

I Maestri alla 64. Mostra



A film by Pere Portabella



Die Stille vor Bach

"The silence before Bach"

www.pereportabella.com , www.mimmomorabito.it

Alla 64. Mostra

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TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

KODAK 35 mm (5218 – 500ASA)

Aspect Ratio 1.85 :1

Dolby Stereo 5.1

102 min. Color

V.O. Spanish and German with English subtitles

Featured in 2007

Die Stille vor Bach

The Silence Before Bach

Die Stille vor Bach

Text by Marcelo Expósito

“Die Stille vor Bach” is an approximation of music and its related disciplines and professions through the work of Johann Sebastian Bach. The film is a reflection on the deep dramaturgical relations between image and music, where music is not merely a subsidiary substratum of image, but a subject of parity.

The starting point of the film is a predefined musical structure. The sound track is composed of music by Bach, in addition to two sonatas by Mendelssohn and an etude of Ligety, which create an architectural vault, under which the history of film unfurls: a passage through the XVIII, XIX and XXI centuries together with J.S.Bach.

Johann Sebastian Bach travelled to Leipzig with his family to occupy the post of Kantor at St. Thomas'. A devoted and applied worker, Bach lived a far from privileged existence both socially and professionally; but his fame as a composer and performer grew exponentially over the course of his life and long after his death. Today he is both a benchmark of high culture and a popular icon.

There is no other story line in this film. As in the rest of Portabella's films over the last thirty years, *“Die Stille vor Bach”* is stripped of anecdote. It reveals no intimacy or scandal, and recounts practically nothing of what we don't already know; in fact Bach appears in few scenes. This is the complete opposite of a *biopic*. It also contrasts from the 35mm format of television series

(today commercial films have people talking non stop because the film production industry no longer believes in image or cinema). There is very little dialogue, but in a way the film *speaks* fundamentally of two things: work and History.

Through the concept of *work* the film chooses to discuss art. Bach is not a genius who creates *ex nihilo* by pure divine inspiration. He is an inexhaustible worker who sells his dedication and the product of his creative intelligence for money (little). He has to struggle to keep his position and he is conscious of the material conditions that allow him to be creative. The entire film is shot with live sound, underlining how music *always proceeds from* technique and physical instruments as well as effort and virtuous

execution. Bach taught his son that the music that resounds inside the head is brought forth through the technique of performing. The characters in this film, including Bach, all work: they include truck drivers who play music, butchers who package entrails with scores from Bach, and piano tuners who are blind. You could say that the film *also works*; it refuses to limit itself to exploiting low passions or pandering to the spectators' expectations or their desire for escape. Instead the film asks the spectator to participate in the work of the film.

This is why in "Die Stille vor Bach" there is no linear story: as in Portabella's other films the story progresses through sequences that appear to have no other cause-effect relation than that attributed by the spectator (the final receiver). There is plenty of History, without the film turning into a historical super production; that is exactly what it is not. This is a European film. Europe grants it nationality, because Europe is the emotional, symbolic, historical and political backdrop of the film: it is the stage on which the film *takes place*. This film (shot in three languages: Spanish, Italian and Germany) maintains that Europe cannot continue without acknowledging the fact that beneath it's past (today transmuted into a tourist location for young backpackers) and its uncertain political present (dominated by technocracy and amnesia) lies a tense, conflictive, dramatic History (the heart of the film is set in Dresden). The splendour of its culture is inseparable from suffering and the impact of exploitation over centuries; its foundations are swarming with a multitude like that of Leipzig Market. Europe's present is no less tumultuous and ambivalent than its past.

