

"RESSACA, FALL FROM GRACE",
INTERNATIONAL EMMY AWARDS WINNER
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Stéphanie Lebrun

The documentary *Ressaca, Fall from grace* produced by Babel Studio and France Télévisions and distributed by Terranova won the International Emmy Awards for best ARTS programme!

Here is a bit of backstory on this French success with producer Stéphanie Lebrun, Babel Studio and international distributor Isabelle Graziadey, from Terranova.



Isabelle Graziadey



TV France: Brazil, the Rio opera ballet and the aesthetic choice of black and white... can you tell us about the genesis of *Ressaca, Fall from grace*?

Stéphanie Lebrun: The production company **Babel** has several offices around the world (Paris, New Delhi, Miami and Rio). We made the choice to live where we produce documentaries, relying on bi-national teams. This allows us to engage in long-term filming, sometimes very risky in terms of production. **Vincent Rimbau** is a French director who has been living in Brazil for 20 years. He arrived in the euphoria of the Lula years, of hope and growth, he saw the inequalities diminishing and then everything collapsed in a matter of a few years. There was the huge Lava Jato corruption scandal that affected all political parties and large companies, and then the crisis: in 2016 the State of Rio declared bankruptcy, and civil servants' salaries were no longer paid.

Babel had already worked with him as a **director of photography**, he had quite the eye. In 2017, after the Olympics, Brazil is in the middle of a "hangover", this is the meaning of

Ressaca, an expression often used in Brazil after the celebration. This is what Brazilians felt at that time. Vincent wanted to make a film to tell this story, and **he wanted to shoot it in black and white**. An aesthetic and symbolic bias: **Brazil**, and in particular Rio de Janeiro, is often a **prisoner of his clichés: the colors, the carnival, the beach, the samba or, on the contrary, the violence of the favelas**. Vincent wanted to document the daily violence of social inequality and racism. I had been living in Brazil for 3 years, and that's also what I felt. So we decided to think about a black and white documentary film and the story we could tell. When we **discovered the situation at the Teatro Municipal**, an institution in Rio, one of the last great ballets in Latin America with a philharmonic orchestra, **500 people in total** who were no longer paid, we told ourselves that **the story was there**. The star dancers who had sacrificed their lives to get to this level were forced to dance for transportation tickets and food baskets, one of them was an Uber driver to pay his bills. What interested us was that the members of the Theater had started resisting, **they were fighting so that the Theater would not close**, so that the ballet would live. And the opera in Rio is a micro-society, **all layers of society** are represented there. Artists are considered **upper middle class**, if they were affected by the crisis, then no one (except the very wealthy) could be spared. And then there are also the **working classes**, like Juan Batista, the **old doorman** who lives two hours by bus from the theater in a favela. For him, not being paid any more means not being able to feed his grandsons who are in his care. **Patrizia Landi, a Brazilian director**, joined the project, the double vision, French and Brazilian, was important. **Vincent and Patrizia were accepted** and started filming regularly, for weeks on end, enough to write the first screenplay for the film and to make a trailer, a convincing case. We were convinced of the potential of the film, which we wanted to treat as a fiction. But we were wondering who would want a black and white film about the Rio ballet troupe... At that time, **France Télévisions had just created an auteur documentary box open to international**. **Catherine Alvaresse** and **Alexandre Marionnaud** were in charge of it. They were very enthusiastic when they read the file and proposed a pre-purchase. The budget was not very high but it allowed us to start production. We were then supported by the CNC, PROCIREP/ANGOA, the PACA region, the documentary platform Spicée, the Parliamentary Channel. A Brazilian co-producer joined us (Cafeina Produções), and ANCINE in Brazil, then Canal Brazil.

We filmed for a year and a half without knowing when or how the film would end... Even if Vincent Rimbaux and Patrizia Landi mastered filming, in documentary, we work with living material and life often offers better scripts than anything we can imagine! Editing began in Brazil and continued in France. There was **a lot of work in post-production**, mixing and grading, directed by **Thibaud Caquot** from the **HighFun** company.



TV France: A successful gamble, crowned by this International Emmy Awards. In your opinion, what made the difference with the other documentaries in competition?

