



A Film By Jessica Sherry

Waiting for John tells the story of America's extraordinary impact on one remote island in the South Pacific and explores the last surviving Cargo Cult, the John Frum Movement, as we follow believers today in the struggle to preserve their way of life

A Production of Alita Films Inc.
Co-produced by Pacific Islanders in Communication
Executive Producer Leanne K. Ferrer

Run Time / Format: 70 min / 56 min, DCP / ProRes 422 / Blu-ray, 16x9

Official Website: www.waitingforjohndoc.com

Teaser: www.waitingforjohndoc.com/#!trailer/cmsy

World Premiere Press Release: <http://ymlp.com/zNVXwm>

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Broadcasting



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Screenings

World Premiere Hawaii International Film Festival – 8:00pm, November 17th, 2015, Dole Cannery
Encore Screening Hawaii International Film Festival – 3:15pm, November 19th, 2015, Dole Cannery

http://program.hiff.org/films/detail/waiting_for_john_2015

Philadelphia Asian American Film Festival – 8:00pm, November 21st, 2015, Asian American Arts Initiative
<http://phillyasian2015.festivalgenius.com/2015/films/waitingforjohn.jessicasherry.phillyasian2015>

Short Synopsis

If you had never heard of an airplane or a refrigerator, would you think it was a miracle when you first saw one? When the American military landed on a remote island in the South Pacific during World War II, the islanders were amazed by America's fantastic cargo - planes, trucks, refrigerators, canned food. They thought such goods could only come from the Gods. Led by the mysterious prophet John, a religion was born: the John Frum Movement, now considered the last surviving Cargo Cult. *Waiting for John* explores this extraordinary religion from the perspective of the last village of believers, as they struggle to preserve their culture in the modern world. In the process this film asks, where do our prophets come from? And what makes people believe?



Every year, the John Frum Movement paints USA on their backs and chests as a sign of respect and brotherhood with America. (Photo by Jessica Sherry)

Long Synopsis

“It is a myth not a mandate, a fable not a logic, and symbol rather than reason, by which people are moved.”

- Irwin Edman

Some people say John Frum was a man, a leader who inspired his people to resist repression. Some say he was a figment created in the minds of shrewd and calculating men, who used him to gain power. Still others claim he was an American, a scout sent by the military before the war. Believers maintain that John is a spirit. Whoever he was, in 1940 John Frum inspired the people of a remote island in the South Pacific to resist European colonial rule and return to their traditional customs. John also made a prophecy - he predicted that Americans would arrive on Tanna Island and good things would rain down upon its people.

In December 1941, World War II raged in Europe and the Japanese had just bombed Pearl Harbor. President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared war on Japan and sent 300,000 troops to build strategic bases in the South Pacific and prevent Japanese advancement. When the American military landed on the island of Tanna with its indulgent cargo – refrigerators, vaccines, pick-up trucks, canned food – the islanders were amazed by these luxuries. Where did they come from? How could they exist? The people of Tanna believed these goods must have a connection to the spirit world. John’s prophecy was fulfilled, a brotherhood with America established, and a religion was born: the John Frum Movement.



Often called a cargo cult, this Movement still exists in one village; the leaders still go to speak with the spirit of John in sacred caves and believers sing songs about him every Friday night. While the US may have forgotten Tanna, the American flag flies high over the village of Lamakara and young men still march in formation, imitating US soldiers with the hope that the American cargo will return. Lamakara is the last stronghold of the John Frum Movement, but today it is plagued by outside pressures and internal conflict. *Waiting for John* tells the story of this last village of believers today - their history, culture and their struggle to preserve the John Frum belief in the modern world.

Director's Statement

"We have always held to the hope, the belief, the conviction that there is a better life, a better world, beyond the horizon." - Franklin D. Roosevelt, October 12th, 1940

When I first heard about the John Frum Movement, it was hard to imagine that a religion like this could possibly exist. Believers who march around like US soldiers, raise the American flag, and await some magical cargo to come from America – it all seemed very far-fetched. Yet, I was fascinated by the idea of strange prophet whose existence could not be determined and a belief system that arose as a peculiar consequence of war. When I met the people of Lamakara, as they became more like friends than documentary subjects, I began to understand the intricacies of their history and belief. I found that though this story has its own unique complications and drama, these people are like many believers all over the world, brought together by a shared history and a faith in the unproven.

The stories of John have never been written down; they are passed from generation to generation and repeated, almost word for word. With this film, the people of the John Frum Movement give viewers a small glimpse into the struggles of their past and the experiences of their everyday lives from their own perspective. Through the tales of the people of Lamakara, I hope viewers can relate to a belief that, despite its seemingly strange origins, reflects the very human desires which guide every religion – the hope for a better life and the need to believe in forces greater than ourselves.

- Jessica Sherry, Director



The John Frum community gathers in the center of town every Friday night, to play music and sing songs about their history and belief until dawn. This is their form of prayer. (Photo by Jessica Sherry)

Production Team

DIRECTOR / PRODUCER: Jessica Sherry

Jessica has been working in the documentary industry for over ten years with networks including National Geographic, Discovery Channel, PBS, Sundance Channel and MSNBC and she has shot in many remote corners of the world. Jessica is making her directorial debut with *Waiting for John*. For the Discovery Channel four-hour special, *King Tut Unwrapped*, Jessica helped craft the story of the first DNA testing of the King Tut royal mummy family. For PBS Nature's *What Females Want*, *What Males Will Do*, Jessica worked with a team in Ethiopia to tell the story of baboon love and its message about evolution. Jessica also produces short form digital content for many online platforms, including Discovery Digital, PBS, and Aljazeera. Throughout her career, she's interviewed DNA scientists, DEA agents and piano playing cats, hoping to glimpse into new worlds. Jessica graduated from Northwestern University with a Radio/Television/Film degree concentrating in production and creative writing.



