

BRAZIL BRAZIL



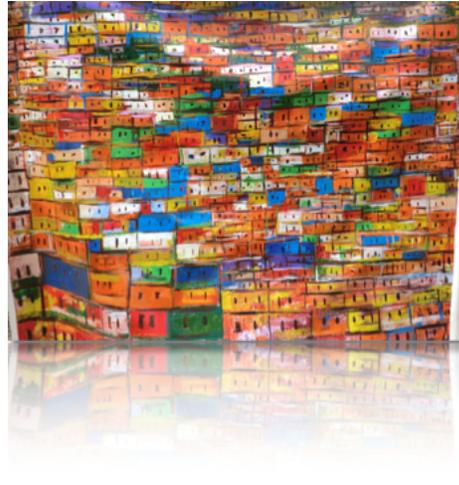
Amazonas & Rio

John Alexander

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Brazil, Brazil: Amazonas and Rio

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PART TWO: RIO DE JANEIRO



1. Why Rio?

Getting Mugged

'Rio? Did I hear you right? Did you say you're going to Rio?' asks Bert, as we sit and drink coffee in a Stockholm café.

'Yep, that's right.'

'Why Rio?'

'What do you mean, "Why Rio?" It's Rio!'

'OK. Just make sure when those guys rob you, you give them everything.'

'Guys? What guys?'

'The guys that are gonna rob you.'

'Why should these guys rob me?'

'Everyone gets robbed in Rio. You don't want to mess with these guys. Just give them everything.'

'You been to Rio?'

'Never been. Don't need to. Trust me. I know these guys. Just give them everything.'

'Are you sure? Everyone gets mugged in Rio?'

'Everyone. In broad daylight. Cops stand around. Don't do nothing. These guys, they shoot you for a \$5 watch.'

'OK. So in Rio, you get mugged. You hand over everything. And you don't mess with these guys.'

He pulls up a travelers forum on the net.

'Take a look...'

Mother and two children, on holiday from Iowa, held up in broad daylight on Copacabana Beach. Passers-by look on and don't react. English male, aged 25, from Leatherhead, held up by young kid with a knife just by a petrol station. 'Why don't you do something?' shouts English tourist. 'Hey', shouts petrol station guy, 'consider yourself lucky his pal over there didn't shoot you!' Middle aged German woman from Dusseldorf, held up at knife point. Gets so

mad she whacks assailant over the head with her beach bag. Kid runs off.

'She was taking a big risk', says Bert. 'Most people get shot or stabbed. So when they hold you up, just hand over everything.'

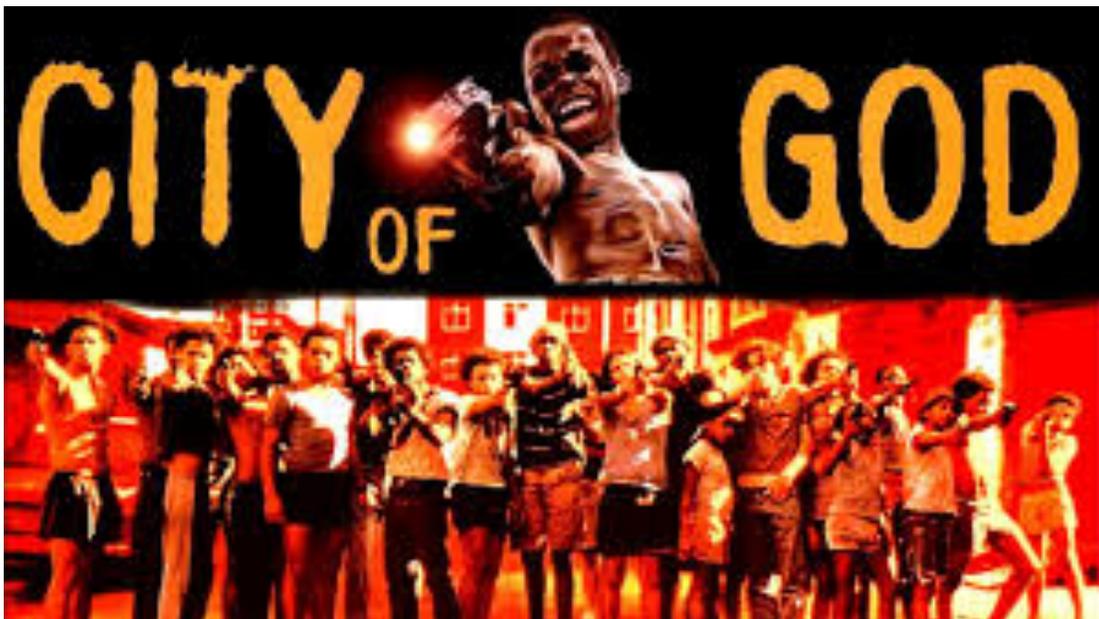
'Can it be really this bad? Sounds like Port au Prince or Liberia. Rio de Janeiro – a city of 10 something million people – not everyone can just get held up, right? I mean people still have to go to work, ride buses, get taxis...'

'Don't count on taxis', says Bert. 'If you're in the wrong place they won't stop. They drive straight through red lights. In fact police recommend for drivers at nighttime to drive through red lights.'

'This sounds terrible. Why do people even go there?'

'Hey. You should be lucky you're not going to Sao Paulo.'

'I'm doing a stop-over at Sao Paulo. What's wrong with Sao Paulo?'



Favela gangs, apparently. Worse even than Rio. Big prison riot at Sao Paulo's notorious Carandiru prison. A story about how a favela gang, armed with machine guns and pistols, blocked a motorway into the city and held up all the middle class folks stuck in morning

peak hour traffic. Took the police 40 minutes to get to the scene and the gang was long gone, with a haul of brief cases, watches, i-phones, computers and who knows... state secrets? The problem with living in gated communities is that sometimes you have to drive outside the gate.



More stories of violent deeds in Rio. Apart from the traveler's forums there's the movies. Made a big mistake of watching some Rio films before leaving. *Last Stop 174* – the drama documentary from 2008, about a *favelas* kid holding up a bus, and how the situation gets completely out of hand, based on *Bus 174*, the documentary made five years earlier. *City of God* (based on the drug wars of the 70s, 80s and 90s and the shoot-outs in the favelas, spilling out into the suburbs), and *Tropa de Elite*,¹ and 2 – the most popular films in Brazilian film history, also loosely based on factual events of cops and gangsters shooting it out in every quarter of the city and the favelas of Rio. Luckily, also saw the Pixar film, *Rio*, (and again as in-flight movie from Lisbon to Sao Paolo), about Blu the Parrot, with its catchy title tune, bright colours, and samba music. Going to Rio. Think positive.



Dead Body in the Japanese Gardens

Arrive at the *Jardim Botânico* on Monday morning, the day after the big tropical storm. Trees fallen down, bamboo across alley-ways, palms uprooted. The gardens virtually empty of people, and considering it's about 35° in the shade, today seems a good day for a visit. A woman reporter from Rio's *O Globo TV* with cameraman reporting in front of a huge tree snapped in half. A brutal storm even by Rio standards.

Midway during the report, her attention is taken by the flashing blue light of a local police car. Then more police cars, an ambulance, a fire truck and a vehicle marked *militia*. All flashing blue lights. Looks serious. She fires off some abrupt instructions to the camera guy, and he looks none too pleased. They run off to the new scene, and we follow behind at a safe distance, two innocent tourists admiring the plants.



Rio local TV reporting; dead body in the Jardim Botânico

This part of the Jardim is cordoned off with yellow and black tape, and two officers stand at the pathway, shaking their heads and their hands. 'Nao, nao, nao.'

'What's going on?'

'Nao, nao, nao,' says one, indicating that we move on, while the other places his hand on the pistol in his holster. We linger a little, and catch a glimpse of two guys with a black body bag, and the unmistakable pink of human flesh being dragged from the stream that runs through the Japanese Gardens. No doubt, a dead body.



View across the Lagoa from Jardim Botânico

So what's happened? The police are obviously not forthcoming and all avenues to the crime scene are blocked, cordoned off, and guarded by pistol carrying police or AK-47 carrying militia. The militia guys are also wearing much larger boots. Now, two more tourists have sauntered in this same general direction, an elderly English guy with an unsettling grin and home counties accent, and his much younger local Portuguese-speaking companion, immaculately dressed considering the heat of the day and the informality of the location.

Local guy exchanges a few words with the police and is given the same kind of marching orders that we received, embellished with familiar phrases no doubt, but with a ridiculous explanation, that there's nothing to see – police are cleaning up after the storm. Just some fallen trees. And the black bag? What about the black bag? A wounded animal, also injured during the storm; now been taken care of. Sure. Six units and twelve officers – for a capybara with a broken leg?!

Monday morning – the gardens have been closed since Saturday afternoon – which leaves plenty of time for a drug gang to dump a body; alternatively a hit squad – police or gangsters, take your pick – to drag the corpse under the foliage of genuine imported Japanese shrubs and plants by the ornamental red wooden bridge. So the rumours are true. Rio is a violent and dreadful place, and people are murdered frequently, and bodies dumped unceremoniously anywhere, even here, the Botanical Gardens, just a few minutes walk from the Lagoa (lake), the jockey club racing course, and a further five minutes from the exclusive shopping district of Leblon. This is supposedly the 'safe' part of the city.

Nothing to do but take in the scenery – the gardens are as splendid as the guide-books say, and the avenues of palms are as recognisable from the stock shots of Rio from the 1930s and 40s featured in *Flying Down to Rio* (Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, 1933), and *Road to Rio* (Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, 1943), unchanged amazingly to the present, with *The Fast and the Furious 5*, (2011) also set in Rio.

We speculate upon the unfolding events with our English colleague and his friend, and we conclude foul play, and Mr 'Home Counties' should know; he has been a resident of Rio on and off for 30 years. They are orchid experts and here to take in the much acclaimed 'Orchid House.'

We part company and leave the police to their business, when side-tracked from a small pathway leading from a Victorian orangerie (all boarded up unfortunately), notice a young guy, with his shirt ripped open, sitting on a bench just 50 yards from the cordoned off area, clutching his head and wailing. His head is covered in a large x-shaped bandage, and his eyes are wild and psychotic. If this isn't the killer... are the police blind?

It is a shady, half hidden pathway; nevertheless, if you have a ranting psycho just fifty metres away, holding himself as if in a strait-jacket, rocking back and forth, mad eyes now darting in our direction. OK. Time to walk slowly in another direction. Most likely the blood stained knife is in the plastic bag beside him, or worse yet, a firearm, still loaded, still warm from the last kill.

From here you can see that the body bag has been loaded into the ambulance, but the vehicles remain – from at least four different local units – and the shadowy figures of investigators brush their way through the undergrowth and thick vegetation that it is the hallmark of botanical gardens. Looking for a weapon? For blood splatter? Why aren't they looking for the killer? Who's right here sitting on a park bench, deranged, psychotic and looking in our general direction.

The Jardim Botânico are huge, with one side bordering on the Tijuca National Park, the largest urban rain forest in the world - a huge wall of green that extends as far as the eye can see. From any position in the gardens the imposing statue of Cristo Redentor gazes outward toward the Atlantic Ocean, framed in by the branches and leaves from exotic plants and trees imported from around the world.

About an hour later we are in the Orchid House, studying a colourful display headed with a banner: 'Orchids: Sex and Magic' with a brief history of the role of orchids in sexual dalliance. We

bump into Mr Home Counties and local guy on the stone bridge over the water feature in the middle of the orchid display. They have succeeded in gathering the low-down on the entire course of the morning's events.



The victim is a 90 year old Japanese male. He worked part-time in the gardens, voluntarily, tending to the Japanese Gardens. A gardener. By all accounts, late Friday afternoon, he suffered a heart attack, and fell down dead beside the small stream. Co-workers discovered his body when they came to work this morning. He had been reported missing on Friday, whereabouts unknown. Now they know.

'So... not a victim of gangland warfare? Or a brutal police execution? Or a victim of the crazy guy sitting on the park bench?

No, no, and crazy guy is, apparently, just that... a crazy guy sitting on a park bench.

And how did this wandering duo come by so lucid an account of the mystery of the dead body in the Japanese Gardens?

The officious police officer who had ushered us all away so indignantly earlier, was apparently stricken by a bad conscience

over the outrageousness of his deceit. Wounded capybara indeed. Chased after local guy and spilled the beans. Most likely an accurate account. There is nothing like an active imagination to paint pictures of dread and fear upon what has proven to be, after just two days, a city of stunning beauty, filled with people – those we have met anyway – who are relaxed, easy-going and... normal?



Tea at Starbucks, Coffee with Carlos

I gave up on tea the first day in Brazil. ‘Tea’ I’d said to the guy behind the counter. ‘What kind?’ ‘Ordinary tea. Black tea – with just a little milk.’ We don’t have black tea.’ He pushed the box my way, seemingly not opened too often. White tea, green tea, camomile, rooibos, matte of course, though not as popular in Brazil as neighbouring Argentina and Paraguay.

Non-coffee drinkers are hard pressed in Brazil - coffee is the fuel that runs the engine of the nation. Previously my only favorable coffee-drinking experience was some 15 years earlier, at a roadside shack on a dusty pathway a few kilometres from the ruins of Tikal in Guatemala – sheer ecstasy. Now, after some 3 weeks of acculturating to the Brazilian espresso I am developing a taste for quality inspired by early favourable coffee drinking experiences in Manaus. In Rio the guy who makes the good stuff is a struggling entrepreneur named Carlos, with his modest café in the Ipuduar stretch with Copacabana on one side and Ipanema of the other. The Copacabana Fort straight ahead. With a special Brazilian blend of

Orfeo Negro – Carlos' single espresso, a shot of cold water, and a morsel of special bolo cacao (chocolate cake), blended from two Amazonian strains of light and dark cacao, is a winning combination for a late afternoon revivification. The total equation, espresso, shot of water, and morsel of bolo cacao, occupying less space than a single tea saucer, adds up to a sublime local experience.



Carlos - proud owner of the finest coffee bar in Ipuduar

Nonetheless, three weeks without a cup of Australian Bushells tea was tantamount to withdrawal, and perhaps it is the complexity of tea drinking that is part of the attraction. Tea, sugar, milk, tea-spoon, the strength of the brew, colour, fragrance... The irony, that in all of Rio, the only place to get a proper cup of cha was at Starbucks at Rios high luxury Leblon Shopping Centre. Which was still an undertaking fraught with complications. No sense of tradition. A charming assistant unversed in the art of serving tea

— the sugar bowl? the milk jug? a cup and saucer? (I had politely declined her offer of a cardboard container – I mean, tea in a paper cup!) Still, soft leather lounge chairs, the tray served at the table, quickly followed by an invitation to today's sampling; chocolate fudge - dark enough and rich enough to push the endorphins to every corporal extremity. My toes twitched. I sneezed. Sure signs of quality.

