



The Pope's Toilet

(El Baño del Papa)

Directed by César Charlone and Enrique Fernández



Uruguay/ France/ Brazil/ 2007/ Drama/
In Spanish with English subtitles/ 90 min./
1:1.85/Dolby Digital

Film Movement Press Contact:

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

Film Movement Theatrical Contact:

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

SYNOPSIS

It's 1988, and Melo, an Uruguayan town on the Brazilian border, awaits the visit of Pope John Paul II. 50,000 people are expected to attend, and the most humble locals believe that selling food and drink to the multitude will just about make them rich. Petty smuggler Beto thinks he has the best idea of all--he decides he will build a WC in front of his house and charge for its use. His efforts bring about unexpected consequences, and the final results will surprise everyone.

An alternately touching, humorous and poignant story of human dignity and solidarity from director/scriptwriters Enrique Fernández and noted cinematographer César Charlone (Oscar-nominated "City of God"). Co-produced by Oscar-nominee Fernando Meirelles ("City of God", "The Constant Gardener").

DIRECTORS' NOTES

GENESIS

Enrique Fernandez: At the time, I was about 10. Beto was the kind of neighbor who came by every morning, just to say hello. He hid underneath an un-tucked shirt, and his thin legs looked like toothpicks when he rode his big old bike that seemed to be on the brink of completely falling apart. Beto used to live with his mother-in-law, Doña Leocadia, a pious old woman who had befriended my mother. To prove her affection, she even offered her old dentures she didn't use anymore. Two days later, my mother gave them back, profusely apologetic. Later, she'd confess to me she tried them on but that they didn't fit. For 36 years, my father— who died in 1964 – had been writing lyrics for a Carnival band. That's how I became familiar with all these characters. They have been part of my childhood as they are today in the film. I know their joys and sorrows. I still see them when I go back to my village. I know them very well and love them.

Cesar Charlone: As an Uruguayan living in Brazil, all the subjects that come to my mind, when I think about film, are related to my homeland. The first documentary I directed and produced in 1978 was a very, very low budget one, shot in Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina and Chile. After 10 years directing commercials, video-clips, and TV series, doing a feature film was “somewhere in my mind”. I had a couple of ideas already written down, they were always related to my Uruguayan past. But to find money for them in Brazil wasn't so easy. So when Elena Laroux, the producer, and Enrique consulted me, I thought it would be a fortunate start. When I received the script, I found there was not only a beautiful story with moving characters, but the opportunity to realize an old dream: working on a Uruguayan story in my homeland. To me, Melo has a special flavor: a Uruguayan town with a great Brazilian influence. Most people in Melo speak Portuguese, watch Brazilian TV and buy Brazilian goods. Not difficult for me to feel at home.

A FOUR-HANDS WORK

Cesar: We worked a lot together, before shooting. Rewriting the final version, looking for locations ... I loved Enrique's story and was committed to get it on the screen as cinematically as possible. For that I worked on a very precise filming plan, which I shared and discussed with him, after which we passed it on to the rest of the crew. So, on the set we all knew how and where we were going. It was a pretty simple and smooth shoot. Shortly thereafter, Fernando Meirelles, the director of *City of God*, with whom I was working, was moved by the script and decided to join us as a co-producer with our company O2 Filmes in Brazil.

Enrique: We did very precise planning and rehearsed a lot together. We had long chats about the characters, situations, and the way things should be shot. When the shooting started, things went quite smoothly. We worked very closely together on the set for the direction of the actors. Cesar took care of everything

that had to do with the visual aspect, while I took care of making sure that we stayed faithful to our script.

AN ORIGINAL CAST

Enrique: We have a cast with professional and non-professional actors. The professional actors are Cesar Troncoso (Beto), Virginia Méndez (Carmen, the mother) and Nelson Lence (Meleyo, flying custom officer). Then, we have Hugo Blandamuro (barman) and Carlos Lissardy (Ches, the madman). The rest of the cast is made up of locals from Melo, and one – a very important one – Mario Silva, is from Montevideo. They rehearsed for weeks to develop the confidence, ability and concentration needed to face the camera.

We had professional actors, non-professionals who happened to be great actors, and ones who had never even seen a camera. It was amazing to see the cast acting together and not being able to recognize which one was the professional.

Cesar: Cesar Troncoso and Virginia Mendez, who are well known Uruguayan actors, were already approached by Enrique. But having such a big cast and mixing them with non-professional actors seemed, at the time, not so easy. Especially considering that their background was mostly theatre. Chris Duurvoort, the trainer, and I had worked together twice before. He is able to make an entire cast homogeneous. Christian went a few times to Melo before the shooting and worked with them on their characters and details, like “how to look like a real cyclist”. Seeing Beto and Valvulina, or Carmen and Silvia acting side by side, it’s difficult to say who is professional.

