

VEGA PRODUCTION PRESENTS

Fortuna

A FILM BY GERMINAL ROAUX

SWITZERLAND 2018

106 MIN. 1.33 – 2K BLACK & WHITE SOUND 5.1

Release Dates

French-speaking part: 11th April 2018

German-speaking part: tba

Photos and Press Kit downloadable on
www.vegafilm.ch

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SYNOPSIS



Fortuna, a 14-year old Ethiopian girl who has had no news of her parents since she arrived on the shores of Italy, is temporarily accommodated in Switzerland with other refugees in a hospice at an altitude of 2000m above sea level to overwinter. A community of Catholic canons gives them refuge whilst waiting for their legal status to be sorted out by the Swiss authorities. This is where Fortuna meets Kabir, a 26-year old Ethiopian refugee with whom she falls hopelessly in love. Their relationship develops, hidden from sight of those around them, until the day when Kabir mysteriously disappears following a police raid.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE



Dear Mediterranean Sea,

you who stretch from the Strait of Gibraltar to the West, as far as the mouth of the Dardanelles and the Suez Canal to the East,

you who knew Socrates and Plato,

you, the generous one who has provided sustenance to man since the dawn of time,

you, who are literally called “the sea in the middle of the land”, — in Latin *mare medius terra* —,

you, who swathed us in your warm waters when we were children,

you, the benevolent one who shared in the first loves of our teenage years,

you, who lulled us with the enchanting lapping of your waves one summer night as we discovered the Great Bear and the Milky Way,

you, who have always been the link between Africa and Europe,

you, “Our Sea”, — *Mare Nostrum* —, as the Elders called you, you have become for some time, for too long already, the place where children die for having dreamed of a better life. Today your clear waters are tainted with blood, fear has contaminated your shores, heavy bodies, nameless and faceless, lie within you, their disoriented souls err beneath the spume of your deathly swells. How is it possible? What happened? How can we bear seeing the dozens of thousands of dead lost in your arms? How can that be bearable?

I imagine however that it is not your doing, and that it is we, men, who are responsible for this.

What have we done? What is this world?

Is there something that I can do?

It is without a doubt with these first questions that I started to write *Fortuna*.

Something had to be done; I had to try at least.

Without hysteria or demagoguery I searched for the way in which we could do better. Humbly, with the tools available to an artist and those of the cinema, I tried to create a place for thought. I patiently brought together the accounts of young unaccompanied minors, refugees, members of religious institutions, educators. I tried to understand what they were enduring and the challenges facing society today in relation to migration. I don't think I found the answers. But I wanted this film to bring us together around ideas rather than dividing us. With poetry, to try to inspire rather than to assert.

“Poetry” when you look at its Greek roots, comes from the word “do”.

One day, someone asked Paul Valéry “What is your poem trying to say?” and Paul Valéry replied, “It does not say, it does!”

Modestly, that is always what I try to do. To make films that “do” rather than say.

Germinal Roaux

FORTUNA OR THE CHOICE OF LIFE (INTRODUCTION)



The story of *Fortuna*, a 14-year old Ethiopian girl who finds herself alone, far from her parents, in Simphon monastery where the canons shelter the refugees before they are sent to the different asylum seekers' centres, tells the story of a poignant personal drama in the shadow of a humanitarian catastrophe.

Still haunted by the images of a dramatic sea crossing, at first Fortuna only shared her secret, of which we soon guess the nature, with the virgin Mary; then it's in Kabir, who has become her lover during their shared misfortunes, that she confides. First she provokes the man's anger, and refusal of any responsibility. He demands that she get rid of their unborn child, before relenting, and then, after a police raid, disappearing...