A sure fire way to save the Amazon rain forests; eat more chocolate. According to Lonely Planet, the margins of profit on cultivating

cacao trees, far outweigh the short term profitability by sheering vast tracts of land for avaricious farmers. More chocolate. Happy to oblige.

Also drinking coffee. Another good reason to save money in Brazilian hedge funds. A Starbucks coffee in Rio is as black as midnight and hits the toes in both feet, unlike LA, where the caffeine wafted past the fingertips to die ignominiously in the fumes of the ever present 101 freeway.

A cup of tea at Starbucks. This was the impetus to this whole train of thought – drinking my first substantial cup of tea in three weeks, the only tea in Brazil. By way of association leading to Brazilian coffee, its reputation, its success, and a clarity of taste that will blow your hat off, without any of the bi-effects of an uneasy stomach, burning throat, bitter aftertaste, and proneness to head-ache and nausea. Not least the unpleasantness of the taste, regardless the rest. (Sure, these are personal reflections, which makes any praiseworthy commentary on the subject of coffee that much more pertinent).

Carlos had set up his café on a back street off the beaten path, so not a perfect location. He'd been open a month and was uncertain about the future. Carlos was one of three Cariocas I met who spoke English, and it says something about the uncertainty of the café's future that we could indulge in half conversations on just about anything, without fear of interruption by the demands of clientele. Also he made the second best cup of coffee I ever had.



Brazilian cafezinho

The Trams of S:a Teresa

Guide books 1 – 4 (DK, LP, Berlitz, RG) tell you the same thing. The best way to see S:a Teresa is take the 20 minute tram ride from Centro, which winds up the steep cobbled and narrow streets, into the Bohemian quarter of Rio, celebrated for a more European style of architecture, fusing art deco with creative gardening, bright colours and old world charm. And the trams of course are beautiful, competing with the San Francisco models, also government subsidized, just like the Bay city, so a cheap ride.



Orfeo, tram conductor, meets Eurydice in Orfeo Negro (1959) at the S:a Teresa tram depot.

The added bonus is that these are the same trams featured in the

classic film, *Orfeo Negro* (1959), the film that brought Bossa Nova music to the world. Now, 53 years later, we have the possibility of riding on a tram (quite possibly the same one), and coming to the same tram depot as *Orfeo*, in the opening sequences of the film known to English speaking audiences as *Black Orpheus*. Here at S:a Teresa, *Orfeo*, *Hermes* and *Eurydice*, spell out their respective parts – a Rio version of the classic Greek myth. With *Açucar*, the favelas and the Rio carnival as a background. Starting here at the tram depot of S.a Teresa.

Further up the hill is the former apartment of English Great Train Robber, *Ronnie Biggs*, and just a little further, in a splendid villa (now a museum) overlooking the beaches of *Bogofota*, the former residence of *Gilberto Freyre*, modern Brazil's most prominent political thinker – the author of '*Order and Progress*', now a slogan emblazoned proudly across the blue, green and yellow of the Brazilian flag. All you need is to take a single cheap tram ride from *Centro*. Only one problem. They don't run any more.



S:a Teresa tram depot anno 2012 - end of the line?

No more trams? Nope. Finito. Forever? Not known. Local houses, cars and buses have black and yellow posters – a black tram and a single tear drop. ‘We miss our trams’, says Dirk, our German Tijuca National Park guide who lives not far from here.

On August 28, 2011, a tram came off the rails, skidded down a street for 540 metres and crashed into a concrete wall. The scars and paint marks are still there. The driver was killed, along with four passengers. Another 27 injured. And now, 2012, the future is uncertain for South America’s oldest electrical tram system, dating back to 1896, and designated a national monument in 1988.

[Full story in <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-14696927>]



The tram derailed in Rua Joaquim Murtinho, in St Teresa



No trams. Not a problem. We walk around S:a Teresa instead - it’s a beautiful part of the city with sights and landmarks familiar from movies and the breadth of Rio iconography. The Brazil World Cup mural (Part Three), the colorful S:a Teresa steps, and the cautionary reality that a half a block in the wrong direction, you find yourself in

the quarters with run-down buildings, shuttered up windows and loitering hard-faced criminal types that would most likely, as Bert pointed out, shoot you for a \$5.00 watch.

A walk in the more sensible direction of Flamengo Park, not far from the Botafoga Metro station, takes you to the Carmen Miranda museum — an unassuming concrete bunker in the middle of the long green stretch that takes you to the tunnel and back to Copacabana. A symbolic stroll that matches the life journey of Carmen Miranda herself...



2. Carmen Miranda's Last Days

Carmen Miranda is probably best remembered for a few Hollywood movies, implausible hats decorated with pieces of fruit, and songs sung with an outrageous Latin accent. Songs like *Chica Chica Boom Chic*, *The South American Way*, *Tico Tico* and *I Yi Yi Yi Yi (Like You Very Much)*.

In the 1940s and 50s Latin exotica was the rage in the US, along with tragic deaths of stars and singers. Billy Holliday was 45 – died of a drug overdose; Judy Garland, 47 – overdose of barbiturates, and Carmen Miranda, 46, when she died of a heart attack after appearing on a TV show in 1955. Following a long period of cocaine addiction, drug and alcohol abuse. She was the Brazilian Bombshell, and just before her return to Hollywood, she had spent 48 days of detox at the Copacabana Palace Hotel.



The Brazilian Bombshell, the Mexican Spitfire, the Inca Princess, the Princess of Mexico – how Hollywood loved to elevate the immigrant stars, whose lesser paid cousins were washing cars and cleaning bathrooms. Lupe Velez (Mexican Spitfire) died in 1944,

after attempting to stage a glamorous Hollywood suicide in a luxury hotel suite, choked on her own vomit over a toilet bowl; a bad mix of sleeping tablets, tequila and Mexican food. Dolores del Rio survived stardom to the ripe old age of 78, and Yma Sumac, the Inca Princess and defining voice of 1950s exotica, died 2008, aged 86.

At the Carmen Miranda museum, her glamorous gowns and hats and shoes are displayed in glass cabinets (she was so tiny), also clips from her better known Hollywood films, but it is a display of Carmen Miranda artifacts, not the 'life of...' What happened those last 48 days at the Copacabana when she was trying to get her life back together, only to return to LA and collapse on a live TV show?



From The Gang's All Here (1943) choreographed by Busby Berkley.

On August 5th 1955 she performs on *The Jimmy Durante Show*, where she sings *Hasta la vista*, sinks down to the floor during the

dance number, and Durante turns to the orchestra and says: 'Stop da music.' 'I'm all out of breath,' says Carmen, but insists on finishing the dance number, her celebrated smile looking rather forced, later does a short comedy sketch in the dressing room with Durante, who says thanks for being on the show. He gives her some lilies – white lilies (!), and then she exits through the door with handsome young Latin dance-partners on each arm. And that's the last recorded image of Carmen Miranda, her colourful ensemble (albeit on black and white 1950s TV), contrasted by the white lilies in her arms. What were they thinking of in the studios? Lilies! Symbol of death. In ancient times lilies were placed at the graves of young innocents.



Copacabana Palace Hotel - Carmen Miranda spends six weeks of de-tox in the luxury suite; dies in Hollywood ten days later

Just weeks before, on Copacabana Beach outside the Copacabana Palace, the priestesses and novices of Candomble threw lilies into the Atlantic Ocean, as offerings to Yemanji, the Goddess of the Seas.

Carmen Miranda, alone in the back of the black hearse-like limousine driving her down Sunset Bde, through the empty tacky streets of West Hollywood to her apartment in Beverly Hills. Nodding to the doorman, taking the elevator up to the 8th floor,

looking at herself in the mirror, a fragile little figure, still trembling from a month and half of detox, and clutching a huge bouquet of white lilies. It's all so obvious she thinks. So obvious. When ten days ago the *Iyakekere* – the fraudulent priestess tried to tie the *gri-gri* amulet around her neck, and she tore it off in contempt. 'This is your idea,' Carmen glaring at Aurora, Aurora standing by the balcony and admiring the view from the Copacabana suite and the uncustomary still waves of the blue Atlantic. 'You should drink your tea, Carmen. You're not well.' Because in Brazil tea is a remedy for the ailing. Healthy people drink coffee. Strong black and Brazilian.

That was ten days ago. Carmen sipping tea, her final chilly session with Aurora.

An hour ago. Back at the studios she tells the doctors it is nothing – just a cramp. And Jimmy is very sweet. Insisting on a check-up afterwards, and she says, no, I'm fine, really. I'll just go back to my apartment and rest. She has to get ready for tomorrow's guest appearance at the new shopping centre on Westwood Drive.

Once inside her apartment she goes to fix a brandy to settle her nerves, but doesn't get the glass to her lips before she clutches her chest, sinks to the floor and struggles for the white telephone beside the bed. Her hand grasps the receiver, which tumbles to the floor, but the pain in her chest is too much. 'Odoia', she says, a final greeting, from a childhood memory a beach-side candomblé. The lilies, spread out over the floor, like an offering to Yemanji herself, who waits down there on Venice Beach, just ten minutes away in the black limousine.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blvW39pbLDA>

August 5th, 1955. Counting backwards. Ten minutes. Ten weeks. An hour. Fifteen years. Ten weeks ago Carmen checked into the

Copacabana. To kill off old habits once and for all and begin a new life.

Fifteen years ago she left Rio for Los Angeles and performed her first big billing for American audiences in *Down Argentine Way*. In glorious technicolour. Hardly a Carmen Miranda picture – she does two numbers; a tagged on opening sequence, and a nightclub performance at the end. Otherwise it's a Don Ameche story about playing the horses in Buenos Aires. It's worth seeing for Carmen's scenes. She is magnificent. *Down South America Way* is ambiguous enough to tie in Brazil and Argentina in the same picture, and her nightclub act she is billed as the new sensation from Brazil.



From the opening sequence of Down Argentine Way, 1940

It hardly mattered to the *cariocas* back in Rio. Carmen had committed the unforgivable. Given herself over to the tawdry gringo culture and abandoned the only country in the world that really matters.

The following year she is the star in a genuine Carmen Miranda picture. In *That Night in Rio* (1941) she plays a madly jealous diva star, speaks English no-one can understand – set in a Hollywood fantasy of Rio; luxury sets and phony nightclubs; toned down samba for the American audiences, and enough glamour and foolish love interest to get people even in Pomona to go out to the pictures on a Saturday night and see the Brazilian bombshell with the crazy hats do her exotic thing. A film that was hit world-wide with the exception of Brazil.



'Chica chica boom chic' from That Night in Rio (1941)

Then came wartime escapist Carmen Miranda vehicles; her English getting a little better with each picture: *Weekend in Havana* (1941), *Springtime in the Rockies* (1942), the lamentable *Four Jills in a Jeep* (1943) leading up to the classic, *The Gangs All Here* (1943).

Classic might be an overstatement – Carmen has now become a cliché of her own image 'the girl in the tutti frutti hat', but... Busby Berkley directs and designs some of the most outrageous dance

numbers ever to be staged in a Hollywood musical. The opening sequence is a long and complex single take of passengers and porters boarding a luxury cruise ship, culminating with the off-loading of huge bunches of bananas which transform into the hat of Carmen Miranda. Masterful. Carmen launches into *Brazil*, which has been a big orchestral hit for a few years by now, and the inspiration behind the flights of fantasy in the Terry Gilliam film of the same name.



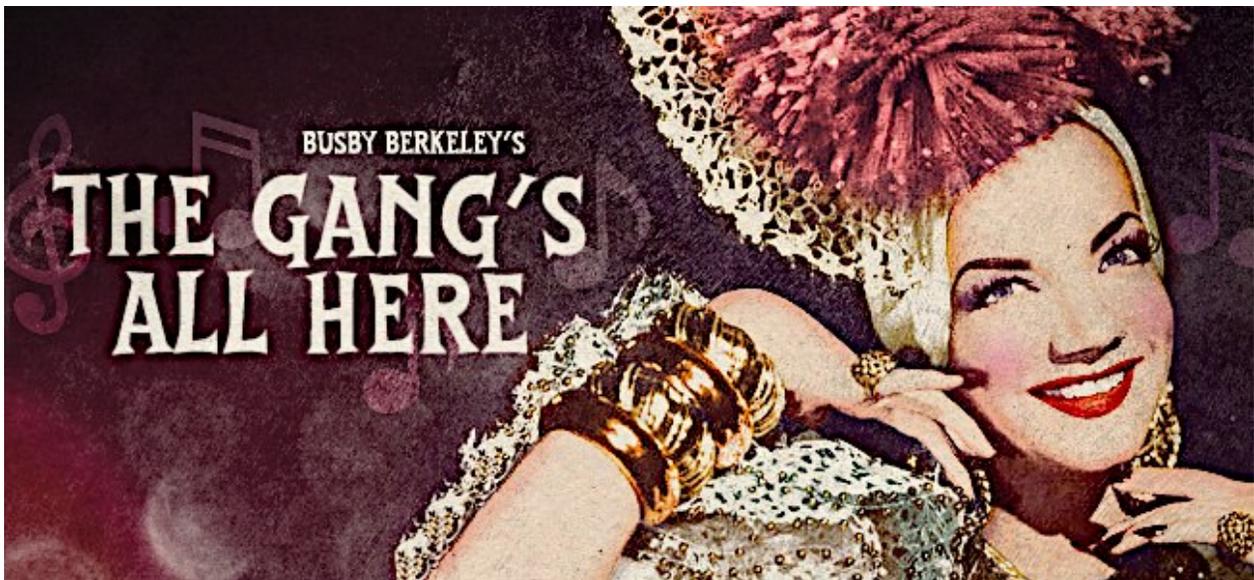
Bananas and strawberries in The Gang's All Here (1943).

This time Carmen is the centre-piece of a huge repertoire dance number, and if the whole piece is starting to look just a little stagey, Busby Berkley's huge technicolour wide-screen camera is pulling back to reveal that it is indeed a stage number – this is Carmen performing at a New York Broadway cabaret show – a performance with enough panache to bring a tear to the most hardened eye.

