



Brazil on Film

Black God, White Devil

Black God, White Devil

Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol

Director: Glauber Rocha

Production Company: Copacabana Filmes

Producer: Luiz Augusto Mendes

Associate Producers: Jarbas Barbosa, Glauber Rocha

Production Manager: Agnaldo Azevedo

Assistant Director: Paulo Gil Soares, Walter Lima Jr

Story/Dialogue: Glauber Rocha

Director of Photography/Camera Operator: Waldemar Lima

Key Grip: Roque-Assis

Graphics/Maps: Calazans Neto

Editor: Rafael Valverde

Art Director: Glauber Rocha

Titles: Lygia Pape

Music: [Heitor] Villa-Lobos

Lyrics: Glauber Rocha

Songs Sung/Performed by: Sérgio Ricardo

Sound Recording: Aluizio Viana

Neg Cutting: Lucia Erita

Sound Effects: Geraldo José

Cast:

Geraldo Del Rey (*Manuel*)

Yoná Magalhães (*Rosa*)

Lídio Silva (*Sebastião*)

Maurício do Valle (*Antonio das Mortes*)

Othon Bastos (*Corisco*)

Sônia dos Humildes (*Dadá*)

João Gama

Antônio Pinto

Milton Roda

Roque

Brazil 1964

118 mins

Digital

Become a BFI Member

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

Sight and Sound

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25*

* Price based on a 6-month print subscription

(UK only). More info:

sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk/subscribe



BFI Player

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

The *cinema novo* movement of the 1960s was envisioned as a challenge to the conventions that had been imported into Brazilian filmmaking through the influence of Hollywood. In his manifesto of 1965, 'The Aesthetics of Hunger', one of the foremost practitioners of the movement, Glauber Rocha, described the artistic landscape of his country as being laden with 'a formal exoticism that vulgarises social problems.' The intention was to act as a prophylactic against such depictions and, particularly in its early years (or 'First Phase', 1960-64), *cinema novo* strove to bring light to the struggles of the downtrodden and exploited. When Rocha's second feature film, *Black God, White Devil*, premiered in 1964, it was not only the most prominent of the films to date – it was selected for competition at Cannes and became the Brazilian submission for the Academy Awards – but it has subsequently been held up as a work that typifies the values espoused during the period and has endured as one of the greatest Brazilian films ever made.

The plot of *Black God, White Devil* follows a cowherd named Manuel (Geraldo Del Rey) and his wife Rosa (Yoná Magalhães) as they struggle through difficult times in the arid *sertão* of northeastern Brazil. They live a hardscrabble life in thrall to a callous landowner, who Manuel attacks and kills in a fit of rage at particularly unjust treatment. The couple is forced to go on the lam, and they fall in with a nascent religious cult led by the self-proclaimed saint Sebastião (Lídio Silva), who prophesies a cleansing fire and primes his flock for apocalyptic insurrection. A gruff bounty-hunter named Antônio das Mortes (Maurício do Valle) – who would go on to be the central figure of a 1969 Rocha film, is despatched by local authorities to remedy the situation. After an intense gun battle at the cult's hilltop retreat, the central duo leave Sebastião dead and find themselves on the run again, this time joining the ranks of rebellious bandit Corisco (Othon Bastos), who has his own bloody war to wage. The film's narrative, though, is just part of what's going on.

There was great variation among the styles of films and filmmakers regarded as part of *cinema novo*, but the first work produced owed much to Italian neorealism. However, rather than a somewhat naturalistic depiction of poverty, Rocha conceived of his aesthetics of hunger as a febrile, interconnected evocation which 'narrated, described, poeticised, discoursed, analysed, [and] aroused the themes of hunger.' Rocha was arguably more enamoured of the spirit of the French New Wave and, keen to move beyond the frameworks of traditional cinema, he folded various creative elements into *Black God, White Devil* that imbue it with its own pyretic energy.

Those elements range from the use of a musical narration – in lyrical descriptive ballads written by Rocha and scored by Heitor Villa-Lobos and Sérgio Ricardo – stilted performances and sometimes glacial pacing to intrusive, stylised sound design and handheld camerawork that bristles with nervous vitality. Rocha was only in his mid-twenties when he made the film, and an audience might see in some of these things the rough edges of a young filmmaker working on a constrained budget. However, he intentionally jostles the components to create a work that coarsely combines the allegorical and the visceral, reality and myth, the frenzy of religious enthusiasm and the deliberate devilry of violent revolt.