This storyline is both simple and full of things that remain unsaid. It alternates Christian kindness — the Gospel of John is clearly cited — and violence, which comes in contrast to the reasons of the heart, represented by a brotherly religious community, and immi-

gration policy rules, with their more or less strict application. Fortuna thus gives us the opportunity, with any organised political or religious discourse set aside, to have an in-depth look into one of the greatest tragedies of the start of the 21st century, whose spiritual echoes bring together the voices of the world, through the purity of the images, and the weight the world bears in relation to the facts alone.

Through the emblematic destiny of our young protagonist, the film also raises the question of personal choice, bringing each and everyone, above and beyond the administrative simplifications and decisions imposed in higher spheres, to face his own responsibilities in his most profound perception of life.

Jean-Louis Kuffer

INTERVIEW WITH GERMINAL ROAUX



With his first three films, Germinal Roaux, a cinema poet, has imposed a new way of looking at contemporary reality along with an immediately personal style of writing, anchored in black and white. As of his very first short film, *Des tas de choses* (2003), which focused on the situation of a mentally handicapped person in our society, there was great emotion to be found. Pierre Assouline said of it in *Le Monde* "28 minutes of absolute grace; a supplement of humanity". In 2007, *Icebergs*, which addressed the issue of the harsh daily lives of teenagers in the suburbs, got the prix du Meilleur Espoir at the Locarno Festival, and won an award at the Journées de Soleure. As for his first full-length feature, *Left Foot Right Foot* (2013), another intense slice of juvenile life oscillating between haunting love and autistic divergence, it won award upon award in Switzerland and abroad.

2018 marks another important step for the 42-year old director, with *Fortuna*, invited to the Berlinale in the Generation section, in February and programmed at the International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights in Geneva in March. Under editing, on the basis of a "rough cut", Germinal Roaux already received a grant of 75000 Swiss francs for the finali-

sation of his film within the framework of the Filmmaker Award 2016, at the Zurich International Film Festival.

Can you explain the genesis of *Fortuna*?

My cinema projects always start with a real life encounter. For *Left Foot Right Foot*, it was my discovery of these young girls who practice prostitution from time to time in order to buy themselves expensive clothes. That brought me to think about our modern day society and the world of appearances. For *Fortuna*, it started with my actress girlfriend, Claudia Gallo, who was hired in Lausanne by the CREAL (Resource Centre for Allophone Students) to look after the Roma children who hang around on the streets and help with their guidance. One thing led to another and she was asked to look after unaccompanied minors who I got to meet in turn and whose stories deeply affected me, in particular the story of a young teenager who'd fallen pregnant during her exile, which prefigured *Fortuna's* exile. The situation these young refugees found themselves in was so harrowing and their accounts so powerful and courageous that I had to talk about them, to do something.

We all feel powerless faced with what's happening in Europe and in the Mediterranean with the nightmarish crossings we helplessly watch on our screens and listen about on our radios. It's terrible to feel that we can't do anything in the face of such suffering. All of these reflections that came from my encounters with these youngsters made it necessary for me to write the story of *Fortuna*. During the first months of writing, I researched refugee reception in Switzerland and that's when I discovered that to make up for the lack of room in the centres for asylum-seekers, the canons of Einsiedeln Monastery had taken some of them in. That struck a chord within me and so I really wanted to base the film at the Hospice du Simplon, which was a place I really liked and already knew because I'd taken photos there. My encounter with the canons at Simplon had a determining influence in the writing of the *Fortuna* project. Month after month, I filled my notebooks, like a herbarium, constituting a collection of ideas and interconnections that finally resulted in a feature film project.

How did you get from that stage to the implementation of the project?

I had started to write a treatment of about thirty pages, after which I went to see the producer, Ruth Waldburger. She was immediately interested and said: let's go. And when Ruth says let's go, you go quickly. I had three months to get a file in to Berne, to get screenwriting assistance funds. So I started dealing with the scenario in close collaboration with my girlfriend whose in-the-field knowledge of the subject really helped me, and with the precious assistance of my friend, Claude Muret. Then, everything went really quickly...

How did you go about casting?

