



Brazil on Film

Lower City

Lower City Cidade baixa

Director: Sérgio Machado

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Presented by: VideoFilmes, Buena Onda Films

Executive Producers: Mauricio Andrade Ramos,

Walter Salles, Donald K. Ranvaud, Robert Bevan

Producers in Salvador: Diana Gurgel,

Péricles Palmeira

On-set Producer: Severo Santos

Line Producer: Marcelo Torres

2nd Unit Producer: Sandra Leite

Production Co-ordinator: Maria Gowland

Production Controller: Carlos Freitas

Location Managers: Péricles Almeida, Dois Mundos

Technical Supervisor: Roberto Corrêa

Post-production Co-ordinator: Bianca Costa

1st Assistant Director: Maria Farkas

2nd Assistant Director: Daniela Carvalho

Director's Assistant: Márcia Faria

Script Supervisor: Maria Gowland

Casting Research: Dan Rodrigues,

Daniela Carvalho, Alexandra Maia,

Péricles Palmeira, Érika Safira

Screenplay: Sérgio Machado, Karim Ainouz

With the collaboration of: Adriana Rattes,

Gil Vicente Tavares

Director of Photography: Toca Seabra

Camera Operator: Toca Seabra

2nd Camera Operator: Kika Cunha

Gaffer: Rondinelli O. Pinto

Still Photographer: Christian Cravo

Special Effects Co-ordinator: Mauricio Bevilacqua

Special Effects: Mauricio Bevilacqua - SFX

Editor: Isabela Monteiro De Castro

Art Director: Marcos Pedroso

Property Master: Dan Rodrigues

Construction Co-ordinators: Gringo,

Paulo Batistela (Nietzsch)

Costume Designers: Cristina Camargo,

André Simonetti

Make-up: Rose Verçosa

Titles/Opticals: Guto Lins, Manifesto Design

Music: Carlinhos Brown, Beto Villares

Accordion/Piano/Percussion/Keyboard:

Carlinhos Brown

Programming/Mixing/Additional Effects:

Beto Villares

Cello: Yaniel Matos

Drums: Raul Carlos Gomes

Bass Guitar: Octávio Américo

Electric Guitar: Géó Benjamin

Percussion: Boghan Costa, Elber Barbosa

Violin: Felipe de Souza

Soundtrack Mixing: L.C. Varella, Beto Villares

Salvador Music Recordist: Flávio de Souza

Music Consultants: Elisa Alvares,

Catherine Dempsey

Dancing Choreography: Ana Clara Amorim (Duca)

Direct Sound: Leandro Lima, Rômulo Drummond

Sound Mixer: Armando Torres Jr

Sound Editors: Waldir Xavier, Denílson Campos

Rio de Janeiro ADR Recordist: Mario Jorge Santos

Salvador ADR Recordists: Raimundo Luiz,

André Rangel

Brasília ADR Recordist: Pauly di Castro

Foley Supervisors: Ricardo Reis, Miriam Biderman

Foley Mixers: Maurício Pasquet, Marcelo Autuori

Foley Editors: Fernandinho Thomáz,

Helena Duarte, Daniel Turini

Acting Coach: Fátima Toledo

Screenplay Research: Isabel Machado

Historical Research: Isabel Machado

Dolby Consultant: Carlos Klachquim

Flickering flames and strumming guitars play over the opening credits of *Lower City*, a sure sign of the fevered passions that will be unleashed over the next 98 minutes. And with the first shot of bottle-blonde Karinna (played by Sonia Braga's niece Alice Braga) making up in front of a cracked mirror, the stage is set for a high-octane drama from the same school of Latin American crowd pleasers as *Amores perros* and *City of God* (the latter of which also featured the younger Braga). The jerky hand-held camera, low lighting and saturated colours are highly reminiscent of both these earlier films. And it comes as no surprise that the accomplished male leads are veterans of Hector Babenco's stylish prison epic *Carandiru*. Toss producer Walter Salles into the mix, and this is a project with a strong track record.

But first-time feature director Sérgio Machado brings much that is new to the screen. Like his actors, he is a native of Bahia. The African-influenced state is far from Rio and São Paulo, the metropolises that have dominated the recent boomlet of Brazilian films seen in the UK. The waterfront location of *Lower City*, with its bobbing boats, crowded streets and buzzing markets, is a visual delight; the twitchily mobile camera clearly revels in the rich texture of peeling walls and sweaty skin. The leads, intensively coached before shooting started, are equally attractive. Lázaro Ramos' boxer Deco and Wagner Moura's more extrovert robber Naldinho brood and posture to perfection; while Braga's pole-dancing prostitute looks sweet and vulnerable even in blue eye shadow and body glitter. (Bahia's Association of Sex Workers, which is thanked in the final credits, may well have helped *Lower City* move beyond stereotypes here.)

As co-writer as well as sole director, Machado picks up the pace through the course of the film. He strings together vivid set pieces one after the other: a deafening, blurry cock fight (echoing *Amores perros*' dog fights); a gruelling boxing match; and a climactic struggle between the love rival male leads.

And Machado is generous to his working-class characters. When Karinna appears to go into a cocaine-fuelled fit, it is just a scam to extract money from a clueless john and she is left none the worse for wear. When Naldinho robs a pharmacy, the only harm that results is that the shop assistant pees his pants.

