

SaNoSi Productions

PRESS RELEASE

TO THE FOUR WINDS



A film by Michel Toesca

90'

SaNoSi PRODUCTIONS – 2, route du Parc 28130 Maintenon
Tél : 02 37 99 52 35 – FAX 09 56 10 00 62 – contact@sanosi-productions.com
SARL au capital de 46 000 € – RCS CHARTRES – SIRET 484 665 187 00023 - APE 5911C

SYNOPSIS

TO THE FOUR WINDS relates the encounters and ensuing relationships between inhabitants in the Roya valley and refugees who have arrived there after crossing the border between France and Italy.

Michel Toesca is a filmmaker who lives in the valley. For the past two years, he has been filming men and women who have decided to take action against an inhuman and shocking situation, at the risk of being prosecuted. Groups of people, who hardly know each other, meet and get organized to claim a right to humanity.

Cédric Herrou is a farmer in the valley. He rapidly became a key figure in helping the refugees. He is one of the main characters in the film.

From their relationship and risks taken together while filming actions that were initially considered illegal, a strong connection developed.

TO THE FOUR WINDS tells the story of their friendship and all the connections woven between the inhabitants and the refugees, who chose to risk it all with the hope of a better life...

THE CROWDFUNDING

To support the production of this film for the cinema, Michel Toesca and his producer Jean - Mary Gigon (SaNoSi Productions) throw today a participative financing which you can find at following address :

<https://www.kisskissbankbank.com/en/projects/a-tous-vents-un-film-de-michel-toesca>



The objective of this financing is double : contribute to the realisation of this film while participating in the media coverage of ongoing actions in the valley of Roya to help refugees.

TECHNICAL & ARTISTIC CHARACTERISTICS

Format: HD - color
Time: around 90'
Type: documentary
Image Format: 16/9
Sound: stereo

Director: Michel TOESCA

Producer: SaNoSi Productions
Jean-Marie GIGON

Technical Team :

Image : Michel TOESCA
Sound : Michel TOESCA
Editor: Catherine LIBERT

Contact : contact@sanosi-productions.com

00332 37 99 52 35

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE EVENTS

Spring 2015

Hundreds of refugees arrive in Ventimiglia. France closes its borders.

Summer 2015

Makeshift refugee camps are established in Ventimiglia. The mayor of the city bans distribution of food to refugees.

Autumn 2015

All camps in Ventimiglia are dismantled.

The whole valley reacts with their presence. Everybody does differently, according to one's own feelings. Some immediately help them, others do not know what to do, the majority keep their distances, and some others feel overwhelmed. In the beginning, we are scared to house refugees in our homes. One day, we learn that someone is helping them, so we talk about it discreetly, because those feeling migrants are invading the country become vocal about it. Very quickly, migrants are welcomed by the few families that have decided to host them, stretching from the south to the north of the valley. There is a surge in acts of spontaneous solidarity, both in Italy and France. This improvised network expands of its own accord, without consultation. It is a gut response to an absurd situation. No one really knows then what is legal or illegal, and no one really bothers in the face of the emergency.

May 2016

With the surge of more and more vulnerable people in the Roya valley, refugees being evicted after the dismantlement of camps in Ventimiglia and against the backdrop of France's repressive policy of closing borders, the inhabitants get more and more mobilized. They decide to get organized and restart the Roya Citoyenne association, modifying the original articles – "the defence of the citizens of the world" is now a priority. The community coordinates mutual assistance; lawyers, including Mireille Damiano, Zia Oloumi and Maeva Binimelis gather together to establish a legal strategy; doctors and nurses from Médecins du Monde volunteer to deliver medical care in reception centres.

Tired of being in constant humanitarian emergency, the collective aims at shifting the political and administrative lines: media coverage becomes strategic.

July 2016

Cédric Herrou and Michel Toesca meet with Adam Nossiter, who won the Pulitzer Prize and is the current Paris correspondent for the New York Times. Adam wants to write a story on the influx of migrants in the region. Cédric and Michel show him the mountain and railroad tracks walked by migrants.

A few weeks later, Cédric is on the front page in the New York Times. The situation intensifies. Cédric quickly becomes an international media figure, embodying solidarity, which he uses to the benefit of his friends and the Roya Citoyenne association to pursue political action, beyond parties. Cédric uses media coverage to expose the issue of migrants in the public and political life, to the point of discussing it live with Manuel Valls on France 2 public television channel. Answering journalists' questions, he does not claim to be an activist but a simple human being taking action in a bleak inhumane situation.

