



ONLY WHEN I DANCE

Directed by Beadie Finzi

“A real life Billy Elliot!” – Jane Rosenthal, *Tribeca Film Festival*



***Brazil, United Kingdom | 2009 | Documentary
In English and Portuguese with Subtitles | 78 min.***

Film Movement Press Contact:

Claire Weingarten | 109 W. 27th Street, Suite 9B | New York, NY 10001 |
tel: (212) 941-7744 x 208 | fax: (212) 491-7812 | claire@filmmovement.com

Film Movement Theatrical Contact:

Rebeca Conget | 109 W. 27th Street, Suite 9B | New York, NY 10001 |
tel: (212) 941-7744 x 213 | rebeca@filmmovement.com

SYNOPSIS

This feel-good documentary follows Irlan and Isabela, two teenagers from the violent favelas of Rio de Janeiro, as they pursue their dreams of becoming professional ballet dancers. This inspiring story takes us from Rio - where their communities must raise the funds to support their ambitions - to exhilarating ballet competitions in New York and Switzerland. It's a film about their determination to dance, and the price one must pay for talent, ambition and success.

FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

OFFICIAL COMPETITION:

Tribeca Film Festival

OFFICIAL SELECTION:

SilverDocs

Edinburgh International Film Fest

Rio International Film Fest

Sao Paulo International Film Fest

Palm Springs International Film Fest

Sheffield International Doc Fest

Vancouver International Film Fest

Doha Tribeca International Film Fest

Warsaw International Film Fest

San Francisco International Doc Fest

Calgary Global Fest Film

Jacksonville Film Fest

Southern Appalachian International Film Fest

Seville International Film Fest

Dominican Global Film Fest

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Only When I Dance has been the most delightful documentary to work on. Working with two great kids, we have travelled an emotional and inspiring journey together over the past year.

The team had worked really hard to cast the best possible characters, choosing two young kids genuinely facing raw challenge and on the cusp of real change. And while it took three long years of research, it was worth the wait.

Irlan and Isabela are not only great dancers but delightful people, who were so generous to us as a crew, and we would film together for over a year, capturing pivotal moments in their lives. The result is a truly nourishing narrative arch, which you rarely encounter as a filmmaker.

Of course Rio was also a stunning backdrop to the documentary. Yet so many fantastic films have come out of Brazil in the last few years, I was anxious not to fall into filmic clichés. To try and present a fresh and honest portrait of this city, and of two working class families determined to fight for a better life. We found truly rich themes of race, of class and, of course, great dance. In all, a wonderful set of ingredients to work with.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

Beadie Finzi

What do you look for in a good documentary?

The key to most good documentaries is capturing a moment of change or transition. This story had some fantastic ingredients; two kids on the cusp of adulthood, trying to realize an impossible dream, where the difference between success and failure would mean everything.

But it was also a tough sell - set in Brazil, shot in Portuguese, a ballet documentary; all pretty niche. However the more I examined the story, the more the universal themes shone through, themes of race and class and the sheer determination, and love of family. And this was really exciting - something I knew could translate to anyone, anywhere.

How did you get involved in this project?

Giorgia first came to see me about three years ago, asking my advice about making a dance film in Brazil. We spent a lot of time looking at different characters, working out the complexity of narrative needed to sustain a feature doc, and discussing how to make this film distinct from other competition documentaries, or dance documentaries. By the time she found Irlan and Isabela, we looked at the tape and knew immediately these two were the ones. The right kids, at the right moment; we began shooting right away.

The characters all speak Portuguese – how did you cope with the language barrier?

I was quite intimidated at first at the language barrier. I had never made a film entirely in a foreign language. But co-producer Christina Daniels was a fantastic collaborator. She was my ears and my mouth. We worked very closely and quietly together on location. I would brief her with questions and she would relay these to the characters and so on. Occasionally I completely misunderstood the sense of a conversation, but most of the time I could follow the debate. In a strange way it taught me to watch in a different way - to really look at my characters and listen to their inflection. I think I also was able to maintain a little more distance - not a bad thing since I was also shooting and recording sound on location.

The narrative was unfolding as you went along – did this make the story harder to tell?

