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SaNoSi Productions and Jour2Fête  
present

# To the four Winds

A film by MICHEL TOESCA

SaNoSi Productions and Jour2Fête  
present



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A film by **MICHEL TOESCA**

## INTERNATIONAL SALES

### Jour2Fête

Sarah Chazelle & Etienne Ollagnier  
Samuel Blanc: +33 6 77 19 48 58  
Clémence Michalon: +33 6 95 93 93 89  
sales@jour2fete.com  
Phone : +33 1 85 73 36 55

## INTERNATIONAL PRESS

### Makna Presse

Chloé Lorenzi +33 6 08 16 60 26  
Gloria Zerbinati : +33 7 86 80 02 82  
festival@makna-presse.com

Length: 100'





## SYNOPSIS

In the Roya, valley located between France and Italy, thousands of migrants try to cross the border each month in search for a better life. Cédric Herrou, a local farmer, has been welcoming migrants at his home since the beginning of the crisis, turning his backyard into a much-needed shelter. With the help of friends and volunteers, he challenges French immigration policies which make impossible for these families to set foot on French ground and seek asylum. Filmed during three years by documentary filmmaker Michel Toesca, this everyday hero will do anything to help them, even risking his own freedom.



WHAT DO YOU DO NEXT?

**by Michel Toesca, Director**

One morning you wake up and look down at the road in front of your house to see people walking past that you've never seen before. Men, women and children that are hungry, cold, exhausted, and that don't speak your language. So you go out to see them, you give them something to eat and drink. You let them get in touch with their family... what do you do next?

This is the question that an entire valley asked itself.

The Roya Valley in the far southeast corner of France is Italian in the south and French in the North. A French enclave in Italian territory where refugees get lost thinking they are heading toward Paris when in reality they are headed for Turin.

This film tells the story of 3 years that turned our daily lives upside down.

When I began filming, Cédric was raising his chickens and tending to his olive trees. He hadn't gotten any media coverage as yet, and we were all extremely shocked by the way in which the French and Italian governments were handling the people arriving and the question of their reception.

By arbitrarily driving underage children and persons seeking asylum back to the border on a daily basis, the French government was acting illegally. But the improvised solutions devised by the valley's residents to assist the migrants quickly became dangerous and, paradoxically, we were also acting outside of the law in order to respect the rule of law that was been trampled on by the French government. We first did what we considered to be right and necessary to help these people, ensure their safety and enable them to pursue their journey.

The script was written on a day-to-day basis. I filmed alone, my camera on my shoulder, in a state of total improvisation. Sometimes, in tense and chaotic situations, and with help from a few accomplices, we filmed with mobile phones. I am entirely satisfied with the aesthetic that lends because it conveys the moment and the urgency. The ease of use allowed me to be available at all times and remain with them, whether they were refugees, soldiers or police officers.

I insisted on filming Cédric amidst what was totally ordinary and extraordinary. I think that filming the ordinary allows you to take measure of this heroic act, as much from a cinematic perspective as from a human one, while refraining from fooling anyone. I was impressed by his aplomb, by the fact that he could take such risks while continuing to live the way he always has. I was often reminded of Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* while making this film. I became attached to the human aspect and to Cédric's righteousness – his determination throughout every ordeal and his commitment – while filming the actions we put into place. His political position is simple: there is a problem where I live and I'm trying to resolve it by using with common sense. His action, our actions are anchored in our lives and in this land faced with an administration that is dealing with the question in a global and inappropriate way.

*To the four winds* is at the very heart of a combat. For me, filming this combat is an act of creation and resistance.







## Michel Toesca

### *How did you meet Cédric Herrou?*

I was born in Nice and visited the Roya valley as a child. Cedric has lived there for around 20 years. We met in the early 2000s, we got along well. In 2008, I moved my family here to the valley. That's when we got closer and became friends.

### *What made you want to follow him in his fight?*

He's the one who came to me. I'd started filming in 2015, mostly in Italy. At that point, the migrants hadn't yet made it up to the Roya. They were confined to Ventimiglia, a town I visited frequently and where I met them for the first time. Of course, I was aware of what was going on in Greece and in Lampedusa, but there was no media coverage of what was happening in that part of Italy and that intrigued me. Since I often travel with my camera, I started filming what was happening there. I spent a lot of time with the refugees in Ventimiglia. I did a lot of interviews. I followed them in the tunnels and in their various meanderings. Then I filmed with Italian associations. You have to remember that in the beginning, nobody really knew what was legal or illegal. So everybody acted independently. Since I moved around a lot, I started establishing connections between the various initiatives. That's when Cédric told me that he, too, was helping out and taking people in. He hadn't gotten any media coverage at that point and I started filming him.

