

FIDÉLITÉ AND ARCHES FILMS
PRESENT

REDA KATEB

CÉCILE DE FRANCE

DJANGO

A FILM BY
ÉTIENNE COMAR

 67^e Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Competition
Opening Film



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SCOPE 2.40

LENGTH: 115 minutes

The Press Kit can be downloaded at
www.django-film.com





SYNOPSIS

1943, occupied Paris. Django Reinhardt is at the pinnacle of his art. The brilliant and carefree jazz guitarist, king of ethereal swing, plays to standing-room-only crowds in the capital's greatest venues. Meanwhile his gypsy brethren are being persecuted throughout Europe. His life takes a turn for the worse when the Nazi propaganda machine wants to send him on tour in Germany...



AN INTERVIEW WITH ÉTIENNE COMAR

What was the origin of your desire to make a movie about Django Reinhardt?

For a long time I wanted to paint the portrait of a musician at grips with the torments of existence. When I was about 40, I plunged back into music by participating in a rock band with some friends, and what an experience! I loved it. It was fascinating. I had forgotten how easily you can

isolate yourself from the outside world when you're playing music. All of us were at rather complicated times in our lives, and we got ourselves out of those complications by having fun playing music together. The time and space of musical creation is a drug that literally grabs hold of you.

And then I thought of a discussion I had as a teenager with my father, who was a great

admirer of Django himself. While he was a young man during the war, he listened to his music and forgot about the German Occupation as long as a record, or the dance, lasted. And then there was my young nephew, who was learning guitar and began playing numbers by Django like crazy. I figured that trans-generational music like that, with its charm and immediate pleasure, possesses something bewitching, vital and

salutary. All of those were reasons that made me want to plunge into the life of Django Reinhardt.

Why did you focus on the years of Occupation?

Because that period of his life is a good example of how music can remove us from the world. Django was at the height of success, swing was officially banned, Gypsies were being persecuted all across Europe, but Django didn't seem to notice. And then, that period of his life is not very well known – we know more about what came after, when he left for the United States. Or about the fire in his caravan, or his duo with Grappelli. I didn't want to make a biopic about Django, with a cursory look at his entire life. I was more interested in finding the right approach. This period from the summer of 1943 to the Liberation allowed me to touch on themes that are my own and that affect me, notably his blindness as an artist, and his later becoming aware of what was going on, as an artist.

How did you envisage writing about that period of his life?

A publisher friend of mine, Antoine Caro, had just brought out *Folles de Django*, a fictionalized biography by Alexis Salatko. He arranged the meeting with Alexis, who had done quite a lot of research into Django. I suggested that we work together. He had never written for the movies before, so we joined our competencies and wrote a screenplay very far removed from his book.

And then there was my encounter with David Reinhardt, Django's grandson, who put his trust in me, as several American biopic projects about his grandfather were floundering. He told me a lot about his forebears at the time, and my movie is based on real facts – Django in Paris, his departure and stay in Thonon-les-Bains, the evening at Villa Amphion, his escape to Switzerland, the composition of his Requiem – but the way I wove all those disparate elements into a whole is fictional, and I am the first to admit it.

The prologue of DJANGO is emblematic of your vision of music as a bubble that can blind you to what is going on around you.

I actually conceived of the first sequence of the film as an "overture" in the musical sense of the term. It foreshadows what the film is going to be about, with a blind musician who refuses to hear the danger that is approaching, and so much so that it costs him his life. That is not exactly what will befall Django in the film, but it does sum it all up a bit metaphorically.

His cultural background also explains Django's unawareness. In Gypsy communities, war is never their concern. It concerns *Gadjé* (non-Gypsies). Gypsies have no territory, little sense of property, and any strife that arises is resolved within the confines of the community. Which partly explains their marginality during the Second World War. Even today, it is hard for them, unlike the Jewish community, to speak about the disaster they survived. For the most part they live in the present, they rarely look back. There exists no real history of the Gypsy community, as there does for certain other communities.

We first see Django onstage, during a long musical sequence...

Yes, because Django is, above all, music. We wanted to introduce him simply, show him doing what he does best. And how he does it, with his talent, disdain, ruggedness, passion, detachment, genius... Because he was all that. Can all that come across in a sequence of only seven minutes in which he plays music? I hope so.

As is often the case with talented creators, Django was a heap of contradictions. I like the idea that



the audience never quite understands him in the first part of the film, that there isn't anything overtly psychological, that each scene contradicts whatever just went before. Sometimes he's funny, sometimes he's unpleasant, charming, angry, cowardly... But his music ties all that together as the film goes on, and we gradually begin to feel empathy with him. Throughout the story, the challenge was to keep the music from becoming merely illustrative, to let it establish itself as a vector of the action and the protagonist's emotions.

How did you come to choose Reda Kateb to play Django?

There were other possible actors for the role, but Reda is probably one of the most talented actors of his generation. He simultaneously combines insouciant charm and a certain gravitas. And that's what the role required. Cocteau said that Django was "a gentle savage". Reda incarnates that perfectly. And besides, I felt that he hadn't yet had his "great role" in the movies. And so it was as much a challenge for him as for me, directing my first film. That only made our shared adventure all the more exciting.

I asked him to get a grasp of his character primarily by the way he played the guitar. Everything else should flow from his ease with music, his insolence, vivacity... And so he spent a year learning to play the guitar and plunged into Django's universe from that angle. His characterization, language, love of clothes, handicap, the Gypsy community, it all came of that. As a professional, Reda puts great demands on himself. He played the role to the hilt. It was a great joy to work with him.



Does he actually play the musical numbers?

Reda worked for a year to be able to perform the numbers, but obviously not with Django's dexterity and timbre. And so I asked the brilliant jazz artist Stochelo Rosenberg, who plays in a trio with his brothers, to record all the numbers and to cover Reda. I gave them both contemporary recordings of Django's playing that I liked to refer to. And I think that these new recordings made especially for the film prove that Django's music hasn't aged one bit.

To what point did you insist on Reda Kateb's imitating Django ?

Aside from his records, there are very few documents: three hundred photos and two minutes of films. The general public does not have much of an idea about what he looked like, unlike the much more popular Ray Charles or Serge Gainsbourg... Quite the contrary, even. As far as personality goes, Reda is pretty much our own personal Django. I reused things I liked about him in my own way.

Django is surrounded by strong women: his mother, his wife, his mistress...

