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**GERONIMO**

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OFFICIAL SELECTION  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES  
special screening

**GERONIMO**  
A FILM BY TONY GATLIF



South of France. In the sultry August heat, Geronimo, a young social educator, tries to ease tensions between the youngsters of the St Pierre neighborhood. The mood changes when Nil Terzi, a teenage girl of Turkish origin, flees an arranged marriage, running to the arms of her gypsy lover, Lucky Molina. Their escape sparks hostilities between the two clans. When the jousting and the musical battles begin, Geronimo struggles to quell the ensuing unrest around her.

## ‘Geronimo is different to my previous films. I felt freer’

Interview by Mélissa Bounoua

**MÉLISSA BOUNOUA:** Geronimo was an Apache. Geronimo is also a social educator, a street monitor who saves young people in your new film. Did you draw inspiration from the ones you encountered when you came to France in 1962?

**TONY GATLIF:** In developing the character of Geronimo, I was inspired by one of my street educators, who is now eighty-five years old and a friend of mine. I wanted to show these amazing people. I’ve seen them snap kids out of a violent trance, saving them just by talking to them. When I was in reform school, one of them was dealing with some thirteen-year-old kid who was going crazy, banging his head against the floor. I must have been fifteen or sixteen years old and I witnessed the scene. A circle of us formed around them. The educator handled it by talking: ‘Can you hear me? Can you hear? Stop this, you’re hurting yourself.’ The boy didn’t react. I said, ‘Put a cushion under his head!’ He heard the one thing that wasn’t meant for him. He thought I was taking the piss and went for me. He wanted to kill me. It brought home to me that words could really make a difference.

When I went out one time in 2012 and saw people gathered at the end of the street, it all came back to me. Someone said, ‘He’s got a knife.’ Some guy, around fifty, had pinned another guy against the roof of a car, and was holding a knife to his throat, ready to stick it in. Right then I had the idea for Geronimo. I went over and began talking to him: ‘Drop the knife. What are you doing?’ He wasn’t listening. I shouted, ‘Hey, you’ll regret it!’ He shot me a look, then lowered his knife. The word ‘regret’ got into his head and he did the maths.

**MB:** How did you translate those stories into pictures?

**TG:** I called my educator and got him to tell me another story I had in mind. ‘You remember that girl you once saved?’ She had just been dumped, she was really down, and he was taking her to the seaside... As they were driving to Deauville along the freeway at 60-odd mph, she flung the door open. He grabbed her without letting go of the wheel, and managed to hold her back.

This story made an impression on me. It had to be in the film. When the bride, a girl from a Turkish family who flees an arranged marriage, jumps out of the car driven by the educator, played by Céline Sallette, here’s how I presented things to Nailia Harzoune, who plays Nil: ‘The educator is taking you someplace to protect you, but you are really afraid that your brothers will take revenge and hurt you. You panic, you don’t trust anyone, you instinctively want to run away.’ The action was superb and very real because when we shot the scene, Nailia actually jumped out before the car had stopped! During editing, when I saw what we had, I was stunned. It sent a chill down my back.

**MB:** Geronimo is a man’s name. Why was he given the face of a woman (Céline Sallette)?

**TG:** I realised that for it to be a modern film, it had to be a female educator. The story centers on two free-spirited, liberated, strong women – one who spurns tradition, aware of the risks she’s taking, and the educator, who helps her out to make sure she prevails, make sure she isn’t slaughtered. This educator is a sweet soul but not a charitable one. Her life is devoted to others. She has no personal life, she’s like a run-down house. If you stuck a guy in the middle of these kids, he couldn’t win because

he’d figure, a father. That was in the original screenplay but I didn’t like it, I kept rewriting it every couple of weeks, I couldn’t put my finger on what was wrong. Women are stronger, fairer, and not so common. Guys are always cast as the saviors, the ones who sort things out, the ones in charge.

**MB:** What were you saying by calling her Geronimo, after a 19th-century Apache?

**TG:** He was an Apache, he saw his family massacred by the Mexicans, who shouted ‘Saint Geronimo!’ to protect themselves when he came to avenge their death. So he adopted the name. Geronimo is the symbol of someone who has had his soul, his land and his people stolen from him; someone who has been betrayed. He’s a rebel warrior. He stands for all those who have been betrayed and sold. It was also about giving the character the name of a saint, like you’d give someone the name Pierre. Calling a woman after an Indian was already kind of rebellious.

