allegheny County.

In 2021, Sierra entered the ¡Tú Cuentas! Cine Youth Fest with her short film titled, *I Am Soil Breaking Off*, also known as *Soy Tierra Desgajandome*. *I Am Soil Breaking Off* is a three-minute and twenty-seven-second short film animated by Andrew Edwards. It is recited in Spanish and subtitled in English. Sierra has been working on this film on and off for four years. Many of her influences come from a Puerto Rican style of poetry called Decimas and Jibaros, which is musically based. These styles of poetry-making are flexible and can be improvised but are usually meant to be sung. By using this style of poetry, Sierra is incorporating her Latina culture into her writing, allowing Latinx countries to connect with her art.

Paloma's process in creating *I Am Soil Breaking Off* comes from a more extensive project that she later translated into her award-winning film. The poetry has three verses involved; the first talks about identity and how nationality is rooted in the land. The last verse combats this idea and argues that nationality does not have to be rooted in the land itself. Sierra did intensive research when it came to understanding the Puerto Rican experience. She did that through reading material on the Latino experience like reading *La Carreta* and *In the Heights*, both of which are considered plays. Sierra's process also included interviewing Puerto Ricans about their identity. The origin of her poetry started as one verse, but she realized that it was heavy with metaphors and feared it would not translate the way she wanted it to. With the help of Andrew Edwards, the animation part of her film helped tell the story because it allowed viewers to see specific messages that Sierra believed they could have missed.

Throughout the interview, Sierra praises the film as a medium for poetry because she could add visuals to her words. Paloma Sierra has a different perspective on how to showcase her poetry; however, it is a tribute to her Puerto Rican influences.

## **Cafecito Chat #2: Cafecito con Flaco Navaja y Eli Vazquez**

**Link:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdE8kdZ9I3U>

### **Recap**

For this second episode of *Cafecito Chat*, Flaco Navaja and Eli Vazquez tackle the steps in making a film and what the process looks like. Flaco Navaja is an actor, poet, singer, and activist, and Eli Vazquez is a writer, director, entrepreneur, digital storyteller, and a proud Afro-Mexi-Rican. Vazquez is a former producer for BuzzFeed's Latinx digital production, *Pero Like*, and the founder and CEO of the production company *Hype Media House*. Also, Vazquez has a social media-brand coaching program, *Self-Hype*, and is a recent Netflix and Los Angeles Latino International Film Festival fellow. This fellow included nine other filmmakers, and they were given 20,000 dollars and six months to make a film, which premiered at the Chinese Theater.

As an artist, Vazquez aims to create inclusive stories that have never been told before. Vazquez grew up with many indie 2000s films such as *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *Lost in Translation*. He also grew up with directors like Edgar Wright, Wes Anderson, Robert Rodriguez, and Quentin Tarantino, but this is not what inspired him. Vazquez did not see himself in these films; he understood the human experiences told in these stories, but this is not what he experienced personally. Instead, he admires filmmakers from diverse backgrounds who tell stories like his, such as Jordan Peele and Taika Waititi.

Eli Vazquez went to film school, but he states that he learned more outside his classes than within. He believed there was no room for growth or mistakes in film school and that he was not given the liberty he wanted when making his art. What he did gain from film school were the connections he made there. He still speaks to many of his schoolmates and continues working with them. As an artist, there is always a starting point; for Eli, it was his first ever T.V. class. Vazquez always knew he was a creative person, but he was just shy. He embraced the opportunity when he took a T.V. class at his new school. The first video he made for this class was a music video to *Ch-Check It Out* by the Beastie Boys. The music video involved them dressing up as *Ghostbusters* characters and saving a girl from a demon. Vazquez described the process as stressful, but from that day on, he knew that making films was for him.

