

# SMUGGLERS' SONGS

A FILM BY  
RABAH AMEUR-ZAIMECHE

(LES CHANTS DE MANDRIN)

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present

# SMUGGLERS' SONGS

(LES CHANTS DE MANDRIN)

A FILM BY  
RABAH AMEUR-ZAIMECHE



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FRANCE - 2011 - 97 MIN - 1.85 - COLOR - DOLBY SR

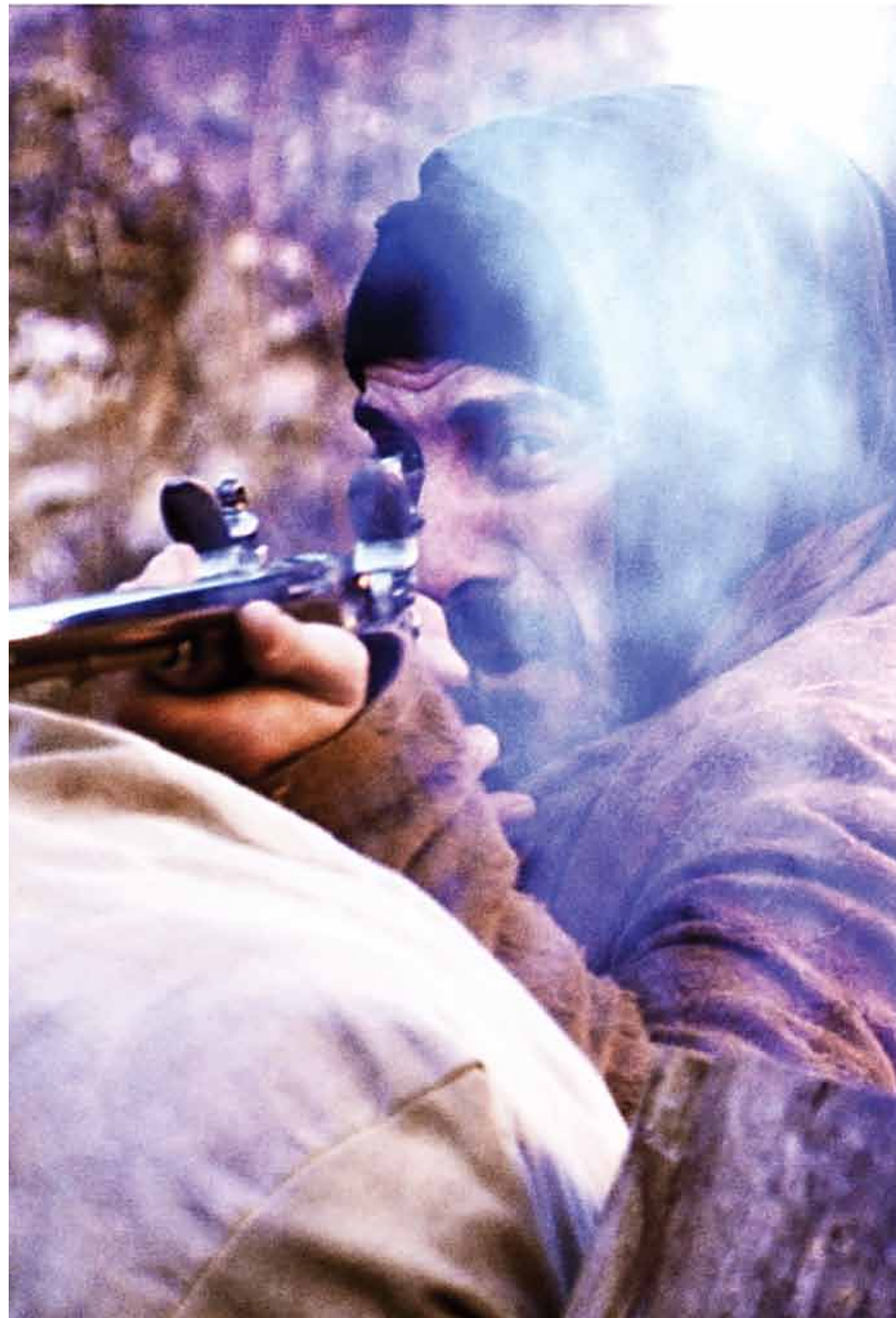
With the participation of Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée,  
and the support of Région Midi-Pyrénées,  
of Région Languedoc-Roussillon,  
and of Région Ile-de-France.

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## SYNOPSIS

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**A**fter the execution of Louis Mandrin, a famous outlaw and mid-18th century folk hero, his companions decide to take the risk of another campaign in France's southern provinces. Under the protection of heavily armed comrades, they set up illegal markets outside rural villages, where they sell tobacco, fabrics and precious goods. They write songs in Mandrin's honour, print them and distribute them to the King's lowliest subjects...





## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

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ith *Smugglers' Songs*, we aim to continue on the road laid out in our earlier films, on the edge of the political, where cinema embraces history, spills into the gaps and shines on it an irresistible light.