Casting took a long time, first in Switzerland. To start off with I really wanted to get some unaccompanied minors involved in my project but then I realised it wouldn't be possible for the obvious emotional reasons. The first Swiss casting didn't bring me THE perfect *Fortuna*. I wanted a young girl who had just arrived in Europe, whose African origins still shone through her voice and gestures. The young girls we met here had rapidly adapted to our Western lifestyle and very often lost their roots. Afterwards, with the help of a casting director, we searched in Paris and West Africa and yet again we drew a blank. On the recommendation of Ama Ampadu, a producer friend, I suggested to Ruth Waldburger that we might go and carry out the casting in Addis-Ababa where, for ten days, we tested about a hundred boys and

girls in front of the camera and that's where I chanced on Kidist, THE *Fortuna* that I was looking for, an orphan who spoke a little bit of English and who had played a small part in the Ethiopian film *Lamb* by Yared Zeleke, which won an award in Cannes in 2015. I was immediately taken with Kidist Siyum Beza's presence and the strength that shone out through an apparently fragile exterior and that came in particular from her deep faith. She is radiant. In spite of her sadness, you can tell that she's on life's side. As for the boy, Assefa Zerihun Gudeta, who I hadn't planned on in the casting, I met him among the numerous onlookers who had come to watch what was going on. He'd done a little bit of theatre and his incredible presence captivated me immediately. He really worked hard to get into the role.

And how did Bruno Ganz get involved in the project?

I had already thought of him during the writing process, because I needed an actor of his calibre to carry off the role of the "superior" canon. And in fact, since *Les ailes du désir* by Wim Wenders, which had made me want to become a filmmaker, I had admired Bruno Ganz for his mix of strength and gentleness. So I talked to Ruth Waldburger about it and we sent him the scenario, which he was really interested in, and our first encounter was marked by a wonderful discussion. He asked lots of questions, as he was particularly attentive to the subject, because Angela Merkel had just taken in roughly a million refugees. I was quite awed by the idea of working with him and didn't quite know how I would bring together this immense actor and a young debutante. Above all, with young Kidist, I wanted to avoid spoiling what she could bring of herself to the *Fortuna's* character and for that reason I decided never to give her the scenario. We worked partly on the basis of improvisation — or more precisely on the adaptation of the dialogue to the two Ethiopian actors' own way of talking, with the precious aid of an Amharic interpreter. As regards Bruno Ganz, he demanded the strict interpretation of a text of which he guaranteed he wouldn't change even a comma. Two very different ways of looking at the work in hand and of building the characters in the film.

How did shooting go with the asylum-seekers who worked as extras?

Shooting took place over 37 days between April and May 2016. It was a unique experience that reached its peak during a shared dinner, the evening when we shot the police raid at Simplon hospice, which brought together the actors and amateur extras of

various origins — asylum-seekers who came from various refugee centres and Roma families —, the technical crew and the canons, as well as all those who had helped us in one way or another, meaning about eighty people who talked a lot that evening about religion and questions relative to asylum.

On the whole, the film shooting, which could have been a catastrophe bearing in mind the harsh conditions, stuck as we were at over 2000m above sea level in freezing weather, turned out to be a great success and a significant collective adventure for all.

How were things with the “real” canons?

At first, I could tell that they were reticent to welcome in a film crew, some of them in any case. So, they read the scenario and discussed it at length among themselves and then they welcomed us in and they accommodated us and helped us with a lot of good will and a great deal of warmth.

What about the question of spirituality that is very present in the film? What does it mean for you?

Above all I wanted to portray an atmosphere. The context brought a lot to it obviously. For the main scene, that I rewrote several times, which focuses on an adversarial debate between five canons who are discussing how to deal with incoming refugees, referring to both their vocation and their reserves in respect of society and its laws, I had several meetings with members of religious institutions in order to try to better understand them and identify with them. In that respect, although having shown a certain apprehension as to taking on this role, Bruno Ganz, who is extraordinarily realistic in the film, really carried off the character of this monk convinced by the fundamental evangelical role of welcoming the other, in contrast with his brothers who were more caught up in their church stories. In fact, it's more a matter of humanity than religion...