After the publication of the New York Times story, local politicians Mr. Ciotti and Mr. Estrosi claim the Roya valley is filled with dangerous extremists. They file a lawsuit against them and accuse them of smuggling foreigners and terrorists on French soil. In the valley too, the population is divided on how to deal with refugees.





October 2016

Households ready to host migrants are too few. More than 80 people now live on Cédric's property. A group of inhabitants, Cédric at the front, open a squat in an disused building belonging to the SNCF state railway company in the north of the valley to give shelter to a hundred of refugees.

Three days later, the director of the prefect's cabinet Mr. François Xavier Lauch, and public prosecutor Mr. Jean-Michel Prêtre (in charge of prosecution on behalf of the state) get to the site along with 200 riot police officers, who dismantle the squat and evacuate the migrants.

Cédric takes on them about the illegal treatment of unaccompanied minors, who are sent back to Italy instead of being taken care of. "Ok, we might not abide by the law, but you don't either. So as long as you keep infringing the law, we won't respect it either!" Cédric demands that the minors still present in the squat be placed in reception centres. The prefect cannot refuse.

An hour later, Cédric is arrested by the police and held in custody for the third time, a scene that Michel captures with the camera hidden under his arm. He manages to give the rushes to a friend before being evacuated in his turn.

January 2017

Nice courthouse. A massive crowd is gathered to support Cédric, including the media. The prosecution calls for an eight-month suspended sentence against Cédric for his statements in the New York Times and opening a squat in the valley. In February 2017, the court orders a suspended fine of €3,000 for helping migrants enter the country illegally but he is cleared of more severe charges of the illegal occupation of an abandoned SNCF building.

In August 2016, he had already faced charges for giving a lift to eight Eritreans but the case was closed on the grounds that he had acted out of humanitarian reasons.

April 2017

The administrative court sentences the prefect for seriously obstructing the asylum process. The actions of both the prefect and police are deemed unlawful.

Both the prefecture and department place Cédric in an absurd situation. He alone can take a dozen asylum seekers from the Roya valley to Nice without being arrested. He overcomes the failings of the state, which is being passive in the situation.

Today

The influx of migrants is growing. SNCF refuses to take migrants on board from Breil-sur-Roya to Nice for free. Police and military controls are on a surge, resulting in the Roya Citoyenne association, with Cédric at the front, to walk there through winding mountain roads. It is a three-day walk, over a distance of a little more than 80 kilometres, on the ancestral salt road towards Nice, with a hundred refugees.

A couple of days later, Cédric's property is surrounded by the police and army, making it impossible to leave the Roya valley. A siege of sorts, containing refugees in the valley, while reception centres are overly congested. The state must do something to cope with the growing number of refugees. It is not for associations to deal with it. The prefecture's inaction and repression are simply inadequate and surreal.

19 June 2017

The advocate general Mr. Raffin calls for an eight-month suspended sentence against Cédric.

21 June 2017

Cédric Herrou is placed a new time in police custody for helping foreigners in an irregular situation. He is released on 22 June. The two minors arrested with him are taken in charge by the local social welfare department.



To the four winds – Michel Toesca
SaNoSi Productions

Presentation of the project by Michel Toesca

Michel Toesca is an independent filmmaker, who was born in Nice in 1960. He started his career in Paris. In 2008, he moved to Saorge with his family, in a mountainous region, near the sea and the Italian border. He continued his work there, still as passionate and enthusiastic as ever. **To the Four Winds** is his fifth feature film.

« I have lived in the Roya valley for eight years. Thirty kilometres from the Mediterranean, as the crow flies, the Roya mountains run at an altitude of 3,300 meters.

I have known this frontier valley since I was a child. I now live in the house where I used spend my holidays as a kid, with my wife and daughter.

I know the people here and I dearly love this land. I have made three feature films, from 2009 and 2015: Per sempre, Le Village and Démocratie Zéro6.

People here do their shopping in Ventimiglia, Italy, as it is the closest city to the valley. Hundreds of migrants coming from Africa and the Middle East first started coming to this city as early as April 2015.

I was aware of the situation in Greece, Italy, Lampedusa, Sicilia, and in the Mediterranean. What was happening in Ventimiglia, however, did not get any media attention. When France closed its border in June, 2015, thousands got stuck in Ventimiglia, trying to avoid the border by reaching the coastline and the surrounding area.