That's what's so fascinating about certain great male artists: they are surrounded by women, and each one of them has a fundamental importance. In the film, Django is pretty macho, but his life is run by women. His mother negotiates his contracts, his wife decides when they're leaving, motivated by his mistress... The Gypsy community has some very virile values, but at the same time, it is a matriarchy.

The character of the mother is very colorful...

Django's mother, Negros, was an unbelievable little woman. Her husband was gone, so the musician and dancer brought her children up rough and tumble. She was the first to be convinced of Django's genius, which supported the family as he became a teenager.

His mother is played by Bimbam Merstein, a Gypsy who had a small role in Tony Gatlif's *Swing*, but who is not at all an actress. Bimbam is also a musician and dancer, she has the exact

same profile as Django's mother. We were very lucky, and it was a great joy to film such an exceptional temperament and personality. She's lived through so much. She's larger than life.

How did you find her, and all the others who play the Gypsy community in Thonon-les-Bains ?

It was important for me to people the Gypsy universe in the film with people really from that community. I wanted Reda be surrounded by that truth, those faces. With our casting director Stéphane Batut, we searched in the region of Forbach, in a Gypsy community that is now sedentary. They have been French for several generations, and are almost all musicians. They are among the last to speak Manouche: a mix of Romani and German. That is the actual dialect - still very much alive - that the actors speak in the film, and that Reda learned. When filming them, it was essential for me to avoid as much as possible the folklore that haunts them in life and in the movies. I wanted to show how close they are to us. Dignified, elegant... In short, just as they are.

And Bea Palya who plays his wife?

Bea Palya is a Gypsy singer of Hungarian origin. She is not an actress either. Her very plump physique really reminds me of Django's wife, Naguine. To play the musicians of Django's group, the Hot Club de France, I again chose not to use actors, but real musicians. Reda had to be surrounded by professionals who wouldn't be just pretending and play, in order to motivate him even more. And then they're new faces, but credible for the period. It makes things all the more believable.



And the choice of Cécile de France to embody Louise, Django's mistress?

I had thought of several actresses, and then I organized a meeting between Cécile and Reda. I wanted to see if they made a workable couple. When I saw them together, it all seemed obvious. They were immediately playing off each other's charm. I wanted a "movie" couple. Django liked to go to the movies in the big motion picture palaces around Pigalle. He was a fan of Errol Flynn, Edward G. Robinson, Clark Gable... All of his obsessions with fancy clothes, classy suits, come of that fascination for the movies of the 30s. I thought it would be fun to recreate a glamorous "American-style" couple. They are absolute opposites, but believable as a couple. Cécile bowled me over with the precision of her acting, the freshness she brought to words that may have looked a little stiff on paper. With her, our work consisted essentially of toning down her very natural lightheartedness, to bring out a more somber facet of her personality. To bring out some of that mystery that surrounds tragic lovers in film noir.

Louise is also a very emancipated woman, she comes, she goes...

I love free women you can never tie down. Django had a lot of admirers, lovers. He was a ladies' man. We think that several people helped him escape to Switzerland, but we find no reference to anyone in his life exactly like Louise. The real fictional character in the film is Louise! It is also one of the few things that remain from Alexis Salatko's book. But when we were writing the screenplay, and inventing the character, I thought a lot about Lee Miller. She was that kind of woman: Man Ray's muse, an it-girl in the Paris of the 30s, unbelievably independent and involved



in the war, a forerunner of feminism, and never to be found where you would expect to find her.

What kind of image did you want for the film?

I wanted an image that combines a high degree of documentary realism and a certain stylization. Christophe Beaucarne was an artistic collaborator in the fullest sense of the word. I gave him piles of photos from the period, of concerts, gypsy camps, faces... And we also spent a lot of time thinking about each of the musical scenes, so that they

would always be spirited, but related to what they were trying to tell. There is a lot of movement during the first concert, so that we feel permanently enveloped by the musicians within the space of a stage. Other moments are more cut and dried, like at the Villa Amphion.

One of our principles regarding light and color was to convey the contrast between the natural elements, something very present in the Gypsy community and in Django's life. First of all, fire. Hence the predominance of red, ochre, black and yellow in the closed spaces of the Paris universe. In Thonon-les-Bains, on the other hand,

water predominates, the other element essential to his life. Django loved to go fishing, and whenever his nerves got the best of him, he would turn on a tap to calm down... The second part of the film is a return to origins, space opens up, blue, green, gray and white dominate. Of course, that wasn't an ironclad principle, but we did try to treat light on the basis of such contrasts.

How did you approach historic reenactments?

The period 1939-45 has been seen so often, both in the greatest masterpieces and in the worst rubbish. People have lots of preconceptions, and all those images are already shopworn... I wanted the audience to take the period for granted, to quickly forget about it, in order to focus on our characters and their emotions. That required, as we prepared and shot the film, day-to-day attention to the art direction with set designer Olivier Radot and costume designer Pascaline Chavanne. What do we emphasize on

screen, in the costumes, on set? What do we keep, but even more importantly, what do we take out to remain as timeless as possible? The same questions came up during the edit, with Monica Coleman of course. There are no more than two swastikas in the film, for example. A big one on a flag, and another on a Nazi officer's medal.

And political similarities with today are numerous...

I didn't choose the period for that reason, but it's true that as we went along on the writing and preparation, I realized how much resonance it has for us today, in terms of artists' political commitments, the perilous issue of national identities, homeless refugees who have no place to go, clandestine migrants being confined... You could almost do a contemporary reading of the film. In the only recently dismantled jungle of Calais, musicians came to record an album so that migrants could express themselves with music.

Music has always been a very powerful means of escape for the Gypsy people, many of them are born artists. It has allowed them to cross borders, it has sustained them in their darkest hours. When facing persecution, and the difficulties of daily life, music still provides them with a great sense of freedom.

Freedom which you show the German authorities trying to curb by forbidding people to dance at concerts, by imposing quotas for the different kinds of music...

Jazz and swing had a very ambiguous status during the war. It was the popular and avant-garde music of the period, the equivalent of rock in the 60s, or techno today. German soldiers liked it a lot... which embarrassed the German authorities and the Vichy government, because for them it was degenerate music... They couldn't forbid it, or fully authorize it. That was the reason for those outlandish rules, light years away from the unfettered spirit of jazz. I don't know whether in reality they were set down for Django as seriously as all that, but what I do know is that music had become a political issue. Still today, totalitarian governments and terrorist ideologues will at one time or another attack music, the symbol of freedom and the melting pot.