The number ends and the master of ceremonies introduces Carmen performing 'the brand new dance sensation, the *samba*.' Exotic

young Latin women drag straight-laced reluctant American boys up to the dance floor; Carmen dances with Everett Sloane, the uptight looking guy with the voice of an accountant in a black suit. He is the nerd to Carmen's embodiment of Latin passion and Copacabana sunshine, with her dance, her exuberance, her willful gaze of seduction. Everett Sloane withdraws in terror; 'She a gypsy', he declares outraged.

'She is not a gypsy, she is Brazilian', his knowing friend replies. And adds: 'She's a bombshell!' Benny Goodman does a couple of numbers, and certainly the musical numbers of *The Gang's All Here* outweigh a trite love story between showgirl, Alice Faye, and a serviceman, with Carmen watching from the sidelines.



References to the Pacific War and the loose morals of soldiers on leave, and the baseball metaphors of getting from first base, to a home run, is not the way to charm Alice Faye. She is having nothing of it. Young Johnny Soldier can stay on the batting pad for the duration as far as she is concerned. Alice does slow ballads with a stage number that would make a corpse look animated; Carmen sets the stage on fire with hot fruit and her callipygean samba. Irresistible.

The *piece de resistance*, Busby Berkley's triumph in tastelessness, elevating kitsch to a whole new level, is the banana dance sequence. Carmen is singing about Brazilian 'senoritas – sweet and shy', while 200 young chorus line Brazilian señoritas are performing a dance number with 200 giant bananas, apparently in honour of Carmen, but disturbingly sexual in their rhythmic rising and falling to the manipulative hands of these young innocent dancing girls.

Contrast the plodding middle America Alice Faye numbers that reek of Reagenesque Republican conservatism (Ronald Reagan was head of the Actor's Guild at the time); outdated mediocrity condoned by some version of 1940s moral majority or precursor to the HUAC. It is Brazilian hedonism contra middle America protestantism. The numbers are great but the songs are terrible; 'Paducah is paradise' (it's a town in Kansas where drafted soldiers come from) and poor Carmen has to sing 'Don't Poo Poo Paducah' (as does Benny Goodman). Then 'The Lady in the Tutti Frutti Hat' – already a self parody; and only her performance of *Brazil* resonates with some authenticity. Maybe she's homesick. Maybe it is bravado in the face of her astringent Brazilian fans accusing her of Americanising 'tropicalismo'.



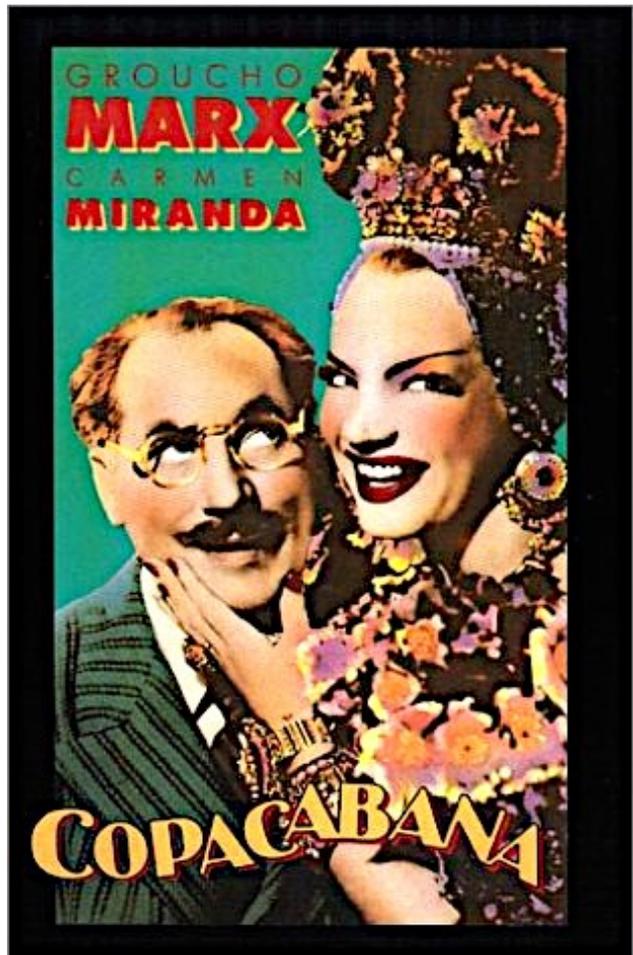
Older sister, Aurora, dances with Donald Duck in Disney's *The Three Callaberos*, 1945

Her dance partner, Tony de Marco, dances like a deity, but he is even smaller than Carmen – what chance of a career? He does a fabulous dance number with Virginia Wilson, and he dances again in a Carmen Miranda film the following year, *Greenwich Village*. Colourful, intensely dramatic nightclub scenes with a bickering Elizabeth Taylor and super nasty Bette Davies; then *Something for the Boys* (1944), *Doll Face* (1945) and *If I'm Lucky* (1946).

But as World War Two draws to its close the technicolour fantasy films of Carmen Miranda give way to black and white noir stories of crime, corruption and the new war against the communists. Older sister Aurora does a stunning and surreal number with Donald Duck in the Disney film *The Three Callaberos* (her sequences filmed in a studio in Rio). And Carmen does a film with the promising title, *Copacabana* (1946).

Groucho Marx gets top billing, but it's Carmen's show, as she plays both herself as the Brazilian Bombshell, and her nightclub competitor, Mademoiselle Fifi, with Groucho the conniving agent.

She does *Chico Chico* after fifteen minutes, gets promoted as the Brazilian Bombshell at the Copacabana Club, six thousand kilometres north of Rio, on Broadway, New York, in the throes of this unlikely partnership with Groucho playing Ed Devereux, the agent. Carmen is his fiancé.



Groucho is a bit slow and wooden without his brothers to pep him along; the script is sluggish and the Copacabana is a dull place indeed in post war black and white. Still, some good Carmen numbers (except for a dreary ballad 'You were so very close to me in Rio de Janeiro'), and a rousing *grande finale* with Carmen, the Andrews Sisters, and a cavalcade of contemporary talent, singing:

Let's do the Copacabana
Comes directly from the caverns of Manhattan
No-one in Brazil has heard of it, but they will
You'll be delighted to know you can
Copa copa copa with the Copacabana

And in the final shot Groucho lifts Carmen's shapely left leg heavily weighted with one of Carmen's enormous wooden platform shoes, currently on show in a glass cabinet at the Carmen Miranda Museum in Flamengo Park.

Carmen in the late 1940s early 1950s is a self-parody by now, doing the same routines she did twelve years earlier. These late movies don't have a lot to recommend them. There's the lamentable *A Date with Judy* (1948) with the most appalling musical clown sequence (no wonder people develop clown phobias), and *Nancy Goes to Rio* (1950) and *Scared Stiff* (1953) where she plays alongside Jerry Lewis. Drugs, alcohol, depression – her agent tells her she's 'got to clean up her act.'

It's 1955. Hollywood is a dirty place, she thinks. I'm not going to get cleaned up here. She returns to her hometown of Rio – checks in at the best hotel and takes their best suite. Six weeks at the Copacabana Palace. Time to reflect on the past and the wild and carefree low budget movies of the 1930s:

[Further reading: *Brazilian Bombshell* by Martha Gil-Montero (1989)]

Carmen Does Rio

O Carnaval Cantado no Rio 1932

A Voz do Carnaval 1933

Alo Alo Brasil 1935

Estudantes 1935

Alo Alo Carnival 1936

Banana da Terra 1939

She spends some time with Aurora, but 'no' she tells her sister, I'm not staying at your luxury manor house up there in the hills of Petropolis, with the glorious views, and gardens and orchids. No, I'm staying here. A hotel suite, room service, chamber maids, and a solid door I can lock every night, and keep out the past, and the memories, and Beverly Hills dealers. Because I'll be going back to Hollywood. I'm going to be a sensation all over again. Television. Everyone watches TV. I'm going to do cabaret numbers live on TV. I've got a booking for the *The Jimmy Durante Show*. And that's only beginning, dear sister of mine. That's only the beginning...

Carmen does Hollywood

Down Argentine Way, 1940

That Night in Rio, 1941

Weekend in Havana, 1942

Springtime in the Rockies, 1942

The Gang's All Here, 1943

Greenwich Village, 1944

Something for the Boys, 1944

Four Jills in a Jeep, 1944

Doll Face, 1946

If I'm Lucky, 1946

Copacabana, 1947

A Date with Judy, 1948

Nancy Goes to Rio, 1950

Scared Stiff, 1953

3. Rio in the Movies

Avid film-goers will know Rio from the movies. Rio must be one of the most cinematically venerated cities in the world. Visiting a city is one thing, and experiencing a place in films is another. You become immersed in a fantasised recreation. As if Bogart's Casablanca ever existed. Rio is special because it is both exotic and recognisable. Copacabana, Ipanema, S:a Teresa, Sugarloaf, Tijuca, the favelas, the Carnival... if we've seen the movies we've experienced somebody's fantasy of Rio de Janeiro. The fantasies of a past generation are also tantalising. Old movies that portray a Rio that transcends history and invention. Here are some of those fantasies... In chronological order a personally biased top ten list (almost) of pre-1950s Hollywood movies featuring Rio:

Hollywood Does Rio

Flying Down to Rio 1933

Charlie Chan Rio 1941

That Night in Rio 1941

Now Voyager 1942

Saludas Amigos 1942

Three Calloberos 1944

Notorious 1946

Road to Rio 1947

Nancy Goes to Rio 1950

Flying Down to Rio, 1933

This is the film that brought Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers together; not as lead roles, but as supporting cast to Dolores del Rio, the 'Princess of Mexico.'

Fred Astaire in *Flying Down to Rio* - big scene at Copacabana Palace, which Bing Crosby and Bob Hope parody in *The Road to Rio*

Flying Down to Rio, 1933 directed by Thornton Freeland, produced fresh off the set of *King Kong*, Merian C Cooper and a Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers earlier in their respective careers, as the main attraction. Although my votes would go to Dolores del Rio. In the words of Miami society girl (Ginger Rogers): 'What have south American girls got below the equator that we haven't', as she watches Dolores whisk away her fresh faced fiancé onto the dance floor.

One answer might be wardrobe upon wardrobe of extravagant lingerie - for Dolores del Rio a collection endowed chiefly by Orson Welles, as token gestures of gratitude for her company.



An original approach to familiar views over Rio in Flying Down to Rio, 1933.

The film is imbued with the spirit of *Gold Diggers of 1933* – same director, same year – which is arguably the best Hollywood musical of the 1930s after *42nd Street*. Perhaps it is this pursuit of wealth, sex and instant gratification that blended the characters (for of story, there is very little) into the Rio de Janeiro setting. Considering the Hollywood film studios post 1930s preoccupation with Rio there is an argument to be made for Fred and Ginger's dancing debut to have triggered off a trend – a trend in transporting Brazilian hedonism to cinema screens. Lightly clad, generously proportioned young women that has prevailed as a Rio percipience to the present day: *Fast + Furious Five*, *Moonraker*, *Blame in on Rio*, *Girl from Rio*, *Emmanuelle in Rio*... it's long list.

Made just after *Dolores del Rio* finished *Bird of Paradise* her presence ensured *Flying Down to Rio* would provide a sought-after hedonistic escape for the audiences of the Great Depression. Dolores naked swim off Polynesian islands in *Bird of Paradise* created a Hollywood scandal swiftly followed by the Hays Code of Censorship. Even the plot bears resemblance.

Travelling from Miami to Rio in a private plane, Dolores and her carioca boyfriend, crash lands on a desert island. Dolores is tempted away from local fiancé for an American boy, Fred's pal, Roger. Every American boy's fantasy.

I guess the turning point is when Roger takes Dolores, who has been acting up with spoilt rich girl impudence, and places her over his knee and gives her the sound spanking she apparently deserves; a Hollywood tradition that continued into the sixties, with John Wayne and Elvis winning over their leading ladies with what today would constitute as a highly politically incorrect form of chastisement.

The stock shots of Rio include in postcard sweeps of Copacabana, Sugarloaf, Cristo Redentor, the racecourse, the Municipal Theatre and the palmed lined avenues of the Jardim Botânico.

Later at Copacabana's Atlantico Hotel, Ginger, admiring the dancing skills of the local girls makes her famous quip about south American girls and 'below the equator', an innuendo not lost as the carioco waltz turns into brisk samba meetings of 'below the equator' minds. The loose plot hinges on Fred and Ginger providing the opening performance for the grand opening of the Atlantico. The big finale is a Busby Berkley sequence mid-air over Copacabana beach, featuring bi-planes, with starlets balancing on upper wings, wearing bathing suits and big smiles.



'South of the equator' fantasies and hedonistic Depression era indulgence

Fred and Ginger – minor characters in the film – also provide a happy couple ending characteristic of its time.

The first time Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers ever dance together in a movie, is this movie, in make-believe Rio, in the ballroom of the Atlantico Hotel (actually the Copacabana Palace), dancing a Brazilian number called the Carioca – foreheads touching ('not a foxtrot' quips Ginger) – to a samba tune of the same name sung by Alice Gentle, Movita Castaneda and Etta Moten.

Fred and Ginger take the lead from the Brazilian dance couples, are joined at the forehead. 'What's with the foreheads?' Ginger asks.

'It's for telepathy.'

'I can see what they're thinking from here.'

At which point a young woman slaps her dance partner who is turning foreheads with a lustful grin. Ginger blushes at her own prurient thoughts. For this number and the bi-plane sequence I would rate this as a must-see Rio movie, with bonus sequences such as the "Flying Down to Rio" number, sung by Fred Astaire, and Ginger Rogers and chorus doing the dance routine in the background.

Other highlights include Fred singing a number where Rio rhymes with sea-oh (!) and the wedding finale featuring American guy Roger and Rio girl Delores, married in a seaplane flying over Ipanema Beach.

It is a film rich with Brazilian hedonism: three American guys grinning lustfully, exacerbated by the closeness of the Brazilian dancers: 'No wonder it never gets cold down here,' they quip. All

part of the hot-blooded pleasure seeking Rio myth-building which pervades to the present day.

Charlie Chan in Rio, 1941

Sidney Toler took over the role after the alcoholism and ailing Swedish actor Warner Oland. This was his tenth film as Charlie Chan, who travels to Rio to investigate the death of a suspected murderer. Although filmed in Hollywood studios the token opening credits set the scene with its familiar Rio settings.



