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EXILE COMMUNITY

Film focuses on Cuban exiles

Documentary draws from a variety of experiences to weave a fabric of the exile community.

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To condense 50 years of exile — a community's achievements, sorrows and hopes — in a 65-minute documentary is a painstaking task in which testimonies and historic episodes must be weaved together to illustrate the exiles' remarkable trajectory in this country.

That was the challenge facing the news team of Univisión 32 for more than a year. The result is 50 Years in Exile, a documentary co-sponsored by the City of Hialeah that premieres at 11 p.m. Saturday.

"Other generations will be able to turn to this documentary as a point of reference for their own history," said Teri Arvesu, the station's executive producer.

The diversity of the interviewees gives a general idea of the texture of the exile community. Among the guests are political figures like Mel Martínez, who came to the U.S. alone as a teen as part of Operation Pedro Pan and Marco Rubio, who is running for a congressional seat. There is businessmen Felipe Vals and Luis Capó, and entertainers like singer Olga Guillot and music impresario Emilio Estefan.

"It was a peculiar selection, because we were primarily looking for people who could tell stories that reflected a generality, who could put together a puzzle, so everybody could be reflected," said Norberto Perdomo, who directed the documentary and wrote its script.

The work closes a year during which WTLV-Univisión 23 (which has a news alliance with El Nuevo Herald) has aired weekly stories detailing the successes of members of the exile community. The series marks the 50th anniversary of Fidel Castro's takeover and opens with historical footage of the early days of the revolution that eventually sent one million Cubans into exile, mainly to Miami.

"Channel 23 has been the historic channel — and the channel of record — to cover the Cuban exile community," said Emilio Marrero, the station's news director. "That is why it's an honor to present this documentary."

In that sense, Univisión's extensive film archives are ideal to illustrate the history of the exile community.

Among the highlights: the Mariel exodus, the flow of rafters, the downing of the Brothers to the Rescue planes in 1996, and the Elián González saga.

Guillot looked at the background of the documentary with mournful eyes. "What it tells is sad," the singer said. "Everybody had to start anew and struggled to overcome the pain of losing the homeland."

However, she added, the positive side is that the movie "will serve as a document for the new generation that now lives on the island and for those who have been born here — some of whom don't even speak Spanish — so that everyone will know why their parents had to emigrate. And not only to Miami, because the exile community is everywhere. I travel around the world. I know."