### *You choose to use cinema to treat a subject that's typically covered by the news. What do you think using a cinematic approach brings?*

Cinema lets you film life. We aren't dealing with the news. Nor is this a militant film but it is political for the simple reason that this initiative is political. It's an act of resistance. We are confronted by a State that is, in this realm, incompetent and violent. Cinema allows us to understand the actions of people like Cédric and others. People that don't necessarily have a political culture but that, when faced with this kind of situation, suddenly take on a very powerful political approach. Cinema also offers a kind of simplicity in the way that it looks at the situation. It lets us get closer and be a part of everyday life.

### *How many cameras did you use?*

Just one. I didn't have a choice because I didn't have anything other than an old DV Cam that records in a format that hasn't existed for 15 years (laughs). And I didn't have the money to buy a new one. And I like this format. I think the image is soft, less electric than the HD formats. It was actually just as well

because, thanks to that lightness, I could be around at all times; people get to know you and, more importantly, forget that you're there. I was directly involved. I actively participated as a filmmaker and as an actor in the middle of the action.

The film's opening, with that pure cinematic shot rising up over the Roya, is not only beautiful, it also makes any notions about borders seem ridiculous. I initially planned to open with refugee testimonials. Something that would shock. But, in a way, the film isn't about them. It's about how they are being received. That's why I wanted to start from the water's surface; to open on Ventimiglia and move up toward the Roya, which we practically never leave after that. The soul of the film is really there because the shot is accompanied by voice-overs from various people. Some have taken in refugees, another might be against it... I wanted people to hear the spirit of the Roya. What has happened over the last three years. And then we actually cross borders. It's the idea of starting from nothing. From zero altitude, from the Mediterranean, crossed by the refugees, and then climbing up toward the mountains.

### *Then immediately afterward, there is the testimonial from the French man of Italian origin on his mother's side, in which he recalls previous migratory waves...*

He's an old shepherd. I know him well because I've already used him in other films. I like when he tells the story of his mother who was imprisoned in the 20s for having crossed the border without papers. He says something very simple: nothing changes, everything repeats.

### *You followed Cédric and the others for three years. We can assume that you gathered an enormous amount of footage. How was the film written in the end?*

For the first two years, I filmed and edited by myself without a producer. And when Jean-Marie Gigon, who ended up producing the film, arrived, I told him that I couldn't manage it any longer. I had too many rushes. I couldn't see where I was going anymore. So we decided get in touch with Catherine Libert, a filmmaker-editor that I greatly admire and trust completely. She was moved by the subject and agreed to help us. I entrusted her with everything – the 16-hour rough cut and also the 200 hours of rushes. Catherine put a lot of herself into the film. She even guided me through the end of the filming process by encouraging me to shoot this image or go to that place. In a certain way, I was under her wing.

When I saw her proposition, I was seduced and relieved at the same time. It had a bit of her vision, her eye. She was truly with us, a part of the team. At that point, the film was 5 hours and 40 minutes!



And that's when we asked ourselves what kind of film we wanted to make: a film that would only be seen by those sympathetic to the cause or, on the contrary, by as many people as possible? And then a real notion of dramaturgy and narration settled in. Since Cédric was the only person in the valley not to have taken a break in three years, I told myself that the only way to continue with the film was to refocus on him in order to tell this story.

*The film never takes on a defeatist tone. It captures a hope that is threatened, but persistent...*

It was imperative that we take that approach. I wanted to show that when faced with a problem, Cédric, the others, and even I, react, but never stop acting. We also had to show the joy, the good humor and the celebration. All are common to our existences and I wanted to show that in the film. As a result, Cédric comes across as an extraordinary yet completely ordinary hero. He's like everybody else. But with a little more determination than the average person.

*This fight is highly contextualized, both geographically and socially; but you film it in its universality...*

That was the essence of the film. At first, I was with the refugees and the associations and wasn't really conscious of that. But very quickly, I became aware of the fact that in this very localized setting, the human, political and social situations that were playing out were identical to those playing out all over the world.