**MB:** What made you think of casting Céline Sallette? As soon as I saw Céline, I knew she was the one. She’s around thirty, she’s closer to the other young actors than she is to me. I liked that. She’s a strong character, she knew how to speak to them, she knows that they’re apt to go off the rails and she defended them. I wrote her a letter to explain the inspiration for her role – a 25-year-old singer I met in Andalusia in the nineties during the filming of *Latcho Drom*. People called her *Caïta*. I’d chosen her to represent the Spanish gypsies. I was blown away by her behavior. She was a free-spirited gypsy woman who lived with her partner, a young woman, and who everyone regarded as a princess, a queen. She was untouchable, and yet she spat in the street and was hardly the type







to go to church every morning, far from it! She wasn't afraid of anyone. Even the police revered her. Once I'd added the character traits of *Caïta*, I had the film. Céline Sallette could handle it and she had the look. She brought her to life.

**MB:** Did it change the way you make a movie?

**TG:** You film guys and women differently. It's a new kind of writing, a film seen through someone's eyes. That's the perspective I used with Céline.

Gypsies say that you see someone through their soul, which can be glimpsed through the eyes, as if through a window. Céline Sallette had this, she was always 'loaded' with emotion. The camera stayed on her, as a witness. She had to get used to having the DP around. He stuck with her. One time when she did forty takes, she was getting angry with herself. I tried to reassure her: 'It doesn't matter, take your time.'

**MB:** Were you looking for a new dynamic in choosing to surround yourself with non-professional actors?

**TG:** I wanted it to be alive, I didn't want anyone to seem like they were acting. I'd already done it with Asia Argento in *Transylvania*. I gave the lines and the action for the scenes the following day at dinner the night before to keep it real, and changed it around even more during filming. A lot of the cast had practically no experience. They had to be non-professional to play these parts. I quickly shook up the reflexes of those who had more acting experience. I described the scene and what I wanted to see. If I felt that they were faking it, I cut the camera. The hardest part to cast was the guy who played Nil's elder brother. I had a very fixed idea in mind. I was looking for a hip-hop dancer. I also wanted viewers to feel compassion for him, even though his character wanted

to kill his sister in the name of tradition. He had to be able to be sweet, reckless and violent at the same time. I met Rachid Yous at the very last moment. I saw him once and immediately knew he was the one. He had that kindness in his eyes. He's just a kid, he kept saying: 'Teach me to act, teach me to act.' And I answered: 'Just be yourself.' My only fear was that he'd be too sensitive because he has a heavy past. I was worried he might explode, that the invention might become reality. But you have to be bold and take risks or there's no film.

**MB:** How did the eight-week shoot go?

**TG:** We started on the first day with an intense scene, when the character of Fazil, Nil's elder brother, loses his temper. I gave him the lines, he acted them, I said, 'Stop. No, Rachid, I told you, nobody is acting in this film. It has to be true, nothing you say in front of the camera is fake. There's no pretending.' Twenty actors, thirty technicians, it's night, the lights are on, everything is ready, I suggest he goes off to sit in a car, away from the set. 'And don't come out till you're "loaded" with anger, and no cheating.' He went off and we waited. The camera had to be ready to roll at any moment. Forty minutes went by, Céline was getting really mad, she wanted me to give him a break. It's in her nature to help people. The other actors started to think it was crazy. 'Stay focused, if you screw up his scene, it'll be horrible.' You could have heard a pin drop. Rachid emerged and we had the scene. He was just brilliant. But I had to gauge the violence to make sure no one got hurt. Everyone was on edge. From that moment, I knew how to make him play it. You don't direct a novice actor, you don't give him instructions, as you would a horse.

He has to pulsate in front of the camera. No insults, no humiliations, no pressure, just words.

**MB:** So you took liberties with the direction?

**TG:** *Geronimo* is different to my previous films. I felt freer. I chose to have no walls in the sets, and no cars. I wanted to get rid of any barriers so that the camera could come and go without hitting anything. The interiors were shot in an old, abandoned metal working plant, near Saint-Étienne, in a hall twice the size of a cathedral. Open spaces are everywhere in the film. There was nothing restricting the direction. Whatever the action, we could follow the actor all the way, always filming in 360°. The camera had no base, it was hand-held on the shoulder of Patrick Ghiringhelli, the DP, always ready to go. When we were shooting medium close and had to back off or pull in, it was instantaneous. I'd never done that before in my films, it meant I never had to let up with the actor or the emotion.

**MB:** The focus of the movie is this young woman, Nil, from a Turkish family, who flees an arranged marriage to the arms of the man she loves – Lucky, who has a Spanish background. In making the film, were you seeking to condemn this tradition?

**TG:** I always dig into my personal history for my movies: there are Gypsies in all of them, and in this one, I have the street educators of my teenage years. As for arranged marriages... When I was eleven years old, I lived in the suburbs of Algiers, near the shantytowns. One day, my brother disappeared. You have to imagine this very handsome guy, who looks like Marlon Brando and is always in trouble. One night my mother sent me to the woods to give him some food. She said, 'Whatever you do, don't tell anyone.'



