

Music Box Films Presents

VAZANTE



116 MINUTES | BRAZIL | 2017 | NOT RATED | 2.39:1 | IN PORTUGUESE WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES

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SYNOPSIS

Forced to marry a slave trader, young Beatriz faces physical and emotional unrest beyond her years in this lyrical and nuanced historical mood piece.

Upon returning from a trading expedition, Antonio discovers that his wife has died in labor. Confined to a decadent but desolate property in the company of his aging mother-in-law and numerous slaves, he marries his wife's young niece, Beatriz. Separated from her family and left alone on the rugged farmhouse in the Brazilian mountains, Beatriz finds solace in the displaced and oppressed inhabitants around her.

Exploring the fraught intersection of feminism, colonialism, and race that has persisted across centuries and continents, VAZANTE is a haunting and stunning solo directorial debut from Brazilian filmmaker Daniela Thomas.

LOGLINE

Forced to marry a slave trader and live on his decaying farmhouse in the Brazilian mountains, young Beatriz faces physical and emotional unrest beyond her years in this lyrical and nuanced historical mood piece from director Daniela Thomas.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

What matrices are we made of? How many misplaced desires are we descendants of? I guess I never really abandoned flirting with History, my first major in college. The ambition, when I set out to write and film *Vazante*, was to portray, with veracity, the anthropological map that gave origin to who we are today in Brazil.

The original story, inspired by family lore, unfolds around the difficulty of culture to contain the force of desire. It shows miscegenation, the driving force in the development of society in Brazil, sprouting on one side from the usual spurious relationships and on the other from true undaunted love and its tragic result.

I wished to depict misplacements, loneliness and rebirth in a land that was both virgin and scarred by exploitation. To portray the malaise of a harsh life, at the onset of the 19th century, in the lost corners of Brazil's backlands, at the mercy of cyclical extractivism, religious conservatism and forced cohabitation even among the wealthier classes. I imagined there being great difficulty in verbal communication among the different groups, with their distinctive languages, limited education, contrasting cultures. And at the very core of *Vazante* would lie Brazil's shameful, violent sin: **slavery**, the condition that undermines the humanity of all, including the masters.

It took myself and my friend and producer Beto Amaral about ten years to write, and at least six to produce, with the engagement of Sara Silveira and Maria Ionesco from Dezenove.

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR

DANIELA THOMAS BY WALTER SALLES

W. Daniela, you studied history and cinema. Is *Vazante* a confluence of your interest in these two territories?

D. That's exactly it. I always had great curiosity about our history. Maybe it has to do with being raised during the dictatorship. My father was arrested 3 times by the political police. It was traumatizing. Trying to understand why we had arrived at that situation mobilized me more than any other subject in my adolescence, so I decided to study history. Cinema, on the other hand, was the most intense personal experience I had in my childhood. Seeing *2001* at age 10 exploded my perception of the world, and I never lost that awe. You know, *2001* is a movie full of uncertainties. And I thought: my god, doubts can be magnificent!

In the film we did together, *Foreign Land*, I began to work this confluence of history and cinema, to deal with the question of our origin, the investigation of what formed us. *Vazante* is the consummation of these two passions. The film is a hypothesis about where we come from, this mestizo people of Portuguese America.

W. The film is an extremely personal, singular work, and I wanted to know how much and how it reflects an intimate concern of yours. What inspired the birth of the film?

D. *Vazante* was inspired by a story my father once told me: a great-great uncle of his, 45 years old, married a 12-year-old girl but the marriage was only consummated after she had her first period, some three years later. The story goes that this drover, whenever he came back from his travels, would bring dolls to his girl wife. Another image of this story stayed with me: this uncle did not wear shoes and picked the soles of his feet to extract little pebbles from the creases. These two scenes awoke in me the desire to make a film that portrayed in great detail the dynamics of life in the early nineteenth century in Brazil. To speak of the clash between the rudeness of life and the skewed way Brazilians face the civilizing process. I also wanted to address the continued submission of women. It is personal in that it allowed me to investigate things that say a lot about my origin, I, a woman, who am a descendent of both black slaves and

Portuguese settlers.

W. The film subverts this historical position of women in colonial Brazil, through it's main female character, who is the one to question the established order. Can you talk about the construction of this character?