(1) Sugarloaf (Pao de Açucar; (2) Guanabara Bay (Baia de Guanabara) (3) Gloria Beach (4) Avenida Beira-Mer (5) Hotel Gloria

The plot is as follows: In the beginning of the film, Charlie Chan is in Rio along with his son, Jimmy, and the Rio chief of police, Chief Souto, to arrest singer Lola Dean, whom Chan suspects killed a man in Honolulu. After a performance, Lola's boyfriend, Carlos, asks her to marry him, which she accepts. Her personal assistant, Helen Ashby, then reminds Lola she has an appointment with a Hindu psychic. Lola visits the psychic, who puts her in a semi-comatose state using coffee and cigarettes. Lola reveals in this state that she did kill a man, Manuel Cardozo, after he refused to marry her in Honolulu. The psychic tapes the conversation. When Lola wakes up, the psychic tells her what she told him, but assures her that it will be kept confidential between them. On the way home, a worried Lola convinces Carlos to elope instead of marry at a later date. Spoiler alert: Charlie Chan reveals that Lola's personal assistant, Helen, is the murderer.

The script is based on *The Black Camel* (the first Charlie Chan film to be produced), and transferred to the exotic Rio setting. Consequently we see an opening act at the Carioca Club in Copacabana, where Lola Dean sings 'They Met in Rio.' ('And so he rode away but left his heart down in Rio/All that remains of their love are the strains of a midnight serenade'). Lola also sings the famous Carmen Miranda number 'I Yi Yi Yi Like You Very Much'.

As with all the Charlie Chan films of the 1930s and 1940s, whether Sydney Toler or Sweden's own Warner Oland, any exposition outside the boundaries of the Hollywood studios was limited, and a 25 second stock footage sequence would have to be enough to convince the audience of the Rio setting.

That Night in Rio, another Hollywood studio-bound Rio film was released that same year, 1941. (See Carmen Miranda's Last Days).

Now Voyager, 1942

There is only ten minutes of Rio in *Now Voyager* (from 40m to 50m) but it's a good ten minutes, marking the transformation of Bette Davis from one who 'is immune to happiness' to a flesh crazed hedonist filled with a lifelong desire for Paul Henried, defying the austere mother who ruined her life early on.

Charlotte – from a rich Boston family – seems to have spent her life on cruise voyages, and coming into Rio harbour she is instructing Jeremiah (Paul Henreid) into the sights – 'there's Sugarloaf', and 'that statue should appeal to your architectural eye – the statue of Cristo.' 'Those golden sands – that is Copacabana... oh what poetry there is in such a name.'



Charlotte (Bette Davis) who claims to be 'immune to pleasure' is proved wrong by Paul Henreid in the wilds of Rio's Tijuca National Park.

While on shore in Rio a local taxi driver drives off a narrow roadway in what appears to be stock footage of Tijuca National Park in the mountains above Rio. Charlotte and Jeremiah - so far a random encounter - are stranded; the couple must spend a night together in a mountain shack. During a raging storm, no less. Thus begins the transformation of Charlotte from anhedonist to hedonist – well, blame it on Rio. A passionate farewell scene at Rio's Botafoga Airport that was featured in *Flying Down to Rio* nine years earlier, confirms Charlotte's new affirmation of happiness.

The film ends with one of the most cryptic lines in film history; 'Don't let's ask for the moon, when we have the stars.' What is Bette Davis trying to say?

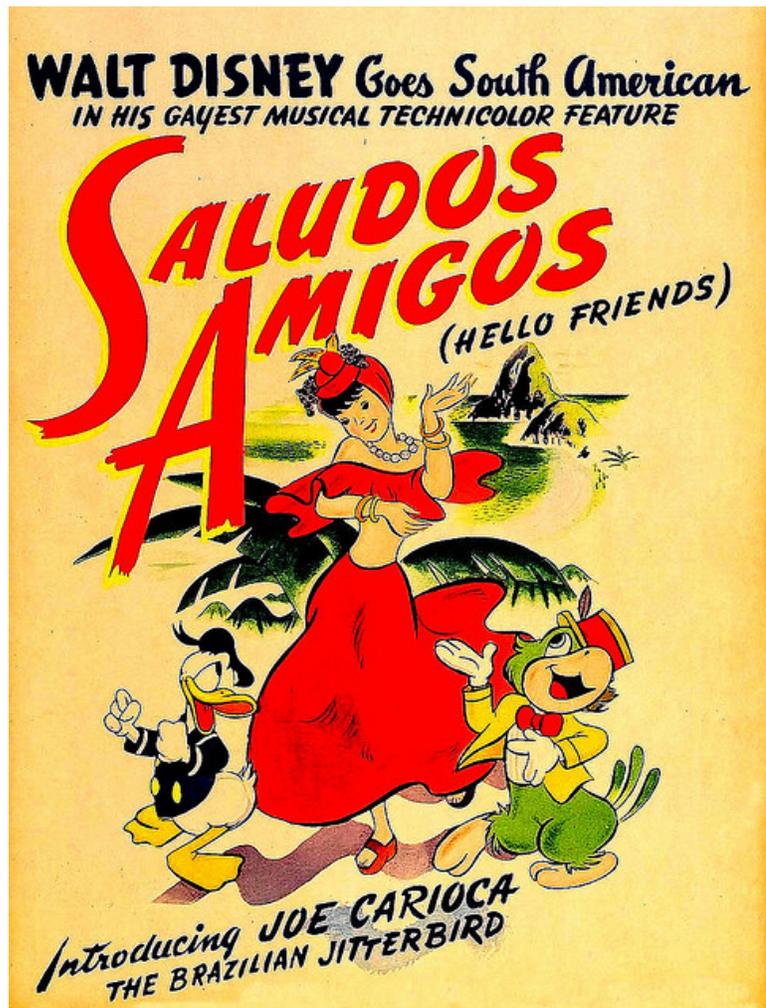
Claude Rains plays the psychiatrist (Dr Jaquith) steering Bette away from her immunity to happiness and toward finding meaning in life (taking care of Paul Henreid's mentally fragile 10 year old daughter). Three years later Claude Rains is back in Rio, as the arch Nazi villain in *Notorious*. He has swapped his Boston sanitarium for a luxury beach house on the outskirts of Rio, with the waves of the Atlantic lapping outside the villa's grandiose entrance.

Saludas Amigos, 1942

However, between Claude Rains sinister activities as psychiatrist in *Now Voyager* and Nazi villain in *Notorious*, emerges two remarkable films with Rio once again as the focal point of pleasure-seeking abandonment. *Saludos Amigos*, was part of the Good Neighbour Policy, aiming to improve relations between the USA and South America. The film premiered in Rio in August 1942 - 6 months before its US release. It is one of two films where Walt Disney went bananas - mixing documentary and art work and animation sponsoring 18 artists to visit Rio, Santiago, Buenos Aries

and Lake Ticitata. Each stop inspires some artwork and a cartoon – most of them with Donald Duck who is described by the narrator as the typical American tourist. (A talking duck?) The visit to Rio is at the tail end of the film, which is short for a feature at 45 minutes. Donald finds himself in a surrealistic psychomachia - a contest of souls - against a water colour art brush and a Brazilian parrot, Joe Carioca, in a ten minute sequence, entitled 'Aquerel do Brasil,' Watercolour of Brasil. Nothing happens. It's a travelogue. Joe takes Donald to some clubs. Donald gets drunk. Nice pictures of Rio – the Corcovador, Sugarloaf, the mosaic beach promenades of Copacabana, Donald with swirly eyes. It's all about Rio.

Two musical numbers are featured – a samba version of Brazil and Tico Tico (the Carmen Miranda hit). As a precursor to The Three Caballeros two years later, this vignette shows Donald drunk on cachaça, finds the samba rhythm in his drunkenness, and to the encouragement of Joe the parrot, dances in the Rio clubland of the day ... and well into the night... the Atlantico, the Urca, the Copacabana, and then it ends.



For the picture houses of the day a short film documentary was included 'South of the Border

Brazil Brazil • Part Two: Rio

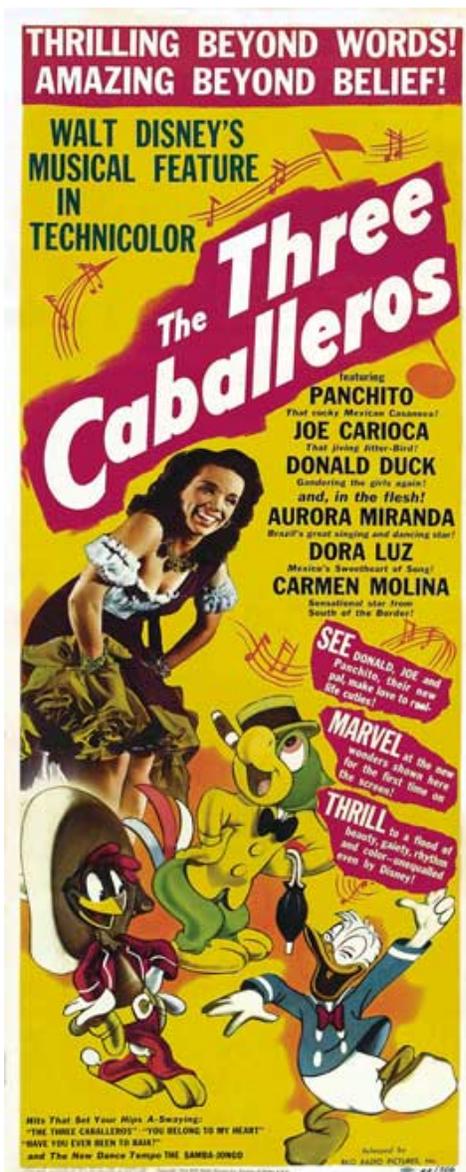
with Disney', beginning with setting up a studio at a Rio hotel, and collecting the artwork and impressions of the artists. OK so far. Then the military propaganda – President Vargas, Independence Day September 7th 'the biggest military parade in South America' showing 'Brazil as a military power to be reckoned with in this time of world war...'; a kid's choir sings patriotic songs – all a bit heady. Then a few minutes of travelogue; the train ride to Corcovado, the cable car to Sugarloaf, a beach walk along Copacabana and a stroll through the Jardim do Botânico. Made 70 years ago. Everyone involved with the project is either dead or infirm. The people have gone and the samba pulse of Rio carries on.



From Saludos Amigos came the ever-popular melody Brazil (Quarela do Brasil) composed by Aro Barroso and featured in almost every film about Brazil since (including Terry Gilliam's film Brazil which has only the melody to inspire the title).

The Three Caballeros, 1944

So 18 Disney artists on chartered planes around South America... two years later, *The Three Caballeros*, with its grande finale in Brazil – albeit Bahai (Salvador), and you can't help but wonder what those Disney artists were having for lunch, or with lunch, or instead of lunch; peyote? Amazonian hallucinogenics? Cuipenhuijeros? Donald goes nuts, once again united with Joe Carioca; if drinking and dancing were his principle vices in *Saludas Amigos*, his taste of Brazilian hedonism leads him down a wicked road of lust, promiscuity and licentiousness. Not the Donald we once knew.



But these animated gems were created in the days when animation was an art form in itself, and intended for the broad viewing public – the idea of cartoons for kids didn't happen until the 1950s and the advent of TV. Consequently Donald's dream sequence where he takes the train to Baia is sublime, and his interaction with a genuine technicolour performance of Carmen Miranda's older sister Aurora (singing *Os quindins de Yaya*), is mindboggling. So this is where David Lynch gets his inspiration.

Donald is mad with the rhythm of samba, and fraught with jealousy when local partners step in now and again. Carioca Joe tries to explain the more easygoing Brazilian approach to love and desire compared to folks back in Disney's Wisconsin.

Everybody and *everything* is dancing: chairs, lampposts, buildings, and the swinging colourful dresses of the live models - all of which is too much for Donald (considering his duck's eye view), and Joe is jumping up and down shouting; 'Donald you are a wolf, you are a wolf, Donald.' Thank goodness Mickey was spared the embarrassment.



Donald 'going loco in Acapulco' following a devastating love affair with Aurora Carmen.

The rest of the film is in Mexico – Vera Cruz and Acapulco – the intense erotic content continues unabated even with Donald as one of the three gay caballeros (anything but), as he pursues a bevy of Mexican señoritas, revealing an unwholesome obsession for real life singer Carmen Molina and Mexican dancing star Dora Luz. With a simple gesture of a hand movement, Dora transforms tiny shrivelled cacti of the desert into giant penises filling the barren landscape. What were this Disney guys taking?

The dance sequences are as surreal as anything David Lynch has come up with (and a clear influence on the opening credits of

Mulholland Drive). The sexual innuendo is equally bizarre. (OK the repeatedly 'gay caballeros', gay, gay and gay serve as mere historical curiosos) but there is no mistaking Jose Carioca's machismo admiration of Donald's conquest of the local gals. 'Donald, you are a wolf – you are a wolf, Donald', observing Donald's transition to hedonistic dance-crazy girl-chasing cavalier.



Seventy years later the film is a souvenir of the vitality, life, zest from a time when the world was in turmoil and a Brazilian samba and technicolour dreams provided some moments of respite from the black and white newsreels of devastation and ruin. A cartoon duck flirting with bathing beauties on the beaches of Acapulco, or flirting outrageously with the vibrant and colorful Aurora Miranda. For the withdrawn and anhedonistic Charlotte of Now Voyager (same place, same time) there is

only the insight that for every pleasure and fantasy flaunted across the cinema screen, belies the tragedy of the human condition – the fleeting passing of every pleasure, every erotic moment, each dance and afternoon basking in sunshine, must end in inevitable darkness – and that immortality is only for the characters of cartoons. So too the songs from a bygone past – the exquisite 'You Belong to My Heart' sung by The Mexicos - a huge hit in the 1940s has faded away like the cover of the sheet music. This particular song returned to the big screen two

years later, in 1946, when Pluto the dog does a superb playback to seduce the neighbourhood girl dogs (somehow the word bitch seems inappropriate), this time with the voice of the Tommy Dorsey Band's lead singer, who that same year would begin his solo career as Frank Sinatra. This was 'Pluto's Blue Note' - Disney's finest hour.

Aurora is great – perhaps not as cheeky as her younger sister – but already a star at 18, and ten years before doing her number with Donald Duck, in 1934, she recorded *Cidade Maravilhosa* written by André Filho who also sings on the record. *Cidade Maravilhosa* long since the nickname for Rio, and quoted frequently in *Tropa de Elita II* (ironically), about the "marvelous city" of Rio de Janeiro as "the heart of my Brazil". This was some 30 years before Brasilia was to become the capital. The song was nominated as the Rio 'hymn' in 1960. Aurora died of natural causes in Rio de Janeiro, in 2005, aged 90, outliving her sister by 50 years. The virtues of temperance.