Die Stille vor Bach

The Silence Before Bach

CREW LIST

Director	PERE PORTABELLA
Script	PERE PORTABELLA CARLES SANTOS XAVIER ALBERTÍ
Production	Films 59
Photography	TOMÀS PLADEVALL (A.E.C)
Sound	ALBERT MANERA
Sound mix	RICARD CASALS
Production Manager	PASQUAL OTAL
Production Assistant	ESTITXU ELIZASU
First Assistant Director	JORDI VIDAL AMORÓS
Script supervisor	ANNIE SETTIMO
Art direction	QUIM ROY
Costume designer	MONTSE FIGUERAS
Steadycam	RAMON SANCHEZ
Key Grip	CHARLI GUERRERO
Editor	ÒSKAR XABIER GÓMEZ
Make up	CLAUDIA DE ANTA
Hairdresser	EVA SANZ

Die Stille vor Bach

The Silence Before Bach

ARTISTIC CAST

Truck driver	ALEX BRENDEMÜHL
Piano salesman	FEODOR ATKINE
J.S.Bach	CHRISTIAN BREMBECK
F. Mendelssohn	DANIEL LIGORIO
Thomaskantor	GEORG C. BILLER
Choir	THOMANERCHOR LEIPZIG
Truck driver companion	ANTONIO SERRANO
Bach's son	FERRAN RUIZ
Cellist	GEORGINA CARDONA
Guide	FRANZ SCHUCHART
Bookseller	JAUME MELENDRES
Butler	CHRISTIAN ATANASIU
Butcher	JOHANES ZAMETZER
Piano Tuner	LUCIEN DEKOSTER
Mendelssohn's mother	LINA LAMBERT
Mendelssohn's friend	JORDI LLODELLA
Cellist's friend	THOMAS SAUERTEIG
Bach's descendant	DANIELA WICK
Truck driver of the bar	ALVAR TRIAY
Ana Magdalena Bach	FANNY SILVESTRE
Bach's daughter	MARIONA SOLANAS
Bach's older son	JENS WITTEW
Waiter	BERT KRIPSTÄDT
Client	GERTRUD KOSSLER
Rider	BEATRIZ FERRER SALAT
Horse	CASANDRO

Die Stille vor Bach

The Silence Before Bach

MUSIC LIST

Aria mit verschiedenen Veränderungen. Goldberg Variationen (BWV 988)

Author: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Interpret: Pianola

Variatio 1 a 1 Clav.- Goldberg Variationen (BWV 988)

Author: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Interpret: Pianola

Variatio 2 a 1 Clav. Goldberg Variationen (BWV 988)

Author: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Interpret: Antonio Serrano, Harmònica

Präludium und Fuge a-moll (BWV 543)

Author: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Interpret: Christian Brembeck, Orgue

Variatio 23 a 2 Clav. Goldberg Variationen (BWV 988)

Author: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Interpret: Christian Brembeck, Clavicèmbal

Präludium Suite für Violoncello solo Nr. 1 in G-dur (BWV 1007)

Author: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Coordinador cel·listes: Lito Iglesias

Präludium C-dur/C-major – Das Wohltemperierte Klavier 1 Teil (BWV 846)

Author: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Interpret: Ferran Ruiz, Clavicèmbal

Das Wohltemperierte Klavier Fuga 24 (BWV 869)

Author: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Interpret: Christian Brembeck, Clavicèmbal

Lieder ohne Worte op. 19 Nr. 1 E-dur

Author: FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Interpret: Daniel Ligorio, Pianoforte

Auf flügeln des Gesanges heine Op 34, Nr. 2

Author: FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Text: Xavier Albertí

Interpret: Claudia Schneider, veu

Jesu, meine Freude – Die Motetten (BWV 227)

Author: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Interprets: Thomanechor Leipzig

Director: Georg C. Biller

Sarabande für Violoncello solo Nr. 5 in C-moll (BWV 1011)

Author: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Interpret: Georgina Cardona

Variatio 7 a 1 ô vero 2 Clav. Goldberg Variationen (BWV 988)

Author: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Interpret: Àlex Brendemühl, Alumnes del Conservatori de Torrent
Coordinadora pianistes: Inma García Soria.

