

MUBI and New Wave Films present

ARABIAN NIGHTS

(As mil e uma noites)

A film by

Miguel Gomes



Quinzaine, Cannes 2015

Portugal/France/Germany/Switzerland 2015 / Portuguese, French, English, German and Mandarin with English subtitles

Volume 1 - The Restless One 125 mins

Volume 2 - The Desolate One 131 mins

Volume 3 - The Enchanted One 125 mins

Volume 1 - The Restless One - Opens April 22

Volume 2 - The Desolate One – Opens April 29

Volume 3 - The Enchanted One – Opens May 6

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SYNOPSIS

Miguel Gomes has followed the black-and-white diptych *Tabu*, with this mutating modern-day folk tale channeling his outrage at Portugal's enduring economic crisis and imposed austerity measures into an exhilarating fresco of contemporary life.

Arabian Nights is the result of a year's worth of investigation, writing and shooting by Gomes and his team of researchers and journalists, who gathered true stories of hardship from across Portugal and transformed them into episodes both fictional and documentary, loosely based on the structure of *The Arabian Nights*, and shot in 16mm and 35mm by Apichatpong Weerasethakul's long-time cinematographer, Sayombhu Mukdeeprom.

It premiered at Cannes 2015, in the Quinzaine, where it garnered huge press attention, and the coveted Palm Dog awarded to its canine star Lucky (Dixie).

In the prologue, a film director (played by Gomes himself) tries to combine the documenting of the closure of a shipyard in Viana with investigating the work of a wasp-exterminator. Panicking, he runs away from his mission to represent his country's misery, and condemned by his crew, he has the idea of telling them an awe-inspiring story in an effort to revoke his sentence. So Scheherazade is introduced, whose tales are gathered in three tragicomic volumes.

Volume 1- The Restless One

The first, *The Restless One*, starts with the island-dwelling virgins of Baghdad who have escaped to avoid the attentions of Shahryar, then in *The Men with the Hard-ons* the technocrats from the IMF trying to impose austerity on Portugal meet a wizard who suspects them all of impotence. He gives them a potion to induce erections, and in their euphoria, they relax the austerity measures. But as the erections never vanish, they need to consult the wizard to reverse the potion. He demands a vast sum of money that only new taxes can pay off.

The Story of the Cockerel and the Fire combines a talking cockerel on trial for crowing too early, with a municipal election, and the story (told in texts) of the jealous Sandra who tries to get her revenge on her rival in love, Catarina, a fire-fighter, by starting forest fires.

In *The Swim of the Magnificents* an annual New Year's Day swim is combined with three testimonies of the effects of unemployment and the boredom of food-bank handouts of frozen soup. Not to mention an exploding whale and a beached mermaid.

Volume 2- The Desolate One

The Chronicle of the Escape of Simão "Without Bowels" has an unlikely hero: a fugitive mass murderer whose powers of evasion made him a local legend. Finally captured he is applauded as the police lead him away. In a post-script, some scouts meet with an unfortunate accident.

In *The Tears of the Judge* three moons light an alfresco amphitheatre where a distressed magistrate presides over a succession of absurdist court cases involving a melancholy stolen cow and Chinese mail-order brides and a parade of other ludicrous but interconnected crimes.

The Owners of Dixie follows the arrival of a Maltese poodle that is shuttled between owners living in an apartment block. After a brief stay with Glória, whose previous dog Dixie he greatly resembles, and is soon named after, he stays with the chain-smoking Humberto and Luísa. They befriend new arrivals Vasco and Vânia and tell them more stories about the residents of the flats, including one about the owners of a talking parrot who ruin themselves with vet's fees when it falls ill after eating peanuts. It recovers, avoids peanuts, but never speaks again.

Finally ending up with Ana the door-keeper, Dixie the "love machine" comes across the ghost of the first Dixie, still haunting the corridors of the tower-block.

Volume 3- The Enchanted One

Scheherazade finds her storytelling abilities revived after an escape to the exquisite Archipelago, in a lush costume spectacle filled with delightful anachronisms. She turns down the attentions of Paddleman, despite his “excellent reproductive system”, but briefly takes up with a thief named Elvis. She meets her father, the Grand Vizier, on a Ferris wheel and gets the confidence to launch her final tale, *The Inebriating Chorus of the Chaffinches*.

It’s a documentary style portrait of a community of working-class bird-trappers who train chaffinches to sing for competitions.

In the middle is an interlude, *Hot Forest*, in which a Chinese immigrant tells her story. She meets a policeman in a demonstration, who becomes her lover. Abandoned, she moves in as a companion for an aristocratic lady.