Flaco and Eli discuss the steps that making a film entails and the hardships that come from it. From a director's perspective, Vazquez tells the viewers that no film will ever go as planned and that even blockbuster films must plan for the worst. Vazquez states that as a director, you must plan for the worst-case scenario and every scenario possible. As a director, you do not want to be

overwhelmed or too stressed, as that will change the dynamic of the crew team and stress them out. Vazquez retells a story about when he made his film *Quince Til' Infinity* which came out in 2022. The film is about two kids who escape a quinceañera, steal a car, and raise havoc in Los Angeles. He had planned to film at a park in Los Angeles with the landscape as the background, and they had been prepping it for a while. However, days before the shoot, they were told they could no longer film at this location because a Dodgers game was occurring, so they had to switch everything around. Vazquez wants young filmmakers to know that no one cares about your film as much as you do. You must take care of everything, your team is there to support you, and you must make sure everyone on your team is making the same movies.

The film industry is a complex one that no one can deny. The lack of representation for Latinx communities is a hurdle that Latinx people must overcome, and Vazquez knows that. Vazquez states that we are in the best era to be a creator of color, but we are still so far from where we need to be. It takes accountability from everyone, on every level, and we must make everything more accessible than before. The Latinx community should understand that there should be no competition, and we must let go of our egos and support each other blindly. That's why Eli Vazquez does what he does. He wants to advise young filmmakers and content creators so that the Latinx community can thrive. People like Pete Corona, an executive at Netflix, are doing so by granting opportunities for Latinx creators, which is what Eli Vazquez was able to take part in.

### **Cafecito Chat #3: Cafecito Chat con Jessie Fuentes y Carlos Ruiz**

**Link:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rY76luIQ9Ks>

#### **Recap**

In this third episode of Cafecito Chat with Jessie Fuentes and Carlos Ruiz, they tackle “The Power of Storytelling” and the question, “How will you tell your story to future generations?” Carlos Ruiz is a writer, producer, and director who has been making art for over two decades. He has been making award-winning content since 2001. He studied filmmaking in Chicago, where he learned about cinema from countries worldwide, such as Argentina and Spain. Ruiz’s medium contains films, documentaries, web series, commercials, and music videos. Ruiz has also worked in groups on the development of fresh ideas of content for clients like Coca-Cola, Direct T.V., T-Mobile, and McDonald's. Ruiz’s first film he created was a film called *Paperball*, which told the story of a kid running around San Germán, Puerto Rico, with a ball. In 2007, his film *Maldeamores* premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival and received a positive reception.

Carlos Ruiz was raised in the theater because his mother worked there. At age fourteen, his brother took him to a film festival, and he watched a Cuban movie that impacted his life. The Cuban movie was about poverty and how this family could still be happy in a poor financial situation. This is when it clicked for Ruiz because he realized that we see this duality in Latinx countries. After all, issues like poverty are prevalent in Latinx countries, and happiness can still

be seen all around. This duality is what Ruiz wanted to showcase in his art. He was also inspired by the film classes he took in Chicago because they taught him that he could travel to Puerto Rico. Also, he could tell a story from Puerto Rico that can be as beautiful as those told in Argentinian and Spanish cinema.

Storytelling is an essential thing in life. Carlos Ruiz argues that we tell stories all the time, but how we tell stories can make a difference in what is considered popular because they are a legacy of our story. Additionally, he goes on to say that as a storyteller, your stories must come from the heart because that is what allows people to form a connection with it. Ruiz states that a story that has impacted him is the story of Desi Arnaz. Arnaz wrote his autobiography about his life as a Latino in America and the difficulty it brought. What stuck to Ruiz and has driven his art is this idea from Arnaz's autobiography that if you can dream it, you can make it happen, but you need to find the tools. Ruiz also states that storytelling does not come from the outside but the inside, our hearts; we just need to learn the ways to make it entertaining. Latinx people need to learn these tools because the media has always been dominated by white male voices that have misrepresented the Latinx culture. Carlos is aware that Latinos have been put into a box, but the Latino community is aware that we are different and have different stories to tell. Ruiz encourages the Latinx creators to use their voices to tell a story that is authentic to them because there will be so many people that can relate to it worldwide.