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PRESENTS



KORKORO

A film by Tony Gatlif

2011, France, 111 minutes, 2.35:1

*Winner, Grand Prix of the Americas, People's Choice Award, Ecumenical Prize
Montreal World Film Festival*

Publicity Contact: Julia Pacetti, JMP Verdant Communications
juliapacetti@earthlink.net / (917) 584-7846

Press materials: <http://www.kinolorber.com>

A Lorber Films Release from Kino Lorber, Inc.
333 West 39th Street, Suite 503, New York, NY, 10018
(212) 629-6880 / contact@kinolorber.com

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SYNOPSIS

The year is 1943. A young French orphan, Claude, wanders the countryside before being taken under the wing of Félix Taloche, a wild member of a group of Roma Gypsies. The family wanders Europe taking odd jobs as migrant workers; however, a new law passed in France has outlawed all nomads, making their way of life illegal. While traveling, the group meet a provincial veterinarian, Théodore, and a young school teacher, Mademoiselle Lundi, who become interested in the families plight and attempt to assist them. Théodore signs his property over to the family to help them avoid arrest, and the Roma struggle to adjust to their new static way of life and the animosity of the French villagers, who regard them as little more than common thieves. When Théodore and Lundi are arrested as members of the French Resistance, the Roma, accompanied by Claude, are forced onto the roads once more. The police come upon them; Taloche is killed while trying to escape, and although the Roma family urges Claude to deny being one of them, he chooses instead to share the fate of his new family.

Korkoro (the Romani word for “freedom”) is based on true events in the lives of a Gypsy family in Nazi-occupied France, and tells the often forgotten tragedy of the many Roma who were taken in the *porajmos* (Gypsy Holocaust) of WWII. Of the roughly two million Roma people living in Europe at the time, between 250,000 and 500,000 died in Nazi concentration camps. Tony Gatlif’s latest film is a plea for humanity towards all people who have been, or still are, deemed ‘undesirables.’

CAST AND CREW

MARC LAVOINE - Théodore Rosier
MARIE-JOSÉE CROZE - Mademoiselle Lundi
JAMES THIERRÉE – Félix Taloche
MATHIAS LALIBERTÉ - Petit Claude
CARLO BRANDT - Pierre Pentecôte
RUFUS - Fernand
ARBEN BAJRAKTARAJ - Darko
GEORGES BABLUANI - Kako
ILJIR SELIMOSKI - Chavo
KEVYN DIANA - Zanko
BOJANA PANIC - Tina
RAISA BIELENBERG - Puri Dai
THOMAS BAUMGARTNER - Tatane

Written and Directed by TONY GATLIF
Produced by DELPHINE MANTOULET & TONY GATLIF
Cinematography by JULIEN HIRSCH
Editing by MONIQUE DARTONNE
Production Design by BRIGITTE BRASSART
Costume Design BY CATHERINE RIGAULT
Sound Design by PHILIPPE WELSH & ADAM WOLNY
Music by DELPHINE MANTOULET & TONY GATLIF

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TONY GATLIF (WRITER/DIRECTOR) SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

Transylvania (2006)
Exiles (2004) – Winner, Best Director, Cannes
Swing (2002)
Vengo (2000)
Gadjo Dilo (1997) – Winner, Silver Leopard, Locarno
Mondo (1995)
Latcho Drom (1993) – Winner, Un Certain Regard, Cannes

MARC LAVOINE (THÉODORE ROSIER) SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

Les meilleurs amis du monde (2010)
Celle que j'aime (2009)
Perfect Match (2007)
Le coeur des hommes 2 (2007)
Toute la beauté du monde (2006)
Frenchmen (2003)
The Good Thief (2002)

MARIE-JOSÉE CROZE (MADEMOISELLE LUNDI) SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly (2007)
Jacquou le Croquant (2007)
Tell No One (2006)
Munich (2005)
The Barbarian Invasions (2003) – Winner, Best Actress, Cannes
Ararat (2002)

JAMES THIERRÉE (FÉLIX TALOCHE) BIOGRAPHY

James Thierrée is the son of Jean-Baptiste Thiérée and Victoria Chaplin, the grandson of actor Charlie Chaplin, and the great-grandson of playwright Eugene O'Neill. As a child, he appeared in his parents' productions, and he later studied trapeze and acrobatics, violin, and dramatic arts. In 1998, he founded his own theater company, Le Compagnie du Hanne-ton; their productions, including *The Junebug Symphony*, *La Veillée des Abysses* and *Au Revoir Parapluie*, have been performed at Sadlers Wells in London and the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York, and combine contemporary circus, movement, music and poetry. His film credits include roles in *Prospero's Books* and *Bye Bye Blackbird*.