Flying into Rio - Devlin (Cary Grant) Alicia (Ingrid Bergman), on behalf of the CIA, about to be immersed in a Nazi plot and an emotional maelstrom beyond their reckoning in Hitchcock's Notorious, 1946

Notorious 1946

Alicia's father has just been sent to prison as a Nazi war criminal and she abandons herself to a life of decadence in Miami. On behalf of the CIA Devlin recruits her to help expose a Nazi spy ring in Rio, taking advantage of her bad conscience and contempt for her father. But Devlin and Alicia fall for each other, while Alicia's assignment is to marry Sebastian (Claude Rains once again), head of the Nazi spy ring.



Copacabana - decadence and sensuality for film-goers even 70 years ago.

To reveal the extent of Alicia and Devlin's involvement, Hitchcock films the longest screen kiss in cinema history, in an apartment overlooking Copacabana beach with the waves of the Atlantic ocean lapping in the background.

Why Rio? The film could have been set anywhere, but we are in Brazil. Nazis, the easy life, decadence and indulgent socialites - the over-privileged far from removed from the favelas and Rio's poorer quarters.

The second act takes us from Miami to Rio; the mandatory shots of Redentor and Sugarloaf and Copacabana. Backdrops to Hollywood studio sets with the line 'dos martinis' the only Portuguese spoken in the film. At the bar at the Copacabana Palace no less.

Some other brief reminders of the Rio setting: Sebastian's careless friend, Emil, lives in Petropolis (the wealthy hillside Rio satellite and home to Carmen's sister Aurora) but never makes it home. A long scene at the races - the racecourse by the Laogo.



Tense conversations in relaxed Rio - a studio set of 'Cinelandia' with Açucar in the background

Everyone wears suits? In Rio? Sebastian's home on the coast boasts an extravagant Beverly Hills interior and a studio backdrop of a curiously motionless Atlantic Ocean with its decidedly artificial moonlight reflection. Still, Hitchcock (and screenwriter Ernst Lehmann) make a few conciliatory passings to audience suspense of disbelief.

At a Rio soiree, Alicia says to the orchestra to 'play something Brazilian'. It is the scene where Devlin and Alicia uncover the secrets of the concealed Uranium in the wine-cellar, so the entire nerve-racking searching in the cellar sequence is accompanied to the upstairs strains of a carioca.

Park bench meetings in down-town Rio, Açucar in the background, Cinelandia, with Teatro Municipal stage left, next door to the present day Odeon, then called the Vittoria, and next door to the Rex. The dialogue, as Alicia is dying of arsenic poisoning, blames their despondence on Rio — Devlin assumes she has gone back to heavy drinking.

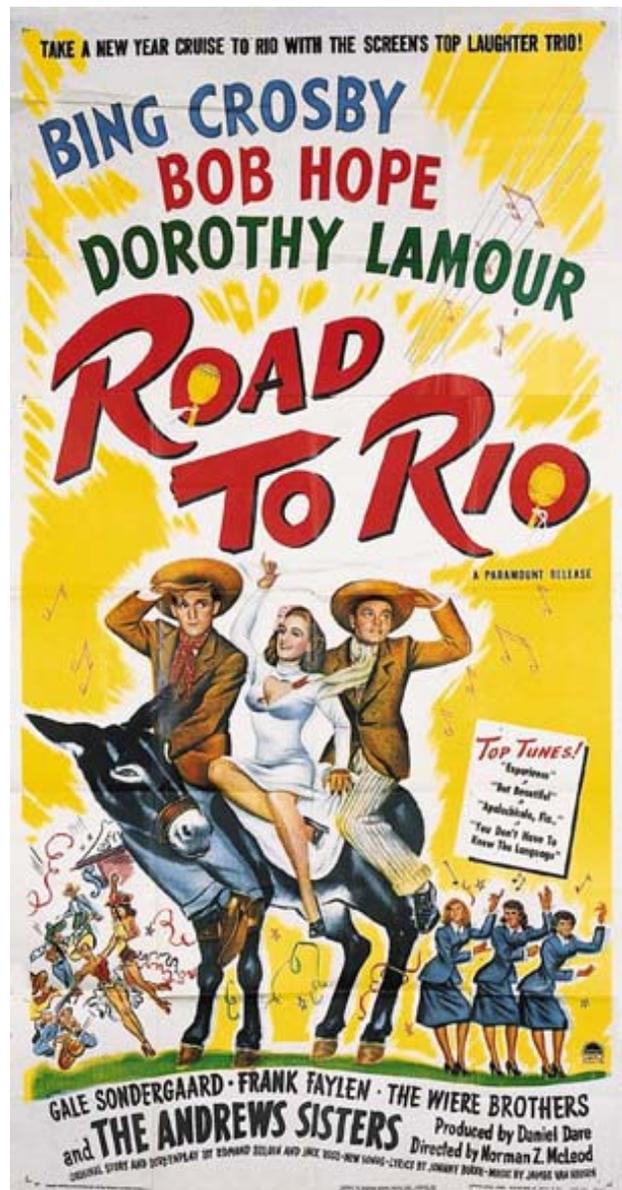
'Not much for a brainy fellow to do in Rio,' she jibes. 'Rio can be a very dull town. Don't you find Rio hard to take?'

In the end Devlin's faith is restored – he returns to the house and rescues Alicia, with the film ending on the lush carved door closing behind Sebastian. Devlin drives off with Alicia, and the fate of Sebastian leading the viewer into a false kind of open-ended concern for Sebastian at the hands of the Nazis, rather than focus on the real open-ended question: Devlin? Alicia? What's their story? He pushes her into having sex with an arch enemy of the state, and she goes along with it, in spite of their attraction for each other. What sort of future do they have together? The cold silences over dinner? The awkward moments in the bedroom?

The film was remade (rather badly) as Mission Impossible 2, with Sydney standing in for Rio, but still with the long beaches and hedonistic life-style. Thandi Newton is not Ingrid and Tom Cruise, definitely not Cary Grant, but there are the swimsuits, the beaches, the bathing beauties and the high life.

Road to Rio, 1947

Road to Utopia is the best of the Bob Hope and Bing Crosby 'road' movies; it features a talking goldfish, and a grizzly bear who walks off the set because the fish got the lines and he didn't. But even the mediocre road movies are good and Road to Rio has a lot going for it. The usual trio, Bob Hope Bing Crosby, Dorothy Lamour; Gale Sondergaard as the femme fatale, and the Hollywood version of Rio, with stock footage of Açucar, Redeemer and Copacabana. A totally insane 'stop the marriage' plot which plays out in a hillside estate outside Rio, and a Brazilian trio of samba musicians who only speak Portuguese. Bing's Portuguese is surprisingly good, but the 'Brazilian' brothers



were actually from Mexico, so as far as lines of dialogue go, the fish and the bear in Road to Utopia had a lot to be grateful for.

Hollywood Rio movies post-war (and post-Notorious which used Nazis in exile as a plot background), seem to portray a more Carmen Miranda Rio rather than a Bette Davis 'Now Voyager' Rio. More for laughs than tears. Which culminated with the ultimate combination – Groucho Marx, Carmen Miranda, a club called Copacabana, samba music, and the whole absurd plot never gets further from New York than 42nd Street.



The opening credits and some familiar sights - closer to Paramount Studios than Rio de Janeiro.

Nancy Goes to Rio, 1950

An MGM musical with Carmen Miranda performing 'Yipsee-I-O' is a highlight in love triangle plot typical of the era - mistaken identities, misunderstandings, ill-directed jealousy, etc with Jane Powell and Ann Sothorn in the lead roles. During the fifties both Jane Powell and Ann Sothorn would re-invent their careers for television studios and Carmen Miranda would end hers live on The Jimmy Durante Show. In Nancy Goes to Rio she also sings Cae Cae

Brazil Brazil • Part Two: Rio

and Baiao (Ca-Room Pa-Pa) and the studio sets consist of MGM interpretations of Rio nightclubs. All glitz and no passion.



Nancy Goes to Rio; Romance Carioca in Brazil, Pasion Carioca in Argentina and Trio i Rio in Sweden - namely Jane Powell, Ann Sothern and Carmen Miranda.



Carmen Miranda sings Yipsi-I-O with her MGM 'Brazilian' boys band.

4. Rio for Real

<i>Orfeo Negro</i>	1959
<i>My Home is Copacabana</i>	1965
<i>Pixote (Babenco)</i>	1981
<i>Bus 174</i>	2002
<i>City of God</i>	2002
<i>City of Men (TV)</i>	2002 - 2005
<i>Carandiru</i>	2003
<i>Favela Rising</i>	2005
<i>Trope de Elite</i>	2007 & 2011
<i>[Linha de passe</i>	2008]

For a gut-wrenching portrait of life in the Rio favelas, *Trope de Elite* is an incredible film considering the intensity of its social criticism. More incredible is the sequel, *The Enemy Within*, released in 2010, indicting police, local politicians and an inept justice system for the ongoing social misery of the Rio favelas. 11.2 million Brazilian people went to the cinemas to watch the film, making it the most successful cinema release in Brazilian film history. The final shots take the viewer from a shoot out in the streets of Rio between the militia and special forces to a sweeping panorama of Brasilia, and the voice of ex elite squad captain Nimenco, putting the blame of Rio's impoverishment onto central government. Life and death in the favela's, he concludes, is all politics.

Director Jose Ze Padilha began his filmmaking career with the documentary of *Bus 174*, then *Tropa de Elite* and five years later, the follow-up. The name 'Ze' comes from the film 'Z - He Lives'; about social and political activism in Latin America in the early 1970s. For Padilha the struggle goes on...



Guys with guns - which side of the law?

Bus 174

"On July 12, 2000, the Rio de Janeiro police trapped a man who was trying to rob a bus. He took eleven hostages, and the local SWAT team was called. This incident became known in Brazil as the Bus 174 affair". This the starting point for Jose Padilha's documentary - the story of a robbery gone wrong. A homeless young drug addict is trapped in the process of robbing bus passengers in Rio - outside Jardim de Botânico no less - which quickly escalates into a hostage drama. The entire event is broadcast live across Brazil.

Padilha interviews some of the key protagonists - hostages and people of the favela who knew Sandro. The TV footage reveals the

panic but also how the situation seems part of an everyday reality for the bus passengers and the onlookers. The difference is that there are cameras recording it all. The documentary captures the sense of watching events unfold as millions of TV viewers did in June 2000.



Sandro's final hour - broadcast live on Rio TV

A street gang friend of Sandro seems uncaring and arrogant, but no less so than the police officer (whose face is not shown) – ‘Homeless street people’, he says. ‘What do their lives matter?’

Somewhere in between are the ordinary folk of Rio - bus passengers on their to work. Padilha explains how he was training at a local gym when he saw the live news event broadcast – and like everyone else in Brazil, became caught up in the drama. In this respect Bus 174 was a drama waiting to happen. The favelas meet the city dwellers, and the cameras are there to record police indifference or police ineptitude.

As with his later films Padilha explores the social issues of the otherwise glamorized city of Rio, looking its underworld and with *Bus 174* he is conducting an anatomy of a life from the favelas - a street kid, abandoned and brutalised.



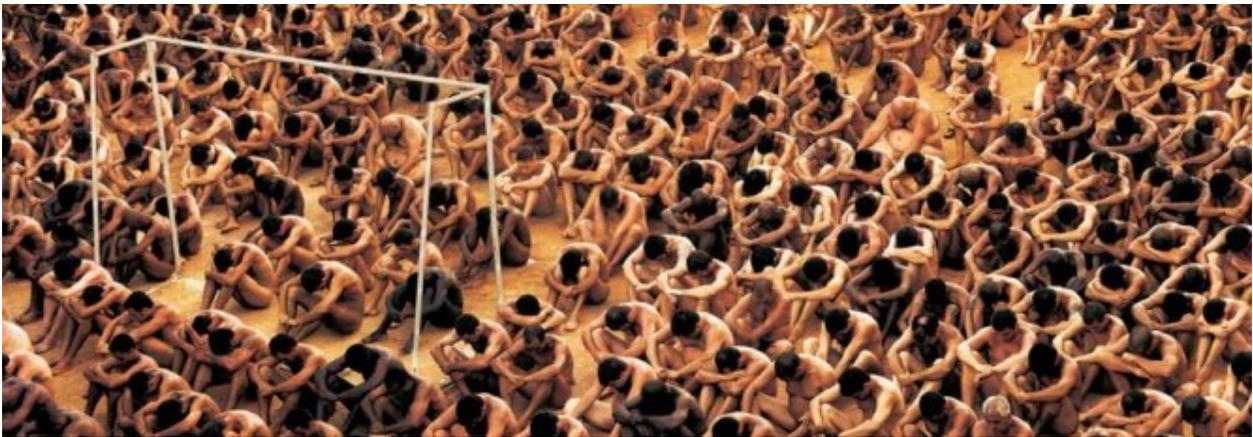
Pixote

Twenty years earlier Hector Babenco (he of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* fame) would make a film that instantly elevated the status of Brazilian cinema - an international success that had the look, the feel and the conviction of a documentary. About a ten year old street kid who survives by picking pockets, dealing and pimping - travelling from Sao Paulo to Rio to score the big drug deal. So ten year old Pixote finds himself in the middle of a score gone bad, shoots the dealer and accidentally shoots his friend. He has already

worked as a pimp for a local prostitute but when she rejects him as well, we have the final image of Pixote, alone and friendless, hunted by the law, walking solemnly into the distance carrying with him an oversized carbine about as big as he is.

Carandiru

Early in the film we catch a glimpse of his life a boy's home - a prison of inhumanity on a grand scale, reminding the viewer of Brazil's most notorious of prisons, Carandiru - in Sao Paolo - nonetheless a powerful image of a society where the economic disparity between rich and poor is the largest in the world.



