

'Jules and Dolores' ('O Roubo da Taca'): Film Review

4/12/2016 by Boyd van Hoeij



Afro-Brazilian star Tais Araujo headlines this intimate comedy-drama from director Caito Ortiz about the theft of the World Cup trophy in 1983 Brazil.

“Some of this actually happened,” we are informed before Brazilian crime dramedy *Jules and Dolores* (*O Roubo da Taca*) kicks off. And indeed, this fast-moving and somewhat sticky feature from director Caito Ortiz is inspired by the December 1983 theft of the Soccer World Cup trophy in Brazil, over a decade after the country had been allowed to keep the statuette indefinitely when it won the cup for the third time, in 1970. Soccer enthusiasts will know that the sterling silver, gold-plated trophy was never found again and might have been melted down by the thieves, so Ortiz and co-screenwriter Lusa Silvestre (*Estomago: A Gastronomic Story*) were free to imagine what actually happened to the cup.

Following only the rough outlines of the actual story, they’ve invented a down-on-his-luck gambler and his looker of a wife whose money troubles could become history when, unbeknownst to her, he decides to steal the cup with a bearded buddy so they can sell it. Except that the thieves hadn’t quite figured out the most important thing: Who, in a soccer-crazy nation like Brazil, would actually want to buy or destroy such a holy relic?

With a SXSW Audience Award in the Visions section under its belt, plus a Netflix deal for all of Latin America except for Brazil, where Paris Films will release the film, this mainstream item clearly has some crossover potential.

“Just going in for some reconnaissance,” the mustachioed Jorge Peralta (Paulo Tiefenthaler) and his bearded friend Borracha (Danilo Grangheia) manage to pry open the lock of the back door of the Brazilian Soccer Association offices, where the award is kept. When they’re finally eye to eye with a gold-plated copy of the “Jules Rimet” (named after the FIFA president who originated the idea of a World Cup) in a trophy case in the board room, their thirst for easy money gets the better of them. After a visit to the bathroom, where a number two should be left for good luck, they have to neutralize the single night watchman to be able to go home with the replica of the prize.

Shown upfront, this sequence is the film’s major setpiece and it throws audiences right into the thick of things and gets a lot of things right. Ortiz clearly knows how to build up tension yet uses the film’s playful, locally flavored score to keep reminding audiences that they shouldn’t take what they’re watching too seriously. Peralta and Borracha also have the kind of rapport between bickering old friends who can — and do — say anything to each other, with the actors getting this particular kind of friendly friction just right.

The quick bathroom scene isn’t simply comedy for comedy’s sake but is actually neatly tied into the narrative, as both men try to, er, get lucky, so to speak, and then one of them then flushes, which makes the other one mad since it only brings luck if you leave your business to be discovered by someone else the next day. It is the noise of the water racing down a pipe that alerts the security guard that someone is in the building, so the thieves’ good luck was literally flushed down the toilet. Oops.

They manage to take out the night watchmen, so initially it seems like all’s well that ends well. But the punchline of the heist is the discovery, the next day, that the Association accidentally put the replica in the safe and displayed the real deal, so the thieves end up with a much bigger but also much less easily sellable prize. Oops again.

While the original Portuguese title can be translated as the relatively straightforward *The Theft of the Cup*, the film’s international title suggests it is about a duo: Jules, of course, refers to the trophy, while the mysterious Dolores (Afro-Brazilian telenovela star Tais Araujo) is actually the wife of Peralta, a gorgeous model shacking up with a ne’er-do-well who moves somewhere in the gray area between dad-bod and corpulent. Somewhat oddly, Dolores is the narrator of the film, though it takes over a dozen minutes before she appears onscreen herself and large chunks of the narrative involve scenes in which she is not present and/or has no knowledge of events, since her husband tries to hide his gambling addiction from her.

As in another recent Brazilian crowdpleaser, Sergio Machado’s *The Violin Teacher*, what’s being told is attention-grabbing, but strange and unhelpful storytelling choices occasionally get in the way of the story itself. For example, the international title and role as the narrator suggest Dolores will play an important role, but she remains the least developed of the main characters. Especially given the film’s ending, she would have warranted more complexity than just her sex-on-legs look. And though she’s the narrator, there’s hardly a sense of how Dolores feels about her husband’s gambling and turn to crime when she finds out what’s going on. Her flirty demeanor with some of the other male characters is also hard to read, since that behavior feels more like male wish-fulfillment than something that’s part of who Dolores is and how she operates. And though there’s a small-scale action sequence in the pic’s

final reel, all the tension in it comes from a plotting/editing sleight-of-hand, not from who the characters are or what they've gotten themselves into.

Though gorgeously packaged, with enough 1980s flourishes to make any vintage addict or anyone over 35 swoon and certainly enjoyable as light and straightforward entertainment, there is a sense throughout *Jules and Dolores* that Ortiz and Silvestre could have done more with the material.

Production company: Prodigio Filmes

Cast: Paulo Tiefenthaler, Danilo Grangheia, Milhem Cortaz, Fabio Marcoff, Tais Araujo

Director: Caito Ortiz

Screenplay: Lusa Silvestre, Caito Ortiz

Producers: Francesco Divita, Beto Gauss

Executive producer: Camila Groch

Director of photography: Ralph Strelow

Production designer: Fabio Goldfarb

Editors: Marcelo Junqueira, Federico Brioni

Music: Rica Amabis, Tejo Damasceno

Casting: Chico Accioly

Sales: Picture Tree International

Not rated, 91 minutes