All that in black and white. Was that really necessary? Didn't that make Ruth Waldburger frown?

From an artistic point of view, Ruth Waldburger gave me a lot of freedom. As for the black and white, that's my language and it's more and more the case. For me, it's the ideal medium to tell stories the way I see them. We could talk about it at length, even from a philosophical point of view, with the play of light and shadow, and I believe that the spectator gets involved in a very different way when a film is in black and white. The cinema can bring us to experience something in the present moment and that's what I'm looking for. My preoccupation is to make the spectator an actor, to give him a role, and make him think about the essential questions of our human condition. The real difficulty in writing for the cinema is managing to write the story, not from the outside as if you were observing it, but from the inside as if you were going through it, allowing each spectator to experience his own film in relation to his own personal experience. A film should be written within the eye of the beholder.

Finally, the ending of *Fortuna* remains open...

The end isn't an end but the start of a new life for Fortuna who has become a woman. It's an open conclusion that offers a variety of interpretations and above all gives us the chance to reflect on Bruno Ganz's final lengthy discourse on the matter of choice. I also noticed that the way men and women understood the end of the film was different, each interpreting the different signals in a different fashion. But I won't tell you any more about that...

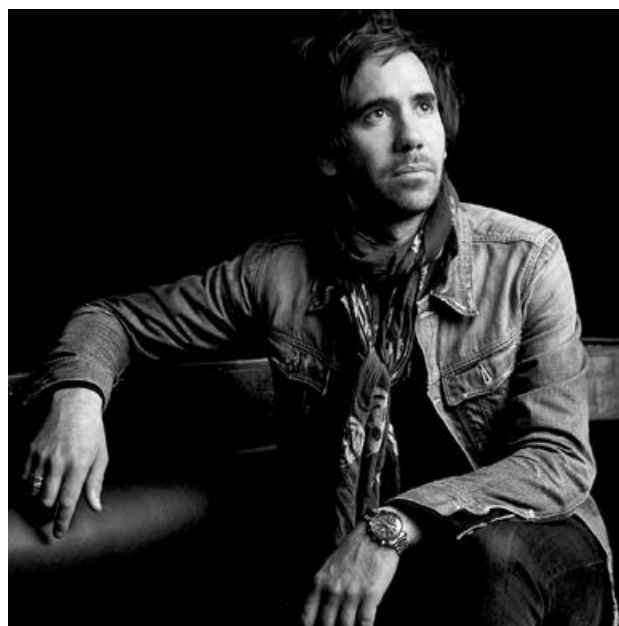
Interview by Jean-Louis Kuffer



BIO-FILMOGRAPHIES

GERMINAL ROAUX

Germinal Roaux (born on 8th August, 1975 in Lausanne) is a self-taught Franco-Swiss photographer and filmmaker. He works entirely in black and white. A reporter-photographer since 1996 for various magazines, in the year 2000 he received the Premier Prix Suisse des Médias, for a series of photographic reports dealing with autism in adults and children which were exhibited at the Musée de l'Élysée in Lausanne. In 2003, he directed his first documentary film "Des tas de choses". The film dealt with the integration of mentally handicapped people in today's society and was selected at the Visions du Réel International Cinema Documentary Film Festival in Nyon. Germinal Roaux wrote and directed "Icebergs" in 2007, which won the Prix du Meilleur Espoir at Locarno international Film Festival and the Prix de la Relève Suissimage SSA for the best Swiss short film of the year at the 43rd Journées de Soleure. The same year, Germinal Roaux started an experimental photographic journal that focused on the transition from adolescence to adult life, called "Never Young Again", that he published monthly on the Internet. Over the years, this photographic work has expanded and now comprises thousands of pictures that are part of the Swiss National Library's archives. In 2012, Germinal Roaux wrote and directed his first full-length feature for the cinema "Left Foot Right Foot" starring Argentinian actor Nahuel Perez Biscayart. The film received the Bayard d'Or for the Best First Feature Film at the FIFF in Namur in 2013, the Prix du Jury at the Palm Springs International Film Festival, and the Prix du Cinéma Suisse 2014 in three categories: Best Photography, Best Acting in a second role and Academy's special prize. In 2016, he wrote and directed his second full-length feature, "Fortuna", which deals with the subject of unaccompanied minor refugees and stars a young Ethiopian actress, Kidist Siyum Beza alongside Swiss actor, Bruno Ganz. On 24th September 2016 in Zurich (Switzerland), American actress Uma Thurman and the Jury of the Zurich Film Festival gave him the Filmmaker Award 2016 for his project "Fortuna".



