



OFFICIAL SELECTION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

DJAM

A FILM BY TONY GATLIF

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DAPHNÉ PATAKIA
SIMON ABKARIAN
MARYNE CAYON

DJAM

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FRANCE • 2017 • 97MN • COLOR • FORMAT 1.50 • SOUND 5.1



DJAM, a young Greek woman, is sent to Istanbul by her uncle Kakourgos, a former sailor and passionate fan of Rebetiko, on a mission to find a rare engine part for their boat. There she meets Avril, 18, who came from France to volunteer with refugees, ran out of money, and knows no one in Turkey. Generous, sassy, unpredictable and free, Djam takes Avril under her wing on the way to Mytilene—a journey made of music, encounters, sharing and hope.



INTERVIEW WITH TONY GATLIF

Where did the idea for this film come from?

From Rebetiko music, which I discovered in 1983 on a trip to Turkey to introduce a screening of my film *Les Princes*. Rebetiko started in the rough neighborhoods of Athens and Thessaloniki, and spread to the islands when the Atatürk expelled the Greeks from Turkey. There is never anger in the music, rather revolt and melancholy, as is true of all the music I like. It's music of the unloved, of people who are proud of who they are. Subversive music. In Rebetiko, the lyrics are words that heal.

To what do you attribute this power?

The cultural melting-pot. I deeply believe in it. Leaving one's country can also be positive—new horizons, new lifestyles. What I like about Rebetiko is the blend between Orient and Occident. That's where I come from. East and West have been in me since childhood.

Why make a film about this style of music, and why now?

Because its songs are songs of exile: the Greeks' departure from Izmir, crossing the seas in rowboats... In my work, everything stems from music and exile. As a child in the early sixties, I saw European settlers leaving Algeria. I can still see them in tears, sitting on their suitcases through the bars of the port in Algiers, waiting for a boat back to mainland France. I was there with them. I can still see the Vietnamese boat people twenty years later, with their overturned boats, so similar to the fate of today's migrants and their ramshackle boats washing up on the coast of Lesbos. I have seen so many peoples condemned to exile that with this film I wanted to talk about all migrants, of yesterday and today. Rebetiko and the urge to film a free-spirited young woman gave me the energy to undertake this project.



There are two young women on the road...

Djam, the first, is headed home and takes the second under her wing on the way. Avril is a 19-year-old Frenchwoman, who came to Turkey to do voluntary aid work, and is completely lost. Together, they travel from Istanbul to the island of Mytilene, which is the route that the migrants take. When Djam takes hold of a Rebetiko song, she is at one with the music and expresses its full meaning in a mixture of insolence, revolt and serenity. As Djam, Daphne Patakia is without violence. Everything she says or expresses with her body is at full tilt, as raw as the finest matter—she is hewn of beautiful rock—but in no way brutal.

Daphne is omnipresent. She sings, she dances. How did she prepare? Did you give her particular directions?

I asked Daphne to learn to sing, play music and dance the belly dance. She does all her own singing in the film, she never mimes. Like most Greeks, Daphne has a great musical culture. She already knew most of the Rebetiko songs by heart, but I was struck by how quickly she learned and how hard she worked. The first time we met, I asked her if she could sing and if she agreed to learn the belly dance. I also gave her a baglama, the instrument used in Rebetiko, and asked her

to learn to play it. Everything she does in the film comes from her own hard work.

Djam is Daphne's first leading role and her first French film. How did you find her?

I spent a long time looking for an actress to play Djam. Six months before the shoot, I still hadn't found her. She did not have to be beautiful, but she had to be able to speak Greek and French. My assistant in Greece mentioned Daphne to me—both parents Greek, born in Belgium, speaks perfect French. As soon as we met, the film's action began to take shape through her. I sensed she would give it all she had, absolutely everything. Growing up in Belgium, Daphne never lost track of her Greek culture. She knows the meaning of exile.

There are always strong women in your films—loners who hit the road and have adventures.

Those are the women I love. Céline Sallette in *Geronimo*. Asia Argento in *Transylvania*. I have no urge to film victims.

Tell us about the cemetery scene where Djam pees on her grandfather's grave.

She announces it clearly and simply: I piss on the graves of those who ban music and freedom. She must do it,



simple as that. But she says it without anger or hatred. Djam is violent only once in the film, when she confronts the repo men with a shotgun. Conversely, it is anger that drives Avril to undress on the road. She has a pride akin to that of gypsies.

While observing Avril, the singer that she and Djam meet at the station notes her resemblance to the women of the 16th century.