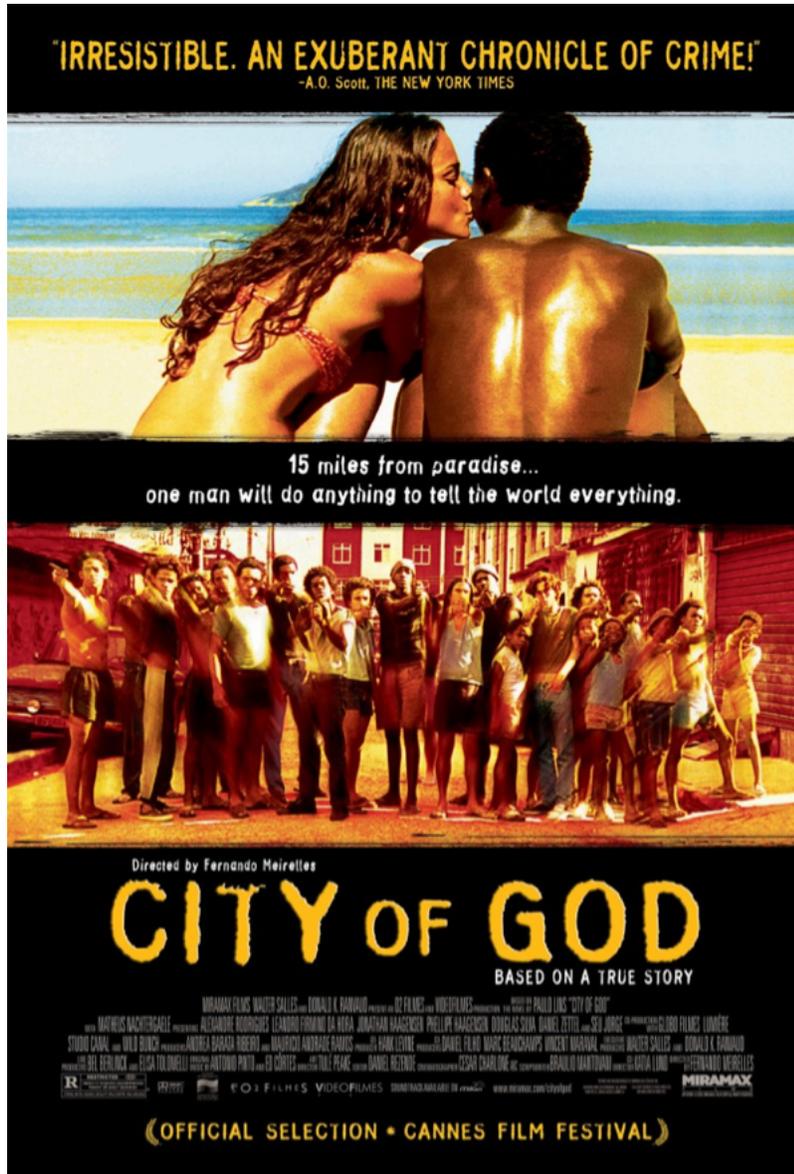
Prison life in Brazil - bowed heads and subjugation — until the riots.

City of God

The prisons, the favelas and the Rio suburb of Cidade de Deus (City of God) are - in the film of the same name - the training grounds for gang wars, drug dealing and gun running. The City of God is the harrowing story of the Rio gang wars in 1970s and 1980s - a dramatized reconstruction of the drug war between gang leaders Lil Ze and Knockout Ned. The narrator, Rocket, chronicles the rise and fall of Lil Ze from the 1960s. The film spawned a TV series, City of

Brazil Brazil • Part Two: Rio

Men, which ran from 2002 to 2005. The film ends with the 'Runts' putting together a death list - anyone that has earned the disfavor of the gang; police, journalists, disloyal gang members.



Such is the reality of the Rio favelas that after the film was completed, the actual gang of the one portrayed - the 'Low Lives' (Caixa Baixa) - put together just such a list. This meant that members of the cast were not able to return to their old lives in the favelas. Help groups were set-up and in 2012 the Peace Squads were formed to help improve the situation for the local people.

There was a political agenda too of course - the Rio authorities were keen to ensure a trouble free environment for the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympics in 2016. For municipal authorities, business people and real estate developers the Peace Squad initiative provided a golden opportunity. Many of the favelas are prime real estate with some of the best views over Rio - many locals were forcibly re-located and by 2014 luxury apartments were being built in some of the older established favelas under police protection. And for Rio entrepreneurs this meant the explosion of a whole new business sector - private security companies.

Favela Rising

Another industry has grown as well. The soundtrack of City of God features a new generation of young Brazilian musicians, the fusion of hip hop, rap, trance and traditional Brazilian rhythms, into a musical style that it is intense, vibrant and angry



This is the theme of the feature length documentary Favela Rising - a portrait of the new Brazil, a new generation as far removed from

Bossa Nova, Brazilian Chill and samba, and as culturally removed as Ipanema from Rocinha favela.



Favela Rising - two sides of Rio, one point of view

The darker side of sunny Rio has proved a popular subject for filmmakers since the rise of the favelas in the 1950s. By comparison, favela life-style was positively lyrical in *Orfeo Negro*, and for French filmmaker Marcel Camus, the Rio favelas proved the ideal background for his modern take on the myth of Orpheus.

Orfeo Negro

For Camus Orfeo is the sunlight - quite literally in the Carnival procession (that is his costume) - dragged into the depths of night and death in his pursuit of the doomed Eurydice. Not sunshine, nor carnivale, nor samba rhythms are any match for the lord of the underworld.

The rhythmic beat of the carnival drums accompanies the film; when Eurydice arrives in Rio a street vendor takes her hand and says; "I feel from your hand how your heart is beating." That beating pervades throughout the film - the rhythm of Rio, from when locals arrive on the city ferry to the dramatic climax of the Rio carnival - people live and die and the beat goes on.



Orfeo Negro - the soundtrack; cinema, myth and music converge in the favelas of Rio.

My Home is Copacabana

Made in 1965, with untrained actors and on location, *My Home is Copacabana* traces the lives of four street kids struggling to make a life for themselves: stealing food, or fish from the local fishermen, or cleaning shoes, or picking pockets. Their brief moments of exhilaration comes from flying kites from the hillsides overlooking all those familiar Rio landmarks.



Swedish nature cinematographer, Arne Sucksdorff filmed *My Home is Copacabana* (*Mitt Hem är Copacabana*) with the sponsorship of the Swedish Film Institute, set up by the Swedish government two years earlier. The poetic justice of a country with the lowest economic disparity between rich and poor representing the country with the highest.



'Those golden sands – that is Copacabana... oh what poetry there is in such a name,' enthused Charlotte in Now Voyager, some 20 years earlier. For Jorghino and Rico those golden sands are a battlefield.



Cidade dos Homens city of men - the contemporary perspective of Rio

5. Rio of the Mind

That Rio is a city of inspiration goes without saying; it is the kind of fantasies that Rio inspires which is fascinating. This is selection of fantasy films with fantasy figures in fantasized versions of Rio. As in the nature of fantasy they are either fun, nightmarish, absurd or erotic... The fantasies involve:

Jean-Paul Belmondo as a reluctant action hero in Rio, 1964

Shirley Eaton in alien invader in Rio, 1967

James Bond as an English spy in Rio, 1979

Michael Caine as a mid-life crisis womanizer in Rio, 1984

Mickey Rourke as a slightly younger womanizer in Rio, 1989

Hugh Laurie as mid-life crisis bank clerk womanizer in Rio, 2000

Emmanuelle in Rio as a seductress in Rio, 2003

OSS 117 as a French spy in Rio, 2010

Vin Diesel as bank robber in Rio, 2011

Blu, an Amazonian Blue Parrot in Rio, 2011



Through the camera lens - fantasies of a city (OSS 117: Lost in Rio)

Here are the ten films - fantasy films in the truest sense of the word - in which Rio constitutes a background for some of the more indulgent and outrageous fantasies of recent cinema history. Why Rio? If the Hollywood screenwriters of the 1940s looked to Rio for a background of hedonistic pleasures, in these films Rio liberates the screenwriters imagination into a fantasized version of a place far removed from the local film productions and documentaries - instead a Rio that only exists in moviegoers imaginations, and for screenwriters and directors, a Rio firmly planted, not in Brazil, but in the mind:

That Man from Rio, 1964

The Girl from Rio, 1969

Moonraker, 1979

Blame it on Rio, 1984

Wild Orchid, 1989

Girl from Rio, 2001

Emmanuelle in Rio, 2003

OSS 117: Lost in Rio, 2010

Fast + Furious Five, 2011

Rio, 2011

That Man from Rio, 1964

Or L'homme de Rio... farce, spy spoof, and adventure. A South American statue is stolen from a Paris museum. The thieves also grab the beautiful young daughter (played by Francoise D'orleac - ill-fated sister to Catherine Deneuve) of the man who owned the statue. She and the statue are loaded onto a plane to Rio. Meanwhile Jean-Paul Belmondo, an army private on leave to visit his girlfriend (the daughter) takes up the pursuit of the criminal gang, follows them to Rio, and the sixties style mayhem begins. Each episode with a Rio landmark in the background, and hefty samba music on the soundtrack.

Rio in 1964 was going through a major reconstruction phase, so we have Jean-Paul Belmondo balancing on cranes and half finished concrete walls, riding the S:a Teresa trams at breakneck speed, almost shot at the Mirante look-out, makes firers with an Ipanema shoe-shine boy, gets thrown out of the Copacabana Palace Hotel, and takes hair-easing promenade along the balustrades of the remaining Copacabana five star hotels.



Sightseeing - That Man from Rio

Belmondo sleeping rough on Ipanema Beach - Ipanema in 1964 was a fishing village with humble two story buildings on the beach front - and young French women throwing themselves into the arms of Jean-Paul. Like many films of the sixties, it is like a movie without a script with Richard Lester like crazy scenes and well known tourist sights as props.

Consequently, *That Man from Rio* (and other fantasy Rio films on our list), may be mediocre entertainment but fascinating documentations of an era, both in terms of style and character, and not least, a living portrait of Rio (in this case) anon 1964 - the swinging sixties Rio Style.

This is the period satirized in the Mike Meyers Austin Powers films, an era when cinema audiences watched films like *In Like Flint* and *Our Man Flint*, and *The Man from UNCLE*, and Dean Martin in the Matt Helm films like *The Silencers* and the outrageously excessive, *Casino Royale* (also Jean-Paul Belmondo). Here it is Jean Paul Belmondo dodging bullets and thumping villains and waking up in beds (or on the beach) with sexy young girls in bikinis who giggle incessantly and say things like 'oo la la la la.'

So watching *That Man from Rio* fifty years later, we can observe that much has changed and much has not. A hotel view from Ipuador (b e t w e e n Ipanema and Copacabana) is much the same, as is the Jardim Botânico on the edge of the Tijuca National Park. And the fantasy of course, the fantasy of Rio, doesn't seem to have changed much at all.

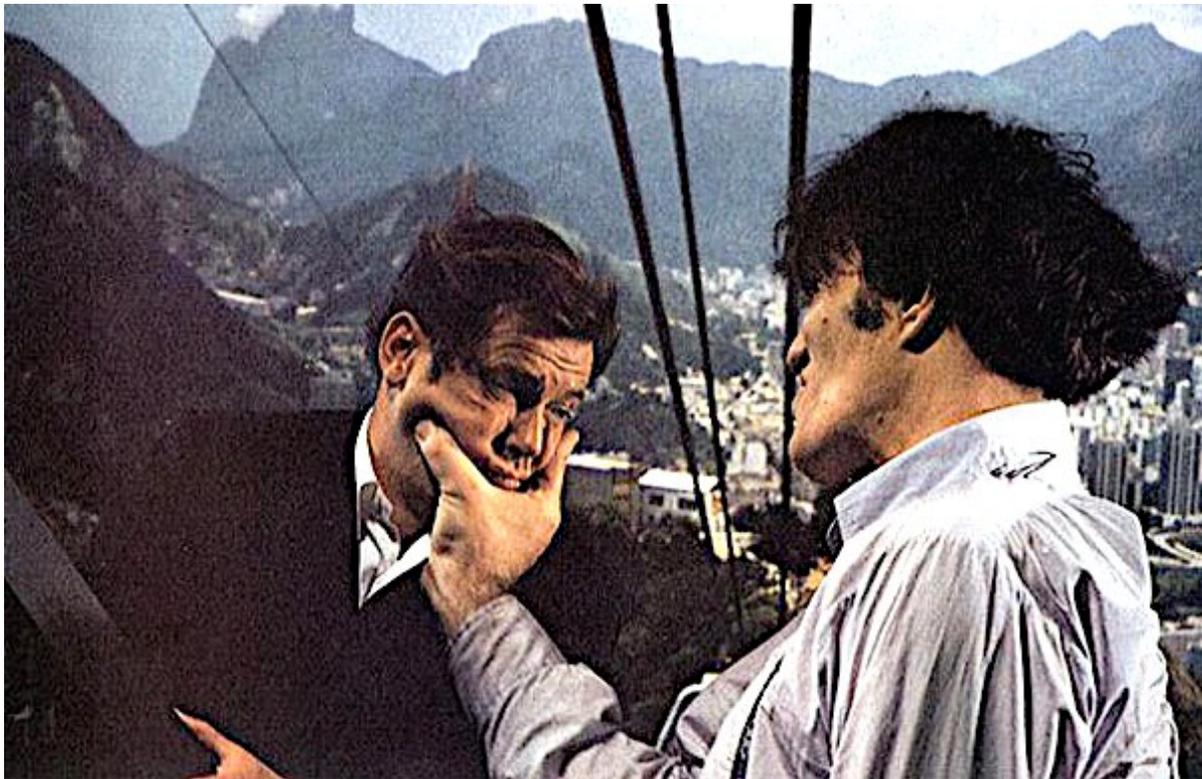


Copacabana - view from the hotel

Moonraker, 1979

For my vote the second worst Bond film of the series (Octopussy gets the prize), and not surprisingly a departure from the Ian Fleming novel; a hastily produced film released in 1979 to cash in on the Star Wars success of the summer of 1977.

Before the ill-conceived space battle sequence audiences are treated to 25 minutes of Rio, and (on a map at least) the Amazon, in search of a rare and deadly orchid that will put an end to mankind. (See Pt 1, Ch 3: Poisonous Plants, and also, below, Wild Orchid, which is more feasible as 'deadly to mankind' than the fictitious plant of the Bond movie). The Amazon sequence (well, 55 seconds of film, which took up two and a half months of troubled production time) was filmed at the Iguassu Falls, some 2,500 kilometres from the Amazon. Filming at the Iguassu was so disastrous that most of the sequence is done with models and studio sets.



Enjoying the sights - from the Sugarloaf cable car

The Rio carnivale is thrown in for good measure with outrageously incongruous inserts of English men in evening wear in alleyways, that looks as much like Rio as Manchester. The cable car sequence was filmed at Sugarloaf, and the 'Jaws' character (Richard Kiel - who was such a hit with the under twelves in the previous film, that his character was written into the script to bite the Sugarloaf cable car cable with his metal teeth. Hopefully it went down with the under 12s – after this sequence the plot goes downhill rapidly, with Argentine cowboys in the outskirts of Rio, and a series of product placement posters all the way up to the Rio favelas. As if.