The concert at Villa Amphion "redeems" the prologue: music blinds the enemy, no longer oneself...

Django did play for the Germans at a gala evening at Villa Amphion. He even wrote a piece in 1947 called *Folie à Amphion*... which only goes to show how much the incident marked him. As for the rest, I jumbled fact and fiction. Suddenly everything comes together: music, emotions,



Django's awareness... Not a word is spoken, everything needs to be read in their eyes, and music becomes an act of resistance.

The presence of Django's monkey permeates the film.

Django had a monkey named Joko. We fictionalized his existence a little to convert him into a symbolic figure. He was so fond of the monkey and its bells, that he gave it a guitar. It was kind of his double. It may seem ridiculously grotesque, but it is only when his monkey is mistreated that Django realizes how urgent it has become to react. Destroying his monkey is tantamount to destroying his soul. Gypsies are of Indian origin and in India monkeys are extremely

important, in particular the protective deity Hanuman. It was the opposite for the Nazis, who had an aversion for this animal that for them symbolized degenerateness. It's always fun to combine history with a capital H and human interest stories.

Django tells the story of a man recovering from his blindness, but it also immerses us in the head of a creator, particularly in the second half, when he composes his Requiem...

The government in Vichy forbade pilgrimages to Saintes Maries de la Mer in 1941, much to the Gypsies' despair. As for Django, he did not think it normal that his community did not have its own

funeral music, composed by a Gypsy composer. And what he experienced at the end of the war inspired him to compose that Requiem. Django did not see himself as being limited to entertaining music, light dance music, swing. He made several attempts to compose symphonic music. He was a great admirer of Bach, Debussy, Bartok... He remained very much abreast of the musical avant-garde, and was very fond of some sacred music. That ambivalence shines through in the composition of this Requiem.

As for the film, the question was to know when to hear that music, so that it never becomes merely illustrative, but always remains intimate and emotional. So that we always know that he is thinking music.

Unlike some musicians and artists who are not politically committed, Django's growing awareness could be seen in the transformation of his music when he composes this Requiem, which I imagine as a kind of redemption. The character's limits touch me deeply. Django was not a hero. He did what he could with whatever means he had.

The film ends with a concert performance of that Requiem at the Institut des jeunes aveugles in Paris, played on one single occasion, at the Liberation.

To my mind, the concert at the end was always the culminating point of the film. It is the only time that Django does not play. He just listens to his music. He isn't really capable of directing it, the shock of the emotion and the surprise force him to pause... He shuts his eyes, reopens them, awake and transported... A reminder of the blindness out of which he has finally emerged.



We learn at the end of the film that the score of the Requiem heard in the last scene has been lost...

Yes, all that remains is the Introduction that we hear on the organ. And so I asked composer Warren Ellis, with the authorization of David Reinhardt – Django's grandson – to imagine the rest on the basis of those first phrases. It was Reda who introduced me to Warren Ellis, who like Django does not have a classical formation. He comes from the world of rock with his pal Nick Cave. He immediately understood the spirit and the challenge of the project. The only constraints I put on him were that it be for organ, voice and strings, because Django appears to have composed it for those instruments.

Django no doubt composed a more dissonant, atonal score, less lyrical and organized. At the same time, he liked sacred music... But that was neither here nor there. The important thing was that those few notes inspire another musician.

And the ID photos of the Gypsies over which the film ends?

They are photos from the anthropometric registry of French Gypsies who were victims of the Vichy government and the German Army. We found them in the Archives of the Bouches du Rhône department.

It was our way of paying homage to those who Django dedicated his Requiem to: all of his brothers persecuted during the war. It was also a way to return to the real world, without using traditional stock footage. The names inscribed on the photos are those of the families who lived through this history. Which is obviously very unsettling.

You have considerable experience as a producer and screenwriter, but this is your first film as a director. Why the desire to direct?

I had been considering it for years. What truly excites me more and more in my work as a producer and screenwriter, is the artistic creation. So it's a natural and logical evolution which took some time with me, but I like the idea that we all have our own rhythm. I just needed to find the right project to take the leap. When I began to write DJANGO, my love for the subject made me want to direct it. The important thing was to understand and tell Django's story, to find the intimate something that I have in common with him. I'm not a Gypsy, I was not alive during the war, I am not a guitarist, and I'm not a genius... But I am deeply moved by the conflict between his unfocused, constraining life at the time, and the artistic, mysterious aspirations that were beyond his grasp. Belief in his music was one of the few things he could hang onto, it was his art that kept him going when staring into the abyss and confronted with the disasters taking place around him. And love too...

The title of the film has already been used in the movies...

Yes, Quentin Tarantino's Western which was a "remake" of Sergio Corbucci's. But Corbucci named his film as a tribute to Django Reinhardt, of whom he was a great fan, because his own cowboy character also had an injured left hand. Loop the loop... In the Gypsy language, *Django* means: *I am waking up* or *I am becoming aware*. I love that double meaning: I can wake people up with my music, as I myself make myself aware. Given how our character does become aware, I couldn't help but use that as a title!

ÉTIENNE COMAR

Graduated from Femis in 1992, and began working in production at Erato Films on BORIS GODUNOV by Andrzej Zulawski and VAN GOGH by Maurice Pialat.

He then embarked on the adventure of independent production with the company Playtime, and then in association with Vendôme Production. He produced fifteen feature-length films, including films by: Laurent Bouhnik (ZONZON, MADELEINE 1999, 24 HOURS IN THE LIFE OF A WOMAN), Nabil Ayouch (MEKTOUB, ALI ZAOUA), Maurice Barthélémy (PAPA), Philippe Le Guay (DU JOUR AU LENDEMAIN, THE WOMEN ON THE SIXTH FLOOR).

Starting in 2009, he worked on several films as a screenwriter and producer (Armada & Arches films): OF GODS AND MEN and THE PRICE OF FAME by Xavier Beauvois, HAUTE CUISINE by Christian Vincent, MY KING by Maiwenn.

In 2014 he co-produced TIMBUKTU by Abderrahmane Sissako, and then in 2015 co-wrote GAUGUIN by Edouard Deluc (in post-production).

In 2016 he directed his first film DJANGO.



AN INTERVIEW WITH REDA KATEB

Did you know Django Reinhardt well?