It's always the case with documentaries: you have an idea of the story line that would make the best film but you have to be able to respond to changing fortunes of your characters. For example, we shot a large segment with Tiago Soares in London that didn't make it into the final film. It can be very frustrating having to constantly re-think and re-strategize every day of filming, but on the other hand it's always dangerous to be too rigid about the narrative. However, we cast the film very carefully and were confident that these were exceptionally talented kids, so we always knew that we were going to have a film, whether they made it through the competitions or not.

You were with Isabela and Irlan for such a long time and at such a critical point in their lives – was it hard to keep an emotional distance?

Yes. Really tough. When you have worked so long with your characters, the highs and lows affect the whole crew profoundly. And it is difficult to keep your head and keep the interests of the film, of the narrative, in sharp focus.

What was your experience of filming in Rio?

Filming in Rio was very tough. You can't just get out of the van and shoot where you want, what you want. The threat of violence and of theft is huge. The standing joke was, whenever I asked "can I shoot that", the driver would answer "no, you'll get shot at"... The problem is that the threat is so high and so consistent you become quite blasé, and it is a real effort to remember as director you are responsible for a whole crew and their safety. You are constantly torn between wanting to get a certain shot vs considering whether it is worth taking the personal risk involved in getting it. In the end we did get through the year but not before a few hair-raising incidents in the favelas where you really questioned if it was all worthwhile.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Beadie Finzi has been working in documentaries since 1994. After making a number of films for UK Broadcasters, Beadie produced *Unknown White Male*, a feature documentary about a young amnesiac rediscovering his life, which was selected for Sundance and Oscar shortlisted in 2006.

Beadie went on to direct *The Hunger Season*, an emotional essay examining the impact of humanitarian food aid. Filmed in Swaziland in Southern Africa over two years, the film was commissioned by Channel 4, NHK Japan, SBS Australia and YLE Finland.

Beadie has just finished shooting and directing *Only When I Dance*, which charts the story of two young kids trying to dance their way out of the favelas of Rio.

Beadie is one of the founding directors of the Channel 4 BRITDOC Foundation, a grant giving body which invests in independent documentary filmmakers.

CHARACTERS & BACKGROUND

Irlan Santos da Silva

Eighteen-year-old Irlan grew up in Rio de Janeiro's most violent favela, the Complexo do Alemão, where his family still live. He first discovered dance at the age of 12, when his cousin invited him to join a dance class and the teachers were quick to notice his talent; he won a scholarship to the Centro De Danca Rio and has never looked back. The elite world of classical ballet is in stark contrast with his impoverished upbringing, and Irlan often says he is caught between the two opposing worlds, that of the favela and that of ballet. While he is dark skinned, he isn't considered to be black like Isabela, and so doesn't experience the same racial prejudice that she has to cope with. In 2005 he won first place at New York's Grand Prix Ballet competition, as well as Brazil's prestigious Joinville competition, and although he appeared in media articles throughout Brazil, his teacher Mariza Estrella thought he wasn't ready to take up any of the training places he was offered, and so held him back. The documentary follows what may well be his last opportunity to gain a place at an international ballet school.

Isabela Coracy

Seventeen-year-old Isabela started dancing at the age of 10 and is the only black girl at the Centro de Danca Rio, and also one of the most talented. She lives with her parents and brother in Cachambi, a poor neighbourhood on the outskirts of Rio. All she has ever wanted to do is dance, but becoming a professional ballet dancer is unheard of around there. The documentary sees Isabela preparing for her first international dance competition – the New York Grand Prix, that took place in April 2008. In order to realize her dreams of studying ballet abroad – the only option for a black ballerina in Brazil – she must win a prize in New York. Yet to get there she must negotiate the other girls' jealousy of her talent, and also the wider difficulties and added difficulties posed by her gender and her race.

CREDITS

CREW

Directed by

Beadie Finzi

Produced by

Giorgia Lo Savio

Nikki Parrott

Original Music by

Stephen Hilton

Cinematography by

Beadie Finzi

Felipe Reinheimer

Film Editing by

Felipe Lacerda

Alan Levy

Sound Editor

Pip Norton

CAST

Irlan Santos de Silva

Himself

Isabela Coracy Alves Nascimento Santos

Herself

Mariza Estrella

Herself