

A Cinema Guild Release



Neighboring Sounds

A film by Kleber Mendonça Filho

131 minutes / DCP / 2.35 Scope / Dolby Digital / Brazil / Not Rated

In Portuguese w/ English Subtitles

Stills available at: www.cinemaguild.com/neighboringounds/

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Synopsis

A palpable sense of unease hangs over a single city block in the coastal town of Recife, Brazil. Home to prosperous families and the servants who work for them, the area is ruled by an aging patriarch and his sons. When a private security firm is reluctantly brought in to protect the residents from a recent spate of petty crime, it unleashes the fears, anxieties and resentments of a divided society still haunted by its troubled past. Kleber Mendonça Filho's *Neighboring Sounds* is a thrilling debut by a major new voice in world cinema.

About the release:

Neighboring Sounds premiered at the 2012 Rotterdam Film Festival, where it received the FIPRESCI prize from the International Federation of Film Critics. It was first presented in the U.S. at New Directors/New Films, co-organized by the Film Society of Lincoln Center and the Museum of Modern Art.

It has been presented at film festivals around the world, including the Los Angeles Film Festival and the San Francisco Film Festival. It won the New Talent Grand Pix (top prize) at CPH:PIX in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Neighboring Sounds opens theatrically in New York City on August 24th at the Elinor Bunin Munroe Film Center in New York City. Release in select cities will follow throughout the fall of 2012.

For a full list of play dates please visit: <http://www.cinemaguild.com/neighboringounds/>

Director's Statement

Recife, in the state of Pernambuco, is Brazil's fifth largest city, and it shares most of the problems common to large urban areas in the country, or in Latin America. Stubaí is the younger, quieter neighbor of Boa Viagem, the city's most expensive real estate, an area now taken over by tall buildings of all shapes and sizes. Setubal is a smaller, more family oriented urban neighborhood, and the setting for *Neighboring Sounds*. Most of this film comes from notes on life happening just across the street, or right outside my window, or under the neighbor's roof. The peculiar tensions which make Brazilian society tick are reflected in the weight and look of local architecture, which is chaotically eclectic.

Neighboring Sounds finds its heart in the human element as it tries to deal with everyday life in such an environment. We have a group of characters, men, women and children, with their own inner and outer tensions. They are part of a social landscape of masters and servants which may even look modern, but at its very foundations is not. These class relations are addressed not only in the way servants gain restricted access to the property of the masters (cars, houses, apartments), but also in the way the rich live out a paranoid life through the crippling fear of urban violence.

Fear is expressed as architecture, be it through the ugly designs of steel grates, electric fences and high perimeter walls, or through remnants of a local history marked by late 19th century slavery found in the *quartos de empregada*, or maid's room, still part of modern architectural design in Brazil. These rooms are an obvious sign of racism disguised as a hot, windowless trap.

One final note: the sound. The very organic nature of life in such an environment seems to have so many different layers of sound at any time of the day. They are not only cues to people living their lives in private, but also information about loneliness, joy, neurosis, happiness or fear, no matter how noisy a place can be, or how quiet.

A CONVERSATION WITH DIRECTOR KLEBER MENDONÇA FILHO

These excerpts are taken from an interview conducted by Paul Sbrizzi for HAMMER TO NAIL during the 2012 Los Angeles Film Festival. It originally appeared on their site on June 27th, 2012.

Hammer to Nail: We know very little about you, since this is your first narrative feature, so can you tell me a little bit about your background? Did you grow up in Recife?

Kleber Mendonça Filho: Yes, well I spent most of the '80s in England where my family moved—my mother got her PhD from a British University and then I went with her. It was from 1982 until 1987, and it was, yeah, very important years in my life. But I was born in Recife and grew up in Recife and went back to Recife after that. And then I did journalism in university and after that I started to write as a journalist and then as a film critic. Two years ago I stopped writing as a critic because I just couldn't do it anymore, it got to be too much, and I had to make this film, and I was also finding myself in situations where I would rather not write about certain films because I was already a filmmaker and that created a situation where—I can't be writing about films by friends or colleagues. It just got to be a little bit too much sometimes. And then I quit to make this film, and of course I miss it, but I'm very happy that I quit also because it's like getting rid of one gigabyte in your hard drive. I was—you know, a normal week I could write two reviews or maybe five. The exercise of going to the films and coming back and having to write—I was already thinking of making this film—it was just too much. And I quit. Now, I'm working for my film, and my films, and I'm also a programmer. I program a cinema in Recife to show everything that the multiplexes will not touch. And it's something that I really love to do—I've been doing it for 14 years.

H2N: As an artist, coming from a background of being a critic, what specifically, or generally, did you think you wanted to bring to filmmaking that was unique and that was yours? Did you see something that was missing in the films that you were watching? Or was there just something personal that you wanted to express?