By closing the border in Menton, France imposed on Italy, in Ventimiglia, what the UK imposes on France, in Calais. The 2013 Dublin Regulation forces refugees to seek asylum in the country in which they first set foot. Most of them do not want to stay in Italy but are grounded there.

When I saw crowds of refugees near the station, under the bridges and on the rocks on the border beach between Ventimiglia and Menton, I realized something was happening. This is when I then started filming, on occasions, without really thinking of a movie yet.

I often capture what I see around me. I like to view the world through a camera. This is what I like doing – make films.

Migrants on the Italian border have a clear view on the French coast... But the border is closed. Most of them try and cross through the mountains. They are regularly arrested by the police and French and Italian army and sent back to Sicilia or the South of Italy. But they don't give up – they go back to Ventimiglia and try crossing again. Some have tried up to twenty-two times, which is interesting, when you think that the authorities communicate on the number of times people have tried to cross, instead of recording the actual number of people who have tried crossing.

In the autumn of 2015, like everyone else in the valley, I started seeing exhausted men, women and children, starving, walking along the roads and railroad tracks, only wearing flip-flops and t-shirts in the cold. They slept on the ground, in the rain, in public gardens and train tunnels with young children. For some months already, refugees had been piling up in Ventimiglia, looking for a way to get into France. In September, they realized they could cross the frontier through the mountains.

These crossings are dangerously risky. Many get lost, or take the wrong route because of the geography of the valley, which is a French enclave into Italian territory – when heading to the North, refugees think they're moving towards Paris when in fact, they're going back into Italy (see map.)

One feels helpless when faced with so many people in the greatest poverty. Like many others, I stop, give them food or clothes. I seek to understand who they are and where they're going. Those who speak English tell me what they've been through after fleeing their countries: War, dictatorship, crossing the deserts, Libya...

I am overwhelmed by their stories, and their destitution. They have endured wars, torture, rape, deserts and the Mediterranean crossing. They get there, in a state of mere survival.

As for local public authorities and the prefecture, they overtly encourage sending the migrants back to Italy, including unaccompanied minors – which is illegal – while reinforcing controls and refusing to set up reception centres. The military police, border police and Sentinelle Police force patrol the valley everyday. Check points have been set up and arrests intensify. Their goal is to prevent refugees to reach the prefecture to seek asylum, although they are entitled to.

*Cédric Herrou lives further down the valley, in Breil-sur-Roya. We've been friends for a long time. He has seen my films, and has even organized a screening of my previous movie *Démocratie Zero6* in a neighbouring village. He raises hens, tends olive trees and sells the eggs and oil in AMAPs (associations supporting small farming) and on markets. He was always part of the struggles in the valley and he's convinced that being a citizen means being present on the ground on a daily basis.*

Very quickly, Cédric Herrou and many others decided to house, feed and sometimes give a lift to refugees to get out of the valley so they could continue their journey. They face up to five years in prison and a €50,000 fine.

I started filming when he started smuggling migrants into France.

I began in Ventimiglia with refugees and Italian associations. I filmed the border and military police as well as Italian and French politicians: powerlessness, contradictory internal commands, circumventing the law on asylum, use of fake legal documents to send unaccompanied minors back to Italy... Refugees face a situation that is beyond their control, paying the price for anomalies in the administration and police institutions that are left to themselves due to the lack of clear directives and competent jurisdiction.

I then followed the migrants' journey and went back up the Roya valley, where I shot how they organized mutual assistance and smuggling.

Cédric Herrou then came to me and suggested I film and participate in the collective of associations set up to cope with a situation that is upsetting life in the valley.

The idea is to point the irregularities from the prefecture and try and make political positions shift to obtain a satisfactory administrative and legal response. At that time, there was no media coverage at all, and Cédric Herrou was not a local hero yet. I accepted his proposal with enthusiasm.

As months go by, our friendship developed as we carried out and shared actions. Him and I have witnessed the same things at the same time. We were both affected and shocked by a brutal and absurd situation. In Cédric, I find a brother who is equally touched by a strong belief in justice, life and self-derision. Because of our mutual trust and understanding, I can record scenes at a very close distance.

It has been two years now since we have seen the first migrants in the Roya valley. Since then, hundreds have crossed our region, and there are newcomers everyday. Quite a lot has happened during that period. After an article in the New York Times, Cédric got a lot of media attention and became a figure of solidarity towards refugees.

During the past two years, over a dozen participants in the struggle were arrested, judged, sentenced, while others are still waiting for their trial.

