

REBUS FILM PRODUCTION & ABOUT PRODUCTIONS IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH LE BUREAU PRESENT



SEMAINE
DE LA CRITIQUE
CANNES 2016



TRAMONTANE

a film by Vatche Boulghourjian



Synopsis NL

Het koor waarvan Rabih, een jonge blinde muzikant deel uitmaakt, wordt uitgenodigd voor een concertenreeks in Europa.

Wanneer hij alle formaliteiten in orde wil maken voor de reis, wordt zijn paspoort door de autoriteiten in beslag genomen en komt hij tot de ontdekking dat hij niet de biologische zoon is van zijn ouders. Een leugen die het begin is van de zoektocht naar zijn identiteit, een reis waarbij hij Libanon doorkruist. Zijn avontuur is ook een portret van een prachtig land dat gebukt gaat onder de littekens die verschillende conflicten hebben teweeggebracht.

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TRAMONTANE

Countries: Lebanon / France / Qatar / U A E

Language: Lebanese

Genre: Drama

1h45 / 2.39 / 5.1

Rebus Film Production & About Productions

in co-production with **Le Bureau**

present



TRAMONTANE

Written & Directed by **Vatche Boulhourjian**

Starring **Barakat Jabbour, Julia Kassar, Toufic Barakat**

Director of Photography **James Lee Phelan**

Editor **Nadia Ben Rachid**

Art Director **Nadine Ghanem**

Sound Editor and Designer **Rana Eid**

Composer and Music Supervisor **Cynthia Zaven**

Producers **Caroline Oliveira & Georges Schoucair**

Co-Producer **Gabrielle Dumon**

Associate Producer **Myriam Sassine**

Production Supervisor **Christian Eid**

Executive Producers **Alexander Akoka & Philippe Akoka**

Line Producers **Abla Khoury & Lara Karam Chekerdjian**

in co-production with

Film Factory, Sunnyland Film As A Member of ART Group

with the participation of

**l'Aide aux Cinémas du Monde, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée,
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and the Sundance Institute Feature Film Creative Producing Fellowship





Synopsis

Rabih, a young blind man, lives in a small village in Lebanon. He sings in a choir and edits Braille documents for an income. His life unravels when he tries to apply for a passport and discovers that his identification card, which he has carried his entire life, is a forgery. Traveling across rural Lebanon in search of a record of his own birth, he meets people on the far fringes of society who tell their own stories, open further questions and give Rabih minor clues about his true identity. Descending into a void at the heart of his existence, Rabih encounters a nation incapable of telling his or its own narrative.

Vatche Boulghourjian

Interview by **Ava Cahen**, member of the **Critics Week** committee

Where does the urge to make this film come from?

This film is the natural outcome of living in Lebanon, being sensitive to its daily realities, and harboring a profound concern and love for its people and culture. Rabih's journey to find the truth about his origins requires him to retrace specific events from the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). Instead of the facts he needs to solve his enigma, Rabih is told myths, visions, and outright lies; none of the people he meets can tell the truth. This is a phenomenon that has become common since the end of the war: to protect or exonerate oneself, the past is fabricated, distorted or altogether concealed.

To this day, no single, official narrative of the war exists; each community is left to devise and teach its own narrative of the war, thus entrenching past enmities in future generations. By all accounts, the war did not end; it just took another shape. As multiple narratives have taken root to describe the same event, a crisis of narrative has fragmented Lebanon. This has exacerbated an already volatile situation where even basic facts are in dispute. By following Rabih's crisis, *Tramontane* looks inward at a country that cannot face its own history.



My goal was to make a film that encourages critical dialogue and furthers our understanding of ourselves in the wake of circumstantial forces that are shaping borders and lives. I was fortunate to have a production team who shared the passion and desire to tell this story, namely Georges Schoucair of About Productions. The subject matter also resonated with my producers who are not from Lebanon – Caroline Oliveira, and Gabrielle Dumon of Le Bureau – who strongly believed in the ubiquity of the narrative. We made this film because we wanted to see this film ourselves, because we felt its urgency and humanity.

It's set in Lebanon. What were the circumstances of the shoot? Was it difficult to produce this feature film?

