

# Meu Pé de Laranja Lima

Um filme de  
Marcos Bernstein

Baseado no romance  
de José Mauro de Vasconcelos



## PASSARO FILMS

MY SWEET ORANGE TREE - 2012 99 minutes

Directed by Marcos Bernstein

Written by Marcos Bernstein and Melanie Dimantas

Based on the book 'O Meu Pe de Laranja Lima' by José Mauro de Vasconcelos, published in 1968 by Editora Melhoramentos Ltda.

Produced by Katia Machado

Executive Producers Katia Machado, Elza Cataldo, Samantha Capideville

Associete Producers Patrick Siaretta and Jerome Merle

Editor	Marcelo Moraes
Director of Photography	Gustavo Hadba, ABC
Original Music	Armand Amar
Art Director	Bia Junqueira
Costumes	Luciana Buarque Maribel Espinoza
Casting	Bruno Costa and Valter Lagoa
Sound Designer	Beto Ferraz

## PRINCIPAL CAST

João Guilherme Ávila - ZEZE  
José de Abreu - PORTUGA  
Caco Ciocler - WRITER  
Emiliano Queiroz - TIO EDMUNDO  
Eduardo Dascar - FATHER  
Fernanda Vianna - MOTHER  
Julia de Victa - GLORIA  
Tino Gomes - ARIIVALDO  
Kathia Calil - JANDIRA  
Pedro Valle - TOTOCA  
Leônidas José - LUIS  
Inês Peixoto - TEATCHER  
Eduardo Moreira - LADISLAU  
Ricardo Bravo - DOCTOR

## LOG LINE

When Zezé grows up, he wants to be "a poet with a bow tie". For now, he's just an intelligent 7-year-old who survives the violent life inside a blue-collar family with the help an orange tree.



## SYNOPSIS

Zezé Vasconcelos is the 7-year-old son of factory workers and fourth in a family of five children. Their family is simple and poorly educated, but Zezé is different: he's sensitive, precocious, and is a talented young storyteller. And he's trouble! Nothing gives him more pleasure than transforming his neighbourhood into a setting for his mischief. Although his sister Glória knows he has a good soul, Zezé has no allies and is mercilessly subjected to beatings.

Things worsen when his dad loses his job. The family stops talking, his mum is exhausted from her extra shifts and food becomes scarce. His frustrated dad spansks him more and more. Zezé's only way out is to get into even more trouble!

Zezé uses his huge imagination as a defence against all this violence. He chats with a bird that lives inside his chest and takes his little brother on walks through a pretend zoo in their backyard. But he finds his dearest source of refuge in a simple yet beautiful imaginary construct: a talking Sweet Orange Tree, a small sapling he calls "Minguinho" ("Buddy"). With Minguinho, Zezé celebrates the good, suffers through the bad and shares the secrets behind his trickery.

Zezé targets the frightening neighbourhood "foreigner", Manuel Valadares, for his most elaborate schemes, and is fittingly punished when the old man catches him on his boat. But their relationship takes an unexpected turn: In a stroke of compassion, Valadares reaches out to the boy and a beautiful friendship develops between them. Valadares gives Zezé the attention and understanding he eagerly seeks, and teaches Zezé to commit his stories to paper.

However their friendship is brutally interrupted when Valadares dies in an accident. Zezé is left incredulous, abandoned and depressed. He falls ill for weeks. Decisive weeks for the Vasconcelos family: While Zezé's world falls apart, his father finds a job and plans their move to a bigger house. But it is too late for Zezé to hope that happiness is still possible with his family. He has changed. In the company of his Sweet Orange Tree, Zezé takes out his pen and paper. A writer is about to be born.



## **PLOT SUMMARY**

There are no cars on the dirt streets. Young children in school uniforms or barefoot fly kites. Scrawny mongrels too drowsy to budge, barely manage to blink their tired eyes as pedestrians pick their way over or around them. Indistinct voices envelop the city, complemented by the hum of radio programs. Mimicking the easy rhythm of small town life, customers wander in and out of shops in a store-lined street.

Most workers and their families live at the mercy of too little work as does the Vasconcelos family and their five children. Zezé, their seven-year-old son is the story's narrator.