What I find immensely satisfying and exciting is that, thanks to our actions, our struggle and the film, we managed to affect a small region in the world. Lawyers got organized in a group to hold the prefecture and department accountable. This is no longer humanitarian aid only, but legal and political assistance. Abuses from the prefecture and the police have been exposed, which led to an order from the administrative court sentencing the prefect for seriously obstructing the asylum system. This may be a small victory compared to the refugee issue in Europe, but we were pleased with the news as we achieved this with joy and derision. We are proud to have been the sand in the gears. We were able to get our way, avoiding violence, and with a smile.

And yet, the prefecture persists in using all the repressive tools in its control to contain refugees in the Roya valley and prevent them from seeking asylum.

This is why we are calling on you today, to help us make this film.

The money collected will enable us to finish TO THE FOUR WINDS, providing funds for the rest of the shooting to be done – the first part were self-financed by the filmmaker – post production and promotion. We would also like to use the money to raise awareness among French citizens and public authorities on this episode in the story of migration, that has been unfolding over the past two years in Ventimiglia and the Roya Valley. »



To the four winds – Michel Toesca
SaNoSi Productions

Presentation of the project by the producer Jean-Marie Gigon

SaNoSi Productions is an independent production company based in the Centre region. Established by **Jean-Marie Gigon** in 2005, it supports unique television and cinema projects questioning the world and its diversity.

SaNoSi Productions produces short pieces, documentaries and fictions for television and cinema.

“I met Michel in 1986. We worked together on the script of a film. We quickly became friends. From then on, on many occasions, Michel has shared his work with me.

In June 2016, Michel told me he had started filming what was happening in his region, the Roya valley – the interactions between the refugees and the locals. He kept me informed on a regular basis, about his work with the migrants and the inhabitants of the valley, which he was interviewing.

Michel is often upset by the refugees’ personal stories, what they went through in order to get here. He tells me how difficult it is, for the valley inhabitants, to help starving and exhausted migrants. He mentions his friend Cédric Herrou, his indignation and refusal to close his door to the exiles.

In the autumn of 2016, Michel asked me if I would be ready to take part in the production of his film. The situation in the valley is rapidly changing, attracting media attention. I am so touched by his effort to act in support of the migrants, with the inhabitants of the valley that I commit to producing his film.

Filming, for Michel, was a way to react and get away from the uneasy feeling in front of an impossible situation – our rich society unable to treat refugees with dignity. His work questions our humanity and our ambiguous position when facing migrants coming from another country, conveying another reality, where death, violence and misery are so common.

Most of us feel uneasy in front of migrants, as their situation is a reflection of who we are, with our share of responsibility and contradictions. We wish we could help them, but only a few of us do...

We have a hard time imagining what these people went through. Who really wants it anyway? We are afraid of it. Their mere presence is questioning our comfortable position, reminding us that life can also mean surviving. We are left coping with powerlessness and over-indulgence.

Politicians have an ambiguous stance on the issue, avoiding it as much as they can, or else exploiting it.

Talking with Michel convinced me that his film was necessary. It won't be an advocacy movie but a political film, directly confronting issues that we are faced with as individuals and as a nation in the current political context.

The film is yet to be done. With Michel, we looked for the person who would be best suited to use hours of rushes, initially made to document the situation on the spot, sometimes in poor technical conditions. We needed someone with a vision who would continue and finish the film. When we met with Catherine Libert, we realized immediately she would be perfect for Michel to work with.”



Catherine Libert, editor

Filmmaker, editor, colourist, **Catherine Libert** worked on documentary and experimental films, including her own. She likes to use silver film, which she develops in laboratories. She met Michel in the Villa Arson National Centre for Contemporary Art in Nice.

“When Michel asked me to edit his film, I discovered the images and I immediately felt I wanted to get involved in the project and fight for it.

I feel exactly like people in the Roya valley. A year and a half ago, a squat opened in a secondary school near my place. Illegal immigrants lived there. I gradually got to meet some of them. I realized they could not get documents because they did not know French well enough to explain what had happened to them since they had to flee their country. This is why I have taught French to a dozen refugees, to help them deal with administrative procedures. What surprised me the most were people’s reactions – some suddenly started talking to me, others winked at me knowingly, before saying, “I help them too”. Like the manager of the printing shop where I was doing copies for my lessons, for example. When he understood what I was doing, he stopped making me pay. I am touched by all these gestures of mutual assistance. I know now that there is much more solidarity than we think. It can be anyone – the baker, our next-door neighbour. People are capable of opening their doors.”