KMF: The starting point really has to be Brazilian cinema—that's the environment which has nurtured my desire to make films. It's like I've been telling some of my friends: you're in a conversation, or on a panel, and the conversation is going somewhere, and then you just feel that you want to put your hand up and say something. In terms of Brazilian cinema, this is the type of film that I would like to see, so that's my personal contribution. But really it's a big surprise, and I'm still in this cloud of satisfaction because I've been traveling with my film in international film festivals. The film hasn't been screened in Brazil yet, and it turns out that the film seems to have good communication outside the environment where I made it. In the beginning I thought it would be a very local, regional, almost parochial film, maybe because I shot it where I live, you know, the street where I live. But I think getting these very positive reactions, not only from critics and programmers, but from cinephiles—people who watch the film—this is great. So yeah, in a way it was my way of giving a contribution to a

panorama of Brazilian cinema, which I think is changing by the way, because I am one of the 10 or 15 younger filmmakers who are coming to their first features after many years or some years making short films. And the other sad thing is that the short film scene is very important and everything, but it is like a ghetto. And the other thing I find out now is that I got out of the ghetto. Which is sad, because short films should be—they should get the same respect. I always thought that, but they don't. And now that I made a feature everything just feels more intense, and people seem to respect me more because I made a feature. But yeah, a lot of interesting filmmakers and their friends—some of them are not so close, but I have a lot of friends who are coming now to the feature film.

H2N: In terms of the story and the characters—you're following this family that is sort of in decline; were you thinking of it... maybe I'm trying to over-explain it, but I was seeing it as the middle class as a whole in decline, as represented by this one family.

KMF: A little bit, but not really. A little bit, because historically that region was always known—or for three centuries was known—for sugar cane plantations. Which means that one of our problems—which maybe we've reached the end of that problem and now we're beginning a new era, with the whole thing with Brazil and the economic boom, and Brazil is growing very fast—so for 300 years we had monoculture. The only thing that came out of Pernambuco, the state, was sugar cane, which means that the money was in the hands of maybe no more than 50 families, which were very rich of course, and over the last 40 years, 50 years maybe, sugar cane production became decadent. And ten years ago it reached a low point, the lowest point probably. So these families of course became decadent. And most of these families still act like they're royalty, but they're not. They've lost most of their money, property. So in a way, yeah—I think Francisco is a typically decadent child of sugar cane. But I don't think the Brazilian middle class as a whole is decadent, in fact they are growing and becoming wealthier, and there's a whole interesting social revolution going on now because the middle class is getting bigger because the lower classes are now becoming middle class, and maybe the upper classes are becoming rich, so it's like a ladder and people are going up and pushing the people who were in the middle towards the top. So that's why I said yes and no—yes historically but no in terms of the Brazilian middle class as a whole is not decadent. Maybe it is in terms of values, but I was thinking in terms of the sugar cane families. And you can see that when they go to the plantation. Beautiful place, but it's falling to pieces. And the old cinema, and the actual processing plants, the mill.

H2N: And yet back in Recife it seems like the middle class is losing control of their streets to these working class people.

KMF: That happened to me and my wife: we live there and one day we had these guys offering their services, and we were exactly like João in the film: “Who sent you? Do you carry guns? I mean why are you here?” But we were the only ones, because everyone else thought it was a great idea. And that's the interesting thing, because all you have to do is show up with a vest and an attitude and you can get a job as a security person. Because everybody's so paranoid about security, and there's this very strange relationship

between the inside and the outside in Brazilian cities. And this is something that I have a really hard time explaining when I travel, because I don't want to sound like a paranoid person or like my film is a harsh or negative depiction of my society, and I keep saying it's perfectly possible to be happy there. You can be happy there, but there is this discomfort, you know? And people are afraid and they do silly things, like they don't walk on the streets and the streets are kind of empty...

H2N: For me one of the things that was interesting was how the class relations work in your film—I think here in the U.S. we have a similar class structure but we have at least a veneer of being a classless society, whereas in your film you see upper class people being openly condescending toward their servants. Maybe it comes from the sugarcane culture?

KMF: I think it does. It comes from—Brazilian society is a fascinating mix of European colonization, native Brazilians, African colonization through the black population that was brought over, Catholicism. Being tropical is also something that plays a big part in the whole thing, and yes there is almost like a promiscuous—not almost, there is a promiscuous relationship between all the colors and all the classes. I don't think it really happens today anymore, but when I was 13 or 14 I remember kids in school talking about their sexual exploits with their maids—it was like a normal thing. And I would even get invited to go and f**k a maid, somebody's maid. I never did it—I didn't lose my virginity with a maid. But a lot of my colleagues did. And this was seen as something that was normal. Not that, you know, mothers would be proud of it. They would maybe turn a blind eye, but the fathers would be very proud of their kids, you know, having sex with the maid. But now things have changed a little bit because, you know, after the '70s sexuality changed in Brazil. At the time it was something that maybe the girls from the good families wouldn't really do, or maybe would wait longer until they could actually arrive at a sexual life. But today it's like everybody has sex very early on, so the thing with the maids is not [*as much of an issue as it was previously*]. But that came from slavery, because if you went back to the plantations it was known that the masters would go over to the slaves' quarters and have sex with the maids, and then children would be born out of wedlock, and there would be a new generation that would be half-white, half-black. I think that took place in America also.