*You also remind us that disobedience can be a form of civic duty...*

More than anything, I'm showing that we are disobeying because the State is disobeying. There is a kind of positive disobedience, if I can call it that. And another, which is negative. And the two are opposed. The State is making it impossible for asylum seekers to seek asylum. Which is completely illegal. By the way, that's what Cédric says in the sequence where he talks with the cabinet director of the prefecture and the district attorney. He clearly states that the State is giving us no choice.

*A sequence in which we hear your voice, incidentally. To be or not to be in the frame is a central question for a documentary filmmaker...*

That's a critical moment in the film because it hones in on a crucial question: are we going to be evacuated by force or in a more concerted, calm manner? And the idea is to tell the authorities that they have no idea what's going on in the field. They aren't familiar with that reality because they are never actually with the migrants. They have a purely statistical vision of the situation, which doesn't reflect the one in the field. That's why I step in. To show that



I'm also a part of this action. In a more general way, I don't think that distance is necessary for a filmmaker when he is observing the world. I don't believe in objectivity. The choice to film one thing or another – framing an image is staging by definition.

*There is the clandestinity of the migrants, but also that of the people who are helping them. Like the nurse that tells you that very few people around her know what she is doing...*

That sequence lets me show that at the beginning, when each person, alone in his or her corner, began taking in refugees, giving them a roof over their heads and food, nobody knew if it was legal or not. That's what Isabelle is saying. When I was shooting that sequence, in the first part of the film, it was still complicated and embarrassing for her to assert herself in front of her clients, because not everyone in the Roya thinks like us. Far from it.

*You make a point of including the refugees' voices...*

It was necessary to include their words, even if the film is focused on their reception.

*The testimonial from the young Chadian man is magnificent. You capture his exhaustion...*

I think what he says is beautiful because it evokes intra-African migration. He was born in Nigeria and then traveled to Chad to escape Boko Haram and feel safer. Since that was impossible, he's now come to the South of France.

*The film score works directly into the narration.*

I didn't initially think of Magic Malik. It was Catherine Liebert that suggested him to me. I knew a little about his work, but nothing more. She had me listen to his music and I thought it would be perfect for the film. So I met with him. He liked our project and improvised music based on the images. I think his score accompanies the film beautifully.

*Was the film difficult to produce?*

When Jean-Marie decided to support the film, we made the decision to produce via crowdfunding, but also through important associations such as Médecins du Monde or Emmaüs that supported us. I think that was a crucial decision because it guarantees our independence and, at the same time, allows the film to be free both in its essence and in the way it is made.



