

ARABIAN NIGHTS

MIGUEL G(MES





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In Portugal — a European country in crisis — a film director proposes to build fictional stories from the miserable reality he is immersed in. However, failing to find meaning in his work, he cowardly runs away and leaves the beautiful Scheherazade to stand in his shoes. She will require enthusiasm and courage so as not to bore the King with sad stories of this country. As nights go past, restlessness leads to desolation and in turn to enchantment! Therefore Scheherazade organises the stories she tells the King in three volumes. She begins like this: "It hath reached me, O auspicious King, that in a sad country among all countries...".







CREW

DIRECTOR
Miguel Gomes

SCREENWRITERS
Miguel Gomes,
Mariana Ricardo,
Telmo Churro

CINEMATOGRAPHER
Sayombhu Mukdeeprom

Lisa Persson (The Inebriating Chorus of the Chaffinches)

Mário Castanheira (The Story of the Cockerel and the Fire)

Telmo Churro,
Pedro Filipe Marques,
Miguel Gomes

SOUND
Vasco Pimentel

PRODUCTION DESIGN
Bruno Duarte, Artur Pinheiro

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: Bruno Lourenco

JOURNALISTS Maria José Oliveira, Rita Ferreira, João de Almeida Dias

RESEARCH Vasco Costa

costumes Silvia Grabowski, Lucha D'Orey SOUND EDITING AND MIX
Miquel Martins

Pascal Mazière

Christophe Bousquet

PRODUCTION MANAGER Isabel Silva

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
Luís Urbano

CO-PRODUCERS AND ASSOCIATE
PRODUCERS
Olivier Père, Remi Burah
ARTE France Cinéma

Meinolf Zurhorst, Alexander Bohr ARTE/ZDF

Nuno Vaz RTP

Françoise Mayor, Sophie Sallin, Sven Wälti, Gregory Catella RTS Radio Télévision Suisse – SRG SSR

Robert Guédiguian Patrick Sobelman Marc Bordure AGAT FILMS & Cie

Michel Merkt

PRODUCERS Luís Urbano, Sandro Aguilar O SOM E A FÚRIA

Thomas Ordonneau SHELLAC SUD

Jonas Dornbach, Janine Jackowski, Maren Ade KOMPLIZEN FILM

Elena Tatti, Thierry Spiche
Elodie Brunner
ROY PRODUCTIONS



Miguel Gomes was born in Lisbon in 1972. He studied cinema and worked as film critic for the Portuguese press until the year 2000.

Miguel has directed several short films and made his first feature The Face you deserve in 2000. Our beloved Month of August (2008) and Tabu (2012) came to confirm his success and international recognition. Tabu was released at Berlinale's Competition, where it won the Alfred Bauer and FIPRESCI award; the movie was sold to over 50 countries and won dozens of awards.

Retrospectives of Miguel's work have been programmed at the Viennale, the BAFICI, the Torino Film Festival, in Germany and in the USA. Redemption, his most recent short film, premiered in 2013 at Venice Film Festival.

Arabian Nights, is a three-part feature film, premieres in this year's edition of the Directors Fortnight in Cannes.



DIARY OF THE MAKING OF THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

The handwritten pages of a diary recording the making of *The Arabian Nights* ended up in the film producers' hands by mere chance. Despite the director's tears, who denied being the author of this diary, reputable experts confirmed its unequivocal provenance. Excerpts of this have been included in this press kit because we consider them solid support material for the film.



SEPTEMBER 9

Big Bang at the Arabian Nights office. The production team set themselves up by the door, both to check when the rest of the crew enters or to flee in case things go awry. Further down the room the team of journalists have nestled themselves right up against the wall because they feel like aliens. Finally, behind a very thin wall, there is the Central Committee room where I preside. Locking ourselves inside, we peak through the keyhole. What will others be doing outside? In theory, the assembly line should work in the following manner: the journalists present topics for research to the Central Committee based on whatever is currently happening throughout the country; the Central Committee votes on the journalists' research proposals; upon being informed of the Central Committee's priorities, the journalists negotiate with the production team how to move on out in the field (i.e. ask for cash); the Committee receives new information resulting from this on-the-ground research and it will forge a fiction story out of them (with or without a script) that will work as the basis for a tale told by Scheherazade; in the shortest time possible, the terrified production team will have to find actors, negotiate rehearsals, arrange for sets and hire a technical team to film that tale. This is how things should run in this office for twelve months. Today's the first day.