No, very little. Like lots of people, I knew a few pieces, I knew that he had two fingers mutilated in a fire, but I didn't know anything else about his life. I found some things on the internet, like that one 4-minute film of him playing in New York with Grappelli. I was also told about the recording with Jean Sablon and Naguine, his wife, at the

end of what was probably a pretty drunken evening.

And then there are a few, very rare sound interviews, particularly at the inauguration of a show of his paintings – at one moment, he began painting. He talks with a reporter, in his very laconic manner: “If one were to assign a note of music to your paintings ? – F-sharp minor. – Why ? – Because it’s more mysterious”. My approach to

the character was made over the long haul, almost archeologically . I had to scratch, look for clues. It was “Looking for Django”!

Étienne also provided me with some material, beginning with a huge pile of books. And he told me that Django worshipped Clark Gable. That was a real lead for me, better than pictures of Django himself. It is very enriching when doing research on a character to go after his myths, the



guy he would like to look like. And so I watched a lot of Clark Gable movies.

Django had a very physical way of playing.

Yes, he was very energetic, always. I was lucky to have nothing but a 4-minute film of him, because it delivered me from the temptation of imitating him, which is not a very interesting way to work. Django is not someone very close to us, we don't have a lot of pictures of him. So I had to combine the Django of my dreams, the Django of Étienne's dreams, with the one I had gleaned some

information about. And then find his incarnation, based on something from deep within me. But it had to be credible. I started to hang out in a lot of Gypsy jazz venues, and it was sometimes frightening to see to what point everyone has their own image of him. Django is more than a fictional character, there is a great responsibility in playing a person who is a god to a people that does not possess many icons. And who was also loved by gadjes... It was important to me that they wouldn't feel betrayed. When Étienne told me that David Reinhardt, Django's grandson, had liked the film and my work, I was so happy.

Music is important in your life. Could you already play the guitar?

I played gnawa percussion, a kind of big metal castanets and the guembri, a traditional three-string instrument, a kind of traditional bass. So I had already been messing around on strings, but without ever having worked at it as seriously as I did for this film, which was a kind of prolongation of my development as an amateur musician. I had been waiting a long while to be able to spend more time to music.

So I took some guitar classes with a very good professor, a good pedagogue, who began with some easier pieces, like some of Bob Dylan's stuff. When I worked on other films, I would keep my guitar in my dressing room, and practice. Django was always with me.

But even with 20 years of preparation, I would never have been able to play like him! It was the great guitarist Stochelo Rosenberg who recorded the numbers in the movie. And Christophe Lartilleux stood in for me during close ups on Django's hands. My job was to pretend, and at the same time to feel those pieces inside of me. I had played and listened to them so much, that I knew when the melody went up or down, and all the breaks... I interiorized the role with my fingers and ears more than with my head!

And how about playing with a hand prosthesis?

It took two hours to put on every morning. It was a coating in latex that reproduced the entire burn. But I had to shape the fingers by curling them up. During the shoot, especially the first few days, I asked our makeup artist Nelly Robin to watch that I never let up. And so I learned to live with my ring

finger and little finger tucked in, and that lasted as a tic for a long time. Two months later, shooting another film, I would bend those two fingers each time I heard "Action"!

How did you manage the long concert sequence at the start of the film?

We shot it towards the end of the shoot, which left me the time to continue practicing, soaking up the numbers I had to play, and working up confidence. But believe it or not, I spent so much time with all that Gypsy music, I needed to clear my head. Before going on set, I would listen to hip-hop, it was like taking a shower! I don't believe all that stuff about remaining permanently in character. I avoid any kind of tenseness. Enjoying yourself is the breath of life.

This role was extremely rich, there were a lot of things to assimilate, but taking a psychological approach is not my thing. I took my main inspiration from the things that surrounded him: his music, his language, his clothes... And then I added a little bit of me!

What was it like working with non-professional Gypsy actors?...

I got very involved in the casting phase. With Étienne and Stéphane Battut, the casting director, we went to see a Gypsy community in Forbach, who received us very warmly. These Gypsies are permanently settled, but you get the impression that the only thing missing are wheels on their houses for them to set off again! We went from one house to the next, meeting with people who could possibly play Django's mother, brother, and the other characters in the film... Those Gypsies are the soul of the film.

Bimbam Merstein, who plays your mother, has a fiery temperament.

Bimbam is incredible. She carried the entire crew. She was the Mama of us all on the shoot. When she was supposed to get going at 4 am, she did it, and that supplied us all with the boost of energy we needed! And then there was also the fact that the film reminded her of the war, she had really gone through it. For them, this film wasn't just a movie. Above and beyond Django, there was also the idea of its being a commemoration. All the Gypsies were aware of that, and that created vibes that went above and beyond making a film.

How did you work with these non-professional actors?

With Bimbam, it was free style! It was anything but plotted out. She had such energy and authenticity, that you couldn't help but follow her. As for Bea Palya, who plays Naguine, she was originally a singer. This was her first time onscreen, so we had to do a lot to reassure her. And finally just say : "come on, go girl!" It was also my job to make the non-professional actors feel comfortable in front of the camera. Which at the same time allowed me to get my mind off myself, to get away from: "It's me who's playing Django!" Actors can very soon find themselves isolated in a bubble. For a character as well written as Django, it was even more necessary to remain porous, to let your identity develop on contact with others. I invited those non-professionals onto my playing field, and at the same time they invited me into their culture and helped me with the pronunciation of certain words and phrases that I had learned in their language. There was an obvious fraternity, a reciprocity, from the start. The week we spent in



the Gypsy camp was a kind of voyage, but a voyage that was much more than just simple tourism.

And working with Cécile de France?

Our acting techniques and our attitude to the set are pretty similar. We're on the same wave length. It was a joy working with her, very chemical and instinctive. Cécile is very secretive,

but at the same time very warm-hearted. She doesn't play the actress off set. She is very rigorous, she knows the text inside out, and so then she can then become truly receptive.

It is with her character that we enter the realm of pure fiction...

Yes, and also the realm of fun, almost Arletty-style. Cécile worked really hard at shaping her character, but at the same time you sense that it's all her. Perhaps it's in that sense that we're on the same wavelength as actors: never trying to show that we know how to act, but giving a lot to our characters, letting ourselves go, and letting ourselves be guided by what we have to do.