2016 - 2018 – *Fortuna* (cinema feature film)

2013 - 2014 – *Left Foot Right Foot* (cinema feature film)

Bayard d'Or pour la Meilleure Première Oeuvre au FIFF de Namur 2013
 Official Selection First Film World Competition – Montreal World Film Festival 2013
 Sélection Officielle «Special Screening» au Festival du Film de Zurich 2013
 Jury Special Mention International Competition 2014 Palm Springs (USA)
 Prix du Cinéma Suisse 2014 pour le Meilleur Second Rôle
 Prix du Cinéma Suisse 2014 pour Meilleure Photographie
 Prix du Cinéma Suisse 2014 - Prix Spécial de l'Académie (costume)

2007 - 2008 – *Icebergs* (short fiction)

Prix du Meilleur Espoir au Festival International du Film de Locarno 2007
 Official Selection TriBeCa Film Festival New York (USA)

2003 - 2005 – *Des tas de choses* (documentary film)

Compétition Officielle Festival Visions du Réel Nyon 2004
 Prix du Meilleur Film Étranger Festival du Film de Dakar 2004
 Prix du Cinéma Suisse (nomination) 2005

KIDIST SIYUM BEZA

2018 – *Fortuna* by Germinal Roaux

2015 – *Lamb* by Yared Zeleke



BRUNO GANZ

Selected Filmography

2018 – *Fortuna* by Germinal Roaux

2018 – *The House That Jack Built* by Lars von Trier

2018 – *Radegund* by Terrence Malick

2017 – *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* by Matti Geschonneck