SEPTEMBER 11TH

Resende is a town of 2000 inhabitants on the riverbank of the Douro but apparently also the epicentre of the world. Yesterday we found out that a cockerel had been the subject of a court case for crowing at dawn, preventing the neighbours from sleeping. Today we found out that a boy set half of the municipal forest on fire after his girlfriend dumped him for a firefighter. Both stories are happening in Resende. What can Scheherazade do with this? Every time we ask ourselves this sort of question we know that we must set off. Bye-bye office, you were a good nest for two days! We must be quick as there will be local elections in three weeks and we want to be set up and filming in Resende by then!

NOVEMBER 21ST

I try to put myself in Sayombhu Mukdeeprom's shoes, the Thai DOP who has agreed to relocate to Lisbon for a whole year to shoot this film. We told him that we had a 16mm camera and a set of anamorphic lenses guaranteed for a year despite the fact that we didn't have the faintest idea of what we would be shooting. For reasons I cannot grasp, he is now here with us. It's his first shooting day and we are in front of the Parliament surrounded by thousands of policemen. The policemen who are demonstrating manage to break the security cordon set up by their on-duty colleagues and start climbing the stairway leading to the entrance. Never has a demonstration previously reached this point. The images we film resemble a revolution. But they are not. Sayombhu looks amused.

NOVEMBER 25TH

But what the (...) are we doing here? I feel like I'm Ed Wood! We rehearse with 73 actors in the morning and distribute dildos to all (filming The Men with a Hard-On next week). I have lunch while checking out photos of camels. In the afternoon I watch videos with testimonies of unemployed people in Aveiro to include in the film at the end of the year (The Swim of the Magnificents?): they leave me drained. The production team is nervous about the idea of booking hotels for New













Year's Eve and wants to have more details. So do I, but I still have no script. I ask for a whale to be built. I advise any director in trouble to have a whale built. That buys some time. I think I'll postpone the shoot of *The Men with a Hard-On* by a week because the shipyard workers of Viana do Castelo, who are about to be laid off, are going to demonstrate. I want to go to Viana do Castelo. The scenes I filmed at the orange grove with the birds bring me some peace later in the day when I watch the lab rushes: two incredible guys stealing oranges, a bicycle, a few brushes of wind through the foliage, mobile phone recordings of bird songs... and I have the feeling that this is the closest I've been of the spirit of the Arabian Nights. I'm going to follow these fellas up to the chaffinches' competition.

NOVEMBER 30TH

I'm told we must develop the neg in another lab. It has gone into bankruptcy. It's the second consecutive film where I witness the closure of the lab we are working with.

DECEMBER 7TH

I ran off through the streets of Viana do Castelo and I'm chased by the technical team. Making this film was the stupidest idea of my life! How can a film of social intervention be made when one wishes to film wonderful stories? And how to film timeless fables when you're committed to the present? I am, at once, in the eye of the storm and in a dead end...

JANUARY 1ST

It rained before and after. It didn't rain during: the Aveiro shipyard workers went in the sea. We filmed with two cameras, in the middle of the chaos and the waves. I felt happy. Bye-bye 2013!

JANUARY 7TH

Four months after the suicide of the couple from Santo António de Cavaleiros we search for a place to reconstruct this story. The tower block where it all happened is magnificent; I'd like to film there. But that would be absolutely obscene! And morbid. I set off by car on a wild recce. I'm drawn by the outline of three tall towers in the distance. We drive closer. It's not possible!!! It's the tower block of the suicides. What now?

FEBRUARY 5TH

We fill several notebooks with stories told to us by the residents of the tower block in Santo António de Cavaleiros. We will film the story of the suicides but also other stories lived by their neighbours; in the very same tower block and starred by its own residents.

FEBRUARY 25TH

We must let Thomas Ordonneau know something, our French producer who is stuck waiting and must organise filming the episode with Scheherazade in Marseille. We can see what we will find there on google earth. Sea and islands. What will be, will be! Scheherazade wins a home (a castle, in fact): Château d'If. What will she be doing there? I haven't got the faintest idea. Filming in Marseille after all this; around September. Nobody asks me why on earth I want to reconstruct Bagdad on Mediterranean islands. It's absurd. But it says something about the astonishing geographic ignorance propagating throughout the world...



