

**STRAND
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presents

GABRIEL AND THE MOUNTAIN

A FILM BY FELLIPE GAMARANO BARBOSA

Starring João Pedro Zappa and Caroline Abras

PRESS NOTES

Official Selection:

Cannes Film Festival, Critics' Week

International Film Festival Rotterdam

COLCOA Film Festival

Country of Origin: Brazil | France

Format: DCP/2.35/Color

Sound Format: Dolby SRD

Running Time: 131 minutes

Genre: Drama

Not Rated

In English, Portuguese, Swahili, Chichewa and French with English Subtitles

National Press Contact:

Jenna Martin / Marcus Hu

Strand Releasing

Phone: 310.836.7500

jenna@strandreleasing.com

marcus@strandreleasing.com

Please download photos from our website:

<https://strandreleasing.com/films/gabriel-and-the-mountain/>

SYNOPSIS

Before entering a prestigious American university, Gabriel decides to travel the world for one year, his backpack full of dreams. After ten months on the road, he arrives in Kenya where he is joined by his girlfriend. But discovering Africa as a tourist is not enough for Gabriel. He decides to go deeper, leaving on his own for a journey across countries, new friendships and raw emotions to finally reach Mount Mulanje in Malawi, his final destination. Based on a true story.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES BY FELLIPE BARBOSA

Gabriel Buchmann was an old friend of mine. We went to elementary and high school together, the same school where my first fiction feature “Casa Grande” takes place. We also went to the same university for Economics in Rio before I left for the US to study film. The idea to turn his story into a film started soon after the news of his disappearance in July 2009, when there was still hope he’d be alive to tell us his story. The Mulanje locals Luka White and Bernard Nyove found his body 19 days later with all his belongings, and his photo camera was the starting point of my research. He left us with many unanswered questions, so my impulse to make this film was also a desire to find some answers.

Since Gabriel is a very playful, almost clown-like at times, I thought he deserved a fiction film rather than a documentary. Gabriel was Brazilian, and it’s very different to be a Brazilian traveler in Africa than a European or an American one. There’s a much closer relationship between Africa and Brazil, because of a shared past that is still very much present. At the same time, it’s rare to see a Brazilian travelling in East Africa, since it’s so far away. Hence Gabriel is an opportunity to also tell this story. He doesn’t want to be perceived as a Mzungu or as a tourist. But at the same time, he is a Mzungu who’s attracted to touristic places. Because Gabriel is Brazilian, he is full of contradictions that make him a very special character.

Researching Gabriel’s journey was very intense work, but also extremely rewarding. There were two different research trips: first in 2011, when I travelled from Kampala to Malawi with my brother, and then to Tanzania with Clara Linhart, assistant director and one of the producers. Then in 2015, with Clara and Vincho Nchogu, co-producer from Kenya who helped a lot in finding the people who then became the characters in the film. Every time we found another real character that Gabriel had met 7 years before, I felt his presence and I knew we were on the right path. I really liked these people. It was as if Gabriel had already put together an amazing cast.

It was particularly hard to locate Lenny, the Maasai who hosted Gabriel. We had searched a couple of villages with the same name as his, had given up, travelled south to Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, where we found his real guide after spending half a day at the park’s main gate showing his pictures to everyone. After climbing Kilimanjaro, we went back to Nairobi. That same day, Gabriel’s mother Fatima found Lenny’s phone number amongst Gab’s belongings in Rio. Call it synchronicity.

But our main source was Cristina Reis, Gabriel’s girlfriend at the time, who travelled through Tanzania and Zambia with him. She helped me a lot with the script, and their relationship makes for almost the entire second act of the film.

The shoot itself posed its own logistical challenges. The most challenging situations were the two big mountains we had to climb, no doubt. I didn't have a crew of mountaineers, but they had faith in my proposition to shoot at the real places, no matter how hard it would be to get there. It was a miracle that all the 13 crew members who set out to climb Kilimanjaro arrived at the top, at a route said to have a 25% success rate. Special kudos to my DP Pedro Sotero, who fought harder than anyone and was surprisingly lucid at 5.850 meters. I'm so grateful to this crew.

And then there was Mount Mulanje. Arriving at the place where Gabriel's body was found was no easy feat. By then, we were all exhausted after 70 days on the road. The last day we had to walk 4 hours to shoot the opening and closing scenes of the film, and then walk back -- which meant we had 2-3 hours to actually shoot. I guess we were very efficient, since there is about 10 minutes of film from that one day of shoot.

Another great challenge was the road. I was scared of travelling 6.000 kilometers by road, on an overland truck, with actors, crew and equipment. Another challenge was to get the gear onto the Zanzibar ferry, and then to arrive at the hotel with all the equipment. I still don't know how nothing was lost.

In comparison, working with the mix of professional and non-professional actors was easier than I had feared. João Pedro Zappa and Caroline Abras, the professional actors who play Gabriel and Cristina, had the script, and we rehearsed in Rio before the shoot, with the help of casting director Amanda Gabriel. So even if they improvised a lot, they delivered the scenes I had written.