No production is ever easy, no matter where the film is shot or the subject of the film. Challenges will always exist and we must accept them as part of the filmmaking process and find ways to transcend them. With this in mind, I believed that the only way to overcome challenges during production was to prepare for every contingency that I could imagine with as much detail that I could imagine. Many of the locations where we shot *Tramontane* were remote villages in Lebanon. The instability in some parts of the country raised some difficulties. But, without exception, every person on the crew brought good humor to the set and even the most difficult times were met with convivial collaboration. Our work together was very gratifying because we faced every challenge together and every difficulty

seemed secondary because we shared a common goal. Preparedness and faith in the project are what bonded the team and provided us the stamina to make the film.

Can you tell me a few words about your main character, a blind musician with a compromised identity? Is this character a reflection of a fragmented nation?

The specific event that Rabih ultimately tries to unearth, which could explain his origins, overlaps with the reasons for his blindness. In other words, the traumatic event that precipitated his identity crisis was also the event that blinded him. Without a memory of the event and without anyone willing to elucidate the past, Rabih is left to draw his own understanding of the circumstances that blinded him. One thing that is clear to him, however, is that this inexplicable event is the outcome of the civil war in Lebanon. Therefore, Rabih's blindness is the result of the war.

The leitmotif of blindness in *Tramontane* serves to underline the mirror-opposite of Rabih's physical blindness found in the people that he encounters: whereas Rabih was dealt a permanent physical disability by the war, the people that he meets were dealt an enduring spiritual and psychological handicap which they are unable to overcome – and has left them incapable of lucidly or accurately describing their experiences. Whereas Rabih is unable to see, those around him are unable to delve inside themselves to parse the experiences that traumatized them for life. So, this war was debilitating for all who experienced it, not just Rabih. It is this ubiquitous damage, visible and invisible, that Rabih recognizes and leads to the greater



understanding of his context. Rabih begins to “see” while the others continue to dwell in the darkness of their handicap, which proves far more debilitating; for, as long as the collective narrative remains unknown, or unspeakable, and the past is denied or unresolved, the present remains unsettled. These themes aim to reflect on the reality which past and present generations of Lebanese have experienced and continue to experience in the aftermath of the war. The contrasts between physical and metaphysical references to blindness, as well as the ability to see, form the allegorical core of *Tramontane*.

While the post-war crisis of identity and disunity continues to seethe in Lebanon, there are cultural threads that bond all the communities of the country. One of these threads is traditional music – which happens to be Rabih’s form of self-expression. Cynthia Zaven, the music supervisor and composer of the film, worked tirelessly to research and arrange the traditional music in the film, which was crucial to molding the on-screen character of Rabih and trace his emotional arc. The original score of the film that she composed was designed to communicate his inner state, trying to decipher his attempt to comprehend, the self-whispering of a lost soul.

For Rabih, the music reflects his narrative and gradually takes new meaning as he witnesses the realities of the country, and they become laments for the fragmentation, the willful amnesia, which effect him personally. Nonetheless, his music shows that the thread still exists; that there is still some hope for acceptance and healing.

Director’s biography

Vatche Boulghourjian is a Lebanese filmmaker. He holds an MFA from New York University’s Graduate Film Program, where he was a departmental fellow. Before attending NYU, Boulghourjian worked throughout the Middle East on documentaries for television while also independently making shorts, experimental films, and documentaries. *The Fifth Column*, his thesis film, received a production grant from the Hollywood Foreign Press Association and in 2010 premiered at the Cannes Film Festival, as part of the Cinéfondation’s Selection, where it was awarded Third Prize. His films have screened at festivals worldwide, garnering critical attention and numerous awards. Boulghourjian’s first feature *Tramontane* was selected to premiere in the feature film competition of the 55th Edition of La Semaine de la Critique / Critic’s Week in Cannes 2016.





Barakat Jabbour [Rabih]

Barakat Jabbour was born blind in 1991, in Northern Lebanon. He showed musical talent at a very early age and went on to study music at The Lebanese School for the Blind and Deaf, where he also joined the choir. He later pursued advanced studies in oriental music at the Antonine University in Lebanon. He currently teaches oriental music and performs across Lebanon and the Middle East with various ensembles. *Tramontane* is his first experience in film.

