



# Bella Vista



# Bella Vista

Written and Directed by Vera Brunner-Sung  
Produced by Vera Brunner-Sung, Jeri Rafter and Brooke Swaney  
Cinematography by Alexandra Cuesta  
Edited by Petra Demas and Vera Brunner-Sung  
Sound by Digital Sorcery

83 min  
HDcam  
16:9  
USA  
2014  
Language: English  
Genre: Dramatic fiction

[www.bellavistafilm.com](http://www.bellavistafilm.com)



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## LOGLINE

An English language instructor struggles to find her moorings, while her students hold the key to adaptation and belonging.

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

An English language instructor is adrift in the American West. While her students find stability and community, she veers toward crisis.

## SYNOPSIS

A meditation on displacement and adaptation in the contemporary American West, *Bella Vista* follows the lives of outsiders in Missoula, Montana. Teaching English to a group of international students, thirty-something Doris finds herself increasingly alone. While she grasps for the connection that might save her, it's her students who understand what it takes to belong.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I am interested in what happens when we are separated from our origins. The child of immigrants to the United States, I grew up in a land that considers this removal a promise of freedom and opportunity. But what are its consequences? *Bella Vista* explores both sides: the perils of rootlessness, as well as the optimism of new beginnings. These themes have crystallized for me while living in the western U.S., where powerful American archetypes – the Indigenous, the Emigrant, the Drifter – are very much alive. In a land of shifting identities, I would like to know what remains constant. My influences include the Western genre, Michelangelo Antonioni, and James Benning's politically charged landscapes.

*Bella Vista* is about the experience of strangers living in the west. While Doris wanders, feeling lost, her students possess purpose and grounding. It was very important to consider this contrasting sense of space in the photography — wide, distancing landscapes for Doris, and more intimate, “normal” perspectives on the students. I felt that as Doris dissolves emotionally, the audience, too, should lose her. Throughout, we are anchored by the subtle courage of the students.

This film is a continuation of the investigation into history, memory, and place, that I began in my previous short experimental films. The script was inspired in part by my personal experience moving to Montana in 2011.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

*Bella Vista* was shot on a shoestring over the course of twelve days – four in winter, eight in spring. Our team was made up of students at the local university where I teach, and friends near and far who were excited about the project and willing to contribute their skills for modest or deferred compensation. We are also indebted to the generosity and flexibility of our many locations in the city of Missoula and on the Flathead Reservation of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. We worked entirely on location with natural light, and often had multiple company moves each day, tailing each other in a few cars. On set, language created new connections among cast and crew — Russian between wardrobe and our Kazakh and Uzbek students; Spanish between our Ecuadorian cinematographer and Colombian student; French between our Moroccan student and lead actor. We shot on Sony FS100 and FS700 cameras, with vintage Nikon 35mm still lenses to achieve a softer cinematic look.

Non-professional actors make up the majority of the cast. I met several of the students in the process of developing the script, sitting in on classes at the University of Montana's English Language Institute. Their own interests inform the film, particularly the individual vignettes, which I asked them to select for themselves. Hiroka Matsushima told me of her determination to make a life in the U.S. and cited the 2011 tsunami as a catalyst for her decision to follow her dream of studying abroad; I created the character of Yuri for her. To round out our supporting cast, we held auditions locally. Finding our lead was the biggest challenge: I needed someone who could express both tenacity and vulnerability with subtlety and ease. I met Kathleen Wise through producer Brooke Swaney, a mutual friend, and auditioned her remotely. Having lived abroad in Europe and Africa, Kathleen had a deeply personal understanding of what it meant to be an outsider — and traveling to Montana from her home in New York, further activated that sensibility.



## TEAM

Vera Brunner-Sung (writer/director/producer) has shown her short experimental documentaries at festivals, galleries, and museums around the world, including the Torino Film Festival, San Francisco International Film Festival, CPH:DOX, MoMA PS1, Images Festival, Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, and Los Angeles Filmforum. She holds an M.F.A. in Film/Video from the California Institute of the Arts, and lives and works in Missoula, Montana. This is her first fiction and first feature film.

Jeri Rafter (producer) has worked on feature films including *Winter in the Blood* (Alex & Andrew Smith) and *Jimmy P.* (Arnaud Desplechin). She was an assistant to producer Megan Ellison (*True Grit*, *The Master*), and on the production team for Rob Reiner's latest film, . . . *And So It Goes*. Jeri is a fifth generation Montanan with an M.F.A. in Media Arts from the University of Montana.

Brooke Swaney (producer) is a member of the Blackfeet tribe and a Salish descendent, and grew up in Montana. As a writer/director, her NYU Graduate short film *OK Breathe Auralee* screened at the 2011 ImagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Fest, 2012 Sundance Film Festival, 2012 Melbourne International Film Festival and the 2012 NBC Universal Short Cuts Film Festival (Finalist, Best Actress). A 2013 Time Warner Fellow with the Sundance Institute and a 2014 Native Arts

and Cultures Foundation Fellow, she is working on her first feature.

Alexandra Cuesta (cinematographer) is an award-winning filmmaker and photographer who lives and works in Quito, Ecuador. Her films have been screened at the Viennale International Film Festival, New York Film Festival, London Film Festival, Anthology Film Archives, Los Angeles Filmforum, Queens Museum of Art, and Centre Pompidou, among other venues. She has an M.F.A. in Film/Video from the California Institute of the Arts.