It is through Zezé's eyes that we grasp the complex emotional relationships that arise when his father loses his job and his mother is forced to spend long stretches of time away from home to try to support the family. The moment after the family finds itself in a dire financial situation until it finally recovers its financial footing forms the backdrop for the final months of Zezé's early years.

Zezé is different from other children - he is precocious, very curious, and extremely sensitive. His imagination is his only escape from the cruel reality of deprivation. What some might see as a positive characteristic, his family sees as deviant behavior, which is severely punished.

His intellectual growth is scorned as if it were a tool of the "devil." Only Gloria, his 15-year-old sister, sees that he is a special soul with strong intellectual potential.

His parents don't understand how Zezé learns to read by himself. They think it's just one more of his tricks, like transforming his house and neighborhood into stages for his not-so-trivial pranks. One day he makes a snake out of a silk stocking and almost causes a pregnant woman lose her baby. Another time he sets fire to the newspaper his uncle is lying in the hammock reading. He cuts the neighbor's clothesline, sending a day's worth of laundry sailing into in a mud puddle. In a fistfight, he stands up for his 12-year-old brother, Totoca, who has no patience for Zezé and even encourages his parents to punish his younger brother.

Whenever he's caught, Zezé is beat within an inch of his life. These beatings force him to escape into his own dream-filled world where we

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accompany him as he swims in the ocean, chats with the little bird that lives in his chest, or heads off on one more adventure.

The only person with whom Zezé shares this universe is his younger brother Luis, or “King Luis”. He escorts Luis into the backyard to visit a luxurious, imaginary zoo. Zezé believes that his little brother must be protected from the harsh realities of a life that Zezé already knows much too well. He seems to capture all the love he has been denied and pass it on to his younger brother.

In the midst of the crisis brought on by Zeze’s father’s unemployment, the Vasconcelos family moves to a smaller house where Zezé finds a small, slightly-thorny, orange tree almost as forlorn as he is. Zezé talks to the tree and to his great surprise, the tree talks back. He baptizes it “Minguinho”, sealing their friendship. Whenever something bad happens and Zezé needs to get something off his chest or wants to celebrate some good news or share a laugh over one of his pranks, he has an amusing, captivating conversation with Minguinho, the most understanding inanimate being in a world where the animate beings seem to understand very little. Minguinho is Zezé’s own choked, vanishing voice.

Like every other kid in the neighborhood, Zezé needs approval. He wants to be admired for his courage and daring. He believes he can achieve this by simply standing up to Manuel Valadares, the terrifying old Portuguese man who owns the most beautiful car. Nobody has ever dared confront Valadares, but challenging this monster is exactly what Zezé needs to lift his low self-esteem. Yet what Zezé sees as glorious undertaking becomes one more fiasco. After he’s caught sneaking on board of the back of the car, Valadares mercilessly drags Zezé off by his shirt and whacks his bottom, humiliating him in front of his friends.

The man is soon on the Zezé’s blacklist and the mere thought of him is enough to make smoke to pour out of the little boy’s ears. In a turn of events that only happens in the most poorly written true stories, soon after seeing Zezé hobbling to school on his badly scraped feet, Valadares, who regrets having been so hard on the boy, gives him a lift. Or rather, he forces Zezé up onto his beautiful white horse and takes the boy to the drug store to have his feet bandaged.

Manuel Valadares’s sudden entrance into Zeze’s life causes a beautiful

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friendship to grow where one least expects it. It is a moving friendship, a friendship with no ulterior motives, prompted by each character's loneliness and hard-won respect for difference. Unlike his relationship with Minguinho, Zezé has found a peaceful, welcoming voice that is not his own.

Zezé invites Valadares into his fantasy world where the old man finds a needy, tormented being who possesses a haunting artistic potential. Valadares encourages the boy's imagination by presenting him with a pen and paper that he inherited from his own father and urging him to record everything he sees. Zezé is delighted.

Valadares is an oasis for Zezé, a shelter from his relentless daily encounters with domestic violence. He teaches Zeze the meaning of tenderness.