Still this is the film that cost more than all the previous Bond films put together, and grossed more as well, and was inspired by producer Cubby Broccoli visiting the Iguassu Falls and deciding that Brazil was the place to make the picture. A sequence in Guatemala stands in for Amazon rainforest, and otherwise distinguished actors get to say lines like 'attempting re-entry' and 'around the world one more time'. Do they know what this means? More entertainment for the under 12s? Blame it on Rio and Cubby Broccoli.



Topless beaches in Rio? Demi Moore as Michael Caine's daughter? Forty + guys paired off with 16 year olds? Testing the bounds of credibility.

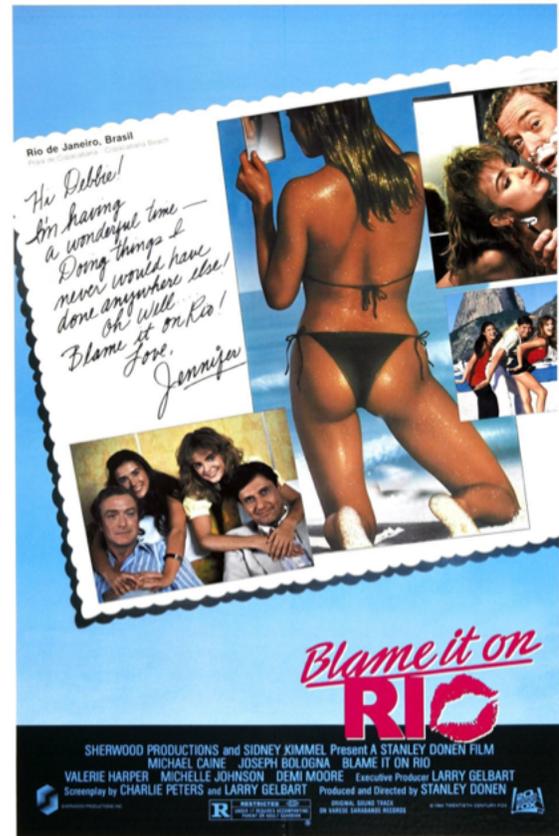
Blame it on Rio, 1984

This is a confession movie in the style of Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*. The story is definitely *Manhattan*. Old guys chasing inappropriately young girls, when they should know better.

Michael Caine and his work pal – from London and the US respectively - are financiers based in Sao Paulo, who decide on holiday in Rio to sort out their troubled marriages. Michael Caine trying to prevent a divorce, and his pal trying to push one through. As a result they end up a deluxe residence on the hills of Tijuca

National Park overlooking Copacabana amid palatial gardens and grounds. So... two dads on holiday together, alone with their two sixteen year old daughters, a debut role for Michelle Johnson, his best friend's daughter, who ends up as Michael Caine's clandestine lover, 28 years her senior. A youthful pre 'Striptease' Demi Moore, plays Michael Caine's daughter, uncharacteristically coy.

The sad story as narrated / confessed by Michael Caine (like Woody Allen in *Manhattan*; same style, same dilemma, different setting and color scheme) is an attempt to justify having a love affair with his best friend's daughter, who happens to be the best friend of his own daughter. Complicated? A situation exacerbated by his friend finding his daughter has a secret lover - 'an older man' - and enlisting Michael Caine's aid to help find him. 'What you are going to do when you find him?'



'I'm going to kill him.'

So the two middle aged dads are searching the beaches of Rio for a man that does not exist; director Stanley Donen's attempt to justify multiple shots of topless girls cavorting by the sea-side. Pure fantasy. Rio traditionally encourages a liberal view to bikini fashion , but as a moderate to strict Catholic country, topless bathing is forbidden, as much in the present as it was forty years ago.



Michael Caine's love interest - Alfie twenty years on...

Blame it on Rio is the catchphrase that defines the temptations of the city, and the life style that supposedly leads folk unwittingly into a life of hedonistic excess over which they have no control. That's the myth. Here a few observations: the director, Stanley Donen, directed *Singing in the Rain* just 30 years earlier. He was sixty when directing *Blame it on Rio*. It was made in 1984, arguable the last of the pre-AIDS films. A year later it would not have been possible to make a film with the sexual excess in terms of plot, character, activities. For example: Brazilian girl to Michael Caine's 40+ pal:

‘You’re my twelfth lover in twelve nights. Does that disturb you?’

‘No not at all. I’m a team player.’

By 1985 – the year the media went mad with AIDS - films, Hollywood studios, producers, TV – took a step backwards and scrutinised productions with a new desexualized critical eye. By the late 80s, gone were scenes of frivolous nudity; gone, the casual affairs and impulsive dalliances. A new tone emerged; a late eighties neo-noir (inspired by Blade Runner perhaps?), where the woman was once again thrust into the role of the femme fatale, and men - the bumbling idiots that fell for them.

The point of Blame it on Rio – if there is one at all – leans toward Rio as the cure for the ailment that Bette Davis (Now Voyager) described as an ‘immunity to pleasure’. Bette found her cure with an act of self-sacrifice in an epiphanic moment in the cloudy peaks of Tijuca National Park. Her immunity to pleasure, she discovered, was due to her obsessive self-interest, her own ego. Now she could answer a nobler calling from the higher self. Would that Michael Caine’s character had a higher self to answer to, rather than blame his mad decline into an hedonic maelstrom upon the bikini-clad nymphets gracing the beaches of Rio.

Wild Orchid, 1989

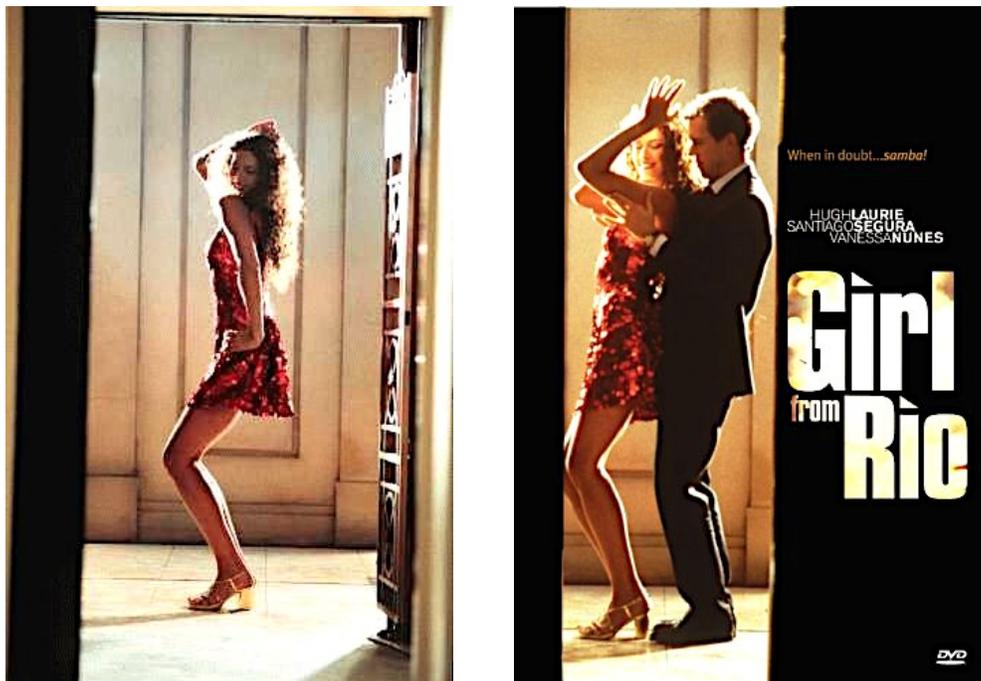
But when it comes to ‘mad declines’ and ‘hedonic maelstroms’ there is little to match Mickey Rourke, reprising his role from 9 1/2 Weeks (1986), with Carré Otis standing in for Kim Basinger, and the



setting of Rio de Janeiro instead of New York apartments and Manhattan art galleries. The authenticity of their passion (the couple were married two years later, having met during the making of the film) makes up little for the banality of the plot and pointlessness of the story. A guy meets a girl in Rio de Janeiro... and?

Girl from Rio, 2000

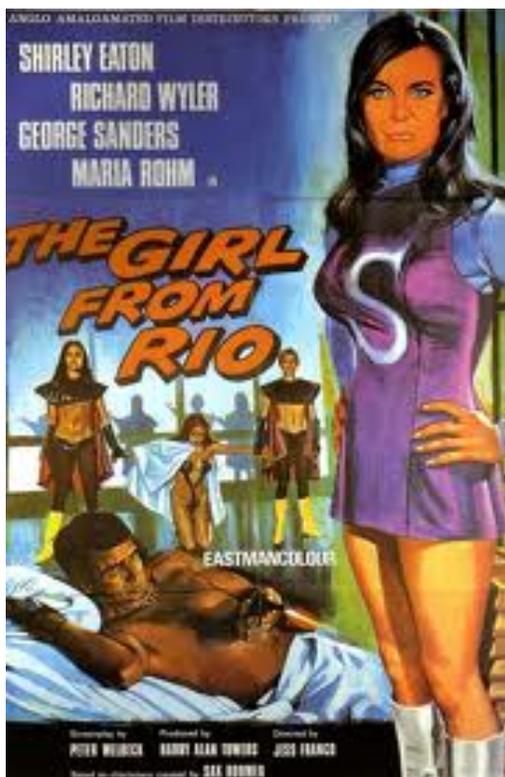
The plot of UK film, *Girl From Rio*, is not so different. Only the guy is a jilted bank clerk played by Hugh Laurie, who teaches samba at evening classes, and the girl is the samba queen of the Rio Carnival. We have half an hour of Hugh Laurie's tedious life is working at a London bank, teaching samba in the evenings to a group mentally and rhythmically challenged old aged pensioners, and discovering his wife is having an affair with his boss. And just a couple of days before Christmas. Hugh goes nuts, robs the bank, while at the same time, entertaining fantasies of Orlinda, the celebrated Rio carnival danseuse in a red dress. All he wants to do is go to Rio and dance samba with Orlinda the samba queen.



The girl (l) and the fantasy (r); the cuckolded bank clerk from London

Thirty minutes later we're in Rio, with the panoramic shots of the usual – Cordocorva, Açucar, Copacabana. Hugh, now loaded, ends up at the Presidential Suite at Copacabana Grand (no such place – actually the Copacabana Sheraton overlooking Apaduor beach). Doesn't stop the concierge bragging out celebrities that have stayed here: Hitchcock, Ava Gardner, The Spice Girls...

Hugh heads down to Lappa - the music district - in the evening, and through the machinations of a shady taxi-driver, is introduced to Orlinda, and dances with her through the night. Well, that's really the end of the story. Hugh has come to Rio to do what he wants to do, and now he's done it. But with fifty minutes left we guess there must be a complication of some kind, and sure enough the girl and the taxi driver are in cahoots with the local Mafia and Hugh loses his money. He ends up working for a favela boss in Rio's most colourful favela, Rochino, and paying off accounts in the picturesque S:a Teresa, when the trams were still running, before the derailment accident of 2011.



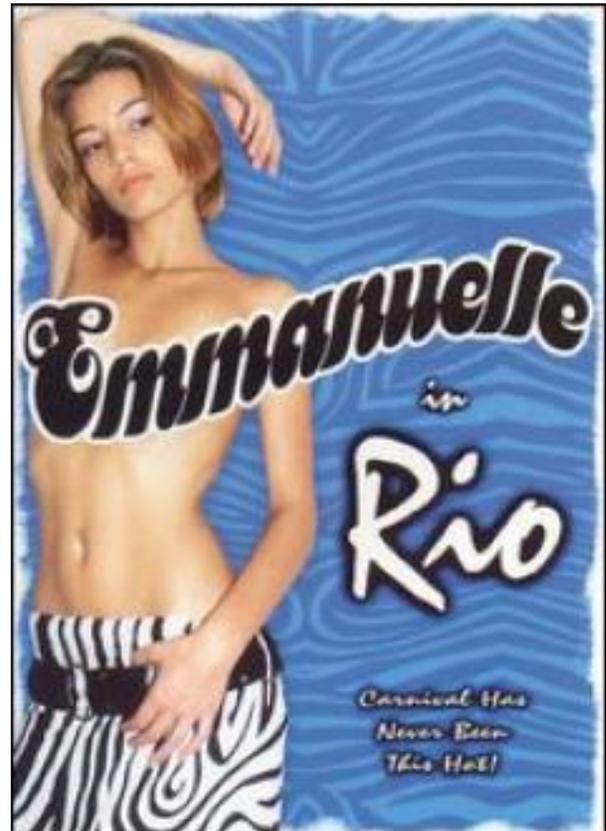
The Girl from Rio, except in Brazil where it was released as City of Men

Alas Vanessa Nunes, normally a sexy and attractive presence, in the hands of a British production is reduced to a grinning and unsexy Sun Page Three, with an excessively exuberant smile and too many teeth. Rather the elusive smile of the Latin woman one would otherwise encounter on the back streets of Rio.

Nor should this film be confused with **The Girl from Rio** (1967) with Shirley Eaton (of Goldfinger fame) as an Amazonian warrior woman from outer space. The Girl from Rio is a 1960s exploitation picture (Shirley Eaton claims she was tricked into the production by a nefarious producer) with an insane plot of outer space women warriors enslaving men. The action - if it could be called that - begins in Rio and culminates amongst the futuristic architecture of the capital, Brasilia.

Emmanuelle in Rio, 2003

This is the film where viewers might be forgiven for wishing that Emmanuelle had not survived the last of the cannibals in *Emmanuelle and the Last Cannibals* (1977). In Rio Emmanuelle has to deal with different kind of predatory men - the unfaithful Brazilian kind. A key scene in which a betrayed Emmanuelle confronts her faithless lover has been described and by a panel of youtube aficionados as the worst film scene of all time.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4FBIfDPwME>

This a complex (and overlong) scene so a viewer has kindly provided the following breakdown:

1. She saw his tape
2. Don't touch her
3. She don't wanna know
4. Get out
5. That was her house
6. Don't touch her damn it!
7. She's serious



Jean Dejudin (OSS 117) - living the politically incorrect dream to the full

OSS 117: Lost in Rio, 2010

This film could be mistaken for a remake of *That Man in Rio*. The first OSS – one of the biggest box office successes in recent French cinema history – is a ruthless parody of French xenophobia and foreign policy, set in Egypt around the time of the 1950s Suez crisis and played out to the full by Jean Dejudin.