Django has everyone at his feet, but Louise gives

him a run for his money. Which happens to be what he is looking for from this woman. We feel that he's weaker, more febrile in her company... Whereas with others, he's a prince surrounded by his courtiers.

Django tells the story of a musician, but also of a man who falls prey to conflicting emotions.

Yes, more than a biopic, this is a portrait of the artist at a given period of his life. Étienne truly chose a moment that condenses quite a few contradictions: he sees his Gypsy brethren being deported while he is at the height of his glory, playing for Nazi officers. And just before his son is born, his mistress reappears...

Étienne and I did not want to make Django too heroic, too squeaky clean, or too sympathetic. Django is not what you would call a bad guy, but he sets the tempo, he forces his own rhythm on everyone else. He plays with - and abuses - that power over others, like a child. And then he is miserly. The darker sides of Django were true sources of inspiration to me. We were not there to further iconize an icon. But not to besmirch it either!

The film also tells the story of an artist who acquires a political conscience...

In the beginning, Django is happily ignorant, his eyes are shut. Then something weighs him down during his stay in Thonon, he gets in touch with his innermost self. He looks at what is going on around him, and his music suddenly echoes that. And in the last shot of the film, his eyes are open.

Django did not collaborate with the Germans, he was just living in a bubble, his musical energy...

Yes, just like a metro driver went on driving, he went on working as an artist. I totally understand. I watched some documentaries about artists in France during the Occupation, to see the individual stances that artists took, how they lived in the Paris of the day. I realized that theaters and concert halls went on playing to packed houses, and not only for German soldiers. Everyone needed to have some fun.

But when he felt he was being closed in on, when he was asked to give a concert in Berlin, he decided to leave. It may be none of his business who comes to see him play onstage, but taking a train to Berlin smacks of collaboration. *Django* is also the story of a man trapped by History.



The concert at Villa Amphion is the climax of the film.

Yes, the film can be plotted as an ascending curve. Django bewitches with his music, he can even conjure up a trance – which is a way of running away from reality, or on the contrary of revealing yourself even more sincerely... In that scene, a lot goes on at the level of eye contact and music. I remember Étienne telling me: "Hold your guitar like a machine gun!" He often gave that kind of very precise and pragmatic direction.

Django's monkey is an important character.

And a magnificent partner! I love animals, and I love playing with them. The monkey was a part of Django's soul. I understand that all the more, since my dog and I are the same way, we're a team! The monkey also brings him back to the Indian origins of Gypsy culture. It's as if Django had his roots sitting on his shoulder, in a big Paris apartment, while the Germans and their collaborators actually consider him... a trained monkey. The loss of his monkey represents a breaking point. When he reaches Thonon, Django is no longer the same, it's no longer the same story, it's almost a different film .

This second half is more interior... We plunge into the mind of a creator.

I like the scenes in which Django fishes, where he is more passive. That's when he has the time to come up with a little music. Creation is not something that is permanently going on, it often happens in quiet moments, when due to the circumstances, Django is immobilized.

You were the one who gave Étienne Comar the idea of asking Warren Ellis to compose the music of the Requiem...

I met Warren on FAR FROM MEN, for which he composed the music with Nick Cave. Then we met again on my short subject, with which he helped me a lot. I loved his way of working, the way he would suggest things to me. For DJANGO, he composed the Requiem based on fragments of the score that still exist. That music also sustained me. I received it a few days before we shot the scene, and I took a long walk through Paris listening to it. I knew that in this final sequence, I wouldn't have to play a conductor, but I had to play Django's emotions, his awkwardness. I steeped myself in the chorus' entry, in the various movements of this Requiem...

This was Étienne Comar's first film...

With so-called experienced directors, in any case with those I like working with, I believe that any film is a first film. Étienne and I stood side by side at the prow of the same boat, interdependent, and facing a challenge we had in common. I make movies for what will remain of them, but they also take up time in my life, and I don't want that time to be wasted in vain, or unhappily. Making a film is also a feast, a pleasure.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2009

UN PROPHÈTE directed
by Jacques Audiard

2013

ZERO DARK THIRTY directed
by Kathryn Bigelow

2013

GARE DU NORD directed
by Claire Simon

2014

HIPPOCRATE directed by Thomas Lilti

2015

LOIN DES HOMMES directed
by David Oelhoffen

2015

LOST RIVER directed by Ryan Gosling

2015

LES CHEVALIERS BLANCS directed
by Joachim Lafosse

2016

LES BEAUX JOURS D'ARANJUEZ
directed by Wim Wenders



AN INTERVIEW WITH CÉCILE DE FRANCE

What was your reaction when you read the screenplay for Django?

I was always a great admirer of Django Reinhardt and I thought it was interesting that this was not your classic biopic, but that it deals with only one part of Django's life, during the war, concentrating on the music and on the fate of the Gypsies.

I admired Étienne's work as a screenwriter on *OF GODS AND MEN*, and his collaboration with Maiwenn. I was thrilled that he chose me to play Louise. Étienne had some very definite ideas about her. Louise is a beautiful woman, admired, intrepid, but also very secretive, murky, evasive, and ambiguous. At one moment in the film, we can't be sure whose side she is on.

How did you appropriate this role of a free and mysterious woman?

Louise never existed as such in Django's life, but for Étienne, she represented those women of the Parisian artistic intelligentsia during the interwar years who worshipped Django and who introduced him, a street kid, into a world far removed from his own.

To help me construct my character, Étienne gave me things to about Lee Miller. I discovered a fascinating woman who started as a model for *Vogue* in New York, before arriving in Paris in the 30s, at the age of 22. She then became a photographer for *Life Magazine*, and met Man Ray. They fell in love, she became his model. And she got caught up in the whirlwind of parties and sleepless Paris nights. She hung out with the Montparnasse crowd: Cocteau, Ernst, Bataille, Picasso... Lee Miller was a free woman, she wore pants, she felt at ease with her body, she was courageous. She became a war photographer, she hated the Nazis. She was a hothead, a woman at work in the field, who inspired me greatly for the character of Louise

Étienne also wanted us to sense a big fault line in her, a vulnerability, an unfathomable sadness. I used some sentences from Marc Lambron's book *L'oeil du silence* for ideas, such as, for example: "Her eyes were fixed on something which I couldn't see", "She would fall into prolonged silences"...

Louise was very glamorous, stylish...