Brazil on Film

We Are Also Brothers Também Somos Irmãos

Fri 1 May 18:20 (+ intro by Dr Felipe Botelho
Correa, King's College London); Sat 30 May 15:20

Boy and the World O Menino e o Mundo

Sat 2 May 12:15; Sun 24 May 12:30

Black God, White Devil

Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol
Sat 2 May 18:10; Sat 16 May 16:00;
Fri 29 May 20:35; Sat 30 May 20:30

São Paulo Incorporated

São Paulo Sociedade Anônima
Mon 4 May 18:30; Thu 14 May 20:40

The Margin A Margem

Fri 8 May 21:00; Thu 21 May 18:15

At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul

À Meia-Noite Levarei Sua Alma
Sat 9 May 13:00 (+ intro by Dr Bruna Foletto Lucas,
University of Hertfordshire); Tue 19 May 20:40

Bye Bye Brazil Bye Bye Brasil

Sat 9 May 18:15; Sat 23 May 14:30 (+ intro by
Dr Antonio da Silva, University of Essex)

City of God Cidade de Deus

Sat 9 May 20:20; Sat 23 May 17:15;
Thu 28 May 18:00

Neighbouring Sounds O Som ao Redor

Sun 10 May 14:40; Sun 17 May 18:10;
Fri 22 May 20:25

Man Marked for Death, Twenty Years Later

Cabra Marcado Para Morrer
Sun 10 May 18:15; Mon 25 May 18:20

Chuck Billy and the Marvelous Guava Tree

Chico Bento e a Goiabeira Maraviósa
Sun 10 May 12:15; Sat 23 May 12:20

Manas

Mon 11 May 18:00 (+ intro by season co-curator
Renata de Almeida); Sun 31 May 18:30

Lower City Cidade Baixa

Mon 11 May 20:50 (+ intro by season co-curator
Renata de Almeida); Wed 27 May 20:55

An Introduction to Brazil on Film

Tue 12 May 18:15

Foreign Land Terra Estrangeira

Tue 12 May 20:20 (+ Q&A with co-director Daniela
Thomas); Tue 26 May 18:15

Mars One Marte Um

Fri 15 May 18:20 (+ intro by Marta Calderón
Quiñones, Cinema Mentirê); Sat 23 May 20:30

Cinema Novo

Sat 16 May 18:40; Tue 26 May 20:45

Dolores

Sun 24 May 18:20; Sun 31 May 15:20

Presented as part of the UK/Brazil Season of
Culture 2025-26 and supported by
Instituto Guimarães Rosa

The film's first half sees Manuel become an ardent disciple of Saint Sebastião, despite Rosa's consternation. In this section, the filmmaking language is that of urgency; time is frequently elided, the camera often adopts positions that create intimate close-ups, and Eisensteinian montage creates dramatic sequences of ferocity and suffering, while the story unfurls some of its most shocking moments. Even when a scene is drawn out, the soundtrack is often loud, intense and discordant. The effect is almost palpable. The torment, desperation and zeal are felt as much as they are observed. Here, violence seems to become the only possible response from those in such straits. The film's composition mimics its protagonists' situation: when Manuel and Rosa find themselves aligned with Corisco, the mechanics change. Shot durations are far longer, pacing more deliberate, the location sparse and depopulated, the action a shifting moral dialogue rather than the staccato study of faith seen previously. The sound continues to be somewhat over-produced, but the effect now is not wild immersion but of a creeping unreality, creating a folkloric milieu.

The formally divergent nature of the film's two halves complicates the way audiences receive the film and forces them to consider its thematic concerns from multiple perspectives. Speaking to *Cineaste* magazine in 1970, Rocha stated: 'To make film is to make a contribution to the revolution, to stoke it, in order to make people in Brazil conscious of their condition.' While some of the takeaways may initially seem incontrovertible and explicit, in *Black God, White Devil* the politics are far from didactic. They're complicated and contradictory in such a way as to dislodge preconceptions and – in theory – force the viewer to grapple with the questions that have been raised and to confront a previously unseen truth. For the Brazilian audience of 1964, this meant reckoning with the despairing situation of the poor. To a modern audience, the film demands a level of engagement that undermines the simplistic devotion to or validation of existing beliefs – whether they be political, religious, or cinematic. It's just one of the many ways the film continues to feel vital and relevant.

Ben Nicholson, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2023

With thanks to



WORLD CINEMA PROJECT



THE FILM FOUNDATION
FILMMAKERS FOR FILM PRESERVATION



25 & Under

We want to open up great independent and classic film and TV for all, making it as accessible as possible. If you are under the age of 26, you can get discounted tickets for BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. BFI Southbank cinema tickets are £4, with festival tickets £6, so you can enjoy the very best of cinema from around the world at an affordable price.

Sign up today and verify your age online, and you can start enjoying discounted tickets immediately.

Join the **BFI mailing list** for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at www.bfi.org.uk/signup