A few days earlier my parents had told him that come the he didn't know her, and he ran off. I saw the sadness and distress of my teenage brother, who didn't want a wife or children. After ten days, he came home and got married. My grandfather said to me sweetly, 'It's your turn next.' That's when I ran away from home and came to France. That story is kind of Nil's story in the film. Showing this girl who runs away is like showing my opposition to this practice from a bygone age. There were no honor killings in my family. But it's so entrenched in North Africa, Turkey, India... It's like a death to me. It shouldn't exist in this day and age. It's a return to the Middle Ages. To people who say, 'Well, that's just the way we do things,' when you haven't heard about these traditions for almost a hundred years, I feel like saying: 'Are you clinging to this practice because of some sickness in your life?' Once they're eighteen, they declare themselves head of the family and want to harm their own sister. It's absolutely crazy. In the film, Fazil wakes up as a true Anatolian Turk from another age. In order to exist, he goes back to the time of his great-grandfather.

For the families that perpetuate this, the disgrace is so black that it becomes difficult for them to live with. They stop going out, they can't look their neighbors in the eye. It's killing them. The only cure is to wash away the dishonor by making their daughter or sister disappear. It upsets me to think of these modern girls finding themselves in these situations when they are students, they have a life.

**MB:** Is it also a way of saying that society cannot prevent these traditions and revenge killings?

**TG:** Society has rules that do not chime with this.







‘Gypsies say that you see someone through their soul, which can be glimpsed through the eyes, as if through a window.’

The police are powerless to act, that’s why they don’t spring, he’d be marrying his cousin. He freaked out, feature in the movie. If a family went to see them, saying that the brothers want to kill the sister, they would just say, ‘File a complaint.’ Whereas no one is going to report their own family, it doesn’t make sense. These practices don’t fit in with modern, western society, which doesn’t have the words or the codes, and fails to grasp this backward step. It’s archaic. However those who practice it aren’t backward. They have cars, cell phones... They are modern people. I hope that my film shows this defeat. It is not just a *Romeo and Juliet* or Garcia Lorca’s *Blood Wedding* kind of story. I wanted viewers to be affected by a victim of tradition; to feel a malaise that I believe is at the origin of terrorism. It’s a new language produced by honor killings – a guy who no longer has any fear of getting hurt, who seems untouchable. Society is powerless, lost, completely disarmed.

**MB:** The violence is perpetrated through music and dance. Why didn’t you show it more graphically, in the clashes between the Turkish and Spanish clans?  
**TG:** I told Stéphane Hessel before his death: ‘You know, I’m going to make a film against violence, but I’ll have to show it, the better to dismantle it.’ Making a violent film while being non-violent was, according to him, the hardest thing to do. I especially didn’t want anyone to enjoy the violence. It’s everywhere in *Geronimo*, simmering below the surface without ever exploding. Music injects excitement and edginess, it highlights the tension of the wait. I wanted one of the few violent scenes to be brutal, to be filmed a raw way. I told my DP, ‘We’re going to do it as in Marseilles, with the awful white, midday light, to

show that it’s dumb and stupid.’ The shots aren’t shots, it’s filmed with urgency. The blood comes much later. It isn’t about modesty, I was keen not to make a show of it. The show is the music and dance. In the scenes where the two clans square up to one another, there are people all around, shouting and cheering them on. They are horrified but they show it by dancing. All the actors knew that every dance step was a violent act. Like drawing a bow without ever knowing when the arrow will fly off. Then things degenerate.

**MB:** How did you compose the music at the center of the film? Certain scenes are like a musical. I’m thinking of *West Side Story*...

**TG:** The clash scenes were the hardest; one involved a 7-minute sequence shot. There were two types of music – a Turkish version and a Spanish version. We mixed the flamenco with Turkish music according to the edit and which clan was on screen. When the two gangs display their weapons and the pressure cranks up, each weapon is in fact an instrument, and the actors/musicians had an earpiece so they could stay in perfect rhythm. Every element in the set became musical. For example, the post that one of the characters bangs on produces an amazing resonance thanks to the instruments we added: beyond the wood, there’s bass, drums... In the end, everything was shot in rhythm although the music had been composed ahead of time, because music is always the starting point of my films. Delphine Mantoulet and Valentin Dahmani began work 18 months before the film began, when I started writing the screenplay. The choice of Turkish and Spanish communities was made because they are countries whose music appeals to me. Turkish music is the root of all the music I’ve



‘A lot of the cast had practically no experience. They had to be non-professional to play these parts.’