Louise is not just one more woman in Django's life. Étienne wanted something very pictorial, a lot like a Hopper painting. And also like the heroines in the films noirs of the time, like Lauren Bacall. Louise as a character is full of contrasts. Étienne and Christophe Beaucarne spoke in terms of light and shadow. I let myself be guided by that kind of vocabulary.

Étienne actually had images in mind. His collaboration with Christophe Beaucarne, whom I consider one of the best directors of

photography, was fascinating to watch. And I loved being part of it. Like Louise in fact, I was a muse, and a model in the hands of those creators of light and images.

And your work with Pascaline Chavanne, the costume designer?

There too, it was lovely watching her work with her staff of seamstresses. Pascaline is a great artist. She picks out her own fabrics, dyes them, creates her costumes down to the smallest detail, down to the lingerie... She truly understood the character of Louise and she adapted herself to my body, my proportions and my energy. And obviously to what Étienne wanted, who was very present during the creation of the costumes and

had some very definite ideas. It is fundamental for me to prepare my character based on her costumes, her look. I would never have been able to become Louise without Pascaline. Or without Jane Milon, our hairdresser, or Nelly Robin, our makeup artist. We had to shape these lips to perfection, with this lipstick...

Louise is something of an icon, and at the same time she remains close to us, a familiar face...

Even when there is something inaccessible about them, I always want my characters to be lovable. With Louise, I couldn't help always wanting to flesh her out, so that people could feel a connection



with her, feel her humanity, despite her darker side. And then what she does do for Django is magnanimous. She wants to save him, because she loves him passionately. And artistically too.

Louise turns the cliché of a woman waiting for her adventurer upside down. She's the one who leaves, and comes back when she feels like it...

Here again, she's a bit inspired by Lee Miller, who lived in a man's world with a familiarity that let her keep them at arm's length. She wasn't a housewife, she traveled, she had loads of lovers, even if she finally did get married. She decided how she wanted to live! It's unbelievable, the freedom women had in the 30s, and they're the ones who emancipated themselves. And the stars of the period embodied that crazy freedom that women longed for and that Louise represents. If it hadn't been for the Second World War, the fate of women may have been very different...

How did you work with Reda Kateb ?

Reda and I have pretty much the same approach to the profession. We like to serve a story and a director. We had a mutual desire to work together, and as people too we have a lot in common. That surely helped in constructing the Django-Louise relationship. Their love story is a bit peculiar; you had to really sense that Louise was in love with Django, despite her nonchalant, slapdash, devil-may-care attitude. And you can't help loving Reda! He's a fabulous actor, we're very lucky to have him. I've admired his work before, but here his commitment impressed me even more. Reda gets extremely involved, he is very concentrated, but he always remains accessible, pleasant and charming.



DJANGO is also an immersion into Gypsy culture.

Since LATCHO DROM, I have been fascinated by their culture and was thrilled to travel with gypsies, to live beside them, and to hear their language... Shooting the concert scenes that begin the film lasted a long time, so I was able to spend a lot of time with them. They are real characters, lovable, inimitable, funny and unique. Even when I didn't have anything to shoot, it was a pleasure to stay

and watch them perform. The encounter with Bimbam, who plays Django's mother was unbelievable. We were all marked by her. There were times when she became overwrought, because the film reminded her of things she had lived through. It wasn't just a story for her. Louise is a great humanitarian, she is brave and she uses her freedom to help the Gypsies. It was an honor to play someone like her in a film that finally talks about this people's past.

Louise participates in Django's nascent political awareness.

Yes, if he hadn't met Louise and been caught up in the political vortex, Django would have stayed on the banks of the Seine to fish! He couldn't care less about things, he owed no one any explanations. He took everything personally, probably because he had a rather harsh childhood, and had to protect himself. He is a little selfish and egocentric. Luckily Louise was there to shake him out of it!

The way Louise's relations with Django's wife are treated is also very beautiful. They love the same man, but that brings them closer together, they are not rivals. In any case, Louise isn't. She isn't a bitch, she doesn't want to steal Naguine's man. Besides, she tries to save her too.

What will you always remember about this collaboration with Étienne Comar?

Étienne knows how to get along with actors, he knows how we work. It was touching to see him take his first steps as a director. He accepted the responsibility of being captain of the ship, warm-hearted and humble, and surrounded by an amazing crew in which he had absolute trust, but he was the one who kept everything under control.

What I love about cinema is working together with a crew. Otherwise I'd be a painter and stay home alone in my studio! I was very happy on this shoot.

Interviews by Claire Vassé



SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2002

L'AUBERGE ESPAGNOLE directed by Cédric Klapisch

2005

LES POUPÉES RUSSES directed by Cédric Klapisch

2006

FAUTEUILS D'ORCHESTRE directed by Danièle Thompson

2006

QUAND J'ÉTAIS CHANTEUR directed by Xavier Giannoli

2006

UN SECRET directed by Claude Miller

2008

L'INSTINCT DE MORT, JACQUES MESRINE directed by Jean-François Richet

2011

HEREAFTER directed by Clint Eastwood

2011

LE GAMIN AU VÉLO directed by Jean-Pierre Dardenne and Luc Dardenne

2013

MÖBIUS directed by Eric Rochant

2013

CASSE-TÊTE CHINOIS directed by Cédric Klapisch

2015

EN ÉQUILIBRE directed by Denis Dercourt

2016

THE YOUNG POPE directed by Paolo Sorrentino



DJANGO REINHARDT

Since his death in 1953, the music and unique style of Django Reinhardt have inspired the greatest guitarists in the world, whether they play Blues, Jazz, Pop, Country or Rock: Jimi Hendrix, BB King, George Benson, Joe Pass, Carlos Santana, John Mc Laughlin, Les Paul, Jimmy Page, Hank Marvin, Chet Atkins, Jef Beck, Jerry Garcia, Eric Clapton, Mark Knopfler... All consider him the first "guitar hero" and one of the most influential.

In France, along with Charles Trénet, Yves

Montand, Boris Vian, Serge Gainsbourg, Sacha Distel and Georges Brassens, contemporary singers such as Jacques Higelin, Sanseverino, Zaz, or Thomas Dutronc, regularly pay homage to him.

A strange fate for a young Gypsy from the wastelands of Paris' outskirts, to conquer great theaters such as Paris' Olympia or the London Palladium, Paris' Salle Pleyel and New York's Carnegie Hall in New York. He was celebrated in his day by poets Pierre Reverdy, Anna de Noailles

and Jean Cocteau, who nicknamed him "*the gentle savage*" or "*aerial sprite*".

