

# A SYMPHONY FOR A COMMON MAN (SINFONIA DE UM HOMEM COMUM)



A FILM BY  
JOSÉ JOFFILY

86 mins / 2022 / English, Portuguese, English Subtitles / Brazil



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## **FILM FESTIVALS AND AWARDS**

Special Award of Merit - Latin American Studies Assoc. Film Festival (LASA), US  
Best Documentary - Los Angeles Brazilian Film Festival (LABRFF), US  
Special Mention - Millenium International Documentary Film Festival, Belgium

Hot Docs International Documentary Festival, Canada  
International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA), Netherlands  
Biografilm Festival, Italy  
International Film Festival of Uruguay, Uruguay  
AegeanDocs International Documentary Film Festival, Greece  
ATLANTIDOC – International Documentary Film Festival of Uruguay, Uruguay  
International Political Film Festival of Carcassonne, France  
Salt Spring Film Festival, Canada  
Crossing the Screen Film Festival, United Kingdom  
Paris Brazilian Film Festival, France  
Philadelphia Latino Film Festival, US

## **SYNOPSIS**

The Iraq War, justified by the United States on the false premise that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, led to the deaths of over six hundred thousand people and devastated the country. Brazilian diplomat José Bustani, the first Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), played a pivotal role in attempting to bring Iraq into compliance with chemical weapons regulations. Under his impartial leadership, countries traditionally distrusted by multilateral organizations were brought into the fold. As he neared success, the U.S. government, intent on regime change and securing oil interests, exerted relentless pressure on Bustani to abandon his efforts. When he refused to yield, the U.S. orchestrated his removal from office through misleading accusations of mismanagement. Nearly twenty years later, Bustani, now retired in Rio de Janeiro, reflects on this American abuse of power and the missed opportunity to prevent a catastrophic war.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

A SYMPHONY FOR A COMMON MAN began five years ago. The first scenes we filmed with José Maurício Bustani, our protagonist, were done with no financing and lacked a precise focus. Despite our long acquaintance, I would only really get to know Bustani better once I understood better the events surrounding his dismissal as Director General of the OPCW (Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons) through the making of this film.

Through numerous conversations, I began to realize what made me want to make this film. Although I already knew that hegemonic countries use authoritarian measures to influence multilateral associations, I found myself shocked to hear the inside story from someone who had personally suffered such pressures. Explicit threats of violence to him and his family most certainly weren't part of his routine diplomatic activities. On the other hand, Bustani's resistance to these threats wasn't part of his job either. It was clear that his resolve was part of his personality. Committed to the goals of the OPCW, an organization he ran for five years and whose core principle was independence, Bustani refused to bow to blackmail and danger. Fully aware of the risks his disobedience could pose, Bustani resisted, ultimately leading him to a confrontation with the world's greatest power: a total inequality of power and personal courage that always reminds me of that lone Chinese citizen facing down a tank in Tiananmen Square.

Bustani's determination to resist the American invasion plan in 2002, regardless of his dismissal from the OPCW, earned him prestige, credibility and respect years later. So much so that in 2021, he would be invited to testify at the UN Security Council about the OPCW's disregard of the report of its own inspectors after the bombing of Syria in 2018. We were by his side, making A SYMPHONY FOR A COMMON MAN, capturing his character and independence once more.

As I said, Bustani was a part of my circle of friends. He was an ordinary person like all of us. What set him apart was his supreme passion for music, which he shared with my brother. So, I didn't want to tell the story of a classic hero. What attracted me was the story of this Brazilian diplomat who never considered himself special. But what was truly special was his courage to follow his conscience and the demands of his position. This rare gesture, and how he achieved it, guided me in making this documentary.

José Joffily

## **DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY**

José Joffily has directed fiction and nonfiction films throughout his career. His films have been in festivals such as IDFA, It's All True, Havana, Berlin, Rotterdam, Guadalajara, among others. In Brazil, he had films awarded at the most important festivals in the country, such as Brasilia and Gramado.

Filmography:

SOLDADO ESTRANGEIRO (Foreign Soldier), doc., 80', 2019;  
CAMINHO DE VOLTA (Way Back), doc., 70', 2015;  
OLHOS AZUIS (Blue Eyes), fic., 85', 2010;  
ACHADOS E PERDIDOS (Lost and Found), fic., 82', 2007;  
DOIS PERDIDOS NUMA NOITE SUJA (Two Losts in a Dirty Night), fic., 88', 2002;  
QUEM MATOU PIXOTE? (Who Killed Pixote?), fic., 1996.

## **PRODUCTION CREDITS**

Director	José Joffily
Producer	Isabel Joffily for Coevos Filmes
Cinematography	Pedro Rossi
Editing	Jordana Berg
Screenplay	David Meyer, Pedro Rossi, Jordana Berg, José Joffily