We return to the trapper Chico Chapas, and the volume ends with him walking a long road to the strains of the Langley Schools Project.

Further information, links and downloads at newwavefilms.co.uk

Photos at: newwavefilms.co.uk/press



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)
Editing	Telmo Churro, Pedro Filipe Marques, Miguel Gomes
Sound	Vasco Pimentel
Production design	Bruno Duarte, Artur Pinheiro
Assistant director	Bruno Lourenço
Journalists	Maria José Oliveira, Rita Ferreira, João de Almeida Dias
Research	Vasco Costa
Costumes	Silvia Grabowski, Lucha D'Orey
Sound editing and mix	Miguel Martins
Foleys	Denis Séchaud, Pascal Mazière
Colourist	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 Spicher, Elodie Brunner: BOX PRODUCTIONS

Portugal/France/Germany/Switzerland 2015 - filmed in 16mm and 35mm – Scope

Volume 1: The Restless One 125 mins

Volume 2: The Desolate One 131 mins

Volume 3: The Enchanted One 125 mins

CAST

Volume 1 :

The Restless One

Scheherazade/Punk Maria
Luís / Luís
IMF representative
Portuguese Prime Minister
Brazilian translator
Cockerel owner
Prostitute
Catarina
Sandra
Rui Miguel
Basirou Diallo
Shipyard Workers

1st Magnificent
2nd Magnificents
3rd Magnificent

Crista Alfaiate
Adriano Luz
Américo Silva
Rogério Samora
Carloto Cotta
Fernanda Loureiro
Luísa Cruz
Ana Margarida Rabaca
Sabrina Lopes
Carlos Loureiro
Wizard
Miguel Cerqueira
Alberto Joaquim Novo
Martinho Cerqueira
Vítor Vieira
Anibal Fabrica
Sónia and Rui
Paulo Carvalho

Volume 2

The Desolate One

Simão 'Without Bowels'
Judge
Genie / Injured Cow
Judge's daughter / Vânia
Vasco / dumb son
Luisa
Humberto
Speaker for Chinese Ladies
Father of the Good Thief
Cattle Dealer
Masked joker
Dixie

Chico Chapas
Luísa Cruz
Crista Alfaiate
Joana de Verona
Gonçalo Waddington
Teresa Madruga
João Pedro Bénard
Jing Jing Guo
Adriano Luz
Américo Silva
Carloto Cotta
Lucky

Volume 3

The Enchanted One

Scheherazade/Beatriz Hesler
Grand Vizier
Chico Chapas
Chaffinch fancier
Hot Forest voice
Paddleman

Crista Alfaiate
Américo Silva
Chico Chapas
Gonçalo Waddington
Jing Jing Guo
Carloto Cotta

INDEX OF EPISODES

Volume 1: The Restless One

The Work of the Film Director, of the Shipyard Workers and of the Wasp Exterminator
The Island of the Young Virgins of Baghdad
The Men with Hard-ons
The Story of the Cockerel and the Fire
The Swim of the Magnificents
The First Magnificent's Story
The Second Magnificents' Story
The Third Magnificent's Story

Volume 2: The Desolate One

Chronicle of the Escape of Simão 'Without Bowels'
The Tears of the Judge
The Owners of Dixie
Part One : Glória, Luísa and Humberto
The Stories of the Residents of the Tower Block told by Humberto and Luísa
Part Two: Vasco, Vânia, Ana and her Grandchildren minute

Volume 3: The Enchanted One

Scheherazade (on the 515th day of narrating stories to the King)
The Inebriating Chorus of the Chaffinches
Hot Forest

Miguel Gomes

Miguel Gomes was born in Lisbon in 1972. He studied cinema at the Lisbon Theatre and Film School (Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema) and worked as film critic for the Portuguese press until the year 2000.

He 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 – a New Wave release) came to confirm his success and international recognition. *Tabu* premiered in competition at the Berlin Film Festival, where it won the Alfred Bauer and FIPRESCI award; the film was sold to over 50 countries and won dozens of awards.

Retrospectives of his 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, a three-part feature film, premiered in this year's edition of the Directors' Fortnight in Cannes, where it was greeted with huge acclaim.