Stéphanie Lebrun: I think that *Ressaca* had the lowest budget among the other films in competition in this category! We were incredibly lucky: we worked in **complete freedom**. **France Télévisions** gave us **carte blanche**. We chose the **French woman composer Malvina Meinier**, and asked **French artist Erwann Le Bourdonnec** (who was living in Rio at the time to create a pictorial work for our opening sequence), it is inspired by the film and mixes chaos and grace, we had no time constraint. The exchanges with France Télévisions before the film was made were pertinent and constructive. In short, the directors were able to make the film as they wanted, as they dreamed.

We were lucky that **the heroes of the film, Filipe, Juan Batista and his grandsons, Marcia Jaqueline**, accepted us on such a long shoot and opened their doors and hearts to us. We thank them again. And fortunately, **those who were able to see the film among the members of the ballet loved it**. It is the most beautiful of rewards!

TV France: And a daring gamble also for its international distribution... What were its first steps on the international scene?

Stéphanie Lebrun: **Lydia Kali from @Edith Paris** was the first distributor of the film. She really liked *RESSACA* and was able to distribute it in a 52-minute version. In **France**, the Parliamentary Channel bought and broadcast this version, it was sold in **Poland** too. In **Brazil**, Canal Brazil bought the long version and Globo broadcast it on VOD.

But it is not easy to distribute this film, especially in the long version, there are few boxes abroad for feature films. **Terranoa is now in charge of distributing the film**.

TV France: With such a specialized theme, what is your international positioning?

Isabelle Graziadey: The film was edited in 52 minutes to fit the standard TV slots, even if some channels bought the 90-minute version. It was thus sold to **TVP Poland, RTP, Sky New Zealand**. Originally it is a film **at the crossroad of Arts and human interest**, set in a context of crisis in Brazil, with a **vivid cinematic approach**. But over time it also became **an immersion and a moving testimony** on the place that **performing arts** occupies in our societies, its role as a social link and access to Culture in the broadest sense. **In the context of this confined year** where we have been deprived of this **communion** around **Performing arts**, these themes question us even more widely and beyond the case of Brazil. In this sense, it is a timeless film that takes on its own significance in the current circumstances. We miss going out to cultural venues such as the opera, concert house, theaters. **To see these great dancers of the Rio Opera** who have **sacrificed everything** to reach this level of excellence, thus **reduced to exile or to dancing for food tickets** to survive because of the economic crisis and because of political choices can only reflect the mirror back to us.

Thanks to the spotlight provided by **this prestigious award** (the Emmy Award), we think that **SVOD platforms** which are looking for **strong and universal stories** could be interested as **they do not have the same limitations in terms of duration and style**

The sales history of our film *Josephine Baker, story of an awakening*, in the US speaks for itself. The film was sold into more than **20 territories**, but could not find a home in the US. The film using **Black and White archives** struggled to find its place in the US despite the iconic figure of Josephine and her Transatlantic destiny. **The nomination in Banff for Best Art Film**, a year and a half after its completion, triggered two sales in the United States and Canada.



TV France: What are the difficulties encountered in the exploitation of such documentaries?

Isabelle Graziadey: We targeted the **Art slots** that are **very formatted** on television. They are essentially **dedicated to biopics or live performances**. The choice of **black and white** is a **real concern** for some buyers, but I'm sure that many broadcasters will be **curious** to see **this EMMY award-winning film** and will look at it in a different light. It will fit into the **Best of Docs**

slots reserved for award-winning feature-length documentaries. *Ressaca* is also a universal story of broken destinies, of Stars falling from grace, and recounts the closing of a cultural institution in Latin America. What happens when there is no more venue in the City to celebrate Beauty and transmit a certain repertoire.

TV France: Will this International Emmy Awards, which recognizes the quality of the documentary, shed new light on the subject?

Stéphanie Lebrun: *Ressaca* has had a very successful festival career. **Christine Camdessus and Anne Georget** had selected it for the **world premiere at FIPADOC 2019**, it was in the selection for the best documentaries where it was noticed. Then it was **selected in different international festivals** where it received Special Distinctions. At the end of 2019, **at the Rio de Janeiro Film Festival, *Ressaca* was awarded two prizes: Best Documentary and Best Direction.** It was already beautiful.

This International Emmy Award is a huge surprise. We were already very happy to be nominated but we didn't think we would win the first prize!

We are obviously **very honored, very proud**, and that encourages us to keep producing and directing **demanding, ambitious, daring films**. Vincent and Patrizia have other film projects, some of them with us. As for us, producers and founders of Babel, we tell ourselves that a **small independent production company can achieve great things and we're not going to stop there!**