Aria Schlummert ein,ihr Matten Augen.Cantata Nr.82 Ich abe Genug (BWV 82)

Author: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Interprets: Àlex Brendemühl, Fagot

Variatio 28 a 2 Clav. 28. Goldberg Variationen (BWV 988)

Author: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Interpret: Daniel Ligorio, Piano

Fantasie und Fuge G-moll (BWV 542)

Author: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Interpret: Pianola

Coulée . Etuden num. 2 für Orgel.

Author: GYÖGY LIGETY

Interpret: Zsigmond Szathmáry

Genehmigung der SCHOTT MUSIC GmbH & Co. KG, Mainz

Fecit Potentiam – del Magnificat (BWV 243)

Author: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

“Wachet auf, ruft uns die stimme”

Cantata BWV 140+ Magnificat BWV 243

Münchener Bach Chor / Munchener Bach Orchestrer / Karl Richter
Deucthe Grammophon 419 466-2

(P) 1962 (BWV 243) / 1979 Polydor International GmbH, Hamburg

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Per cortesia d'UNIVERSAL MUSIC SPAIN, SL

PERE PORTABELLA'S PROFESSIONAL FILE

Director / Producer / Writer

PRODUCER:

THE DELINQUENTS (1959), directed by Carlos Saura

THE LITTLE COACH (1960), directed by Marco Ferreri

VIRIDIANA (1961), directed by Luis Buñuel

HORTENSIA / BÉANSÉ (1969), directed by Antonio Maenza

TREN DE SOMBRAS (1997), directed by José Luís Guerin

WRITER:

IL MOMENTO DE LA VERITA (1964), directed by Francesco Rossi

DIRECTOR-PRODUCER:

NO COMPTEU AMB ELS DITS (1967)

Journées Internationales du Film de Court Metrage de Tours (1968)

The San Sebastián Internacional Film Festival (1968)

X Internacional Festival of Documentary and Short Film of Bilbao (1968)

IV Compétition Internationale du Film Expérimental de Knokke-Le Zoute (1968)

Centre Pompidou of Paris (2003)

42ª Mostra del Nuovo Cinema de Pesaro (2006)

BAFICI 8º Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival (2006)

NOCTURN 29 (1969)

Journées Positif (1969)

Festival de Jeune Cinema de Myères (1969)

Quinzaine des Réalisateur de Cannes (1969)

Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema de Pesaro (1969)

Centre Pompidou of Paris (2003)

42ª Mostra del Nuovo Cinema de Pesaro (2006)

BAFICI 8º Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival (2006)

VAMPIR (1970)

Quinzaine des Réalisateur de Cannes (1971)

XXV Rencontres Cinematographiques d'Avignon (1971)

internacional Film Festival of Belgrad (1971)

The Museum of Modern Art New York (1972)

Cinémathèque Française (1972)

London National Film Theatre (1972)

Documenta 11 Kassel (2002)

Centre Pompidou of Paris (2003)

Cinema du Réel of Paris (2005)

BAFICI 8º Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival (2006)

42ª Mostra del Nuovo Cinema de Pesaro (2006)

Stanbrackage Symposium – Colorado University, introducing by Jonathan Rosenbaum (2006)

Chicago Gene Siskel Film Center introducing by J. Rosenbaum (2006)

UMBRACLE (1971)

Quinzaine des Réalistes de Cannes (1972)
Cinématèque Française (1972)
The Museum of Modern Art New York (1973)
London National Film Theatre (1972)
Documenta 11 Kassel (2002)
BAFICI 8° Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival (2006)
42ª Mostra del Nuovo Cinema de Pesaro (2006)
The Fabric Workshop and Museum of Philadelphia (2004)

THE DINNER (1974)**GENERAL REPORT (1976)**

Centro Pompidou of Paris (Mayo 2003)
Documenta 11 Kassel (2002)
BAFICI 8° Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival (2006)
42ª Mostra del Nuovo Cinema de Pesaro (2006)
The Fabric Workshop and Museum of Philadelphia (2004)