Django and his guitar...

His virtuosity was all the more legendary, since he had to overcome a terrible handicap. The Gypsy guitarist lost partial use of his left hand in a fire in his caravan in 1928. Django Reinhardt had already become a hero of legend in his youth: everyone, beginning with his family and friends, was subjugated by the dazzling virtuosity of the little banjo prodigy. Then he played with an

accordion ensemble, and his reputation as an extraordinary instrumentalist spread like wildfire through the jazz world. That universe was more suitable for the blossoming of his musical ambitions, which came true on the guitar in 1934 with his Quintette du Hot Club de France and the violinist Stéphane Grappelli. Together they composed some astonishing masterpieces, such as *Djangology*, *Tears* or the biggest hit of the day, *Minor Swing*, all of which sound just as fresh today as they did back then.



His creative approach smacked of genius, and was related to his fantastic talent as an improviser, that confounded people such as Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins, Duke Ellington and Benny Goodman, while his dazzling mastery of his instrument fascinated guitarists around the world...

But when war broke out, it might be feared that his blazing ascension would be soon cut short. But on the contrary, during the Occupation, perhaps thanks to a kind of instinctive resistance, the extraordinary vogue of *Swing à la française*, symbolized by his guitar and new quintet – that now included a clarinet - kept him in the spotlight. And so much so, that his many popular successes, *Nuages*, *Swing 42*, *Les yeux noirs*, *Douce ambiance* or *Mélodie au crépuscule* attracted the attention of the German authorities. While the overly enthusiastic reactions of the young hipsters who mobbed his concerts were being censored, it was suggested in high places that he be sent on a tour in Germany.

It is just that dark and menacing period in 1943 that the film evokes, with Django's clandestine attempt to escape into Switzerland, and a number of other crazy adventures worthy of a fictional movie character. But for Django, fact was often stranger than fiction.

After the Liberation of Paris in 1944, many of the GIs who had just arrived immediately enquired where they could finally see the *amazing gipsy* with his appealing *two fingers style*. Members of Glenn Miller's legendary big band knew what they were doing when they fought for the honor of playing with him, or simply listening to him play! But the *Swing Era* was definitely on the way out. The Americans had more than just Coke and chewing gum in their famous jeeps. They also

brought the intriguing recordings of a certain Charlie Parker. Bebop came as an enormous shock, and in France Django alone immediately understood its importance and considered it a decisive (r)evolution. Now in direct contact with modern jazz, and adapting it as best he could to an electric guitar, Django multiplied his experiments: a tour in the USA with Duke Ellington (1946), jam sessions with Zoot Sims, Roy Eldridge (1950), Don Byas, Kenny Clarke (1951), his first modal experiment ten years before Miles Davis (*Flèche d'or*, 1952), a memorable concert with Dizzy Gillespie, or a last recording with Martial Solal a month before his death (1953).

And so this genius /autodidact who knew nothing about music theory left us, forty-three years old. When asked: "*Monsieur Reinhardt, you don't know anything about Music?*", he answered: "*No, but She knows all about me!*"

A FEW DATES:

- January 23 **1910**, Jean Reinhardt was born in Liberchies, Belgium into a Gypsy (Manouche) family of itinerant musicians.
- In the **1920s** Django played banjo with exceptional dexterity. He regularly visited Paris dance halls and bistros in the Porte d'Italie and Porte de Clignancourt areas. His reputation was such that the greatest musicians fought over him. But the banjo would always remain an accompanying instrument behind the accordion.
- He cut his first record in Paris in **1928** and signed a contract for a European tour with the famous Jack Hilton Orchestra. But on October

26th, he barely escaped death and lost the use of two fingers of his left hand in a fire in his caravan.

- During his convalescence in a hospital (which lasted almost two years) his brother Joseph brought him a guitar, easier to handle than the banjo. Many thought he was lost to music for good, but he was stubborn and developed a new, unique playing technique (avoiding the use of his ring and little fingers). And so the guitar became his instrument.
- As of **1930**, Django focused on swing jazz and followed up on his intuition that the guitar

had a role to play in jazz formations. Through the intermediary of painter and photographer Emile Savitry, he met Duke Ellington, Joe Venuti, Eddie Lang, Louis Armstrong, Benny Goodman.

- In **1933** Django's talent convinced Jean Sablon to hire him and impose him in recording studios, where he met violinist Stéphane Grappelli. At the same time, Django played the chic cabarets of Montparnasse, where he became the darling of the Paris art world: Cocteau, Kessel, De Kooning, the Delaunays, Poliakoff, Picasso...
- With Stéphane Grappelli, he founded the Quintette du Hot Club de France in **1934**, first

managed by Charles Delaunay who would later become their impresario. The group also included his brother Joseph Reinhardt, as well as Roger Chaput on guitar, and Louis Vola on the double bass. The formation was soon a resounding success.

- As of **1935**, concerts and recordings followed in quick succession (*Swing from Paris, Djangology, Minor Swing, Tears, Swing 39, etc...*). It was then that he also met and played with great American jazz musicians performing in Paris, such as Coleman Hawkins, Louis Armstrong, Benny Carter, Duke Ellington, Bill Coleman, Benny Goodman. They were fascinated by his innovative, revolutionary use of the guitar in a jazz-swing formation. With Django, the guitar became a melodic instrument in its own right, giving it star billing for improvisations and radically new harmonic developments.
- In **1937** Charles Delaunay founded the Swing label which was to record most of Django's discography.
- Until **1939** the Quintet du Hot Club de France, under the aegis of Django and Stéphane Grappelli, spread his unique style during their many tours of France, Spain, Belgium, England, and Italy. But the declaration of war in September **1939** surprised the quintet while on tour in England. Stéphane Grappelli chose to remain in London, but Django returned to France.
- During the war years **1939 - 43** Django formed a new quintet, replacing Stéphane Grappelli and his violin with a clarinet (Hubert



Rostaing, and then Gérard Lèveque aka “La Plume”) . Alone at the commands of the Quintet du Hot Club de France, he had his greatest successes (NUAGES – RYTHME FUTURE – BELLEVILLE – MÉLODIE AU CRÉPUSCULE – VENDREDI 13 – MANOIR DE MES RÊVES...). His popularity was considerable during the German Occupation, when Parisians and the French were starved for dance music. Django’s swing was a kind of release. He also hobnobbed with the greatest stars of the day, the Prévert brothers, Rubirosa, Charles Trenet, Danièle Darrieux, Marlène Dietrich...