D. I created this girl as an expression of pure desire. When I wrote the film, I thought: there are two vital forces that act on a human being, desire and culture. And I imagined a fable that revolved around this question: if culture does not have a strong hold over someone who is young, fragile and sensitive, perhaps desire can express itself purely without hindrance. Then I put this girl in the center of the story, a girl with a delicate temperament, a child attached to nature, and placed her in a situation where she is separated from church, mother, father, kept away from the formal structures of the transmission of culture. She then finds herself alone with her desire. And that's where it all goes wrong. Desire without connection to culture, without submitting to the hegemony of culture, is bound to fail. This clash is always very hard. And the young actress we found to play the character of the girl, Luana Nastas, has this ethereal quality, she's almost an elf. She spent her days on the farms where we filmed playing with the animals, running around barefoot, collecting ticks... She was Beatriz even before she was cast to make the film, you know? It was a very happy choice.

W. To the "cordial man" defined by Brazilian anthropology you also counterpose a much tougher view of that reality, in which interpersonal relations are much rougher between dominators and dominated, between the masculine and the feminine. In this sense it seemed to me that the film also subverts a perception of Brazil that we learned in the history books. Can you talk about this?

D. This idea that slavery in Brazil would have been less violent than in the United States is very controversial. But it is a fact that interracial relations in Brazil were very different from the American case. We wanted to portray in *Vazante* - and here I borrow the beautiful phrase of Hannah Arendt's - the "banality of evil" that is at the root of one man's exploration of another. The white master does not even bother to punish a slave who supposedly "fails". In *Vazante* he orders the thrashing. We sought here to portray how a white man might have treated a black man at that time, which, in our

perception, was the same treatment he gave to his packhorses. I did not want to portray the sadistic pleasure a white man took in hurting a black man, I wanted to talk about a society that systematically hurts black people.

W. The film invites the spectator to immerse himself in a world where there seems to have been no reconstruction. One does not feel the effort of the direction which is a rare achievement to be able to convey everything a movie asks for without you feeling the production effort behind the camera. Can you talk about the preparation of the film?

D. My desire was to make a laboratory of life in the time and place of the story and to film the results of that experience. We developed a series of strategies to achieve that and I am glad to see that it worked. The first of them was to enlist the support of a historian of social life in Colonial Brazil, Mary del Priore. She brought us a myriad of precious information that fueled the creation of the daily rituals in life and every moment in the film. I discovered the faces of my characters in Rodrigo Siqueira's extraordinary documentary *Terra Deu Terra Come* about a village of runaway slave descendants in Minas. We invited these descendants to play extras in the film. The men who play the Africans in the film, in turn, are refugees from West Africa who had just arrived in Brazil, and did not speak Portuguese. The meeting of these non-actors who, on the one hand, never left this remote and undeveloped region of Brazil, with other non-actors who have just crossed the ocean, leaving behind their families, their lives, and who in common have only black skins, plus Brazilian actors from the theater, a Portuguese actor who had never been in Brazil, and young actors in their first work in the cinema, in itself already established a strong human base, a living chemistry of the meeting of these diasporas that happened in that same house, 200 years earlier.

We worked on another important strategy in production design. Everything was built with the exact techniques of the time, either the result of our research or because the descendants still built their homes and wood stoves in the very same way. No sewing machines were used in the costume studios. Everything was hand sewn and embroidered. There is something naive, gauche in these interpretations of European clothing, which is identical to the drawings of the time. The cinematography was also very elaborate. I don't like photography in period films that use standard equipment to light scenes, which I discussed with Inti Briones.

He immediately proposed to light the whole film with candles or open fire. Inti and his team were rigorous, even in very difficult situations, never to divert from his radical project; they even developed special equipment, candle holders, gas nozzles to help.

Vasco Pimentel, the legendary Portuguese sound man, gave us a deep and rich sound, with layers and layers of sounds of birds, insects and frogs, cataloged obsessively, day and night, to distinguish each moment in each location. This is the soundtrack of *Vazante*: true sound embroidery. This experiment, which lasted almost six months between research trips, the creation of art workshops and the preparation of the actors produced my much-desired "time bubble". We, the film crew, were the aliens, and we tried to disrupt as little as possible the life that was created there.

W. Fernando Pessoa said that phrase, which we have all known since childhood, that "our language is our homeland", right? And this is a film with several languages and people that were actually taken out of their home countries. Can you talk about the role of languages in the movie?

