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OFFICIAL COMPETITION
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MANNHEIM-HEIDELBERG



THE PHANTOM FATHER

a film by lucian GEORGESCU





GAV presents

Marcel Iures

THE
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FATHER**

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Romanian/English, color, 1:2.35, Dolby Digital, 1h33, 2011

thephantomfather.com
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A road-movie, The Phantom Father used as a starting point the short story „Almost Oriental” by the American writer Barry Gifford („Wild at Heart”, „Lost Highway”, „Perdita Durango”) who also has a cameo in the film.

A bitter sweet comedy, the film tells a double love story: on one hand, that between Robert Traum (Marcel Iures, in a impressive and unprecedented role) and Tania (Mihela Sirbu, whose acting was appreciated by Variety as a „formidable debut”) and, on the other hand, the love for old cinema, nomadic, popular, naive and generous.

A tender and nostalgic homage for a past era, The Phantom Father stylistically combines postmodern and classical cinema, assisted by Liviu Marghidan’s photography as well as by Johannes Malfatti’s original soundtrack.

Interview with Lucian Georgescu

Who are the people mentioned in the end credits dedication, “Bose, Stein and Balkanski”?

They are all Phantom Fathers... Stein was Barry Gifford's grandfather, while Balkanski was my father's family name before WW2. As far as Bose is concerned... Bose was one of my best friends, regarded as the most talented Romanian film director, even though he made mostly shorts and documentaries... For a long time during the first decade after the Romanian revolution, everybody eagerly waited for his feature film debut. **The Phantom Father** was supposed to be this debut. But Bose left us just weeks before us signing the first financing contract. The film is dedicated to his memory, even though I believed he would have made a better one. The only way I could put his signature on the film is the presence of Iosif, his younger son, who plays the part of little Robert in the flashbacks.

This is how you came to direct?

No... I was the writer and the producer of the film so my mission was to complete the movie, that's all. I tried working with two other directors, but things were not progressing and the deadlines set up by the financiers were approaching. By the time I met Joachim von Vietinghoff, who joined the production, I was desperate. But he liked the script and suggested that I should direct it. It was too personal, he said... After a couple of months of agony, I accepted to step behind the camera. **The Phantom Father** is a buddy movie – production wise I mean. It is a film made by friends, all together on the road, some disappearing on the way: Bose, Barry, Marcel, Lucian, Joachim, Johannes, Liviu, Kim, John... and all the others.



Is *The Phantom Father* an adaptation?

No. Or at least not one of the book with the same title... ***The Phantom Father*** is a memoir book by Barry Gifford, a collection of short stories in which he created a portrait of his father from past and faint recollections. A brilliant text, but nothing actually related to the film, apart from the image of the childhood of a Chicago gangster's son. However, the Foreword of that book contains the original idea – Barry recalls a trip to Europe and the discovery of his grandfather's transit visa papers in Vienna. The rest is more or less fiction, and the first treatment of the film is actually a short novel that Barry published under the title ***Almost Oriental***. We both loved ***The Phantom Father*** as a title, though... But the film is still very far from ***Almost Oriental***. Robert is a Traum himself, not a biographer of the family, as in Barry's early version. Sami now has a much more important role and meaning, his little subplot becomes a major plot of the movie. Tanya is less mysterious, but more feminine, while the Ukrainian mobsters are not to be taken too serious – a decision I made at the story level and which stylistically changed the whole concept for the film.

Some could argue that Robert's quest is not linear. He comes looking for his family roots in Eastern Europe but, on the way, he becomes distracted... A bit confusing, isn't it?

Life is confusing. My character is confused. He has his midlife crisis and seizes the opportunity to leave, looking for a change – any excuse is good though! And let's not forget that, in life, things do not evolve as in the "how to..." manuals. In a way, Robert's arrival is similar to

Barry's coming to the Transylvania Film Festival in 2003, the place where we met. He had come there as a Jury member, but he had a hidden motive – to see the "Old Country" from where his family left in strange circumstances before WW2. On the other hand, when we entered the Synagogue of Siret and we discovered there, on a stone between some other names, that of one of the Stein family, his ancestors, Barry stormed out and later told me: "I don't want to know whether this Stein was my grandfather or not. Mystery is better than truth". I agree with him. And I do agree with his former film buddy, David Lynch, who once said "Why should we explain everything?"