2017 – *The Party* by Sally Potter

2016 – *Un juif pour l'exemple* by Jacob Berger

2015 – *Heidi* by Alain Gsponer

2015 – *Amnesia* by Barbet Schroeder

2013 – *Night Train to Lisbon* by Billie August

2013 – *The Counselor* by Ridley Scott

2011 – *Sport de filles* by Patricia Mazuy

2010 – *Satte Farben vor Schwarz* by Sophie Heldman

2009 – *Giulias Verschwinden* by Christoph Schaub

2008 – *La Poussière du Temps* by Théo Angelopoulos

2008 – *The Reader* by Stephen Daldry

2004 – *Der Untergang* by Oliver Hirschbiegel

2000 – *Pane e tulipani* by Silvio Soldini

1999 – *L'Éternité et un Jour* by Théo Angelopoulos

1993 – *In weiter Ferne, so nah !* by Wim Wenders

1992 – *Die Abwesenheit* by Peter Handke

1987 – *Der Himmel über Berlin* by Wim Wenders

1983 – *Dans la Ville Blanche* by Alain Tanner

1981 – *Le Faussaire* by Volker Schlöndorff

1981 – *La Dame aux Camélias* by Mauro Bolognini

1979 – *Nosferatu : Phantom der Nacht* by Werner Herzog

1977 – *Der amerikanische Freund* by Wim Wenders

1976 – *La Marquise d'O* by Eric Rohmer



PATRICK D'ASSUMÇÃO

Selected Filmography

2018 – *Fortuna* by Germinal Roaux
 2018 – *L'apparition* by Xavier Giannoli
 2018 – *Normandie nue* by Philippe Le Guay
 2016 – *Le secret des banquises* by Marie Madinier
 2015 – *Les Ogres* by Léa Fehner
 2016 – *Nos patriotes* by Gabriel Le Bomin
 2016 – *Le chant du merle* by Frédéric Pelle
 2016 – *La mort de Louis XIV* by Albert Serra
 2015 – *Une enfance* by Philippe Claudel
 2015 – *A trois, on y va* by Jérôme Bonnell
 2015 – *Journal d'une femme de chambre* by Benoît Jacquot
 2015 – *Trois souvenirs de ma jeunesse* by Arnaud Desplechin
 2015 – *La vie très privée de Monsieur Sim* by Michel Leclerc
 2015 – *Floride* by Philippe Le Guay
 2015 – *La tempête* by Samuel Collardey
 2013 – *L'inconnu du lac* by Alain Guiraudie



YOANN BLANC

2018 – *Fortuna* by Germinal Roaux
 2017 – *Une part d'ombre* by Samuel Tilmans
 2016 – *Un homme à la mer* by Géraldine Doignon
 2016 – *Je me tue à te le dire* by Xavier Seron
 2016 – *Tonic Immobility* by Nathalie Teirlink
 2016 – *Baden Baden* by Rachel Lang
 2015 – *Avant-Terme* by Xavier Seron, Matthieu Donck
 2014 – *Bouboule* by Bruno Deville
 2013 – *Vandal* by Hélier Cistern
 2012 – *Traumland* by Daniel Lambo
 2012 – *Torpédo* by Matthieu Donck
 2011 – *L'hiver dernier* by John Shank
 2011 – *Hell* by Tim Fehlbaum
 2011 – *De leur vivant* by Géraldine Doignon



ASSEFA ZERIHUN GUDETA

2018 – *Fortuna* by Germinal Roaux
 2015 – *Bekum Kafekershign* by Benjamin John Setho
 2014 – *Difret* by Zeresenay Berhane Mehari
 2013 – *Sost Meazen 1* by Theodros Teshome
 2012 – *Zewud Ena Goffer* by Benjamin John Setho
 2012 – *Duka* by Tegegne Samuyel



CAST

Kidist SIYUM BEZA
 Bruno GANZ
 Patrick D'ASSUMÇAO
 Assefa ZERIHUN GUDETA
 Yoann BLANC
 Pierre BANDERET
 Simon ANDRÉ
 Philippe GRAND'HENRY
 Stéphane BISSOT

CREW

Original idea by
 CLAUDIA GALLO
 GERMINAL ROAUX

Scenario and dialogues
 GERMINAL ROAUX

Written in collaboration with
 CLAUDIA GALLO
 CLAUDE MURET

Director of photography
 COLIN LÉVÊQUE

Sound
 JÜRIG LEMPEN
 EMMANUEL SOLAND
 ROMAN DYMNY

Production designer
 IVAN NICLASS

Costumes
 GENEVIÈVE MAULINI

Make-up
 LAURENCE RIEUX

Editors
 SOPHIE VERCRUYSSE
 JACQUES COMETS

First production assistant
 FREDDY VERHOEVEN

Executive Producer
 JEAN-MARIE GINDRAUX

Producer
 RUTH WALDBURGER
 Vega Production

A coproduction with
 ANNE-LAURE GUÉGAN
 GÉRALDINE SPRIMONT
 NEED Productions

A coproduction with
 RTS Radio Télévision Suisse, Françoise Mayor
 SRG SSR, Sven Wälti

Proximus - Tanguy De Keyser

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 and Inver Tax Shelter

Succès Cinéma
 Suissimage
 Succès Passage Antenne
 Filmmaker Award du Zurich Film Festival

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