D. Most of those languages are all that is left of the history of men and women torn from their homes, their families, their origins. I really wanted the film to be able to show this forced contact of cultures that happened here in Brazil, and how difficult it must have been. The leader of the group of Africans, for example, (played by Toumani Koyaté, Malinese Griot and son of the great actor Satigui Koyaté), is a man who we imagine has a previous history of great nobility. It is his important action in the film that runs contrary to expectations about the relationship between slaves and masters. The character needs to communicate; he speaks but no one understands him. You realize that he is articulate, that unlike almost everyone else in the film, he likes to use words. But the white man's ears are deaf anyway, even if he could speak an understandable language, I think the white man would not hear him. It was very exciting to listen to all those languages in our set. The Portuguese mestizo of the traditional songs played by the slaves, the African languages, the Portuguese of the colonizer, spoken by Antonio. These languages are the true music of our origins.

W: It's a world that is rarely captured in black and white and in 2:35. Can you talk about those choices, which were important to the movie?

D: I remember when we did *Foreign Land*, you used a phrase by Robert Frank to talk about filming in black and white. What was it?

W. "Black and white are the colors of hope and despair"

D: How beautiful. In the case of *Vazante*, the question of the absence of color is almost a reiteration. A world without color, a world made of shadows and light. There is an austerity; a roughness in black and white that I believed would intensify what I wanted to communicate with the film. And I also believe in the semiotics of the black and white image. It evokes the past. When I made the first trip to the Diamantina Mountains and took pictures in black and white I realized that there was a deep beauty in the shades of gray and black of the rocks. And the faces I sought for our characters echoed the roughness of these landscapes. As for cinemascope, Kubrick's 2.35 from 2001 came naturally to the film. This vast, empty landscape asked for it. It emphasizes the immense distances that men traveled by foot at that time.

W: Since childhood, we are told that Brazil is "the country of the future". In a way our cinema reflects this perception: we make more contemporary films than films that look back at our history. However, the search for a Brazilian identity may be the meeting point of your work as a whole, from theater, to film and as one of the main directors of Olympic Opening Ceremony, which was extremely well received, in good part thanks to its visual creativity but also because it focused on the formation of the Brazilian identity. I wanted, as a last question, to ask you to talk about the importance of thinking about our identity as something still in the making?

D: Trying to understand and create hypotheses about our origin and history is really what fascinates me and I think is a great theme for artists in Brazil. We, the people of this singular "Portuguese American" country, as Caetano Veloso loves to say, are passionate about the question of our identity. Our past is still a field to be explored by the cinema of Brazil. We are, perhaps, the most miscegenated people on the planet but rarely has the history of this miscegenation, the origin and the form of what occurred here been seen on our screens. And this is one of

the main themes of *Vazante*, the miscegenation that is the fruit of relationships that happen outside of the living room, on the edges of social life, most often spurious and humiliating relationships for women. I hope my film *Vazante*, which is also greatly influenced by Brazilian Cinema of the past, may contribute to the discussion of the endlessly pliant Brazilian identity.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

Daniela Thomas, Director and Co-Screenwriter

Daniela Thomas directs and writes films, creates opera and theater sets, writes and directs plays, designs exhibitions and creates installations. She was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1959, is based in São Paulo, but her work has been seen, exhibited and played around the world. It all started in the early 80s at La MaMa Experimental Theater in New York. She then moved back to Brazil, where she partnered with Walter Salles, writing and co-directing three features, *Foreign Land* (1996), *Midnight* (1998) and *Linha de Passe* (Palm D'Or for Best Actress to Sandra Corveloni at the 2008 Cannes Festival), and many shorts, including the Paris, Je T'aime segment *Loin du 16e* (2006). Thomas' other feature is *Sunstroke* (2009), co-directed with her partner in theater, Felipe Hirsch. She directed the Opening Ceremony of the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics and the Flaghandover Ceremony in the 2012 London Olympics.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2009 SUNSTROKE

with Felipe Hirsch.

Selected to the Orizzonti Competition in the 66th Venice Film Festival

2008 VOYAGE

segment of STORIES ON HUMAN RIGHTS

2008 LINHA DE PASSE

with Walter Salles

Winner – Golden Palm for Best Actress (Sandra Corveloni), 2008 Cannes Film Festival.

Grand Prix Havana Festival.