EDITOR: Benjamin Sozanski

Ben got his start in editorial working on the Academy Award winning feature doc *Taxi to the Dark Side* about the use of torture in prisoner interrogation, and followed it with another feature, *Gonzo: The Life and Work of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson*. Since then, Ben has branched out to a wide variety of production and editorial opportunities including *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*, *MTV True Life*, and national ad campaigns for Bud Light and Fisher Price. More recently Ben edited Part One of *History of the Eagles* for Showtime, a documentary about the seminal American rock band, and *Sinatra: All or Nothing at All*, a four-hour documentary exploring the life of Frank Sinatra for HBO.

About Alita Films: Alita Films is a documentary production company that specializes in long- and short-form films for cinema, television, and online platforms. Bringing stories to life from the far corners of the world in visual, intimate, and visceral ways, Alita Films works with clients including MSNBC, Zillow, National Geographic, Aljazeera +, PBS, Discovery Digital, and others to produce high-quality documentary content. Alita Films is based in Portland, OR. Visit www.alitafilms.com for more.

About Pacific Islanders in Communications (PIC): Since 1991, PIC's mission has been to support, advance and develop programming that enhances public recognition of and appreciation for Pacific Islander history, culture and society. PIC works with independent producers to create and distribute programs about Pacific Islanders that bring new audiences to public television, advance issues, and represent diverse voices and points of view not usually seen on public or commercial television. PIC offers a wide range of development opportunities for Pacific Island producers through fellowships, seminars and media training. PIC is a member of the National Minority Consortia, which collectively addresses the need for programming that reflects America's growing ethnic and cultural diversity. Primary funding for PIC and the Consortia is provided through an annual grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Visit piccom.org for additional information.



John Frum believers march with bamboo rifles, imitating US soldiers' formation during World War II.
(Photo by Jessica Sherry)

Abbreviated Credit List

Director, Producer, Writer	Jessica Sherry
Editor	Ben Sozanski
Director of Photography	Jessica Sherry
Associate Producer	Todd Leatherman
Composer	Justin Melland
Cultural Advisors and Translators	Numalin Mahana
	Werry Narua
	Lamont Lindstrom
	Jacob Kapere
Consulting Linguist	Jeremy Hammond
VX Graphics	Pixeldust Studios
Animator	Stephanie Gould
Color Correction	Axel Ericson
Online Facility	Digital Arts
Sound Designer and Mixer	Paul Furedi

For Pacific Islanders in Communications	
Executive Producer	Leanne K. Ferrer
Production Manger	Cheryl Hiras

Waiting for John is the feature debut of Director Jessica Sherry and is a co-production of Alita Films Inc. and Pacific Islanders in Communications (PIC), with funding provided in part by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).

Production Notes

CYCLONE PAM

On March 14th, 2015, Cyclone Pam tore through Tanna Island and destroyed many of the villages there. Nearly 80% of the homes were damaged and there were many deaths and injuries because of the storm. Most of the homes that you see in *Waiting for John* are no longer standing and the people on Tanna now struggle to find food and clean water. We are partnering with aid organizations in an effort to raise money and rebuild the village on Tanna Island where the film takes place. I hope this film can help raise awareness about the needs of the people in Vanuatu and launch a fundraising initiative to help our friends in the John Frum Movement during this difficult time.



Every Friday, John Frum believers sing about the spirit John's return, playing guitars, singing, and dancing, from dusk until dawn. (Photo by Jessica Sherry)

WIND

Kaulaka, the medicine man of the village and the last man who can speak with the spirit of John Frum, was always a strange character. I'm not sure if it was his contact with his spirit world, or his claims that he could cure cancer, or if it was just his long silences and skeptical looks, but he could always make me uneasy. One day, I was visiting Kaulaka at his house and as we sat about snacking on roasted breadfruit, Kaulaka posed a new question through our translator Numalin. Numalin, who was a woman in her sixties with her own all-knowing and spiritual quality, turned to me, "Kaulaka asks, 'We know that the sun rises every day, we can see it. We can see the rain. But where does wind come from, how can we explain it? There is no explanation, so wind is from the spirit world. It can only come from the Gods'. I could understand Kaulaka's logic, but I could not help but think how perfectly well this represented the Cargo Cult belief. This form of conclusion is known, perhaps fittingly, as Cargo Cult Science – when someone, especially a scientist, is missing essential information and attributes the wrong cause to a certain outcome. Similar to the idea that, the Americans march in formation and then they receive cargo from the sky and sea. If we march like US soldiers, the American cargo will also come to us. But, then again, who really knows where the wind comes from?

Additional Stills from the Film



John Frum believers march like US soldiers on John Frum Day, a celebration that began in 1956 and continues today. (Photo by Jessica Sherry)



Ladies grate potatoes and bananas for laplap, a traditional dish of Tanna Island, as they prepare for the John Frum Day feast. (Photo by Jessica Sherry)



Chief Isak watches over the village of Lamakara, the last stronghold of the John Frum Movement.
(Photo by Jessica Sherry)



Young man gets USA painted in red on his front and back, preparing for the marches on John Frum Day. Painting USA is a sign of respect for America and commitment to the John Frum Movement. (Photo by Jessica Sherry)