This confirms Machado's vision of a film that, in spite of its seductive look, is driven by character not action. Rarely for Latin American cinema, the focus is not on social conditions but on human emotions. Machado even claims that his threesome could have been born in Norway and worked in a supermarket. It seems unlikely, however, that Nordic shelf-stackers would have the enviable sexual potency depicted here. Whether Karinna is making love with Deco or Naldinho in a boat, a brothel or an alleyway, the frequent zipless (and unprotected) fucks go from nought to ecstasy in ten seconds.

More intriguing is the hint that the two men might be more interested in each other than in the girl they both seek so desperately. Deco caresses the manly chest of his friend before his hand moves on to Karinna's pert breasts. And when the boys are briefly reconciled after quarrelling over Karinna, Naldinho insists on giving his mate a rough kiss. But in spite of teasing us to the limit (Karinna dances in a disco between the two hot men), Machado chickens out: there will be no threesome between the lovers, let alone unsublimated male on male action.

Special Thanks: Daniel Dantas, Eduardo Coutinho, João Moreira Salles, Carlos Diegues, Hector Babenco, Daniela Thomas, Guel Arraes, Fernando Gabeira, Antônio Pinto
Fight Choreography: Ariela Goldman
Publicist Co-ordinator: Anna Luiza Müller

Cast:

Wagner Moura (*Naldinho*)
Lázaro Ramos (*Deco*)
Alice Braga (*Karina*)
José Dumont (*Sergipano*)
Harildo Deda (*Careca*)
Maria Menezes (*Luzinete*)
João Miguel (*Edvan, pharmacist*)
Débora Santiago (*Sirlene*)
Dois Mundos (*Dois Mundos*)
Divina Valéria (*Zilú*)
Hugo Rodas (*Chilean commander*)
Gerônimo (*Fúá*)
Fernando Fulco (*police officer*)
David Herman (*English commander*)
Olga Machado (*doctor*)
Fernanda Freitas (*Nilma*)
Ricardo Luedy (*Karina's client 1*)
Leno Sacramento (*Rufino*)
Wilson Melo (*Ferreirinha*)
Zeca Abreu (*Marinalva*)
Nonato Freire (*clerk*)
Ricardo Spencer (*Marcelo*)
Adelena Rios (*stripper 1*)
Tais Wagner (*prostitute 1*)
Carolina Ribeiro (*Jamily*)
Andréia Elia (*D. Lenita*)
Marcos Pedroso (*Seu Marquinhos*)
Alessandra (*stripper 2*)
Guiga Scott (*Xanadu voice*)
Agnaldo Lopes (*Karina's client 2*)
Rai Alves (*presenter*)
Tinho Bahia (*boxing opponent*)
Luís Olho De Gato (*sparing partner*)
Carlos Pronzato (*deputy Chilean commander*)
Felipe Ferreira (*Joilson*)
Brazil-UK 2005©
98 mins
Digital

The screening on Mon 11 May will be introduced by season co-curator Renata de Almeida

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So *Lower City*, which claims to be based on ‘how people get horny, pissed, have orgasms’, is less transgressive than it thinks. Machado says the people of Bahia live only for the moment, but it seems likely that each of the two guys would prefer to settle down in coupled bliss with the girl. The plot is thus caught in a vice with no real development possible, as the two men alternate between the poles of ecstatic fulfilment and morbid jealousy. It is symptomatic that so many plot strands (Karinna’s pregnancy, Naldinho’s conflict with his crime boss, Deco’s argument with his boxing manager) go unresolved at the film’s end. And the final battle between the two friends reveals that classic macho jealousy is still more than a match for homo-social bonding. *Lower City*’s script, partly improvised during rehearsal, is sometimes banal (‘you’re my main man’) or sabotaged by heavy-handed subtitles (‘that’s phat, bro’). But, like its young stars, the film remains a likeable and accomplished addition to the Latin American new wave.

Paul Julian Smith, *Sight and Sound*, December 2005

The 37-year-old Machado – previously a documentary filmmaker and assistant director to Walter Salles – spent three months researching the script for *Lower City* in the strip joints and brothels of Bahia, his native state. ‘For a long time I’d wanted to talk about this young, drifting generation among Brazil’s working classes,’ he says. ‘How do they survive? But I didn’t want to approach them from an outsider’s point of view – I wanted to create something very personal.’

Central to *Lower City*’s success is a remarkable performance by Alice Braga. She shows a bold lack of inhibition in the raw love-making scenes that dominate the film, convincingly portraying a 20-year-old with few options other than prostitution. ‘Hanging with you two is just for fun,’ she tells her lovers at one point, ‘but I’ve got bills to pay.’ Then, with her clothes on, she reveals a defiant fragility: waiting for the result of a pregnancy test, her eyes fill with apprehension as the walls around her threaten to close in even further.

‘The sex scenes weren’t hard to film because we trusted each other,’ says Machado. ‘I wrote a letter to the actors before shooting that said, ‘let’s just trust in each other and jump into the abyss’.’

Machado strove to provide a new take on a situation that has become a film staple – the subject of movies ranging from *Jules et Jim* to *Y tu mamá también*. ‘What makes this love triangle special is that it’s equilateral – each side loves the other two sides in the same way,’ he says. ‘Usually, triangles are based on the impossibility of the situation but *Lower City* talks about possibility. I wanted the audience to support the idea of the three of them together, of them breaking the taboo.’

Ali Jaafar, *Sight and Sound*, December 2005

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