## LEAD CAST

Film credits of Kathleen Wise (DORIS) include *Palimpsest* (selected short Sundance Film Festival 2013), *First World Problem* and *Mammal Drama* (webseries), and many other independent films. Her theater credits include Portia in *Julius Caesar* (The Acting Company/ Guthrie Theater), *Burn This*, Caryl Churchill's *Fen*, *StrindbergStrindberg* (dir. Mark Wing-Davey) and Caridad Svich's *Rift*. Kathleen received her M.F.A. from New York University's Graduate Acting. She lives in New York.

Hiroka Matsushima (YURI) was born in Yokohama, Japan, and came to the United States to study English and Media Arts at the University of Montana. She wants to work in the film industry when she graduates, as well as travel around the world. This is her first film.

## CREDITS

Co-producer  
Music Supervisor

Do Ho Suh  
Robin Joseph

### Cast (in order of appearance)

Doris	Kathleen Wise
Aman	Amangeldy Assatov
Sara	Mastewal Mekonnen
Fahad	Fahad Alsaif
Khadija	Khadija El Aouni
Ruslan	Ruslan Abkerimov
Luisa	Luisa Fernanda Vargas
Keito	Keito Sugii
Yuri	Hiroka Matsushima
Rway	Rway Ali Alhkeem
Steve	John Ansotegui
Cindy	Sandra Janusch
Teen girl	Hannah Appell
Teen boy	Taylor Lennox
Moviegoers	Clare Antonioli, Jeff Medley, Kayje Booker, Joy French, Jeremy Sher, Kelly Czarnik, Rence Brown
Kid on the street	Quinn Brownell
Bowlers	Abdulrahman Alotaibi, Faisal Alotaibi, Ahmed Al-jassas, Saad Al-dossari, Hussain Al-eid, Yagoub Al-mulla
Salish man	Sam Sandoval
Man getting a beer	Kyle Daugherty
Bar patrons	Hatton Littman, Shibu Arens, David Weinandy, Sharlene Peone Weinandy, Douglas Koester, Zak Oliver, Robert DiGiallonardo, Jon Miller, Veronika Engebretson, Jessye Duplessis, April Potter, Joseph R. Potter, Marlo Crocifisso, Dan Gustin, Lori Glassco, Joseph D. Smith, Karen Smith, Lisa Jarrett, Burke Jam, Lisa Willis, Craig Hutchison, Claire Dryer, Jared Hendee
Chemistry tutor	Ileana Areiza
Motel manager	Tootie Welker
Tour guide	Carolyn Thompson
Basketball player	Sam Meister
Jessica	Bonnie Kathleen Ryan
Boy on motorcycle	Cordell Redfern
Kids on 4-wheeler	Nicholas Redfern, Cheyenne Taylor
Jogger	Gabriel Furshong
Laundromat employee	Kelsey McMullen
Man in coffee shop	David Weinandy
Oulagins	Lizzie Dolan, Mandy Shafer, Staci Burns, Sue Larew, Cindy Gilbert, Rachel Smith, Libby Latrielle, Kali Lindner, Crystal Smith, Carrie

	Nowlen, Lacie Ellis, Breanne Black, Tamara Love, Carolyn Buchta, Kathryn Kelly, Victoria Clapp, Jen Bertland, Sarah Cobbler, Bernice Johnston, Silvia Demaras, Kay Persson
Oula instructor	Amanda Taylor
Additional Voice Acting	Maiah Wynne, James Steele, Jr.

#### Crew

Assistant Director	Brooke Swaney
First Assistant Camera	Jesse Spaulding, Brandon Woodard
Second Assistant Camera	Anders Bronnum, Tom Stagg
Steadicam Operators	Robert Bohannon, Brandon Woodard
Digital Imaging Technicians	Taylor Lennox, Michael Workman
Stills Photographer	Michael Coles
Additional Camera	Tom Stagg, Robert Bohannon
Gaffers	Hannah Weinert, Mat Miller
Production Sound Mixer	Troy William Dunn
Boom Operator	Heidi DuBose
Art Director	Max Kubisiak
Hair, Make-up & Wardrobe	Bonnie Kathleen Ryan, Erin Hale
Scenic Artist	Devin Leonardi
Choreography	Amanda Taylor
Production Coordinator	Kelly Czarnik
Production Assistants	Tommy Driscoll, Ryan Cole, Brennan Buhl, David Walsen, Michael Melugin, Josef Metesh, Andrew Mikkola, Marianne Zugel
Casting Assistance	Lisa Willis, Allyson Kellum, Joshua Rosenberger, Jeremy Sher, Crystal Smith, Daisy Rooks, Caitlin Hofmeister
Assistant Editors	Gennady Fridman, Anders Bronnum
Dialogue & Foley	Heidi DuBose
Additional Sound Editing	Troy William Dunn
Color Timer	Persephanie Engel
Visual Effects	Anders Bronnum
Titles & Graphic Design	Victor Hu
Insurance	Truman Van Dyke Company
Fiscal Sponsor	Los Angeles Filmforum
Bookkeeper	Leah McBriarty

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Songs

"Gebreal"

Written by Mekuria

Performed by Tewodros Yosef

Courtesy of Jigsa Bekele and St. Raguel

"Belmont Jail Song"

Written by S. Cahill

Performed by Crete Boom

Courtesy of the artist

"Winds of Change"

Written by Jon Dillon Schumaker

Performed by Off in the Woods

Courtesy of the artist

"Faded Heart"

Written by Alejandra Estela Deheza and Benjamin

David Curtis

Performed by School of Seven Bells

Courtesy of Vagrant Records

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Preston Alexander	Jessica Frye	Kalene Pool
Steven Alexander	Nancy Gass	Mickey Price
Mohammed Alotaibi	Jesse Gillan	Bob Rebarchik and Jeff Kin, U.S. Fish & Wildlife
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Bagels on Broadway	Rachel Gregg	Courtney Saunders Smith
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