Her physique is not modern. You read «Enlightenment» and «French Revolution» on her skin and her face. It's a vast culture, which is totally foreign to her. She does not use it, she has never known it, and describes her roots as being in a housing estate. Where are you from? Djam asks. A housing estate, she answers, as if it were a country or a region. She does not have the passport of song or music, but one word is all it takes to bring her into the dance. She is not like the Greeks, who still get together to sing songs going back hundreds of years, recounting their family tree. The recognition, in the beauty of her face, of the beauty of women from bygone times when France was the cradle of the Enlightenment, brings to the surface a legacy she never knew she had in her.

She seems drawn to discover Greek culture.



By meeting these people, she has found faith—the faith to stand together and reach out to others. Rebetiko fosters sharing.

You never worked with Simon Abkarian before.

For the role of Kakourgos, Djam's uncle, I wanted an actor whose face is a journey. Even though we know Simon is Armenian, we don't know exactly where from. He personifies exile. We go back a long way, and I knew that Simon was a true aficionado of Rebetiko music. When I asked him to act out the scene where he talks about Djam's mother, who died in exile in Paris,



Simon gave me the gift of his sincerity and emotion. He must have gone looking for that on his travels in Armenia, Lebanon or elsewhere.

You contrast the extraordinarily carnal presence of Djam and Avril with the migrants' incorporeal presence—inscriptions on the walls in a station, an extinguished bonfire...

I was very aware of setting these young women off on a journey in the footsteps of migrants who walk from Istanbul to Edirne to cross the Ardas River—a very deep river, 20-30 meters wide that marks the border—before they reach Kastanies in Greece. The migrants are pushed across at night by the people smugglers in small inflatable boats. When they reach the other side, they head for the train station at Didimoticho. All the migrants go through that station and I was sure I would find signs of their presence when we got there.

When we arrived with my actors, the day of the shoot, I found half-burned logs and realized that the migrants had made tea—left behind charred tin cans and tea bags were there as proof. They had used old railroad sleepers to build a shelter, and they wrote on the walls in charcoal. Somebody had written: Come free from Sham. Blood is shed in Aleppo and Idlib. The mention of Sham proves a deliberate intention to emigrate.

Those are the traces that I wanted to film to evoke the exodus of the Syrians, as testimony to their passing through. That's the image of exile that I want to keep.

Like the mountains of life vests abandoned on an empty plot of land?

Seeing those piles of life vests, hidden out of sight a hundred meters or so from the beach was like seeing thousands of stories heaped on top of each other. Migrants bought those life vests, some of which were fakes, at a high price from the people smugglers before they made the crossing. Way too many did not have the good fortune to reach the Greek coast at Skala Sikaminas, which is on Lesbos ten kilometers from Turkey. Some of the wearers of those vests are dead.

Djam ends on an almost optimistic note.

That's the crux of the movie—life is more important than anything else. All the rest—walls, countries—is only money. If I have to choose between money and life, I choose life. Even though very serious things loom ahead all over the world. The aim of the people taking us back in time, by building borders, concrete walls or razor wire fences, is to protect money. So, yes, I am like my heroes on their boat singing a Rebetiko song. We're free, we exist. And I vote for life.



We are far removed from the despair of Pano, the Greek who threatens to bury himself standing up in the grave that he digs with his own hands after he is evicted from his home.

Let there be no mistake, there is pride in his gesture. For that scene, I was inspired by a gypsy poem, Bury me standing up, which is emblematic of modern-day Greece: a population that the power of money drives to self-inhumation, but a proud people that will not kneel, that keeps its head high. And behind that depressed man, there is a whole people that sings.

Pano finds work in Norway, while Kakourgos and his family will most likely wander from port to port. There is a lot of violence in their trajectories. Could they be said to capture the state of contemporary Europe, which forces its citizens to move to make a living, while closing its borders to others?

Of course! It's not by chance that at the beginning of the film, I show a fence against which Djam is singing. Many countries are forgetting what fascism is. By unburying the hatchet of protectionism, they renege on everything that has happened since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Even in France, traditionally reputed to be a land of welcome, a certain number of people seem ready to



forget it. It's scary. Djam also talks about this Europe in which I no longer feel at home. The only true Europe is the Europe of culture and exchange. ■

Interview by Marie-Elisabeth Rouchy



CAST

Djam **Daphné Patakia**
Kakourgos **Simon Abkarian**
Avril **Maryne Cayon**
Pano **Kimon Kouris**
Solon **Solon Lekkas**
Father **Yannis Bostantzoglou**
Maria **Eleftheria Komi**

• GREECE •
Coproducer **Fenia Cossovitsa**
Assistant Director **Anna Nikolaou**
Production manager **Anna Zografou**

• TURKEY •
Coproducer **Suzan Guvërte**
Production manager **Menderes Demir**
Production Coordinator **Berivan Tokem**