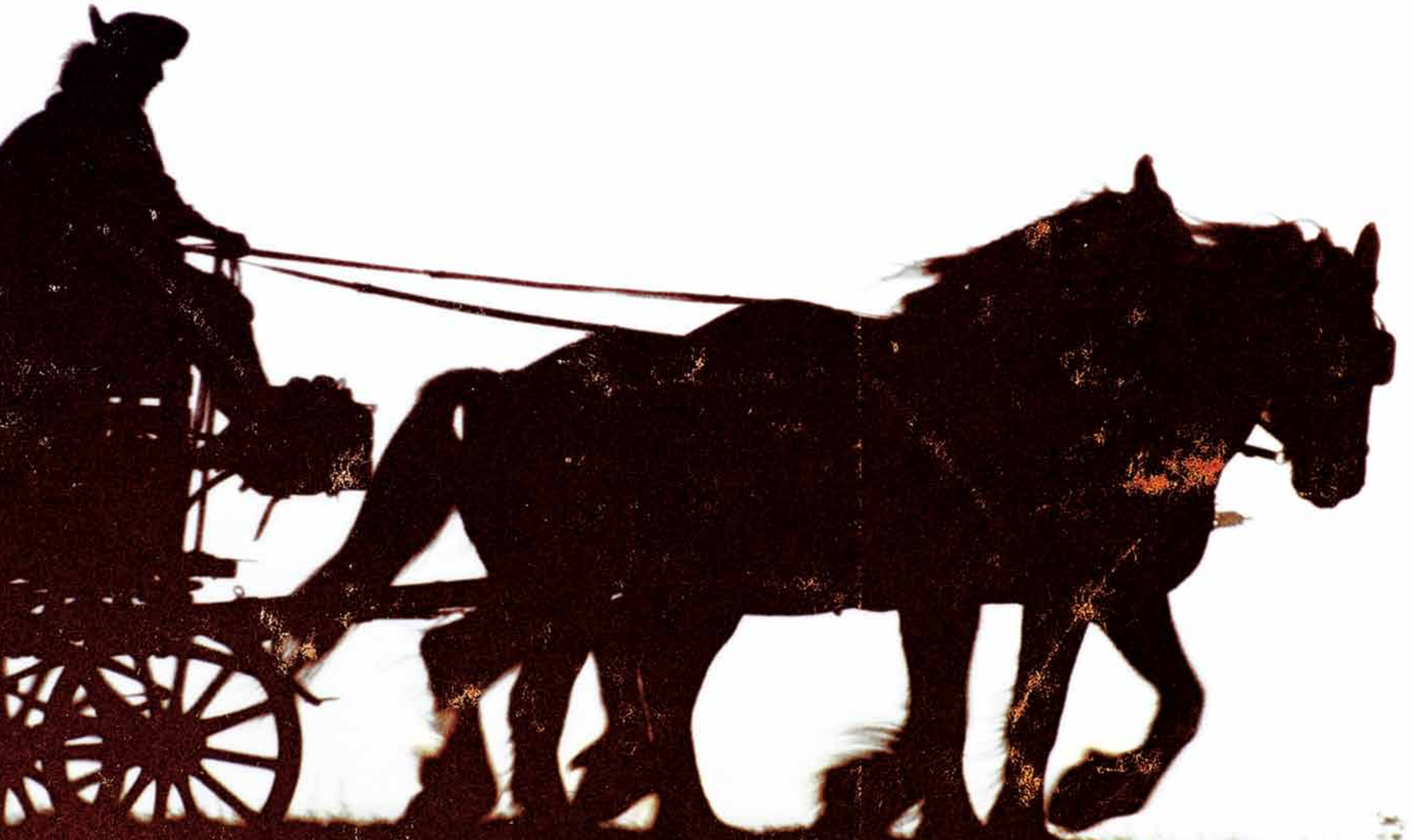
Our intention is once more to create a unique space, a poetic utopia where art unleashes its full power of representation and reflection.

Our story begins after Mandrin's death. His companions take to the road once more to sell their contraband goods. «Traitors to the crown, murderers, thieves and disruptive elements», the Mandrins, like the American Indians, are at home in the wilds of nature — rebellious and vengeful predators of farmers-general, but also sumptuous and merciless Dionysian heroes and poets — rooted to the land, but constantly on the move, fluid and elusive, striking like lightning and wilful as the wind. Amid the diversity of France's landscapes, indomitable nature will be exalted and become a character in and of itself. Freely inspired by historical events, we want to portray men entrenched in the progressive ideas of the time and dismissive of the ruling power. The Mandrins will be rebellious warriors verging on the sublime in action, in a perspective that depicts the community as a boundary, at a time when, in order to develop, it must assert its values and specificities.

We will portray situations without shying from sentimentality: inventive writing and strong direction combining to capture raw action, changes in form and tone. Glimpses and fragments, lyrical and brutal. In the plot structure and composition of scenes, different aspects will emerge that belong only to the moment, to the thrust of the story.