THE BRIDGE OF WARSAW (1989)

Quinzaine des Réalistes de Cannes (1990)
Karlovy Vary Festival (1990)
Tokio Film Festival (1990)
Birmingham Film Festival (1990)
Montreal International Film Festival (1990)
Mostra de Cinema Mediterrani de València (1990)
Vancouver Film Festival (1990)
Estambul international Film Festival (1991)
Cinema and television week of Buenos Aires
Centro Pompidou of Paris (2003)
Documenta 11 of Kassel (2002)
Jacob Burns Film Center, Pleasantville (NY), introducing by Jonathan Demme (2005)
BAFICI 8° Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival (2006)
42ª Mostra del Nuovo Cinema de Pesaro (2006)
The Fabric Workshop and Museum of Philadelphia (2004)
Lincoln Center, Nueva York (2006)
Maine International Film Festival (2006)

HAY MOTIVO (2004)

Collective film. Pere Portabella directs the piece "Plan Hidrológico Nacional".
The San Sebastián International Film Festival (2004)
Bogota Film Festival (2004)
Toulouse Film Festival (2004)
Goteborg Film Festival (2005)
New York University. (2005)
BAFICI 8° Buenos Aires Festival Internacional de Cine (2006)
42ª Mostra del Nuovo Cinema de Pesaro (2006)

Museums and the contemporary art institutions

- 2001 MACBA (Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona) makes the exhibition "Histories without argument: the cinema of Pere Portabella".
- 2002 He's invited to Documenta 11 of Kasse as the only Spanish artist invited in the showing. Screenings of **Umbracle, General Report, The bridge of Warsaw**.
- 2003 Centre Pompidou makes a tribute to Pere Portabella and acquires a copy of **Nocturn 29. No compteu amb els dits, Nocturn 29, Umbracle,, Vampir, Miró l'altre, General Report, The bridge of Warsaw** were screened.
- 2004 Retrospective in The Fabric Workshop and Museum of Philadelphia. Screenings of **Umbracle, General Report, The bridge of Warsaw**.
- 2006 Retropective in BAFICI, 8º Buenos Aires Festival Internacional de Cine Screenings of **No compteu amb els dits, Umbracle, Vampir, Nocturn 29, General Report, The bridge of Warsaw, Hay motivo**.
- 2006 Retrospective in 42ª Mostra del Nuovo Cinema de Pesaro **No compteu amb els dits, Umbracle, Vampir, Nocturn 29, General Report, The bridge of Warsaw, Hay motivo** were screened.
- 2007 The following september 26th a retrospective of Portabella's cinema will take place at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), where its last film. Die Still vor Bach, will be presented by Jonathan Demme and Jonathan Rosembaum. The MOMA will be screening all his filmography as director and some of his films as producer.
At the beginning of October the Chicago Gene Siskel Film Center will also be screening some of Portabella's films and will presented with Jonathan Rosembaud, Die Still vor Bach.

Persevering cinema of Pere Portabella

Text by Marcelo Expósito

To understand the historical relevance of Pere Portabella we need to consider his work as the singular result of a crossing of the artistic vanguard, cinematic experience and political activity - experience which, since the beginning, has sought to operate simultaneously *in synch* and *in depth* with the contemporary languages of vanguard cinema, while remaining rooted in its own cultural, political and historical context.

The films of Carlos Saura (*Los Golfos*) and Marco Ferreri (*El Cochecito*), which Portabella produced at the end of fifties, marked the eruption of a new type of critical realism on the Spanish post-civil war cinematographic scene: a cinema of renovation that reformulated the European neo-realistic trend towards aesthetic realism and Spanish literary tradition. His reappearance as a filmmaker, after a period in exile in Italy due to the scandalous success of Luis Buñuel's *Viridiana* in Cannes (1961, which Portabella co-produced), came as one of the protagonists of the modernisation of Spanish cinema of the time. *No contéis con los dedos / No compteu amb els dits* (1967) and *Nocturno 29* (1968) acknowledged the arrival of new languages to cinema, languages with which to shake up the world. They connected the tradition of political commitment in film, art and vanguard literature, which had been wiped out by General Franco's regime after the civil war.