Filmography

Feature-length Films

- 2015 **ARABIAN NIGHTS, Volume 1: THE RESTLESS ONE** (As mil e uma noites, Volume 1, O Inquieto)
- ARABIAN NIGHTS, Volume 2: THE DESOLATE ONE** (As mil e uma noites, Volume 2, O Desolado)
- ARABIAN NIGHTS, Volume 3: THE ENCHANTED ONE** (As mil e uma noites, Volume 3, O Encantado)
- 2012 **TABU**
- 2008 **OUR BELOVED MONTH OF AUGUST** (AQUELE QUERIDO MÊS DE AGOSTO)
- 2004 **A CARA QUE MERECE** (THE FACE YOU DESERVE)

Short Films

- 2013 **REDEMPTION**
- 2006 **CANTICO DE CRIATURAS** (CANTICLE OF ALL CREATURES)
- 2002 **KALKITOS**
- 2002 **TRINTA E UM** (31 MEANS TROUBLE)
- 2000 **INVENTÁRIO DE NATAL** (A CHRISTMAS INVENTORY)
- 1999 **ENTRETANTO** (MEANWHILE)



Interview with Miguel Gomes (*Film Comment*) by Nicolas Rapold

This movie is kind of crazy—in a good way.

I would say “wild.” That is why I said “OK, let’s rock ‘n’ roll!” at the screening. My previous film, *Tabu*, was much more elegant. This film comes out of a more chaotic situation, which is what’s happening in Portuguese society, but it’s also chaotic because of *The Arabian Nights*, which is quite a mess. The book is completely crazy. You’re right, it’s a little bit crazy.

With adaptations of literary works, audiences often forget that the original works can be fairly wild too. And with *Arabian Nights* I don’t think readers had the expectation that the stories would have to be neatly told and all the loose threads cut short.

In fact, what is *Arabian Nights*? It’s a compilation, a collection of tales from centuries ago. It is based on popular culture, so they are structured in a very wild way. The book—much more than the film—is very scatological, sometimes very violent. It’s completely punk, this book. And because it comes from popular culture, it has very extreme things, very direct feelings, and primal things too. I wanted this film to echo this kind of feeling.

These are also the stories of a storyteller, so they are trying to hold your attention with funny things and shocking things. In the second film, *The Arabian Nights, Volume 2: The Desolate One*, the court scene is an amazing chain of moments, one surprising bit after another. It’s almost like a sketch show.

Yeah, the fact that it’s a chain, in that case, allowed me to start the film like a comedy and to end it with the sensation of a Greek tragedy. For instance, I don’t know if this exists in America, but there are these songs for children in Portugal and other European countries that are constructed like: “A cat did that…” and then what he did turns into another thing and another thing. And so it keeps accumulating, and the whole song becomes lots of things.

In English there’s a song “For want of a nail…” that ultimately ends “A kingdom was lost.” The guy gets on horse to tell the king something, but he’s missing a nail in his boot, and so on.

Yeah, like this. That’s a good song. I don’t know it. I like that song.

The humour in the movie is also important, and the satire is especially strong. There’s an undertone of frustration and anger to it—as in the first film, the whole thing about the businessmen with hard-ons. It’s funny, it’s a very blunt conceit, but it’s blunt partly because of the anger behind it.

Of course. It’s also part of the tradition in popular culture to mock the people in power. It exists in every age, in every society, to try to mock them, even sometimes with scatological things. This is very present in *Arabian Nights* the book. I thought we could also have a place for this in the film. Finally I thought the film had to be so big to have all of this that I said to the producer: “Jesus, I’m sorry but it’s three films. I’m so sorry, but I could not do it otherwise.” Because we had to invent a place for everything. I think that the diversity of the film is what makes it rich. So I had to find a place for the satire, taking a sarcastic approach to the powerful with this idea that these men of power were afraid because they had too much sexual power. This comes from anger, of course, but there are very different kinds of humour in the film.

Humour is a filter that you need. I think a lot about what goes on between the film and the viewer. I started as a viewer, and I still love cinema, and I’m frustrated here at Cannes because I cannot [i.e., don’t have time to] see anything. But one of the things that gets me really mad is when a film is pushing things at me, throwing things in my face, and I cannot do anything. My ability, my power as a viewer is very limited because the film is putting me in a place where I can’t do anything. Humour is very important when you’re dealing with dramatic things, like the kind of reality in this film. It’s very hard in Portuguese society nowadays, and it’s easy to do emotional

blackmail with the viewer. Humour is always the filter you can put that will protect the viewer from the dramatic feelings that come out of the film.

But you have to have a balance between all of these things to have a good, honest relation with the viewer. For me, it's very important to respect the viewer and not say: "OK, I will not do this in the film because it's very complicated for you." The best way is to respect the intelligence of the viewer. Of course there will be some people who will not care about what they're shown. This is life. What is important is to help the viewer, with all the different emotional storms that are within the film.