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Câmpulung
Moldovenesc
29km
Vatra
Moldovitei
5km



Is Sami, the film projectionist, a fictional character? Is it yours or Barry's?

Sami is real. We discovered him in our trip through Bucovina, in a small town called Siret, close to the border with Ukraine. Sami was one of the last surviving male Jews and the bearer of the keys of the local Synagogue, which had already been closed for good – there weren't enough men to perform the ritual. At the same time, Sami was a real film projectionist and we met him in his cinema, the only one in town. After the war, it was renamed "Maxim Gorki", but in the film we changed it to "Excelsior", for the good old times' sake – good old times which are never coming back... the Romanian "Belle Époque"!

In the film, he is traveling in a caravan, showing movies to the people...

This is fiction. Partially, at least... Funny enough, just a few weeks before principal photography started, I watched in the news the case of an errant projectionist: a local cinephile was traveling through North Moldavia and Bucovina showing movies with an old projector. I wrote this new sub-plot into the script and then it became essential to our story: Sami is chased from his old cinema by a greedy local politician who wants to build a shopping mall and travels the country showing movies with his improvised Kino caravan. This is critical to our story: Robert discovers the Old Country is full of weird characters and situations, but this situation of the cinema being replaced by a mall or any other crap is emblematic for a nation which tears down the old values set in stone and replaces them with some plastic kitsch. Sadly, a few months before completing the film, Sami passed away... our last old-school film projectionist was gone...

Where are the cinema scenes shot?

We didn't want to use a set – we wanted to film it on location, and it was a

nightmare to find an old cinema still close to its initial purpose and look. Finally, after scouting Romania from North to South and from East to West, we found this fabulous building in Braila. It is a very sad story... Tragic, even... old cinemas have been transformed into casinos, cheap bars or discos. Gorgeous buildings vandalized by the new bourgeoisie of the young Romanian capitalism. Horrible... Braila is a good example – in the 19th century, this city used to be one of the most important inner ports of Europe on the Danube, with an amazing architecture and a vivid social and cultural life; today, it is a ruin and people are unhappy and resigned to their grey life.

What about the Turkish bath scene?

This scene is important to me because it was written by Gifford himself. And there are very few scenes written by him left in the final film. Had I not left it in the film, Barry would have never forgiven me. But he still would have liked for the bathers to be fatter... MUCH fatter...

How was your working relationship with Marcel Iures?

If *The Phantom Father* is alive today, is because of him. As I said before, this is a film made by friends – a type of production one cannot find anymore, I think. Marcel is a great actor but, in addition, he is a great person and a great friend. I enjoyed every moment spent together, even the difficult ones. He saved me from agony and despair with his humor, philosophy, calm and warmth. I was so lucky having him around.

How do you see your film in the context of the New Romanian cinema?

I don't... *The Phantom Father* has a different look and feel than the New Romanian cinema, but the same is applicable for the Old Romanian cinema. And, actually, this is what makes this film worth watching. It is different.



Biographies

Lucian Georgescu

Lucian Georgescu belongs to the first generation of Romanian post revolutionary filmmakers. He's a film and TV screenwriter, actor, producer, film critic, (UCIN, FIPRESCI), Senior Lecturer in Film and Media at the Romanian Theatre and Film University in Bucharest. ***The Phantom Father*** is his film directing feature debut.



Other credits:

Mimi, short feature, ATF, Romania, 1993 (screenwriter/director, together with Cornel Lazia); awarded the DAKINO Special Prize of the Jury.

Night within a Day, short feature, directed by Alexandru Maftai, UNATC, Romania, 1996, (screenwriter); awarded the DAKINO Trophy in Bucharest; FIPA d'Or in Biarritz

Keep an Eye on Happiness, feature by Alexandru Maftai, 1998 Roxy Films Germany/TVR Romania (screenwriter and actor).