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INTERVIEW WITH TONY GALIF

How did you come up with the idea for the film?

I'd wanted to do a film about the Roma holocaust ever since I started making movies. But the subject frightened me. I often met Roma who said, "Make us a film about the deportation of the Roma." In early 2007, I participated in an international conference of Roma in Strasbourg and young Roma Representatives of the European Community asked me to do the same. They told me how much they suffered from the lack of recognition, and from others' ignorance of their people's history. I didn't see how I could do this film. [I'm a] filmmaker who loves the camera to roam freely — how could I respect the strict rules of a period piece? And I backed off in fear of failure, really.

Then one day I learned Jacques Chirac was going to reunite "the Justes" at the Pantheon to pay tribute to them. I thought, we're finally going to find out if there were "Justes" who saved gypsies. Unfortunately, they didn't show up. I started to look for them, and I finally found an anecdote in a book by Jacques Sigot, just a few lines long:

"The fate of a man named Tolloche was particularly tragic. Held at the internment camp in Montreuil-Bellay, he managed to obtain his freedom with the help of a notary by buying a small house a few miles outside town. Incapable of living indoors, he set out on the road again to return to his homeland in Belgium. He was arrested in the north and disappeared in Poland with other unfortunates like himself."

It was the fate of Tolloche, who risked everything to preserve his liberty, that made me determined to do this film. And then there's the notary, a "Juste" who also took risks in the attempt to save him.

Did you consider doing a documentary?

Of course, but I didn't have enough material to make a documentary. The people are dead. There are very little archives. We know of no living "Juste" who saved Roma. And that last aspect is fundamental to me: to understand why a man or a woman decides one day to save Bohemian lives. That's the lesson of humanity that I wanted to make into a film. I don't want to condemn anyone, not even the French police who were part of the round-ups. I just want to show what was, without exaggerating or humiliating anyone. History speaks for itself. Because of that, everything I show had to be historically truthful.

So did you do a lot of preliminary historical research?

Yes, with the help of historians. My idea was to recreate what happened with the greatest possible historical accuracy. The problem is that there isn't much documentation about the Roma holocaust. No films, of course, and very few books — just a few chapters here and there in books about gypsy history.

How do you explain this "black hole"? It's rare that such a major event gets so little attention. No one contests its historical existence...

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During World War II, the Roma were imprisoned and slaughtered and every country agreed to it, with the notable exception of Bulgaria, which — despite being fascist — refused to hand its gypsies over to the Nazis. Even today, very few people know about this part of history and very few try to understand the problems of the ten million people in Europe who seem to float about in extreme poverty.

That black hole is intentional. The subject is not even mentioned in school books. Until recently, they had no real representation [as a people], no one to defend them, except for a few gypsy writers, including Matéo Maximoff, and a few non-gypsy friends. This made it easier to despise them, easier to pass the repressive law of 1912 requiring anthropometric identification and the laws of Vichy which made nomadic life illegal and required that gypsies and Bohemians be locked up in concentration camps – forty of them all over France. That hate led to the Nazi extermination of half a million gypsies in Europe. In truth, gypsies have always been the black sheep of organized society.

How did you write the script?

I wrote the first draft of the script in a month. It freed me of the weight I'd been carrying around for so long. Everything became clear when I understood that the only way to tell this story was through the characters of two "Justes" — Theodore, the village mayor and veterinarian, and Mademoiselle Lundi, the schoolteacher. Both were inspired by real people: Theodore, by the notary who tried to save Taloché and his family, and Mademoiselle Lundi by the real story of schoolteacher Yvette Lundy, who worked in Gionges, La Marne. She helped me work on all the scenes relating to her character and school. I also used a lot of my own personal history, and people who helped me in childhood and youth: my teacher, instructors and drama professor.

I know Roma from all countries, I know what they're like. They haven't changed since 1940. I had no problem describing them. I recreated a gypsy family that travels across Europe and gets stuck in the war in France. I worked a year on it. The men let their hair and mustaches grow. All the actors went on a diet because there was nothing to eat back then. We built three trailers identical to ones from 1940. The nomad gypsies were nowhere to be found, we weren't going to look for them. One day we got to the end of a path in the back of the woods and they showed up like a breeze. You never know where they come from, you just know when they come. I described them this way for their first appearance in the script. Once I was done with this draft of the script, I realized I needed the gypsy soul.