Julia Kassar [Samar]

Julia Kassar is a Lebanese actress. She is a holder of a Higher Education Diploma in Dramatic Arts from The Institute Of Fine Arts, at The Lebanese University (1987), and a Master of Arts in Visual and Performing Arts at The University Of Holy Spirit Kaslik-USEK (2007).

She worked with many established directors in theater, film and TV such as: Raymond Gébara, Nidal el Achkar, Roger Assaf, Jalal Khoury, Chakib Khoury, Kamil Salamé, Joseph Bou Nassar, Gabriel Yammine, Marwan el Rahbani, Lina Abyad, Antoine Remy, Samir Habchi, Randa Chahhal, Hany Tamba, Fouad Alaywan, Joana Hadjithomas et Khalil Joreige and Vatche Boulghourjian.

Julia has also been, since 1998, a drama teacher, at the Department of Theatre, Movie and Television at The Institute of Fine Arts at the Lebanese University. She won numerous prestigious acting awards at acclaimed international film festivals, and lately won a directing award.



James Lee Phelan - Director of photography

James Lee Phelan's recent work, the short film *The Chair*, was in competition for the Palme d'Or at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival. He has photographed several features films including *Five Time Champion* (South by Southwest Film Festival 2011), *Mulberry Streets* (directed by Abel Ferrara) and *Go Down Death* (IFP Finishing Lab 2012). His work has screened at film festivals around the world winning awards in both the United States and Europe. Jimmy Lee's commercial work includes clients like Nike, Macy's, NARS, CRUSH, The Room and Tommy Hilfiger. He has recently wrapped a new TNT Latino series entitled *Latitudes*, starring Alice Braga and Daniel de Oliveira, which was nominated for an Emmy in 2014. Phelan holds an MFA in Cinematography from NYU.

Nadia Ben Rachid - Editor

Nadia Ben Rachid has edited over 40 features and documentaries, notably all the works of Abderrahmane Sissako. *Timbuktu*, Sissako's latest feature, won seven Cesar Awards, including Best Picture and Best Editing, and was nominated for an Oscar® for Best Foreign Language Film. Nadia began her career as assistant editor on films by Roman Polanski, Claude Berri, and other legendary directors. Nadia is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.



Cynthia Zaven - Composer and music supervisor

Cynthia Zaven is a composer, pianist and artist based in Beirut. She performs classical, experimental and improvised music in solo shows as well as in collaboration with other artists. Her projects combine a variety of media including video, photography, performance and the use of archive material to explore the relationship between sound, memory and identity through interwoven narratives.

Her works include *Untuned Piano Concerto With Delhi Traffic Orchestra* (performance, 2006), *Octophonic Diary* (8 channel sound installation, 2009), *Morse Code Composition* (Soundworks, ICA, 2012) and more recently, *A Bunker Fairy Tale* (12 channel sound installation with video, 2013), exhibited at the Project Biennial of Contemporary Art ARK Underground in Konjic, Bosnia & Herzegovina. In 2002, she took part in the Klangturm project, a 72-channel electroacoustic concert with Andres Bosshard inside a purpose-designed sound tower in Biel, Switzerland.

Since 1993, Zaven has also composed original scores and created sound designs for film, theater, live performance, dance, visual art, and conceptual art projects. The award-winning works have been exhibited at festivals worldwide including Locarno, Toronto, Edinburgh, Dubai, as well as IDFA, Tribeca, Kassel, Videobrasil, the Bern Kunstmuseum, the Institute of Contemporary Art London and Oxford's Museum of Modern Art.

In July 2015, Eurasians Unity, the ensemble she's part of was awarded the Ruth prize for world music at the Rudolstadt World Music Festival in Germany. Her music has been published by the Berlin based label, Staalplaat. She is currently a piano professor at the Higher National Conservatory of Music in Beirut.