The hardship of the last years of the dictatorship places *Cuadecuc-Vampir* (1970) in the field of what is generally known as "independent cinema", which in reality deals with a major trend in radicalisation in Spanish cinema towards unregulated, semi-clandestine or openly anti-Franco practices. *Vampir* is one of the founding films that reflect this trend, making Portabella a prominent figure during one of the most tense and important periods (and perhaps not by chance, most forgotten) in Spanish cinema. *Umbracle* (1972) is indisputably an *opus magnum*: an analysis of the political conditions of the dictatorship articulated through a rigorous reflection of cinematographic language. In parallel, Portabella formed part of the *Grup de Treball*, a memorable Catalan example of the international trend in radical questioning of artistic institution through conceptualism and institutional criticism. The work of Portabella in the artistic and cinematographic fields during this period cannot be dissociated from the contemporary reality of the anti-Franco opposition movements. *Informe general sobre algunas cuestiones de interés para una proyección pública* (1975) is the culmination of this period: a choral account of the heterogeneous spectrum of political alternatives that would open up after the death of the dictator. This is a film that embodies the corresponding and contradictory

expectations and hopes for social change.

"Breaking with the Aristotelian narrative canon, rejecting anecdote, going directly to the core of the issue", as in Brechtian dramaturgy; fragmenting the hegemonic linear narrative, cinema that proceeds in cinematic stages provoking emotional responses in the spectator, as in Eisenstein's theory of a cinematic "montage of attractions" based on the experience of political theatre in Russia and Germany during the twenties: Portabella's cinema pulverises the mechanisms of the naturalisation of classic representation, attacking bourgeois forms of living and alienated forms of social identity. These are some of the essential traits that characterise a very anti-idealist cinematography, a peculiar materialism that moves between an in depth exploration of the spectator's fascination for the showing of a film in a dark room and a critical anti-illusionist gap.

The most recent projects in the biographical and creative career of the film maker who some have qualified perseverant, were the production of a film by José Luis Guerín called *Tren de sombras* (1997) and Portabella's return to directing with *Puente de Varsovia / Pont de Varsovia* (1989), an accurate fast paced film shot after the fall of the Berlin wall, which *takes us back to History* contradicting both amnesia and nostalgia.

"The other continuity of Pere Portabella"

Text by Josep Torrell

In his films, Portabella has broken into pieces the rules of narrative continuity of the model of institutional representation. The model of intention of Portabella has almost always been to investigate the relations of the change of shots: what happens between a shot and the following one; and, by extension, the phenomena that take place between the passage from a sequence to another one. On this invisible space the radical invention of Portabella unfolds. Thus, he has annulled the hierarchical structuring of sequences in favor of a more kaleidoscopic structure, where every sequence is independent on its own. He has taken away the meaning of the distinction between preparatory sequences and culminating sequences, sweeping away any hints of transitional sequences. The dramatic progression has been replaced by a structure in which the aesthetic criteria weigh more than the narrative ones.

But his blind rage about the narrative transparency has also originated the investigation of, what we could call, the ways of another narrative continuity. That is to say, the footpaths of a continuity of a new breed, freer and without any bounds. In other words: what Straub and Huillet were looking for during many years is what Portabella had found in the Barakaldo steel mills in the shooting of *General Report*: a shooting that on its own time limits reveals all the critical intention by which it was shot. Or the scene between Jeanine Mestre and Christopher Lee in *Umbracle*, for example, proves that the consistency of a slowed down tempo also works inside the scene, and not only from the sequence. Or the sequence in *The Silence before Bach* about the combat between the Pianola and the camera, shows a way of shooting which is absolutely visual, clearly innovating and eminently aesthetic. The remission to Eisenstein in *Nocturno 29* is also the best known amongst the film directors of the Soviet editing school, that is to say, to most combative of the ways of alternative representation that included the possibility of a different way of representing ideas.