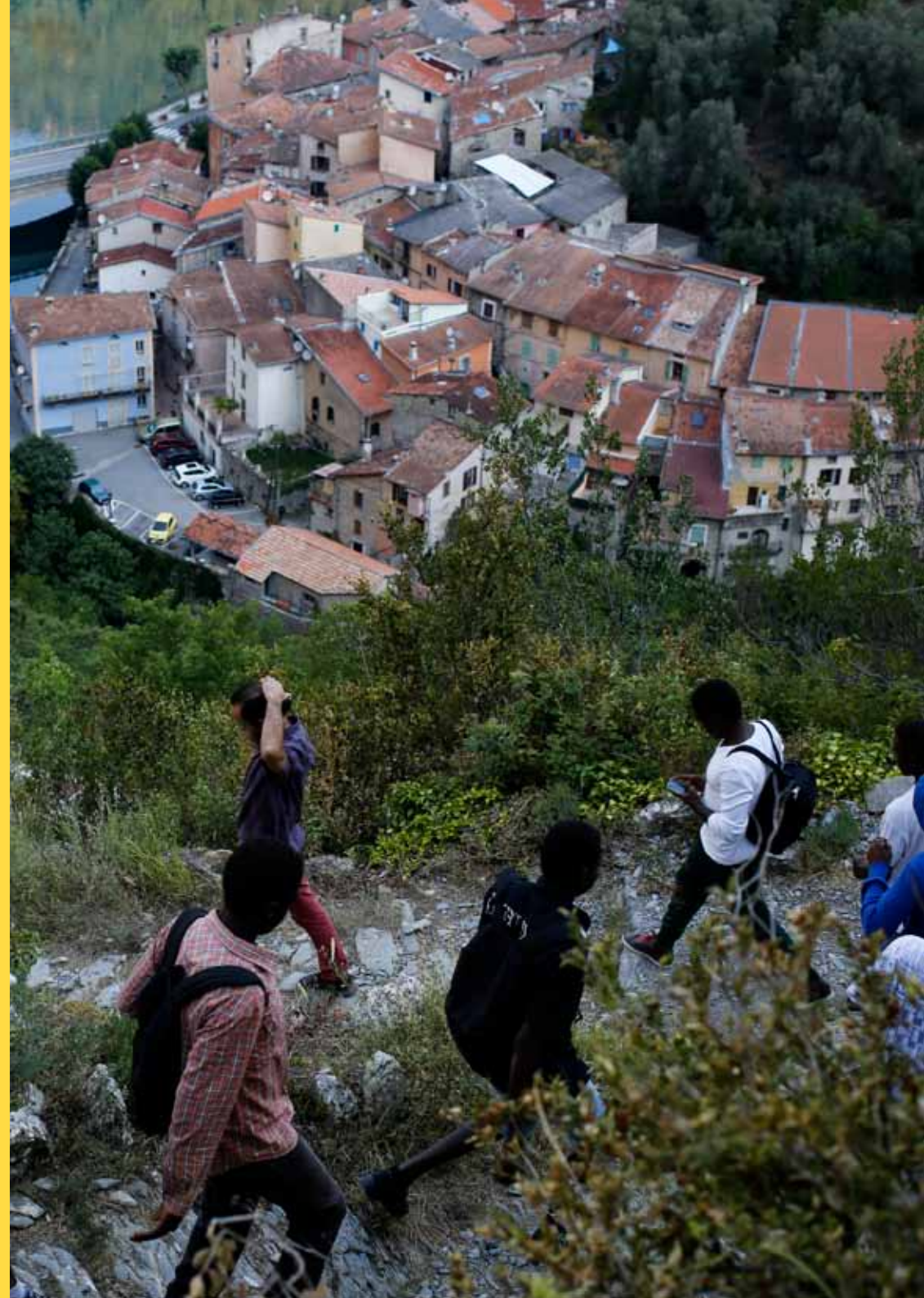


## Michel Toesca

DIRECTOR



Michel Toesca is a French filmmaker born in 1960. A self-taught editor and sound-recordist, he directs his first short-film *Muthos* in 1983. After working on several TV shows, he joins filmmaker Claire Simon to work as sound designer and editor on her documentary features *800 km de différence - Romance* and *Mimi* before directing his own first-feature: *J'irai cracher sur vos tongs* in 2005. In 2008, he leaves Paris and moves to Saorge in the Roya valley, where takes places his latest film: *To the four winds*.



## HISTORY OF THE CRISIS

### SPRING 2015

Thousands of refugees from Africa and the Middle East arrive on Italian soil. Two months later, France, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia close their borders. Most of the migrants have no desire to remain in Italy, however they are stuck there.

Italy finds itself alone in the face of this influx. By closing its border at Menton, France imposes the same situation on Italy at Ventimiglia that the UK has imposed upon it at Calais.

### SUMMER 2015

Makeshift camps are set up at Ventimiglia. The town's mayor forbids residents from distributing food to refugees. The various passageways near the coast are heavily guarded. Despite several deaths, the attempts to cross the border continue, becoming increasingly dangerous. The only other way of reaching France from Ventimiglia remains the Roya Valley.

### AUTUMN 2015

The camps at Ventimiglia are dismantled one by one. The residents of the Roya start seeing exhausted and hungry men, women and children walking through the valley along the roads, trails and railroad tracks. Spontaneous acts of solidarity begin to proliferate – both in Italy and in France – and the few homes that have decided to take in migrants fill up from the south to the north of the Roya. This totally improvised “network” establishes itself without consulting anyone. No one really knows what is legal or not; but they rarely ask themselves the question in the face of such an emergency.

In France, the local public authorities as well as the prefecture openly encourage illegal expulsions and beef up surveillance, all while refusing to put reception structures in place.

### MAY 2016

The residents of the Roya decide to organize themselves and reactivate the Roya Citizen association, amending its statutes in the process. “The defense of citizens of the world” becomes a priority. The community mobilizes to organize assistance while lawyers including Mireille Damiano, Zia Oloumi and Maeva Binimelis meet to establish a legal strategy and Médecins du Monde intervenes to provide care for the refugees.