enjoyed: Arab, flamenco, Greek... From Turkey to Spain, the same rhythms are found. There's the way of beginning songs with Aman, Aman, then the story follows. They use it as a starting point to find the tone of the song. That happened with the film – I had to find the rhythm, the music that went with it. For the Spanish family, there's modern flamenco, which the kids adapt in the film with a hip-hop rhythm. Flamenco pulls together all the rhythms the gypsies encountered as they crossed India, Turkey, Romania, and the countries of the East (which I showed in *Latcho Drom*). Spain is a melting pot for all types of western and oriental music. I'm always guided by music ●





‘My only fear was that he’d be too sensitive because he has a heavy past. I was worried he might explode, that the invention might become reality. But you have to be bold and take risks or there’s no film.’



GERONIMO



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A movie written and directed by  
**TONY GATLIF**

**CÉLINE SALLETTE** Geronimo  
**RACHID YOUS** Fazil  
**DAVID MURGIA** Lucky  
**NAILIA HARZOUNE** Nil  
**VINCENT HENEINE** Antonieto  
**ADRIEN RUIZ** El Piripi  
**AKSEL USTUN** Kemal  
**TIM SEYFI** Tarik  
**SÉBASTIEN HOUBANI** Hassan  
**FINNEGAN OLDFIELD** Nikis Scorpion  
**ARTHUR VANDEPOEL** Alex  
**MARYNE CAYON** Soda  
**PIERRE OBRADOVIC** Yougos  
**ALEXIS BAGINAMA ABUSA** Yaxa

With the friendly participation of  
**SERGI LOPEZ**

Hip-hop dancers

**MOUSSA FOMBA** Wil  
**OMAR BEN SMAIL** Roma  
**AHMED CHOUIKHI** Zigzag  
**MEHDI HARHAD** Aboo

Flamenco dancers

**TOMASITO** Bocanegra  
**PRADO JIMENEZ** Prado

D.O.P.

**PATRICK GHIRINGHELLI**

Original soundtrack

**DELPHINE MANTOULET**  
**VALENTIN DAHMANI**

Musical direction

**TONY GATLIF**

Sound

**PHILIPPE WELSH**

Film editing

**MONIQUE DARTONNE**

Executive producer

**DELPHINE MANTOULET**

Production accountant

**SYLVAIN MEHEZ**

1<sup>st</sup> director assistant

**JEAN-LUC ROZE**

2<sup>nd</sup> director assistant

**VALENTIN DAHMANI**

Director assistant

**JULIEN DARA**

Script

**ANDRA BARBUICA**

Cast

**EVE GUILLOU**

Teenagers cast

**VÉRONIQUE RUGGIA**

Production manager

**CHRISTIAN PAUMIER**

Unit manager

**NICOLAS BEAUSSIEU**

Sound editing

**ADAM WOLNY**

Mixing

**DOMINIQUE GABORIEAU**

Costums

**CATHERINE RIGAUT**

Make-up

**LAURENCE GROSJEAN**

Set photographer

**PIERRE PESSEL**

Shooting locations

France : régions Rhône-Alpes &  
Languedoc-Roussillon





Filmographie de **TONY GATLIF**

1975 : **LA TÊTE EN RUINES** – Feature film

1978 : **LA TERRE AU VENTRE** – Feature film

1981 : **CANTA GITANO** – Short film

Nominated for Cesar Awards 1982

1982 : **CORRE GITANO** – Feature film (Spanish production)

1982 : **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 Mitterrand' 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

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

César Awards nomination for Best Music 2011

2012 : **INDIGNADOS** – Feature film

Berlinale – Opening Panorama 2012

Selected filmography of **CÉLINE SALLETTE**

2014 **UN VOYAGE** by Samuel Benchetrit

2013 **ONE OF A KIND** by François Dupeyron

2013 **A CASTLE IN ITALY** by Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi

2012 **CAPITAL** by Costa-Gavras

2012 **RUST AND BONE** by Jacques Audiard

2012 **HERE BELOW** by Jean-Pierre Denis

2011 **IN TURMOIL** by Christophe Ruggia

2011 **A BURNING HOT SUMMER** by Philippe Garrel

2011 **HOUSE OF TOLERANCE** by Bertrand Bonello

2011 **THE NIGHT CLERK** by Raphaël Jacoulot

2009 **HIGH LIFE** by Emmanuel Salinger

2008 **THE GREAT ALIBI** by Pascal Bonitzer

2007 **ROOM OF DEATH** by Alfred Lot

2006 **MARIE-ANTOINETTE** by Sofia Coppola

2006 **MURDERERS** by Patrick Grandperret

**GERONIMO**

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GERONIMO (P) 2014

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**PRINCES FILMS**