The search carried out by Portabella during forty years has its own internal rationale - the scaffolding structure, in his own words - related to a narrative continuity different from the conventional one (the continuity by the discontinuity). The change of a take - or of a sequence it is the central matter of the cinematographic narrative, and it is here where Portabella has located good part of his power.

All the discourse about surprise is, at the same time, a reflection on continuity. It is because of this centrality that his cinema does not age, it rather looks growingly present. Because while cinema exists, those who create it will have to face the

connection between two shots, trying to imagine what may follow after a certain take. Its permanence comes, simultaneously, from the will to innovate but also from the acute awareness of being in the edge of time. The modernity of Portabella is not the low voltage version of it in a film library, but rather, it is a cinematographic bet of a high vitality and ethical tension, that incessantly reformulates its aesthetic and renewing program.

Before the shooting of a film, any director - and, considering his attitude, any critic or any kind of aficionado who is a movie buff (if such thing still exists) - will permanently be faced to what type of shot or what type of sequence should be placed one after the other. This, being so simple, gives an enormous importance to the work of Portabella with the other narrative continuity. This is what makes him invulnerable to the passage of time: this is what makes him be an unquestionable classic of modernity.

UMBRACLE – J. Rosenbaum(Extract Village Voice and Time Out – Sept. 1972)

“For the second year in a row, the boldest new work I saw at Cannes was by Pedro Portabella. ‘UMBRACLE,’ a multi-faceted statement of political despair from Franco Spain, is far more ambitious and open-ended than last year’s “Vampyr”, and even harder to encapsulate. The eerie, spectral imagery of “Vampyr” —slightly over-exposed footage with bleeding whites and grays, where the light almost seems to come from another age, or planet—persists in parts of the new film, when Christopher Lee takes hallucinatory trips across Barcelona, or visits a museum of stuffed birds in glass cages.

The progression shown by Pedro Portabella’s three features from *Nocturno 29* (1968) to *Vampyr* (1970) to *Umbracle* (1972) reveals the birth and refinement of one of the most personal styles in the modern cinema. How do you classify these films? Are they horror movies, political statements, formal studies of sound affecting image, homages to the silent cinema, private reveries, or laconic portraits of contemporary Spain? To some extent each of Portabella’s features is all of these things.

Umbracle’ how ever, is Portabella’s most powerful and achieved film to date. Here we fins a synthesis of much of the best in both previous films, joining the freedom and variety of *Nocturne 29* (of which this is, in many respects a superior remake) with the rigor and simplicity of *Vampyr*. Yet if it is the most provocative of his films, it is also the one that most resisted analysis or paraphrase. The witty dichotomy and dialectic between sound and image in *Vampyr* is pushed much further, until it becomes an aggressive assault on the spectator’s unconscious narrative expectation.

UMBRACLE Verina Glaesner (Extract Time Out, 1972)

During the festival there was also a series of one-off screenings outside any official presentation, and one of the films shown, Pedro Portabella's "Umbracle".

"Umbracle" (the title means literally "shady place" and is the name of an area of Barcelona), is a film about frustration, repression and paranoia, that operates within the environment of the horror film. The main character, Christopher Lee on stage sings and then reads from "The Raven" – a sequence that becomes the heart of this complex, mysterious and disturbing film. Throughout the sensation of nightmarish distortion is intensified through Portabella's brilliant use of repeated sound, for instance, two people sit in a room talking inaudibly while outside the sound of someone knocking at the door grows louder and louder, they appear not to notice, and the camera slowly withdraws from the room.

Umbracle is a genuine masterpiece, a political statement in the widest sense, of disturbing force. Badger the National Film Theater into screening it and Portabella's other films. Ironically, although his films are available for showing outside Spain, Portabella himself has no passport.