Unfortunately his reprise of the role in Rio is undermined by locations and limitations of the script. Plus an all too obvious parody of Sean Connery's James Bond. Right down to the blue towel bathrobe and knowing smirk. Lovely shots of Rio, an improbable shoot out on the stairs of Cristo Redentor, and overall a substandard script.

Fast Five, 2011

A 22 car pile up on the south freeway from Barra into Rio. Where the road follows the railway line – only used for freight these days; the passenger service closed down in the 80s. Apart from a few quaint exceptions, there are no serious railway lines in Brazil. It is too wet, too mountainous and too many waterways. Which makes Vin Diesel and Rio Fast and Furious (Fast 5) a little difficult to grasp when it comes to plot logic. (The railway sequence was filmed in Arizona!) It's difficult enough anyway. It opens on this stretch of freight railway line parallel to the Rio freeway where Vin's team of five Ferraris burst onto the tarmac and race on all three lanes.



The Furious Five in Rio - more leaps of the imagination

Having been stuck here on a bus with thirty other passengers heading toward Rio, it requires one huge leap of imagination to believe that a gang of US street racers take command of all three lanes oblivious to the stream of local traffic. For the past three hours police cars with flashing lights are stuck with the rest of us, as debris salvagers from the other side clear wreckage, bodies, and direct the city bound traffic past the cordoned off single lane, that finally emerges like a theatre scene. Several kilometres long, and an astounding array of wreckage – cars, trucks, vans – one yellow taxi concertinaed from a four seater to an extremely compromised two seater; dark blankets covering shadowy figures now that night has descended, and flashing red and blue lights illuminating the world's longest proscenium stage, along with a slow moving carioca floating audience, gasping appropriately, head shaking, and but for the grace of... a long dark graveyard of annihilated vehicles, pulsing white lights at the beginning and end of a freeway, no longer fast, no longer furious – a barrage of electric candles flickering and fading into the darkness as our bus moves into second gear for the first time in three hours and heads toward the big city...



Escape from the favelas, fastly and furiously

The pile-up made the front page of O Globo the next day, and was featured on the late O Globo TV news. In spite of the fact that pile-ups and hour long delays on the freeways into Rio occur several

times a week. This particular pile-up tallied up a death toll of six.

The film itself, *Fast and Furious Five*, supposedly set entirely in Rio and its surroundings, is a disgrace. Here's why...

Up to a point *Fast Five* follows the 'Fast' franchise, 1 to 4 with the winning formula of fast fast cars and sexy latino girls in hot pants. Popular with car nerds, teenage boys anti-feminists. *Furious Four* took the same formula to Tokyo — same formula, only set in Tokyo; fast cars, Asian girls in hot pants, and a street race maneuver called the Tokyo drift.



Opening credits... 'salvation?'

Furious Five begins well with the return of Vin; some stunning aerial shots of Cristo Redentor, Cordocova, the favelas, Açucar, St Teresa, the Avenida, and feisty gun-toting gangsters. Vin gets busted from a fate worse than 25 years in a California penitentiary and heads down to Rio to join his fat brother. Fat Brother has had the good fortune to hook up with beautiful Carioca girl in hot-pants, Rosa. For the fast and furious, life in Rio, in the favelas, is one long party.

Enter arch-villain Reyes the Rio Police chief and entrepreneur (borrowed from *Elite de Tropa 2*) who runs the favelas like a business and as profiteering cop. 'Here in Rio we do things in a special way,' he tells Dwayne Johnson, head of an FBI task force enlisted to catch Vin and co. So as a viewer we need to ask — how do US federal agents get to: (a) have unrestricted shoot out permission anywhere in Rio; and (b) get to tell local Rio militia and police and the *Elite de Tropa* to 'stay out of our way' (plus a string of expletives). Have they not seen *Tropa de Elite*? To confront those fellows and their impressive array of firearms with a stream of profanities and demands - and on their turf - seems unwisely provocative. (Imagine *Tropa de Elite* invading New York?)

Then we have Rio Police Chief Reyes' revisionist interpretation of Brazilian history. Which smacks of Hollywood scriptwriting hackery at the very least; that the Spanish colonized the New World by mass shootings whereas the Portuguese colonized by bringing presents. Shooting creates resistance and violence (the Spanish speaking New World legacy), but the Brazilian locals get dependent on the presents. Which is why the Portuguese succeeded and the Spanish failed. And how Reyes came to run the favelas. (Read police squads). By making drug running into a business venture, the way of the corrupt police in *Tropa de Elite 2*.

As disturbing and incorrect as this interpretation may be, it pales against the questionable lack of ethics displayed by Vin – on one side of the law; and Dwayne Johnson on the other. Who team up, united in their contempt of anyone not a US citizen. Especially the impoverished residents of the the Rio favelas.

And for anyone who has sat in the back seat of a Rio taxi there are some severe strains on credibility in regard to traffic. Such as racing four stolen police cars, four a breadth for a kilometre down Ipanema's Avenita.

Soon the plot pitches US elite forces against the favelas. Vin saves Dwayne which seems to prove that being a US citizen constitutes a stronger bond than social ties or class solidarity or the criminal fraternity or simple loyalty to partners in crime. The essence of the film – which is significant in attempting to analyze Brazilian/Rio culture – is US vs Brazil; LA vs Rio; Vin plus Dwayne (the teaming up of both sides of the law) vs the Brazilian political, economic and social framework. Which may not be overwhelmingly positive in the light in which it is portrayed, but – it IS Brazilian!



'Truth, justice and the American way...'

Dwayne and Vin's allegiance suggests that the film is an exercise in US foreign policy propaganda, advocating direct US intervention in world affairs. 'We don't sneak,' says Dwayne as a voice of the FBI, so it is up to Dwayne and Vin together to 'fix' the social and political agenda of Rio and Brazil, by stealing from the locals. Which could be interpreted as apparently Brazilian people (a) are unaware of their social and political problems; and (b) if they did, they would be incapable of doing anything about it. Thus Dwayne's

FBI squad is justified in killing several hundred local policemen (not an exaggeration — there's a lot of shooting), as we are led to believe, based on the risk-filled premise, that all Brazilian cops are corrupt requiring what US foreign policy so often euphemistically refers to as 'being brought to justice.'



Justified

That American crooks succeed in stealing a room full of Brazilian Reals (now a stable currency on the world market) is portrayed as an example of American corporate ingenuity – a cause for celebration. The criminal element provide admirable examples of just how to deal with new found wealth; by heading to the gambling casinos of Monte Carlo, buying outrageously expensive cars and luxury escort girls, while Vin — working class hero — while content to open up a garage in LA, succumbs to the temptation of an over-priced one-of-

a-kind speedster, and not one tight-skirted escort girl, but two. Truly the rewards of American entrepreneurship. And the finale between Vin and ex-cop O'Connor sets out to prove that the only meaningful resolution to the complexity of life is to see who could drive a car fastest.

But it's the end credits that really stick in one's eye. 'Special thanks to: "Governo/Polícia and Profeituero do Estado do Rio de Janeiro."' Did anyone send them a copy of the script in Portuguese? And even better, the disclaimer at the end: 'This motion picture used sustainability strategies to reduce carbon emissions and environmental impact,' with a 'Green is Universal' tag at the end. This is a film about cars driving fast and furiously, and a DVD edition with 20 minutes of extra material of how much 'practice' they need to drive just that fast and just that furious. That's a lot of petrol. Was it ethanol? That's a lot of rain forest.



An Amazon Blu - pining for the... manchineel trees?

Rio, 2011

Rio through the eyes of a local has a more appealing profile - the film's director Carlos Saldhana (proud of his Rio background) claimed the film was a declaration of love for the city where he grew up. All the familiar landmarks are here, but now in the psychedelic hues of digital enhancement and a 'camera' liberated from its fixture. A hair raising tram journey through S:a Teresa, flying through the peaks of Tijuca National Park, and careering along the Avenitas of Copacabana and Ipanema - all familiar sights, portrayed in a way we have never seen before.



Brazil as a flight of the imagination to the haunting strains of 'Brazil, Brazil'

Brazil, 1985

And then there are the Brazil films, when Brazil is so much of the mind, that Brazil does not exist at all. The Boys from Brazil about the rise of neo Nazism, set in Paraguay, (although filmed in Portugal);

and the sublime Brazil, which in the mind of Terry Gilliam exists only as the orchestral piece of music as a soundtrack to insanity. Aquarela do Brasil, - Watercolour of Brazil composed by Ary Barroso in 1939 and popularized in Disney's Saludos Amigos a few years later - said he wanted to "free the samba away from the tragedies of life." For the Jonathan Pryce character of the film, trapped in a kafka-esque nightmare from which there was escape - a tortured prisoner in a nameless future, 'Brazil' offers the winged freedom of flight in pink tinted clouds, beyond Rio, beyond Brazil, beyond all earthly confines...



6. Yemanjá at Copacabana

I asked Dirk if he was working New Year. Dirk is from Germany, has lived in Rio some 15 years, and works as an eco-tourist guide, mainly in the Tijuca National Park. We'd spent the day in the rain drenched mountains, admiring the views of cloud-covered peaks.



Rio and the omniscient presence of Cristo Redentor

'Just got a new assignment', says Dirk. 'A French diplomat based in the UK, on a visit to Rio. He wanted tickets for himself and family for the new year.' That would be in four days time.

'Two million people on the beach, and hotels booked up five years in advance? He'd be lucky.'

'He was lucky. He got rooms at the Copacabana Palace. But he has

a problem with the new year celebrations.'

'What kind of problem?'

'He doesn't like crowds.'

'Two million people on one beach? This is going to be the most crowded place on the planet.'

'Yes. It's a problem.'



Dirk in the Tijuca Rain Forest - at Pica da Tijuca 1,021 metres above seal level

Today is December 27th. Workers are putting up the framework and pylons for the stands and the speakers, and a sound system that will synchronise samba rhythms for the 6.3 kilometres of Copacabana beach. Two million people. That's like the entire population of Latvia. On one beach.

One ceremony is of particular interest, just for Copacabana and just on December 31st. This is the Condomblé ritual (white magic) of paying homage to Yemanjá, the sea-goddess, to ensure her blessings for the year to come.

According to Morwyn's book *Magic from Brazil*, it is quite possible

to see the *condomblé* priestesses on Friday nights at the corner of Copacabana in front of the Forte not far from Ipaduar. But the book is 20 years old and for the past two Fridays, we've seen kids playing football, a few swimmers, street musicians, fishermen and the late night strollers. Like every night on the Copacabana promenade.

Tonight it's Tuesday, the 27th – the electronic countdown clock lists four days to go, and now at 11pm, the beach walk is filled with folk from the Copacabana street market (now closing down), with people visible as far as the bright lights can illuminate, the whole 6.3 kilometres, all the way past the Copacabana Palace to Bogofota and the Sugar Loaf mountain.



Heading back toward Ipanema, and, well, well... here on the corner of the beach, by the rocks of the Forte, is a group of white dressed women, a large circle of candles, and a line extending out toward the sea. The circle is filled with bottles, flowers, candles and food offerings, and the ten or so women form a small circle, chanting, while some menfolk and kids, stand not far away. It is the ceremony to Yemanjá, the goddess of the sea, and the mother of pearls – a deity high up in the hierarchy of orixa gods and goddesses.

My Portuguese consists of 'entendo', and 'nao entendo', (understand; don't understand) and about ten different words for juices, so getting into a more meaningful conversation with the high priestess of condoblé and tonight's special ritual was not easy. 'Yemanja, sim,' she says. 'Fridays - too many people. Today is better.'

'And the new year ceremony?' I ask. She extends her arms and casts her eye in the direction of the scaffolding and the speakers and the sound stage, already built in preparation for Friday's celebrations. OK. I can get that — two million Rio hedonists dancing wildly along the 6.3 kilometer beach front; hardly convivial to the quiet reflective meditation of the condoblé ritual in honor of Yemanja and the protective blessings she may bestow.



New Year at Copacabana - not for the claustrophobic

Religion and rituals are all the mode. On Christmas Eve at the midnight mass the Catholic Church at Ipuđuar was filled to capacity. Just along the road, the loud chanting from the Evangelical Church. The nativity frescoes, in both cases, mix saints with Orixá gods and football players. St Lazarus (the saint 'who was loved so much' that he was brought back from the dead), sits next to Omolu, the god of healing and purification, who sits next to Pelé, honored in Brazil, as not only the best football player of all time, but the player with the purest heart. This mix of *condomblé* (*condomblé* is the religion, *macumba* is sorcery), originally an African practice celebrating the gods of the Orixás, the church, and the weekly year-round devotion to football, must make Brazil one of the most religious countries in South America.



Pelé, St Lazarus, Omolu - icons of worship

The Brazilian author Jorge Amado wrote a novel, *The War of the Saints* - set in Bahia - describing the local faith and spiritual fusion. Catholic saints and Orixá gods and goddesses, vying for local patronage. Better to be on the safe side and worship at many altars. *Macumba*, on the other hand, the 'darker' side of *condomblé* -

magic spells and sorcery - is more likely to be found in the back streets and darkened rooms. This occult side to Brazilian spirituality is also reflected in popular culture - comics, music, TV, movies.

In *Macumba Love* (1960) an American writer comes to a Brazilian island to exposé macumba rituals as behind a series of unsolved murders. But he comes up against the reigning macumba queen, Mama Rata-Loi, who selects his daughter for the next victim to die in a grisly voodoo ceremony.

For the more interesting (and original) insights into the Brazilian occult, there are the films of Coffin Joe, José Mojica Marins (or Ze do Caixao). His trilogy: *At Midnight I'll Take Your Soul*, *This Night I Will Possess Your Corpse* and *Embodiment of Evil*, from 1963, 1967 and 2008 (!) respectively, mix religion, horror and the occult with a touch of surrealistic genius. Coffin Joe - who is a character in his own films - went on to make a television series for Brazil TV and still today, nearly 80 years old, is a cult figure in Brazil and his native Sao Paolo.

Coffin Joe is a sinister figure in black cape and top hat, who regards religion, superstition and morality with contempt. The film titles refer to his obsession of finding the 'perfect woman' ("intellectually superior to the average Brazilian woman"), in order to create a birth line of superior off-spring. It has proved to be a quest lasting nearly half a century.



Coffin Joe (Jose Mojica Martins) - centre - aka Ze de Caixao (José of the Grave) - on his quest for the 'perfect woman' – a descent into the worlds of the occult, religion and Brazilian myth.

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End of Part Two