CREW

Screenplay & directed by **Tony Gatlif**
Producer **Delphine Mantoulet**
Coproducers **Francis Boespflug,**
Stéphane Parthenay
D.O.P **Patrick Ghiringhelli**
Sound engineer **Philippe Welsh**
First Assistant Director **Valentin Dahmani**
Script-girl **Andra Barbuica**
Editing **Monique Dartonne**
Sound editing **Adam Wolny**
Mix **Dominique Gaborieau**
Head of accounts **Sylvain Mehez**

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Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée,
Centre du Cinéma Grec (GFC)-Aide à la Coproduction
d'Œuvres Cinématographiques Franco-Grecques
and **ERT**

TONY GATLIF

1975 - **LA TÊTE EN RUINES** (Feature film) • 1978 - **LA TERRE AU VENTRE** (Feature film) • 1981 - **CANTA GITANO** (Short / Nominated for Cesar Awards 1982) • 1982 - **CORRE GITANO** (Feature film - Spanish production) • 1982 - **LES PRINCES** (Feature film - Grand prix at Munich European Film Festival Grand prix at Taormina Festival, Silver Epi at Valladolid Festival) • 1985 - **RUE DU DÉPART** (Feature film - Grand Prix at French Film Festival of Florence) • 1988 - **PLEURE PAS MY LOVE** (Feature film) • 1990 - **GASPARD ET ROBINSON** (Feature film) • 1992-93 - **LATCHO DROM** (Feature film - Un Certain Regard Prize – Cannes Film Festival 1993 'La mémoire France Libertés Danielle Mitterand', Prize best 'experimental movie' - American critics Prize 1996) • 1994 - **MONDO** (Feature film - from the novel by J. M. G. Le Clézio) • 1997 - **GADJO DILO** (Feature film - Locarno 1997: Silver Leopard, Bronze Leopard for best Actress (Rona Hartner), Special Grand Prix des Amériques, Rotterdam 1998 : Public Prize, César Awards Nomination for Best Music 1998) • 1998 - **JE SUIS NÉ D'UNE CIGOGNE** (Feature film) • 2000 - **VENGO** (Feature film - Official Selection: Venice Film Festival 2000 and Toronto Film Festival 2000, César Awards Nomination for Best Music 2001) • 2002 - **SWING** (Feature film - Official selection – Berlinale 2002) • 2004 - **EXILS** (Feature film - Festival Cannes 2004 : Cannes Film Festival: Best Director Award César Awards, Nomination for Best Music 2005) • 2006 - **TRANSYLVANIA** (Feature film - Official Selection: Closing film of Cannes Film Festival 2006) • 2010 - **KORKORO** (Feature film - Montréal World Film Festival, Grand Prix des Amériques Henri Langlois Award 2011) • 2012 - **INDIGNADOS** (Feature film - Berlinale: Opening Panorama 2012) • 2014 - **GERONIMO** (Feature film - Sélection Officielle Séance spéciale - Festival by Cannes 2014 / Piazza Granby - 67^{ème} Locarno Festival Film)

DAPHNE PATAKIA

2015 - **INTERRUPTION** by Yorgos Zois • **TO XYPNIMA TIS ANOIXIS** by Constantine Giannaris • 2016 - **NIMA** by Alexanbyr Voulgaris

SIMON ABKARIAN

(Select Filmography)

1989 - **LA NUIT MIRACULEUSE** by Ariane Mnouchkine • 1992 - **RIENS DU TOUT** by Cédric Klapisch • 1996 - **CHACUN CHERCHE SON CHAT** by Cédric Klapisch • 2002 - **UN MONDE PRESQUE PAISIBLE** by Michel Byville • 2005 - **PRENDRE FEMME** by Ronit et Shlomi Elkabetz • 2006 - **LE VOYAGE EN ARMENIE** by Robert Guédiguian • 2008 - **LES SEPT JOURS** by Ronit et Shlomi Elkabetz • 2009 - **L'ARMÉE DU CRIME** by Robert Guédiguian • 2010 - **BY FORCE** by Frank Henry • 2013 - **THE CUT** by Fatih Akin • 2014 - **GETT, LE PROCES DE VIVIANE AMSALEM** by Ronit et Shlomi Elkabetz • 2015 - **UNE HISTOIRE DE FOU** by Robert Guédiguian • 2016 - **CHOUF** by Karim Dridi • **LA MÉCANIQUE BY L'OMBRE** by Thomas Kruihof

MARYNE CAYON

2013 - **LES APACHES** by Thierry by Peretti • 2014 - **GERONIMO** by Tony Gatlif • **MERCURIALES** by Virgil Vernier • 2015 - **JE NE SUIS PAS UN SALAUD** by Emmanuel Finkiel