### JULY 2016

Cédric Herrou meets Adam Nossiter, a journalist from the New York Times and winner of the Pulitzer Prize that has come to write an article about the situation in the region. A few weeks later, Cédric makes the headlines of the New York Times. From then on, things move quickly and Cédric becomes a central figure in the movement to assist refugees. This media coverage will enable him to take the issue of migrants to the political and public domain, even appearing live on France 2 with Manuel Valls.

Meanwhile, local politicians accuse Cédric and the other citizens involved of “facilitating the illegal entry of foreigners and terrorists to the national territory”. In the valley itself, the population is divided with regard to the approach to be taken vis-à-vis the refugees.

### OCTOBER 2016

The residents' accommodation capacity is soon inadequate to cope with the number of migrants. Over 80 people are living on Cédric's land. To remedy the situation, a disused SNCF building in the north of the valley is squatted in order to give a hundred refugees shelter from the cold and the rain.

Three days later, the Director of the Cabinet of the Prefect and the district attorney of the Republic arrive on the premises with 200 mobile guards to evacuate and dismantle the squat. One hour later, Cédric is arrested and taken into police custody for the third time.

### JANUARY 2017

The courthouse in Nice. A considerable crowd arrives to support Cédric during his trial. An 8-month conditional sentence is sought for his declarations made in the New York Times article and the opening of the squat in the valley. The verdict is delivered in February of 2017. Finally, Cédric is fined €3000 with probation for facilitating illegal immigration on Italian soil, but he is cleared of the other accusations made against him.





Direction BREIL



#### APRIL 2017

By court order, the prefect is sentenced for “a serious attack on the right to asylum”. The prefect and the police are denounced for the illegality of their stances. Henceforth, the prefecture and the region put Cédric in an absurd position: he is the only person capable of taking a dozen asylum seekers from Vintemille to Nice on a daily basis without being stopped, thereby making up for the administration’s shortcomings.

#### MAY 2017

The influx of refugees increases. The SNCF refuses to transport them from Breil-sur-Roya to Nice free of charge. Police and military surveillance has increased considerably, which pushes the Roya Citizen association – with Cédric in the lead – to make the journey on foot via mountain trails to lead a hundred or so refugees to Nice. A three-day journey covering more than 80 kilometers.

Two days later, Cédric’s property is surrounded by the police and the army, making it nearly impossible to leave the Roya. A sort of state of siege confines the refugees to the Roya Valley where accommodation capacities are more than stretched to their limits. The prefecture’s repressive actions are surreal.

#### AUGUST 2017

General counsel Christophe Raffin asks the Court of Appeal to sentence Cédric Herrou to an 8-month suspended prison term for facilitating the clandestine immigration of migrants at the Franco-Italian border. The farmer is given a four-month suspended prison sentence and is placed under judicial supervision. One month later, another resident of the Roya, researcher Pierre-Alain Mannoni, receives a 2-month suspended prison sentence for aiding the stay and circulation of illegal aliens after having rescued and housed three Eritreans.

Since the autumn of 2017, the State has noticeably increased the number of police and soldiers in the Roya Valley. Checkpoints have been set up and arrests are in the rise. Today, the State has managed to neutralize the Valley, obliging refugees to take another route through a valley further north; now with better weather and a slightly relaxed police presence, the arrivals are starting to pick up again in the spring in 2018. Some asylum seekers already involved in the administrative process have even moved in with Cédric. They manage the camp and welcome new arrivals the way they were welcomed almost a year ago. They hope to be able to settle in the valley, find work, make friends, start projects and live “normally”! Cédric continues to tend to his olive trees and his chickens. In October of 2017, he created the DTC Association – Défends ta citoyenneté (Protect your citizenship) – with the objective of creating social and economic projects with the exiles. Along with a diverse group of people including political, judicial and media figures, he organizes public debates about migration and other socio-political subjects that question these difficult times.



A solidarity march to welcome migrants, e.s. Ventimiglia-Calais is planned from Ventimiglia-Breil on 30 April- 1 May in Calais-Dover 8 July, 2018.



## TECHNICAL SHEET

Written and directed by Michel Toesca  
Music Magic Malik  
Sound and cinematography Michel Toesca  
Editing Catherine Libert et Michel Toesca  
Sound mix Joël Rangon  
Produced by Jean-Marie Gigon / SaNoSi Productions  
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