- 2006 **LOIN DU 16e**
segment of *Paris, Je T'aime*
2008 Prize Chloturdis
Winner – 2008 Golden Trailer
Opening Film of Un Certain Regard, 2007 Cannes Film Festival
- 2003 **GUNS AND PEACE**
short film
- 2002 **CASTANHA E CAJU CONTRA O ENCORAÇADO TITANIC**
short film
- 1998 **SOMOS TODOS FILHOS DA TERRA**
documentary short
- 1998 **MIDNIGHT**
with Walter Salles
Panorama, 1999 Berlin International Film Festival
- 1996 **FOREIGN LAND**
with Walter Salles
Winner of 5 International Prizes, including Best Film in the Bergamo Film Meeting and Entrevues Film Festival

CREW BIOS

Beto Amaral – Co-Screenwriter and Producer

Beto Amaral graduated with departmental honors in Film Studies at Columbia University in New York. In 2003, he founded Cisma to develop and produce independent films, theater, and visual arts projects, including Daniela Thomas and Felipe Hirsch's film *SunStroke* (2009), which was selected to the Orizzonti Competition in the Venice Film Festival. Beto (with Cisma) also produced and co-wrote Daniela Thomas' *Vazante* in addition to producing and assisting with dialogue for her forthcoming feature *O Banquete*. Cisma was also responsible for several theatre plays and video art exhibitions by renowned filmmakers such as Eija-Liisa Ahtila.

Inti Briones – Director of Photography

In 2013, Inti Briones was chosen by *Variety* as one of the "Ten Directors of Photography Worth Paying Attention To" for his work in *The Loneliest Planet* by Julia Loktev. A frequent traveler, Inti met veteran DOP Hector Ríos and directors like Ignacio Agüero, Pablo Perelman, Andrés Raczy, and master Raúl Ruiz while spending time in Chile. Today, Inti's journeys and collaborations continue with directors such as Julia Lokvet, Walter Salles, Paula Gaitan, Felipe Hirsch, Daniela Thomas, Joanna Lombardi, and others.

Vasco Pimentel – Sound Designer

Born in Lisbon in 1957, Vasco Pimentel is a renowned Portuguese sound engineer and sound designer. He studied music in the National Conservatory and film at the National School of Theater and Cinema in Lisbon. His professional work in film and theater includes a range of crafts such as sound design, filmmaking, composing, and creating visual art. Since 1979, Vasco Pimentel has been active in more than 130 feature-length films and numerous documentaries and short films. Some notable projects have been in collaboration with film directors such as Wim Wenders, Raul Ruiz, Werner Schroeter, Samuel Fuller, Vincent Gallo, Fred Kelemen, Robert Kramer, João Cesar Monteiro, Miguel Gomes, and Teresa Villaverde.

Valdy Lopes JN – Production Designer

Valdy Lopes JN was the set designer of many renowned Brazilian art films, including *Cinema, Aspirinas e Urubus* (Dir. Marcelo Gomes/2003), *Cidade Baixa* (Dir. Sérgio Machado/2004), *A Máquina* (Dir. João Falcão/ 2004), and *Garotas do ABC* (Dir. Carlos Reichenbach/2002). Valdy has also worked as the production designer for *Antônia* (TV Globo) and the following films: *Falsa Loura* (Dir. Carlos Reichenbach/2006), *Linha de Passe* (Dir. Walter Salles e Daniela Thomas/2007), *Contador de Histórias* (Luiz Villaça/2008), *Insolação* (Daniela Thomas e Felipe Hirsch/2008), *Amanhã Nunca Mais* (Tadeu Jungles/2009), *Rosa Morena* (Carlos Oliveira/2009), *Corda Bamba* (Ugo Giorgetti/2010), *A Novela das 8* (Odilon Rocha/2010), *Somos Tão Jovens* (Antonio Carlos da Fontoura/2011), *A Primeira Missa* (Ana Carolina/2011), *Heliópolis* (Sérgio Machado/2012), *Jonas e a Baleia* (Lô Politi/2013), and *Mundo Cão* (Marcos Jorge/2014).

PRODUCERS BIO

Maria Ionescu – Producer / Executive Producer

After graduating from ECA/USP in cinematography, Maria founded the Orion Cinema e Vídeo production house in 1985, where she produced the feature film *Cidade Oculta* and various short films. Since 1997, she has worked for Dezenove Som e Imagens, during which has produced several films, including *Bicho de Sete Cabeças* by Lais Bodanzky, *Dois Córregos* and *Falsa Loura* by Carlos Reichenbach, *Durval Discos* and *É Proibido Fumar* by Anna Muylaert, *Cinema Aspirinas e Urubus* by Marcelo Gomes, *Ó Pai Ó* by Monique Gardenberg, *Sunstroke* by Daniela Thomas and Felipe Hirsch, and *Trabalhar Cansa* by Juliana Rojas and Marco Dutra.

