

# VARIETY

## ***Coimbra on 'A Wolf at the Door': Getting the Audience Involved***



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***The first-time director talks in Rio about 'A Wolf at the Door,'  
Mundial's first pick-up from Brazil***

***John Hopewell***

Produced by Gullane Ent. and TC Filmes, the first Brazilian pick-up of Mundial, the new sales joint venture of IM Global and Canana, selected for Toronto and the winner at San Sebastian of the Latinos Horizontes section, a pick of 2013's very best Latin American movies, [Fernando Coimbra's "A Wolf at the Door"](#) is the highest-profile of 11 movies in the Rio Festival's centerpiece Premiere Brazil fiction feature competition.

Turning on a pretty young woman, Rosa, and her married lover, Bernardo, who are hauled in for questioning at the police station after Bernardo's child is abducted, "A Wolf at the Door" is told in three flash-back confessions, two Rosa's, one Bernardo's – framed by police questioning, As "Wolf" gathering momentum, their confessions

reveal a ghastly crime. Coimbra's feature debut bowed to a SRO crowd in Rio Saturday. It gleaned strong applause. Variety interviewed Coimbra on the rooftop of Rio's Miramar Hotel, – Copacabana beach to one side, a still drug lord-occupied favela on the hillside on the other – about a drama thriller that pointedly deals with neither of these worlds.

**Why did you make this film?**

It was an obsession. I read the true story, which happened in the '60s, in an old newspaper about a woman. The press at the time talked about the perpetrator of the abduction as a monster, a beast. But for me the case said a lot about human behavior. I wanted to understand what happened in this relationship between a man and his mistress, to understand this crime. There's an animal part to us. We deny it, say we are superior, but I don't think we are. We have basic emotions, instincts.

**Your film isn't about exotic beaches, or drug wars, or painterly poverty, it's set in Brazil's middle-classes. Why?**

Rio de Janeiro is usually represented by its richest and poorest parts, the favela, the beach districts. But its biggest part is the suburbs shown in the film, where ordinary people live in Rio. I want audiences to identify with the characters, which are like most people in Brazil, not say that they have nothing to do with them, that they're different.

**"A Wolf at the Door" is, on one hand, quite a demanding art film: For about two-thirds of the film, two characters lie to the police inspector and to audiences. Maybe even the final confession isn't totally true. On the other hand, you push the envelope on thriller elements. Why this mix?**

When I started to write the story, I was trying to tell a drama. But the thriller potential was there, it was unavoidable, and with it the audience gets more involved in the story, it wants to know who's telling the truth. There's a danger of course that the film could end up as neither art-house nor commercial, but the thriller-heft gives it potential with all kinds of audiences.

**Locally, "A Wolf at the Door" will be released first semester 2014 by Imagem, one of Brazil's biggest distributors which is best known for releasing big films, foreign and Brazilian.**

They were great. They read the script when we didn't have the money to make the film and were trying to get it from the Ministry of Culture. They liked it a lot and decided to take the film. Nowadays, Brazilian distributors do pick up films at the script phase, but it's more difficult for first-time feature directors, so we were delighted.

**Though it has a lot of dialogue, key scenes in “A Wolf at the Door” depend more on actors’ expression than words. There’s one, for example, where Bernardo and Rosa are in his car on the beach, caught in a two-shot both looking out to sea. They’re relaxed, maybe post-coitum. He says, he’d love the two of them to drive up the coast to the north together, take their time, sleep in the car. She says she also has dreams about what they could do together. Suddenly, very quickly, his face darkens, his jaw sets. The mood’s shattered.**

I was an actor for a long time, not a very good one, but it’s no mystery for me to work with actors. I believe in working with actors. I shot most of the film’s scenes in longshot because you can film real-time reactions and capture different emotions in one scene. We had a lot of rehearsals. This was a very important scene for me. If I don’t have Bernardo’s look, this scene will not work. At that moment, she realizes they’ll never be together. He realizes it too.

**In conventional films, the audience is told about characters at their beginning, then they gain a goal and have to confront huge obstacles to achieve it; which they do. In “A Wolf at the Door,” you only find out about the characters, the depth of their feelings, their iniquities, right at the end, and the audience is never quite sure when they decide to do what they do.**

The characters have contradictions. We didn’t want everything to make sense. In real life, everything doesn’t make sense. In one scene, for example, Rosa visits Sylvia at the family house. She doesn’t know exactly why she’s going there. Yes, she wants to get to know the woman whom her lover won’t leave her for. But, in some way, she even likes Sylvia, even though she wants to separate Sylvia and Bernardo. She acts out of impulse. We never know exactly what we’re doing. We never say exactly what we mean.