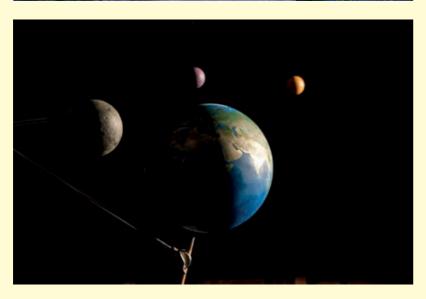












MAY 3RD

The day has arrived! All the bird-trappers we followed for months will be at the competition. I am as excited as they are. The competition is happening on a plot of land right next to the runway of Lisbon airport. Phenomenal! Near the area where the 30 knock-out rounds unfold all that can be heard is the chorus of the chaffinches and airplane engines. The bird-trappers drink beer and keep a solemn silence, leaning against the precinct's scaffold. It's the most impressive thing I have filmed in my life.

JUNE 29TH

The killer Simão "Without Bowels" is being driven to the court in a police jeep. In other words, it's Chico Chapas, our favourite bird-trapper who is in the jeep, looking just as at ease as someone who has been an actor all his life. But I forgot to warn him that around the next corner a group of people will be either cheering or booing him... I see an uneasy Chapas for the first time. "Fuck! These people really think I'm the killer!"

JULY 10TH

After watching Melo by Resnais again I tell Sayombhu that the story of the Judge should happen on a night of three moons (two of which are coloured). Since we want to film in an open-air amphitheatre with studio lights, visible on NASA satellite photos, I sense that this is when we will bust our budget. Well, things would have always had to come to an end...

JULY 13TH

The chimney of the Marseille house still doesn't emit white smoke. The final script with Scheherazade continues to be a blank page to fill. We listen to Novos Baianos F.C. for the one-hundredth time — me, Mariana, Vasco... and Maureen. I make Dry Martinis.

NOVEMBER 18TH

As I watch a 2h and 40min assembly of the chaffinches' film I begin to make out what Arabian Nights may be like. I call the producer to tell him the news:

- "Urbano?"
- "Yes?"
- "Do you want the good or the bad news?"
- "The good news."
- "This will be three films."
- "And the bad?"
- "This will be three films."
- "(...)"



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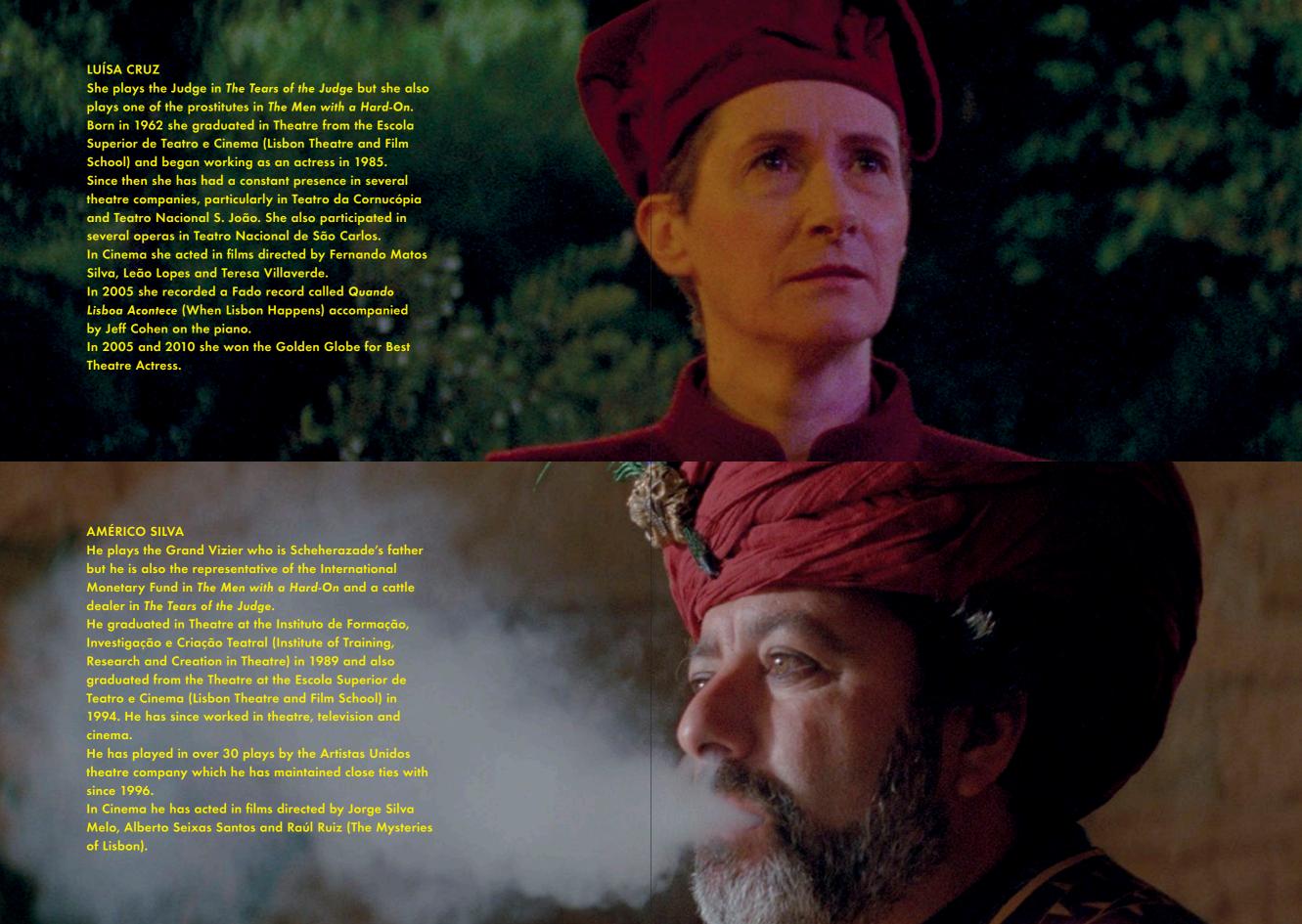
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CRISTA ALFAIATE