The friendship is brutally interrupted by an accident that kills the old Portuguese man. Zezé is devastated by this abandonment and his deep sadness makes him fall ill, causing him to waste away for weeks. They are decisive weeks for the Vasconcelos family: as Zeze's world falls apart, his father finds a job and plans to move to a bigger house. An atmosphere of peace returns to the family's house.

Bit by bit Zezé recovers from the blow he has suffered. His father holds him in his lap as he rocks back and forth very slowly so Zezé doesn't get dizzy. Zezé slips out of the chair and walks toward the kitchen door, gazing out at his orange tree in the backyard. He goes over to the tree and digs up a can containing the paper and pen that Valadares gave him. Cloaked in the shade of the tree, the little boy leans against its silent trunk and begins to write.

THE END

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## DIRECTORS NOTE

Most adult films featuring children tell stories about adults whose lives are altered when they meet and become emotionally involved with these children. My Sweet Orange Tree is different. It does the opposite.

It tells the story of how the life of a very inventive child seeking refuge from ignorance and indifference in the world of his imagination is transformed when he meets an adult who understands him and tries to participate in his special universe. Like both the book and the script, the direction is structured in such a way as to validate and explore these circumstances by telling Zezé's story through his own eyes - the way he both sees and perceives the world.

So the film turns silent and pale when Zezé is feeling alienated and excluded. It becomes more vibrant, dynamic and tumultuous, when Zezé learns to ripen, to know himself and to behave in the hostile world. The film is darker and stays still when Zezé is frustrated at home. It is sharper and colorful when Zezé discovers the unknown world and his fantasies. The silver tone following Zezé in his frustrating days is replaced by a warmer light, more gentle, when Zezé lives adventures and meet people who give him comfort.

More than anything, the discretion of everyday images and sounds gives way to vibrant and unexpected colors, layouts and ravishing music, that loom and run through the screen each time Zezé takes board on one of his fantasies.

My Sweet Orange Tree consists of the contrasts between these glimpses of Zezé's daily life and the grand, almost epic, images of his fantasies by creating an "intimate epic" where the spectator will be both moved by the affectionate portraits of these characters and dazzled by the magnificent images of Zezé's imagination.

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### DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY/FILMOGRAPHY

Born in Rio de Janeiro, Marcos Bernstein debuted as a director in 2004 with 'The Other Side of the Street', starring Fernanda Montenegro and Raul Cortez. The film received over 20 international awards, including a CICA Award in 2004 at the Berlinale (+Panorama+), Best Actress at the Tribeca Film Festival and in Horizontes Latinos at San Sebastian, and Best Ibero-American Film at Mar del Plata. He has written screenplays for films like 'Central Station', 'Foreign Land' (by Walter Salles) and the documentary \*The Go-Between\* about Pierre Verger. He has also written local box-office hits, such as Brazilian B0 film 'Chico Xavier' by Daniel Filho, and has written films for productions in the US, UK/Germany, Spain and Chile. Bernstein has been a regular advisor to the Sundance Screenwriting Labs in Utah.

MY SWEET ORANGE TREE is his second feature-length fiction film as a director.

### PRODUCER'S BIOGRAPHY

Katia Machado has been an independent film producer since 2002, when she founded her own production company Passaro Films with offices in Paris, France and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. 'The Other Side of The Street', by Marcos Bernstein with Silver Bear winner actress Fernanda Montenegro, was her first feature production. The film received various international awards including Berlin Festival - Panorama 2004 - C.I.C.E.A. Award - Best Film; Her second documentary-feature 'Warming House Party' by Toni Venturi & Pablo Georgieff, received among other prizes the "Honor Mention" from the Brazilian Association of Documentaries in 2006. Since then she become an associate producer of the Spanish feature 'Moon in the Bottle' by Grojo, co-produced Bruno Barreto's 'Last Stop 174' followed by the features documentaries 'Barracão' by Waldir Xavier and 'Amazonia Eterna', by Belisario Franca.

She is currently developing four new features films: 'Sea Change' by Marcos Guttman, 'Scarlet Moon' by Waldir Xavier, 'At the left side of the lord' by Belisario Franca and 'Meine Ferien' by Gustavo Hadba. And about to release theatricaly Bernstein's second feature 'My Sweet Orange Tree', which script was selected by the Berlinale Co-production in 2010.