H2N: I wonder also—if you could put your old film critic hat on—films like yours from what I see have become kind of rare. What we call art films, at least in recent years, have tended to be very sparse. Your film seems to fit into more of a 20th Century tradition of filmmaking.

KMF: I actually thought about that: I didn't want to make one of these sparse, laconic—I actually think my film is laconic enough, but, you know, not in the way that you have two people say seven words to each other in 30 minutes, because that is what is supposed to be meaningful. I think personality comes from the personal touches you're able to put in your film or in your book or in your music. And sometimes I think people confuse that with certain rules that have to be applied to get a kind of result, and I think that's the negative aspect, but the other thing that explains why some of these modern films are

sparse and laconic is maybe the use of new technology—today you can make a film in a weekend, and you can make a good film during the weekend. But sometimes, or most times, they don't turn out to be good films. Because they were made in a weekend. [KMF laughs] So I just made a very—well, definitely for my standards—big film, and I made it for almost seven weeks—which is like crazy for me—with some good money, and I just tried to make it as full as possible, make it very classic and a film with wide lenses and wide screen and zooms and people talking and other people listening and then they answer back! [KMF laughs] And then suddenly the film shuts the f**k up and nothing happens, but why not? And then there's noise. And hopefully that would work. I had great feedback from the script. The script went to the usual funds around Brazil, and we got the money very quickly because people reacted—they said they couldn't put it down, it was like a page-turner. But the same people who said it was a page-turner asked me if that would work as a film. I said, "I don't know. I can tell you that I don't know because films are organic. I don't know. I hope so, but I don't know." Yeah, that's what's fascinating: you never know what's gonna happen. I didn't know anything about my film until I began to get the first five reactions in Rotterdam. After five reactions I looked at Emilie, my wife, and said, "I think it's gonna be all right." Well of course I had the selection—that's one sign. That's a good sign but you don't know. It's like you—when you write a review sometimes people react in a way they didn't react to the last review and you wonder why. Maybe you caught a nerve.

H2N: What about “Crazy Little Thing Called Love”—was that always the song that was gonna be in that scene?

KMF: Well, that's funny because we finished that day I think 25 minutes early. But there was this vibe of sadness in Maeve's face, which I thought, "Maybe I should photograph her, sitting on the couch." It would be like you smoke marijuana and then you come here and you're completely like feeling bad, because of the thing with the sister, and she's really sad and I said, "Do you know 'Crazy Little Thing Called Love'?" And she says, "Yeah, but can you play it again because it's been quite a while." And I played it for her on the headphones, and, "Yeah let's just shoot you, you're just lying there, really sad, like you are now." [KMF laughs] And then I shot it, in one shot, without any cuts, without even the clapper board. We just shot it. And then I played it live, in the room. I played it very loud, the song. And the good thing is that I know—he's a wonderful person—the press guy for Queen, in England, so I thought that maybe I could try to buy the song, and we ended up buying the song. Yeah, I really like when that plays. Yeah, you get stoned and you're sad and it's not a good thing. And then you play music and maybe it's a little better.

The full conversation can be accessed at:

<http://www.hammertonail.com/interviews/a-conversation-with-kleber-mendonca-filho-neighboring-sounds/>

Kleber Mendonça Filho

Biography:

Kleber Mendonça Filho was born in 1968 in Recife, Brazil. He graduated with a degree in journalism and has worked extensively as a film critic as and as the programmer of Recife's top alternative cinema. In the 90s he made documentaries, experimental films and fiction. Over the last decade, his short films have won over 100 awards in Brazil and abroad, with selections in Karlovy-Vary, BAFICI, Rotterdam, Recontres Cinemas D'Amerique Latine de Toulouse, Clermont-Ferrand and Cannes. His first feature, the documentary *Critico*, focused on the troubled relationship between filmmakers and critics through a personal series of interviews recorded over a period of eight years. *Neighboring Sounds* is his first fictional feature.

Cast

Irandhir Santos

Gustavo Jahn

Meve Jinkings

W. J. Solha

Irma Brown

Lula Terra

Yuri Holanda

Clébia Souza

Albert Tenório

Nivaldo Nascimento

Felipe Bandeira

Clara Pinheiro De Oliveira

Sebastião Formiga

Mauricéia Conceição

Clodoaldo

João

Bia

Francisco

Sofia

Anco

Dinho

Luciene

Ronaldo

Fernando

Nelson

Fernanda

Claudio

Mariá

Crew

Written and Directed by

Produced by

Cinematography and Camera

Art Director

Editing

Sound Design

Sound Recording

Soundtrack

Assistant Director

Production Managers

Casting

Costume Design

Kleber Mendonça Filho

Emilie Lesclaux

Pedro Sotero & Fabricio Tadeu

Juliano Dornelles

K. Mendonça Filho & João Maria

K. Mendonça Filho & Pablo Lamar

Nicolas Hallet & Simone Dourado

DJ Dolores

Clara Linhart

Brenda Da Mata & Renato Pimentel

Daniel Aragão

Ingrid Mata