You also protect the people who are the subject of the film, because you give them many different roles in the movie, not just passive. In the beginning, you have people giving their testimony about problems they've had, and you could have done a whole movie that's just that—people saying that these terrible things are happening. But in the other segments, you have people taking on other roles: a folk hero, for example, or people not at work but in their leisure pursuit, with the finch enthusiasts.

Yeah, we have to show everything. This was very important, in fact, to have a film with such a range. I'm very lucky to have been able to do this film, because I could shoot so much, and so I had the obligation to make different things, to have the unemployed guys talk about their experience of being unemployed. And you feel the weight of this. You feel that they are angry or sad. It's a difficult situation, but I also have whales exploding, and all of these very different things and characters. You have to have this range to show the complexity of the situation. There is not only one good angle to see things. You have to shift and to change.

This is why for instance [in *The Arabian Nights, Volume Two*] in "The Owners of Dixie," the dog story, I have very dramatic situations: a couple commit suicide, people have to ask for charity in order to eat. But you also have another point of view: a dog that should be in a Walt Disney film, but he's in the wrong country and the wrong film. He's kind of happy! I think the second volume is the most dark of the three, the most desperate. The only character that is happy is a dog because he is not aware of things—everyone is committing suicide, and he doesn't know about that. He's just trying to eat and to play with people. I think you also have to have this point of view.

In this I follow the master, Jean Renoir, who said you have to have all points of view of the characters. You have to have all of this in the film because it's really this that gives you the real scale of things in cinema. I welcome dogs and the rich people and poor people and non-actors and actors and exploding whales.

This raises the question of what you decided to cut. Was there material you didn't include?

Of course. I was preparing the film, I mean, doing *something* with the film—shooting, editing, writing, researching, rehearsing, finding locations—for 14 months. During this period, we shot all you see in the film. We didn't cut any stories, but of course there are scenes that I shot and are not in the film, like in every film I made. Even in a film of six hours, you cannot put everything. For some things, I was not able to do it the right way, or I didn't find a place to put it in the film. But you get pretty much what we filmed.

Let's talk about the look of the film. There, too, you see such variety across the three volumes. I was wondering what visual ideas you discussed with your DP, Sayombhu Mukdeprom.

I'll tell you about Sayombhu. I think he has some kind of mental disorder, which I love because he was crazy enough to agree to come to Lisbon and live there for more than one year to shoot a film, when I told him: "I don't have a script, so I don't have any idea what I'm going to shoot. What I want is for you to be available to shoot, and we don't know when will be the moments when we are really going to shoot. We have to live there all the time." I was astonished when he said: "OK, I'm coming." I said: "OK, you're crazy." He said: "Maybe, but I like this idea." He was great. I have to thank him. He's very, very good working with natural light. He can do everything.

He accepted the idea that the film would be a patchwork where you could not have an established look. We knew the film would be formed by very different things with very different moods. So what we could do was to relate between a certain moment in the shooting and the characters that we have to shoot, the locations, and try to get in the mood for that kind of a film. In the court scene, with the three moons and the different colours, that was a moment where we created on the set a different kind of lighting that has nothing to do with the workers at the beginning—nothing to do.

Sayombhu and I share something: we are very pissed with the idea of being obliged to shoot on digital. For him, it's very important, and so he was excited by the idea to keep shooting on 35mm and 16mm. We had anamorphic lenses to shoot on 'scope on 16. That means you have a little bit less definition in the image, and the grain becomes a little bit bigger. We loved the idea of having the 'scope format—the scale for epic films, the thing you do for *Ben-Hur*. So, doing *Ben-Hur*, but in a lo-fi way. The lo-fi feeling, of course, is attached to the stories that Scheherazade is telling and the situation in Portugal—more lo-fi, a more poor kind of image. The only thing we shot in 35mm is the sequences with Scheherazade in Baghdad, to make a distinction—like in *Tabu*, where the first part is in 35 and then the past in Africa is 16. Here, it was 35 for Scheherazade. We talked about doing it in 70mm. I'm glad that we didn't. It was too expensive and the camera is very, very heavy, so it would have been difficult for us. I'm glad because in France, the lab that worked with 70mm shut down during the shooting process.

The premise of Scheherazade's song is that she's telling stories to stay alive. I was curious how you would answer that: why do you keep on telling these stories? What's your reason?

Because I think that the reality in the last few years in Portugal was very, very hard for everyone. I think that in order to stay alive, we have to tell stories. We cannot renounce fiction. We cannot renounce the possibility of saying things in very different ways. And it seemed very important to tell stories about Portugal and about Portugal nowadays with this range—and to *do* it, to do it. Because if we are silent, we are dead. Making films is my way of not being silent. That's my way to react to the situation.