It isn't easy to express what the gypsy soul is and make it understood. There is no word in their language that means *liberté*. Gypsies don't use this word because they're free. I needed to find a character who could represent the entire Roma community with his purity and *naïveté*, his fantasy, freedom and extravagance. That character was Taloché. After that it took me nearly a year to complete the final script. Writing that way, I ended up getting closer to the reasons for the silence surrounding Samudaripen (the Roma genocide). Gypsies are afraid of ghosts. When they enter a cave, they run back out for fear of meeting ghosts. Taloché is like that: he is afraid of the dead.

What happened at the end of the war, when the gypsies understood that hundreds of thousands of them had been exterminated?

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They were afraid of those who were dead, afraid of waking them up, afraid they'd come back. [They were] definitely afraid of talking about it. Today that's all over, but that fear existed well into the 1980's.

You were born in Algeria. Do you feel like this is your story?

Yes, absolutely. Algeria had been liberated earlier by the Americans but the laws of Vichy were in force there. The injustice done to the Roma people is revolting to me. The silence that engulfs it is horrible. I just want everyone to know about it – it's a necessity.

Did you leave the actors room to improvise?

No, except for Taloché. I asked the actors to learn the Romani language. So I had to write the dialogue for that and then leave it alone. Everything was written and translated.

What about casting?

First, I went to Transylvania. Roma villages are like concentration camps, except they aren't surrounded by barbed wire. It's as if the only thing changed by time is their clothes. The nine people I found there came to France to shoot the film. Otherwise, for the rest of the gypsy family characters I found Albanian, Kosovar, Georgian and Serbian actors. I found the grandmother in Oslo — she was of Russian origin.

James Thiérrée, who plays the role of Taloché, isn't Roma...

That's true. For that role I wanted a musician, someone capable of playing music and climbing up trees and falling down as well — [and it was] impossible at first to find that actor. And then one day I saw James at the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris. I'd never seen such a thing. I was impressed. He was the actor I'd dreamed of for the role. Since he's not Roma, he worked long and hard to become one. In six months he learned to speak Romani, play gypsy swing and above all, let himself be possessed by the free spirit of Taloché.

And the other French actors?

For the role of Theodore, I wanted an actor who looked like a typical Frenchman of that era. A voice and a face a little like Pierre Fresnais, Maurice Ronet, Jacques Charrierou or Gérard Philippe. Marc Lavoine has both. I saw him regularly while I was writing the script to talk to him about his character and about history. Marie-Josée Croze seemed an obvious choice for Mademoiselle Lundi. She was made for the part. I saw her like a Hitchcock character, fragile, mysterious and strong. I also saw her regularly for nearly a year, to talk about the real Mademoiselle Lundi, whom she met, and about the subtlety and ambiguity of her character, a schoolteacher active in the Resistance.

Rufus is your typical Frenchman, everyone's uncle. He's France itself. For the character of Pierre Pentecôte, a member of the militia, we worked with Carlo Brandt on keeping him from becoming a caricature of a villain. On the contrary, we gave him a pitiful look with his hat falling into his eyes and his brown suit closed with a safety pin because of all the weight he'd gained since the beginning of the war.

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When we see the movie, we're struck by your determination to break stereotypes, even if the way you represent the Roma is very precise.

I tried to demystify certain clichés. For example, with the music there's that scene where we see them giving a concert for chickens! I had fun with this cliché, even if music in films and concerts helped gypsies to achieve love and acceptance. I wanted to show them the way they are, horse dealers, blacksmiths and musicians, for example. And if they won't allow their children to go to school, it's from the fear that they'll lose their souls.

Educating Roma children is still a major problem today. In the film, the school is a central location. But if the children agree to go to school, it's on the condition that they get paid, since they consider it to be work. In the end, they decide to show up after all, but mostly it's to eat and to take advantage of Mademoiselle Lundi's cookie hand-out. As a matter of fact, once they've swallowed their portion, they run away.

You talk about the necessity of educating Roma children, and yet your film in itself has immense educational value. Most viewers, particularly those in primary and middle school, will learn of the existence of those repressive laws that restrict the freedom of the Roma. In fact, didn't you want the film to be shown first and foremost in schools?

Absolutely. It's important that *Korkoro* be seen and explained in school. I hope one day there will be no more school books depicting Bohemians as kidnappers. Schools have perpetuated racist imagery of the Roma for a long time.