In this film, as in my previous movies, it's this principle of spontaneity that will be highlighted, a crucial counterpoint to the established structure. Escapism rooted in the physical, sensorial and carnal; and in the symbolic, crystallizing aspirations of freedom.

**Rabah Ameer-Zaïmeche**



# HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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LOUIS MANDRIN (1725-1755), FAMED FRENCH SMUGGLER

**L**ouis Mandrin: a French Robin Hood and pioneer of the 1789 Revolution. Louis Mandrin was born in 1725 near the Swiss Alps and was the eldest son in a family of merchants that were on the decline. He declared war against the Ancien Régime's corrupt tax system (where inspectors would ruin peasants and small businesses), became involved in smuggling goods, and quickly rose to be the head of an organization composed of hundreds of men. Beginning in 1754, he went on to organize six expeditions, trafficking mostly tobacco and fabrics between Switzerland, France, and Italy. He quickly gained the support of the population and a part of the local aristocracy, in addition to the admiration of important figures like the French Enlightenment philosopher and writer, Voltaire. But the tax inspectors, exasperated by his popularity, were finally able to trap him in 1755. Quickly tried and sentenced, he was broken on the wheel before 6 000 people.

The French tax system Mandrin stood up to was the subject of harsh critique during the French Revolution. It was suppressed in 1791 and several tax inspectors were eventually guillotined.

## Louis Mandrin's heritage, a spoken tradition

The space left by Louis Mandrin's death was quickly replaced by legend. Perpetuated through a song called "Mandrin's Lament", the story of the famed smuggler spread throughout all of France and beyond, taking the form of booklets containing the words to the song. They often lacked notation, but readers were encouraged to sing them "to the tune of..."



# RABAH AMEUR-ZAÏMECHE

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**S** *mugglers' Songs* is Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche's fourth film, following *Wesh Wesh, what's going on?* ("Wesh Wesh, qu'est-ce qui se passe ?", 2002), *Back Home* ("Bled Number One", 2006) and *Adhen* ("Dernier Maquis", 2008). He has established himself as one of the finest directors of his generation by offering political films that treat sensitive subjects such as religion, immigration, and employment without falling into a black-and-white view of the world or becoming explicit.

The films express themselves through the quality of their poetic observation of the world around them. Born in Algeria, Ameur-Zaïmeche grew-up in a housing project on the outskirts of Paris. He set up his own company, Sarrazink Productions, in 1999, making films entirely of his own creation, serving as writer, director, and actor, a matter of both choice and necessity. His views of society and of making films, which sometimes clash with political correctness, resulted in timidity from financial backers. He makes guerrilla films, leading a small gang of collaborators to organize "pirate" shoots with a passion that makes up for a lack of money. One cannot help but admire artistic and human initiatives of this sort, especially when they're driven by such great talent.

Olivier Père. *Text from TAKE 100, published by Phaidon editions, 2010*

## BIOGRAPHY & FILMOGRAPHY

Born in 1966 in Algeria, Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche arrived in France in 1968. He grew up in the Bosquets housing project in Montfermeil, Seine-St-Denis. After studying humanities, he founded the company, Sarrazink Productions, in 1999. Since then, he has produced and directed four films.

### FILMOGRAPHY

- 2011 **SMUGGLERS' SONGS** (Les Chants de Mandrin)  
International Competition - Locarno 2011  
Jean Vigo Prize 2011
- 2008 **ADHEN** (Dernier Maquis)  
Directors' Fortnight - Cannes 2008  
Jury Special Prize - Dubai 2008
- 2006 **BACK HOME** (Bled Number One)  
Young Audiences Prize - Un Certain Regard, Cannes 2006
- 2002 **WESH WESH, WHAT'S GOING ON?** (Wesh Wesh, qu'est-ce qui se passe ?)  
Louis Delluc Prize for Best First Film 2002  
Wolfgang Staudte Award - Berlin International Forum of New Cinema 2002



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## CAST

The Marquis  
The Peddler  
The Hare  
Bélissard  
Twinkle  
M'Lord  
Blondin  
Buzzard  
Tambour  
La Flûte  
Mandrinette  
The Publisher  
The Sergeant  
The Sergeant Major

Jacques Nolot  
Christian Milia-Darmezin  
Kenji Levan  
Rabah Ameer-Zaïmeche  
Salim Ameer-Zaïmeche  
Sylvain Roume  
Nicolas Bancelhon  
Abel Jafri  
Nicolas Larmignat  
Sylvain Rifflet  
Sylvia Albaret  
Jean-Luc Nancy  
Xavier Pons  
Yann-Yvon Pennec

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## CREW

Script, Producer, Director  
Documentation & research, Production manager  
Coproducteur  
Original score  
Image  
Editing  
Sound  
Sound mix  
Mix  
Costumes design

Rabah Ameer-Zaïmeche  
Sarah Sobol  
Maharaja Films, Mathilde Henrot  
Valentin Clastrier  
Irina Lubtchansky  
Nicolas Bancelhon  
Timothée Alazraki, Bruno Auzet  
Mathieu Farnarier, Boris Chapelle  
Nikolas Javelle  
Christiane Vervandier

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