Somewhere in Palilula, feature by Silviu Purcărete, Libra Film, Romania 2011 (co-producer)

Barry Gifford

Barry Gifford's novels have been translated into twenty-eight languages. His book ***Night People*** was awarded the Premio Brancati in Italy, and he has been the recipient of awards from PEN, the National Endowment for the Arts, the American Library Association, the Writers Guild of America, and the Christopher Isherwood Foundation. David Lynch's film



Wild at Heart, based on Gifford's novel, won the Palme d'Or at Cannes 1990. His novel ***Perdita Durango*** was made into a feature film by Spanish director Alex de la Iglesia in 1997. Barry Gifford wrote with David Lynch ***Lost Highway***, with Matt Dillon ***City of Ghosts*** (2003) and the libretto for Ichiro Nodaira's opera, ***Madrugada*** (2005). Mr. Gifford's books include ***The Phantom Father***, named a New York Times Notable Book of the Year; ***Wyoming***, named a Los Angeles Times Novel of the Year, and which has been adapted for the stage and film; ***The Sinaloa Story***; ***The Rooster Trapped in the Reptile Room: A Barry Gifford Reader***; ***Do the Blind Dream?***; and ***The Stars Above Veracruz***. His most recent books are the novels ***The Imagination of the Heart*** and ***Memories from a Sinking Ship***. Mr. Gifford's writings have appeared in Esquire, Rolling Stone, Sport, New York Times, El Pais, El Universal, La Repubblica, The New Yorker, La Nouvelle Revue Française and many more.

Marcel Iures

Marcel Iures was born 2 August 1951 in Bailesti, Romania and is one of Romania's most acclaimed stage and film actors. He has acted in films and on stage both in Romania and internationally, as well as playing a plethora of roles on Romanian and British television.

He made his stage debut at the Bulandra Theatre, Romania, in the 1975 production of *Ferma*, playing George. From 1978 to 1981 he acted at the Cluj National Theatre. During the early 1980s, Iures appeared at both the Bulandra and Odeon Theatres in Bucharest. Among his roles were the title roles in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Henry IV* and *Richard III*.

He is the president of Teatrul ACT (the first independent theatre in Romania) of which he was one of the founders in 1995. Iures is the president of the Anonimul International Film Festival and also the president of Ideo Ideis Festival (an annual national theatre festival for teenagers).

The quality of Iures's performances in both Western and Romanian movies and also his stage performances have established him as one of the greatest actors in motion picture and theatre history. This in turn has resulted in Iures receiving many accolades and nominations (in both Romania and abroad) throughout his career.



Selected filmography:

Pirates of the Caribbean 3: At World's End

(Gore Verbinski, 2007)

Youth Without Youth (Francis Ford Coppola, 2007)

The Tulse Luper Suitcases, Part 2 (Peter Greenaway, 2005)

Layer Cake (Matthew Vaughn, 2004)

Hart's War (Gregory Hoblit, 2002)

Amen. (Costa-Gavras, 2002)

The Peacemaker (Mimi Leder, 1997)

Mission: Impossible (Brian de Palma, 1996)

Joachim von Vietinghoff

With over 50 national and international cinema and TV productions on his credit, Joachim von Vietinghoff is one of the most successful producers of new German Cinema. Among numerous national and international awards he received the German Federal Distinguished Service Cross 1st Class in 2001. Since 1972 Joachim von Vietinghoff has had his own production company, has been teaching at the German Film Academy in Berlin and has been a member of the consulting selection committee of the International Berlin Film Festival since 1995.



Cast & Crew

With: Marcel Iureș, Barry Gifford, Mihaela Sîrbu, Valer Dellakeza, Mihai Constantin, Mimi Brănescu, Victor Rebengiuc, Mariana Mihaș, Iosif Paștina, Nicodim Ungureanu, Vitalie Bantaș, Marcello Cobzariu, Mirela Opreșor

Screenplay: Lucian Georgescu, based on a novel by Barry Gifford

Cinematography: Liviu Mărghidan

Editing: Ioachim Stroe

Music: Johannes Malfatti

Art Direction: Gabriel Nechita

Costumes: Alexandra Ungureanu

Produced by: Lucian Georgescu & Joachim von Vietinghoff

Directed by: Lucian Georgescu

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*"This quest for origins embodies the idea that a journey
is more important than its destination"* ARTS & OPINION

"Mihaela Sîrbu's standout perf makes the journey worthwhile" **VARIETY**





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