The film is not only a tribute to "the Justes," [though] — it also pays tribute to schoolteachers and to the institution of public education. I have a huge amount of respect for people like Theodore and Mademoiselle Lundi. I love the kind of people who decide to "do something," who can't make up their minds to do nothing. I deliberately made it a mayor who saves Roma lives. Mayors — with few exceptions — are traditionally black sheep for the Roma people. Conversely, the Roma are black sheep for mayors. We hear it all the time: when Roma come to a city, it's chaos and filth, etc.

All these commonplace clichés made me want to create the character of the mayor as a "Juste" of great humanity, who will go so far as to fight his own colleagues to protect the Roma from the villainous laws in force. The man who most helped me when I was young was a schoolteacher who believed in the French Republic and social justice.

How did you direct the actors on this film?

No one had the script. I gave them their scenes the night before, so that they would know their lines the following day. I talked a lot with each one of them. The gypsies of Romania didn't know that the Holocaust existed. I told them about Ceausescu so that they would understand.

And with James Thiérrée?

I often told him Roma stories that I knew, to help him get into character. I wanted Taloché to have antenna, to sense danger. Like birds that feel the storm coming. James is like that, he's [like an] animal. For example, for a dancing scene, I wrote him war music, with people crying out in

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Romani: “Don’t shoot!” and “Stop the murder!” When James showed up and I asked him to dance to the music, we got the impression he was making love to the earth, that he was in osmosis with it. An animal making love to the earth.

When he gets into the house, he decides to “liberate the water,” so he opens up all the faucets. Was the idea for that amazing scene yours?

I had the idea for that scene while we were shooting, to expose the stupidity of trying to blindly impose permanent settlement on the Roma without knowing them. A Roma can’t live between walls, for fear of the evil spirits that live in stones. Theodore’s house contrasts with the house in ruins given to them to protect them, which becomes like a prison because it’s “inhabited.”

When Taloché discovers that water – which for him is the water of rivers – is imprisoned in the faucets, he sets it free, and it’s only natural for him to plunge into the stairwell. Director of photography Julien Hirsch and I had decided we would follow him no matter what he would do. We obviously hadn’t planned on him plunging into the stairwell. He was the one who had the urge to do that all on his own.

And yet, you asked him to fall from the top of a tree without using a stunt double. Wasn’t that a huge risk?

I had proposed a stunt double, which he obviously refused. I saw him climb to the top of that tree several times. He was checking it out, observing where he would catch on it, breaking down how he would fall. And I also saw that he was an extraordinary trapeze artist. He mastered everything. Only then did I say, “let’s go for it.”

Let’s talk about that scene where Taloché is running on the train tracks and he falls and finds a watch with inscriptions in Hebrew on it. It’s one of the fundamental scenes of the movie...

A train, train tracks, Germans. Everything begins with that sequence where we see three young Nazi soldiers washing up with well water. Aryans, filmed in the style of Leni Riefenstahl. Nothing violent, just the fact that they’re Nazis. The tension mounts off screen. Taloché understands something is going on, that a train on its way to a concentration camp has been through there. Taloché is afraid and goes into a trance, begins to run and falls, throwing himself on the ground by the tracks. While we were shooting, he was in a state I’ve never seen any other actor in before. He had gravel embedded in his face. He felt the danger and all of a sudden, he saw that watch. We’re on the path of extermination. Of all exterminations. The extermination of the Jews and of the gypsies as well. Of all those who were martyred by the Nazis. That’s what that watch and its Hebrew inscriptions means.

At one point in the film, a gypsy says: “We will be free when we have left here without anyone knowing where we are going...”

That’s what liberty is. Never having to say what you’re going to do or where you’re going to go. With anthropometric identification, gypsies had to have ID papers with visas and get them stamped in a police station or city hall when they came to a village and when they left. These papers were obligatory in France for all Roma until 1969. The quote criticizes that practice of systematic record-taking.

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Do you think this film resonates with current times or is it just a historical recreation of the past?

Writing it, I wanted it to echo what's happening today. We're living through the same thing today, only there's no death in the end. There's no more political extermination, but from a psychological and political point of view nothing has really changed. In Italy under Berlusconi, the Roma are still subjected to discriminatory laws. Same thing in Romania and Hungary. Even in France the Roma are often parked in unhygienic places, from which they are driven away and expelled. French law only authorizes Traveling People to stay in one place for 24 hours. The number of authorizations they need to be able to stop somewhere is incredible, which by the way enables them to be constantly tracked.

At the end of the film, Catherine Ringer sings a song that you wrote with Delphine Mantoulet. What does it say?

It's early morning and the Roma have just been taken away, never to return. The song says: "Good luck to you all, if anyone worries that we're gone, tell them we've been thrown from the light and the sky, we the lords of this vast universe."