About Productions

About Productions produces feature films and documentaries with a distinctly Arab voice, expressing the identity of the region. Since 1998, the company managed to bring together an important network of Arab and Lebanese artists and produced award winning films such as *A Perfect Day* (2005), *I Want to See* (2008) and *The Lebanese Rocket Society* (2012) by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, *The Last Man* (2006) and *The Valley* (2014) by Ghassan Salhab, *Stray Bullet* (2010) by Georges Hashem, *Melodrama Habibi* (2007) by Hany Tamba and *Ladder to Damascus* (2013) by Mohamad Malas. About Productions has a strong partnership with MC Distribution, a distribution company dedicated to promote new films from the Middle East along with direct and priority access to the sole art house theater in Lebanon, Metropolis Cinema. About Productions' main objective remains to help structure the Lebanese and Arab cinema craft into a solid industry.

Filmography (selection)

2017 *One of These Days* - Nadim Tabet (post-production)
2017 *A Certain Nasser*, doc - Badih Massaad & Antoine Waked (post-production)
2017 *Amal - Mohamad Siam*, doc (production)
2017 *Eye of the Architect* - Nadim Mishlawi, doc (production)
2016 *Tramontane* - Vatche Boulghourjian (100 min)
2015 *Dégradé* - Tarzan & Arab Nasser (84 min)
2015 *A Time To Rest* - Myriam El Hajj, doc (66 min)
2014 *The Valley* - Ghassan Salhab (134 min)
2013 *Ladder To Damascus* - Mohamad Malas (97 min)
2012 *The Lebanese Rocket Society* - Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, doc (90 min)
2011 *Sector Zero* - Nadim Mishlawi, doc (80 min)
2010 *Stray Bullet* - Georges Hachem (75 min)
2008 *I Want to See* - Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige (75 min)
2005 *A Perfect Day* - Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige (88 min)



Le Bureau / The Bureau

Production companies Le Bureau (Paris) and The Bureau (London) were set up in 2000 by producer Bertrand Faivre. His producing partners are Gabrielle Dumon in France and Tristan Goligher in the UK.

Over the last 15 years, both companies have gained recognition on either side of the Channel for the distinctive talents they have nurtured and retained, as well as for the excellence shown in the management of the companies. Both companies' credits include films by newcomers and multi award-winning directors and most of these films opened in prestigious festivals and were critically acclaimed as well as financially successful.

Since 2009, their activities have widened to international sales through The Bureau Sales. TBS now handles more than 600 titles from prestigious directors, including Celluloid Dreams' and Rezo Films' libraries and recently moved on to selling in-house productions and co-productions.

Rebus Films

Caroline Oliveira is a 2013 Sundance Creative Producing Fellow as well as an alum of the Venice Biennale College of Cinema and Rotterdam Producers' Lab. She produced Grainger David's *The Chair* (2012 Cannes Film Festival, Official Selection, Short Film Competition; 2012 Winner Best Narrative short at SXSW; 2012 Winner Best Narrative Short at LAFF), Aaron Schimberg's *Go Down Death* (Fantasia 2013 and Raindance 2013) among other films. Caroline was born in São Paulo, Brazil, and holds an MFA in Film Production from NYU Tisch School of the Arts.

Filmography (selection)

- 2016 *Daphne* - Peter Mackie Burns (post-production)
- 2016 *A Life Elsewhere* - Olivier Peyon (post-production)
- 2016 *Lonely Hearts* - Sylvie Verheyde (post-production)
- 2016 *Tramontane* - Vatche Boulghourjian
- 2015 *Sky* - Fabienne Berthaud
- 2015 *45 Years* - Andrew Haigh
- 2014 *A Little Chaos* - Alan Rickman
- 2013 *Le Weekend* - Roger Michell
- 2013 *A Place On Earth* - Fabienne Godet
- 2011 *Late Bloomers* - Julie Gavras
- 2011 *In Turmoil* - Christophe Ruggia
- 2010 *Lily Sometimes* - Fabienne Berthaud
- 2009 *Weekend* - Andrew Haigh
- 2009 *London River* - Rachid Bouchareb
- 2009 *The Farewell Case* - Christian Carion
- 2008 *Welcome* - Philippe Lioret
- 2007 *Julia* - Erick Zonca
- 2005 *Isolation* - Billy O'Brien

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TRAMONTANE

