

# Screen

INTERNATIONAL



# Samba rhythm captures the world

## THE SOUND OF BRAZIL (MORO NO BRASIL)

Reviewed by Lee Marshall

Dir: Mika Kaurismaki. Ger-Fin-Fra-Brazil. 2002. 105mins.

**A** well-known European art-house director goes on a musical pilgrimage to a Latin American country. Sounds familiar? Echoes of Wim Wenders' *Buena Vista Social Club* come thick and fast in this roots-of-Samba documentary by Finnish director Mika Kaurismaki. But in the end, *The Sound Of Brazil* carves out its own identity, one which is looser but also less manipulative than Wenders' fairy-tale 'documentary'. Produced by an international consortium headed by Franco-German culture TV channel ARTE, the film has the potential to prove itself as a theatrical release, especially if supported by a strong CD compilation of highlights from the soundtrack. The film plays at the San Francisco International Film Festival on April 19; invitations have also been extended to this festival pleaser from Karlovy Vary, Moscow and Melbourne, among others, following its Berlinale appearance earlier this year.

*The Sound Of Brazil* opens with a shot of the director standing in the icy winter landscape of his native Finland. "It all began," he tells us, "when I swapped a Deep Purple record for an obscure collection of Brazilian samba classics." This sets the tone for the deadpan, rambling

style of the director's English-language voiceovers, which are kept to a minimum in order to leave space for over 50 separate musical performances, many filmed and recorded on the street. Presented as a voyage from the roots of samba to its present-day excursions into rap and funk, *The Sound Of Brazil* is also a voyage through two contrasting areas of Brazil – the rural north-eastern states of Bahia and Pernambuco, and the bustling city of Rio de Janeiro.

The first part of the film comes over at times as rather too much of a TV travel programme: ("I stopped off in Caruaru to visit a traditional street market"). But Kaurismaki's voice is always veined with good-natured irony, and there are times when it almost looks as if he is parodying *Buena Vista Social Club*. The film mixes spontaneous performances from toothless musicians with more structured scenes which come close to full-scale pop promos. In one, an all-girl dance group pose like Hindu goddesses in the shell of a disused factory; another features an exhilarating performance by a funk percussion group in the favelas of Rio.

It is here in Rio, Kaurismaki's home for the last 12 years, that the film goes into overdrive. Up to now it has been an amusing, sometimes touching, but rather directionless musical travelogue. But in Brazil's

carnival city, the volume is suddenly cranked up a notch: live concert footage of singer Margareth Menezes has us dancing in our seats. And it is here too that Kaurismaki stumbles across his equivalent of Compay Segundo, the ninetysomething musician whose career was relaunched by *Buena Vista Social Club*. An elderly singing tailor and a natural actor, Walter Afkiate has the film's best line, delivered with all the right pauses: "I'll give you some advice. To forget a love affair, start a new one."

Jacques Cheuiche's colour-soaked, hand-held photography provides its own amiable commentary, pulling away from its subject to shoot through a forest of legs, or to observe two boys carrying a huge satellite dish on a motorbike. Having begun in a Finnish blizzard, the film ends up in Kaurismaki's own music club in Rio, Mika's Bar. If nothing else, this likeable musical voyage is a good plug for the venue.

Prod co ..... Magnatel  
Co-prods . . . . ARTE, Marianna Film, TV Cultura,  
..... Lichtblick, YLE TV1  
Int'l sales. .... ARTE  
Prod ..... Phoebe Clarke  
Scr ..... Mika Kaurismaki, George Moura  
Cinematography ..... Jacques Cheuiche  
Ed. .... Karen Harley