Sara Silveira – Producer

One of the most active film producers in Brazil, Sara has lead the Dezenove Som e Imagens production house in partnership with also producer Maria Ionescu since 1991. Over the years, she has produced some of Brazil's most memorable and internationally awarded Brazilian films. Recently, she participated as a juror on the Carte Blanche selection committee for the 67th Locarno Festival, and also served as President of the jury for the Horizontes Latinos section of the 62nd San Sebastian Festival. Sara also received the great honor of administering a master class on La Fabrique des Cinemas du Monde at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival.

CAST BIOS

Adriano Carvalho

Antonio

Born in 1970 in Estoril, a seaside village near Lisbon, Adriano started his professional acting career in the very beginning of the 90s. Since then, he has maintained a prolific career working in film, television and theatre productions. In cinema, he has worked in several features with directors such as Joaquim Leitão (in *20,13*) and Bruno D'Almeida (in *Operação Outono*). He has been directed by some of the most creative stage directors in Portugal's theater scene.

Luana Nastas

Beatriz

Luana Nastas was born in 2003 and has been attending acting classes since 2012. Luana was discovered among hundred of girls who auditioned for Vazante in many schools around São Paulo. Daniela Thomas was mesmerized by her charisma on screen and immediately selected her for the role. Like her character Beatriz, Luana is deeply intrigued and fascinated by sounds, animals and nature.

Sandra Corveloni

Dona Ondina

Sandra Corveloni is a Brazilian actress born in São Paulo. She acted and directed a large number of plays before breaking into film. In 2008, she was awarded the Palme d'Or in Cannes for best actress in *Linha de Passe*, her first movie. Several other movies followed, including *Somos tão Jovens* (2013), *Sangue Azul* (2014), and *Oração do Amor Selvagem* (2015).

Juliana Carneiro da Cunha

Dona Zizinha

Juliana Carneiro da Cunha was born in Brazil in 1949 and has lived in Paris since 1988. Her successful career as an actress began on a Brazilian theater stage with works such as Petra von Kant's *Bitter Tears*, featuring Fernanda Montenegro, in 1982. In Europe, she worked with Maurice Bejart, Maguy Marin and Ariane Mnouchkine. Since 1990, Juliana has been part of the Théâtre du Soleil group, directed by Ariane Mnouchkine. She is widely recognized in Brazilian cinema for

her award-winning performance in the film *Lavoura Arcaica* (2001), directed by Luiz Fernando Carvalho.

Toumani Kouyaté

Lider Africanos

Toumani Kouyaté belongs to an illustrious family of Djélis - griots from West Africa, masters of words and arts. He has been acting since his youth and received Canada's Anselme Chiasson Award in recognition of his professional artistic career. Since 2011, he has developed has worked in Brazilian theaters, festivals, cultural centers, and universities spreading and promoting African Culture in the country. Toumani is the son of the great griot-actor Sotigui Kouyaté, who won the Silver Bear for his performance in *London River* and is known for his work with Peter Brook.

C R E D I T S

CAST

Antonio
Beatriz
Dona Ondina
Dona Zizinha
Bartholomeu
Feliciana
Maria Joaquina
Líder
Virgílio
Jeremias
Joana
Porfírio
Manuel

Adriano Carvalho
Luana Nastas
Sandra Corveloni
Juliana Carneiro Da Cunha
Roberto Audio
Jai Baptista
Isadora Favero
Toumani Kouyaté
Vinicius Dos Anjos
Fabrício Boliveira
Geisa Costa
Adilson Maghá
Alexandre De Sena

CREW

Director
Screenwriters

Director of Photography
Production Design
Sound Design
Costume Design
Editors

Make-up
Producers

Co-produced by

Associate Producer
Line Producer
U.S. Distribution

Daniela Thomas
Daniela Thomas
Beto Amaral
Inti Briones
Valdy Lopes Jn
Vasco Pimentel
Cassio Brasil
Estevan Schilling
Tiago Marinho
Rosemary Paiva
Beto Amaral
Maria Ionescu
Sara Silveira
Pandora Da Cunha Telles
Pablo Iraoia
Fernando Meirelles
Cristina Alves
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