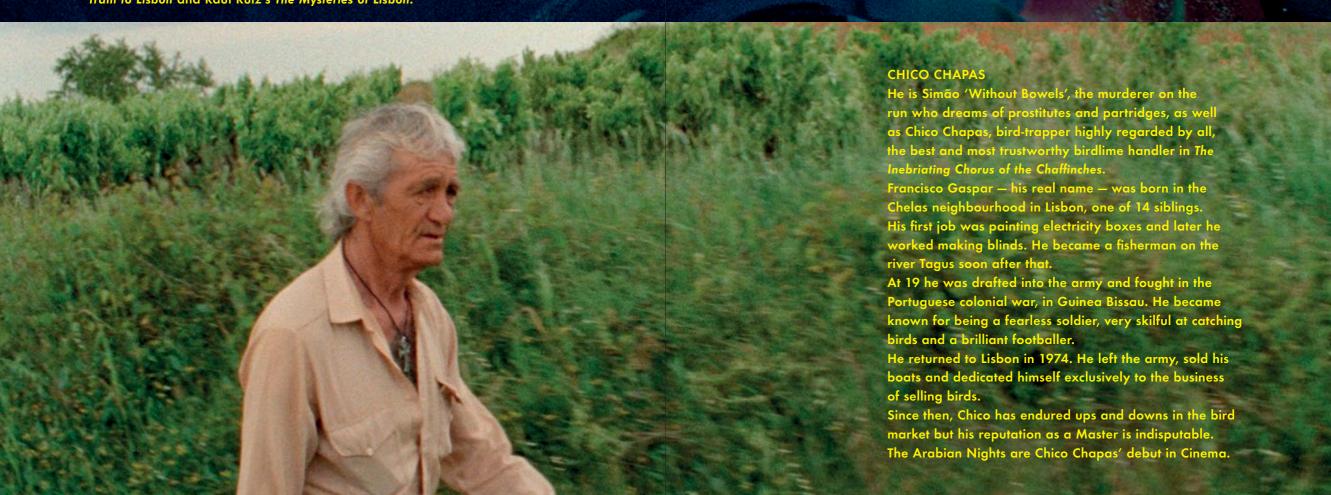
She embodies and gives voice to Scheherazade but she is also Punk Maria in The Swim of the Magnificents, both the Genie and the injured cow in The Tears of The Judge and countess Béatriz Hesler of Lancaster in Hot Forest.

Crista Alfaiate was born in Lisbon in 1981 and graduated in Theatre by Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema (Lisbon Theatre and Film School). She collaborates regularly with several theatre production companies (such as O Bando, Mala Voadora, Comédias do Minho and Artistas Unidos). In 2014 she founded the theatrical project 'Lá Fora, a show for infants' in partnership with Carla Galvão. Her film credits include 4 Copas by Manuel Mozos (2008) and A Espada e a Rosa (The Sword and the Rose) by João Nicolau (2010).























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