With the locals, I didn't share the script. Since they aren't trained actors, I didn't want them to memorize text. I treated the scenes very naturally, as if they were easy, since the scenes were very simple and involved actions they were used to. So the biggest challenge was to transmit a sense of calm and faith to them, and not let them see my anxiety, which was always there of course. Most of them really loved Gabriel, so they were happy to relive the moments they shared.

On a personal level, the most difficult part was the editing. Fortunately, I worked with three great professionals: French editor Théo Lichtenberger, French producer Yohann Cornu and Brazilian sound editor Waldir Xavier -- who helped me find some objectivity and tell the best possible story. Also crucial was the help from my two cowriters, Lucas Paraizo and Kirill Milhanovsky. I did not want to idealize Gabriel. He wasn't always an easy person, after all, and to confront that in the film wasn't easy either.

I felt that the work we were doing would help his spirit understand what happened, so he could let go. I felt that I would eventually help his mother, sister and friends to find some closure. I was very moved many times, and felt very lucky to be doing this. Because death is not only sad and tragic and painful -- it's also the greatest mystery of life. It makes us stronger to look at it.

FELLIPE BARBOSA (DIRECTOR)

Born in Rio de Janeiro, Fellipe Barbosa directed the short films *La Muerte es pequeña* and *Salt Kiss*, selected at NYFF, Clermont-Ferrand, Guadalajara and Sundance. In 2008, he developed the screenplay of *Casa Grande* at the Sundance labs; the film premiered at Rotterdam's competition in 2014. *Gabriel and the Mountain* is his second fiction feature.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

2014 CASA GRANDE (F)
2011 LAURA (D)
2008 CANOSAONE (D)
2007 BEIJO DE SAL (S)
2005 LA MUERTE ES PEQUEÑA (S)

JOÃO PEDRO ZAPPA'S BIOGRAPHY (GABRIEL)

João Pedro Zappa has performed in several plays and was nominated for the "Best Actor" award at FITA 2014 (International Theater Festival of Angra) for the award winning Oscar Wilde play "The Importance of Being Perfect" directed by Daniel Herz (2013-2014). He was nominated for the Contigo Award, TV Revelation Category, for playing the character "Greg" in the "Second Lady" TV-series (2014), he also acted in "The Big Family" (2012), "Tapas e Beijos" (2014), among others in TV Globo, Multishow and GNT Channels.

João Pedro also participated in several short films, seven out of them as protagonist, including "Dead Living", selected by La Quinzaine des Réalisateurs of Cannes Festival in 2012. He has performed in nine feature films, among them "Auto Exposure" (Juliana Reis), "Eden" (Bruno Safadi) and "Ressaca" (Bruno Viana), for which he won the Best Actor Award at the Cine-Esquema-Novo Festival in Porto Alegre. In 2013 he starred in the film "Good Luck" by Jorge Furtado, directed by Carolina Jabor, alongside Fernanda Montenegro, and in 2016, "Gabriel and the Mountain" is his second fiction feature.

CAROLINE ABRAS' BIOGRAPHY (CRISTINA)

In 2006, Carol Abras performed the short film "Something Like That" (Esmir Filho and Mariana Bastos) and won her first prize at the Gramado Film Festival in the category of Best Actress. In the following years, she worked on projects such as "Perto de Qualquer Lugar" (Mariana Bastos), "Bellini and the Devil" (Marcelo Galvão), "If Nothing Else Works Out" (José Eduardo Belmonte), with five winning nominations (BRAFFTV Toronto, LABRFF Los Angeles, Festival Du Cinéma Brésilien de Paris, Rio International Film Festival and Sergipe Latin American Film Festival), "Estação" (Marcia Farias), "Screen" (Carlos Nader), "Augustas" (Francisco Cesar Filho), "Blue Blood" (Lírio Ferreira) and "Entre Idas e Vindas" (José Eduardo Belmonte).

Besides starring in “Gabriel and the Mountain”, Carol’s current projects include the feature films “Rodantes” (Leandro HBL) and “Something Like That - The Movie”..

CAST

GABRIEL	João Pedro Zappa
CRISTINA	Caroline Abras
	Alex Alembe
	Lenny Siampala
	John Goodluck
	Rashidi Athuman
	Rhosinah Sekeleti
	Luke Mpata
	Lewis Gadson

CREW

DIRECTOR	Fellipe Barbosa
PRODUCER	Rodrigo Letier Roberto Berliner Clara Linhart Yohann Cornu
COPRODUCERS	ARTE FRANCE CINEMA, Olivier Père, Rémi Burah CANAL BRASIL Vincho Nchogu
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER	Mauro Pizzo
SCREENPLAY	Fellipe Barbosa Lucas Paraizo Kirill Mikhanovsky
CINEMATOGRAPHY	Pedro Sotero
EDITING	Théo Lichtenberger
SOUND	Pedro Sá Earp Waldir Xavier
PRODUCTION DESIGN	Ana Paula Cardoso
MUSIC	Arthur B. Gillette