- In June **1943** he married Sophie “Naguine” Ziegler with whom he had been living for fifteen years. At the same time, he was approached by the German Propaganda Office to perform in Germany. To escape, he fled to Switzerland via Thonon-les-Bains.
- His son Babik was born in the summer of **1944**, and he returned to Paris in the same year. The American landing on D-Day rapidly revolutionized European popular music. The onslaught of bebop, and a few years later rock, definitively put swing to rest.
- In October **1946** he met Stéphane Grappelli in London. They recorded a version of the Marseillaise that provoked a scandal and was forbidden on the airwaves. That same year he was invited to take part in an American tour with Duke Ellington. Not used to playing with an amplified electric guitar, Django had a hard time eliciting perfect sound. Disappointed in his half-hearted success, and also due to his haphazard life style, he returned to Paris in February **1947**.

- Having somewhat fallen out of fashion, Django virtually disappeared from the music scene between **1948** and **1951** to devote himself to his son Babik’s education, painting and fishing... with the exception of a series of recordings with Grappelli in Italy, amounting to almost sixty titles, that may perhaps be considered a kind of reworking of his oeuvre.
- In **1951** Django settled in Samois-sur-Seine near Fontainebleau. He played in the clubs of Saint-Germain-des-Prés and regularly recorded with the best of the French bebop musicians (Roger Guérin, Hubert and Raymond Fol, Pierre

Michelot, Bernard Peiffer, Jean-Louis Viale) who were able to bring him out of “retirement”. He finally adopted the electric guitar and nudged his playing style toward bebop.

- In **1953** Django cut his last record, with Martial Solal, before succumbing on May 16th to a cerebral hemorrhage in Samois-sur-Seine in the middle of the forest of Fontainebleau.

Alain Antonietto
*Specialist in Gypsy music, culture
and Django Reinhardt*





MUSIC

Music from Django REINHARDT interpreted by *The Rosenberg Trio* - Original soundtrack composed by *Warren Ellis*

Django Reinhardt Played by "The Rosenberg Trio"

The Rosenberg Trio (Stochelo Rosenberg: lead guitar, Nours'che Rosenberg: rhythm guitar, Nonnie Rosenberg: double bass) quickly established itself as the best formation in its field. Initially inspired by Django Reinhardt, it has widened its repertoire to include classical music, pop, and bossa nova, interpreted in a Manouche swing style, while also incorporating a great number of original compositions.

Enjoying wide recognition in Europe's Manouche and Gypsy communities since the late 1970s, the Rosenberg Trio began to penetrate international markets with success and brio the 80s.

For more than twenty-five years, the Rosenberg Trio has been called the "quintessence of Gypsy jazz" and Stochelo Rosenberg is considered one

of its best guitarists, combining impeccable technique, supreme elegance and very personal vibrato, in a blend of virtuosity and emotion.

Over the last twenty-five years, the Rosenberg Trio has performed at all the big international jazz festivals: Festival de Jazz Montreal, North Sea Jazz Festival, Festival Django Reinhardt in Samois, Jazz in Marciac, Jazz in Vienne, Carnegie Hall in New York, The Los Angeles Rose Bowl, ...

On its tours, the Trio has also played with an impressive number of great musicians of very diverse styles: Toots Thielemans, Jan Akkerman, Stéphane Grappelli, Herman van Veen, Louis van Dijk, Peter Beets, ...

The Rosenbergs have also enjoyed the support of a number of artists, as different as Shirley Bassey, Randy Crawford and Luciano Pavarotti.

Over the last quarter century, the Rosenberg Trio has recorded more than 26 CDs and DVDs, all with great success.

WARREN ELLIS

Australian musician and composer, member of Dirty Three, and Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds. He has composed several original motion picture soundtracks. *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* by Andrew Dominik, *The Road* by John Hillcoat, *Far From Men* by David Oelhoffen, *Mustang* by Deniz Gamze Ergüven, *Hell or High Water* by David Mackenzie.

CAST

Reda Kateb	Django Reinhardt
Cécile de France	Louise de Clerk
Beata Palya	Naguine Reinhardt
BimBam Merstein	Negros Reinhardt
Gabriel Mirété	La Plume
Vincent Frade	Tam Tam
Johnny Montreuil	Joseph Reinhardt
Raphaël Dever	Vola
Patrick Mille	Charlie Delaunay
Xavier Beauvois	STO Doctor
Doctor Jazz	Jan-Henrich Stahlberg
Hono Winterstein	Toto Hoffman
Étienne Timbo Mehrstein	Timbo Hoffman
Levis Reinhardt	Gagar Hoffman
Rossignol	Hugues Jourdain
Hans Biber	Alex Brendemuhl
Hammerstein	Ulrich Brandhoff

CREW

Director	Étienne Comar	Line Producer	Christine de Jekel
Screenplay	Étienne Comar & Alexis Salatko	Produced by	Olivier Delbosc Marc Missonnier
Freely adapted from	<i>Folles de Django</i> by Alexis Salatko, published by Editions Robert Laffont	Coproduced by	Romain Le Grand Vivien Aslanian
Director of Photography	Christophe Beaucarne - AFC SBC	Associate Producer	Ardavan Safaee
Editor	Monica Coleman	A coproduction	Arches Films Curiosa Films Moana Films Pathé France 2 Cinéma Auvergne Rhône Alpes Cinéma
Set Designer	Olivier Radot	With the participation of	Canal + Ciné + France Télévisions The Auvergne Rhône Alpes Region CNC
Costume Designer	Pascaline Chavanne	With the support of	The Ile de France Region
Sound Engineers	Cyril Moisson Vincent Guillon Stéphane Thiebault	In partnership with	CNC
Music	Django Reinhardt interpreted by <i>The Rosenberg Trio</i> - Warren Ellis		
Assistant Director	Luc Bricault		
Casting	Stéphane Batut		
Production Manager	Philippe Hagege		



PRESS CONTACT

EMMA GRIFFITHS PR
Emma Griffiths
P: 917-806-0599
E: emma@eg-pr.com

UNDER THE MILKY WAY

175 Varick Street
New York, New York 10014

django-movie.com