EPILOGUE

Cesar: What I like about *The Pope’s Toilet* is the different levels of the story. There is a social one, a very South American side. The fact that our “heroes” are smugglers and our “bad guys” are the authorities, the power; that there are social and moral codes, quite different than the ones we normally see. It’s a story about the need to have a dream, the need to hope for something better. But we also have our “love story”, not the typical love story, but a silent, almost hidden one. A father who wants to be loved, accepted, and maybe even admired by his daughter.

Enrique: The story ends with a broken dream, but not with the end of hope. And it’s like that because the daily struggle of Beto, like that of all the poor around the world, is a daily task that has to be carried out with conviction and courage. Like anywhere else on earth, some day, the culture and traditions in Melo will no longer exist. They’ll change or disappear. We wanted to tell their stories before the inevitable happens.

BIOGRAPHIES

Directors' Biographies

César Charlone was born in Uruguay. He worked primarily in Brazil after having studied at the School of Cinema in Sao Paulo. He began working in 1975 as director of photography on documentaries, commercials and feature films for directors such as Murillo Salles, Sergio Resende, Roberto Gervitz and Renato Tapajos. In 1997 he relocated permanently to Brazil and began a career as director of commercials, music videos and several episodes of the TV series "City of Men", whose scripts he also wrote. Since then, he has been working alternately as a director and cinematographer. In 2001 he was responsible for the photography in Fernando Meirelles's *City of God*, for which he received several awards, including the "Golden Frog" at the Festival of Lodz, and an Oscar nomination. In 2003 he worked with Spike Lee, as well as once again with F. Meirelles on *The Constant Gardner*, which was nominated for Best Photography at the BAFTA Awards.

Enrique Fernandez was born in Melo, Uruguay. Fernandez took part in the making of several short films and documentaries in Uruguay and Germany (where he lived for several years) as a scriptwriter, assistant director and cameraman. In 1997 his script "Otario" was filmed by Diego Arsuaga and was in the official selection at the Festival of San Sebastian. Fernandez teaches scriptwriting at the Uruguayan School of Cinema.

Cast Biographies

César Troncoso (Beto) began studying acting in the late 80s at the age of 25. During his time at theater school he formed a comedic duet with Roberto Suárez. Together they worked the local night clubs, parties, and rock concerts. Upon graduation he began an uninterrupted theater career, having to this day approximately 30 plays under his belt. The majority of these plays took place in non-conventional locales (train stations, stables, family homes, parks...) He travelled with many of these plays to numerous international theater festivals (Caracas, Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Santo Domingo, Porto Alegre). In 2004 César won the Florencio prize for Actor of the Year, awarded by the Uruguayan Association of Theater Critics. After working in many shorts, he made his feature-film debut in 2003 with a lead role in Guillermo Casanova's *The Trip Towards the Sea* (El Viaje Hacia el Mar). For this role he received the Revelation prize and Best Actor of the Year Award presented by the Association of Uruguayan Critics. He recently appeared in Lucía Puenzo's movie *XXY*.

Virginia Mendez (Carmen) is a graduate of the Margarita Xirgú Municipal School of Dramatic Art (Montevideo, Uruguay). She has worked in a professional capacity since the 80s. She is one of the founding members of the Italia Fausta

Theater Company, one of the most prestigious and successful theater companies in Uruguay. She joined Petru Valenski and Luis Charamelo in “Who’s Afraid of Italia Fausta?,” a play that had a 15-year run. In the art field she has participated in the design and development of props, wardrobe, and stage design in over 250 Uruguayan plays. In 1988 she received the Florencio prize for best actress in the Rubro Theater for Children. *The Pope’s Toilet* is her professional film debut.

FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

WINNER – Audience Award, Golden Kikito, and Kikito Critic’s Prize – **Gramado Film Festival**

WINNER – Silver Colon, Golden Colon – **Huelva Latin American Film Festival**

WINNER – Best First Work, TVE award – **Lleida Latin American Film Festival**

WINNER – Horizons Award – **San Sebastian International Film Festival**

WINNER – International Jury Award – **Sao Paulo International Film Festival**

WINNER – Best First Film, Best Actor and Best Cinematography – **Providence Latino Film Festival**

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Guadalajara Int’l Film Festival

Cleveland Int’l Film Festival

Seattle Int’l Film Festival

CREDITS

Crew

Directed by
Produced by
Original Script
Adaptation & Final Version
Co Producers

Enrique Fernández & César Charlone
Elena Roux
Enrique Fernández
Enrique Fernández & César Charlone
Andrea Barata Ribeiro
Bel Berlinck
Fernando Meirelles
Serge Catoire
Francisco Salomon
Hugo Kovenski
Sandino Saravia Vinay
Claudia Büschel

Associate Producers

Line Producers

Cast

Beto
Carmen
Silvia
Valvulina
Nacente
Tica
Meleyo
Teresa
Gordo
Capitán Álvarez
Soldier

César Troncoso
Virginia Méndez
Virginia Ruiz
Mario Silva
Henry De Leon
Jose Arce
Nelson Lence
Rosario Dos Santos
Luna Alex Silva
Baltasar Burgos
Carlos Lerena