

# SWING

*A film by Tony Gatlif*



*Berlin Film Festival 2002  
Official Selection – Panorama*

*France, 2002, 90 minutes  
In French with English subtitles*

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# SYNOPSIS

Max, an only child, is 10 years old. He loves Manouche jazz, a music he discovered the first time he heard the guitar virtuoso Miraldo play. This music becomes his passion and brings him to the town's Manouche neighbourhood, where he buys an old guitar.

Max will learn about Manouche music and culture through the lessons Miraldo agrees to give him. He quickly makes friends with Swing, a young gypsy girl who is the same age as he is and whose charisma, self-confidence and freedom fascinate him.

# CAST

Max	<b>Oscar COPP</b>
Swing	<b>Lou RECH</b>
Miraldo	<b>Tchavolo SCHMITT</b>
Mandino	<b>Mandino REINHARDT</b>
Khalid	<b>Abdellatif CHAARANI</b>
Max's Grand Mother	<b>Fabiène MAI</b>

# CREDITS

Director	<b>Tony GATLIF</b>
Screenplay	<b>Tony GATLIF</b>
Image	<b>Claude GARNIER</b>
Editing	<b>Monique DARTONNE</b>
Music	<b>Mandino REINHARDT, Tchavolo SCHMITT, Abdellatif CHAARANI and Tony GATLIF</b>
Producer	<b>PRINCES FILMS</b>

**France 2002 - 35 mm - Scope - Colour - Dolby SRD - 90 mn - Visa n°102 945**

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# INTERVIEW WITH TONY GATLIF

***You have already dedicated four films to the Gypsies and their culture.***

I'm simply trying to transmit something that is disappearing. I'm trying to be a witness.

***Max discovers the Gypsies' world. He's initiated to their music and their traditions.***

Max goes to the Gypsies to buy a guitar. It's music that brings him to the Gypsies. Max is initiated to a way of life that is completely different from his. He will discover this world because he is unprejudiced and totally detached from his mother's universe. His mother spends all her time on her cell phone.

***In the beginning Swing is a tomboy, then she discovers and affirms her femininity.***

In the beginning, Swing, seeing the way the Manouche (one of the many different gypsy populations) women around her live, prefers to stay within childhood's ambiguity. It's only upon meeting Max, the little gadjo (non-gypsy), that she really discovers and affirms her femininity.

***These two children come from two different worlds, have a different education and different dreams...***

They represent the oral culture and the written culture. Max feels the need to write down his memories; while for Swing, writing means nothing. She can't read. The Gypsies' oral tradition and culture were partly annihilated by the Nazis.

***How did you find the young actors who played the parts of Max and Swing?***

I had them pass screen tests, improvisations, but I didn't give them any precise text. In the beginning, the most important thing for me is energy and gestures. I asked them to look into each other's eyes. Pre-teens never look into each other's eyes. It makes them uncomfortable, so they laugh. I really liked the way that Oscar and Lou looked into each other's eyes. I made my choice based on that look.

***You wanted to meet a Manouche guitarist, just like Max, your young hero. Tell us about Tchavolo.***

I really wanted to make a film with Tchavolo Schmitt. Tchavolo fascinates me because he is not interested in fame or money! Tchavolo Schmitt is the gypsy equivalent of Tomatito, Cameron de la Isla's guitarist. Tomatito is world-famous, while Tchavolo prefers to stay in his temporary home near Strasbourg. That's why I went to film him in his house, in his street, in his kitchen. He doesn't have a car, he earns his living by playing music in bars.

***He plays with the famous "Django guitar"!***

It's the Selmer guitar invented for Django, the swing guitar, which has a hollow in the right side. Django even set up a factory to make this guitar.

***How does music influence your directing?***

Music is the liberty that inspires me when I make my films, and gives me the energy to go out and meet people throughout the world. This film couldn't have been made without music. It symbolizes the freedom of a child like Swing. And Max goes to the Manouches to discover this music that is foreign to his culture. Music punctuates the entire film. We worked with Tchavolo and Mandino for three months on the adaptation of "Dark Eyes", mixing Manouche, Arab and Yiddish influences.

***How did you film the musical sequences? We really feel like we're in the caravan, surrounded by the musicians and the dancers. Was it improvised?***

On the contrary, the fact that the caravan was so small required us to prepare the musical sequences very meticulously. We set up the camera movements very carefully, in order to have the right rhythm and the right focus on each musician at any given time. I told Régis Leroux, the sound engineer, and Claude Garnier, who was both chief cameraman and camera operator, that we were going to film 20 musicians in the caravan. Claude asked: "But where will the camera be?" I replied: "Everywhere!"

***You film the Gypsies' festive atmosphere and their joie de vivre, yet you also dedicate a sequence to the Gypsies' genocide.***

It is a delicate subject. The few Gypsies who came out of it alive are hesitant to talk about it, or don't even speak about it at all. I looked for a Manouche woman who would agree to talk about her internment in a concentration camp, and I found Héléne Mershtein.

***This scene is filmed like a documentary.***

I refused to direct the actress in this specific sequence. We just placed the camera there and I gave Héléne total liberty to tell her story: she was captured, along with her entire family. They left everything by the side of the road: their caravans, their animals, the burning fire... Approximately 500,000 Gypsies died in the camps. That's a lot of people. Few elderly people survived. This is why the younger generation doesn't know very much about their culture. The Gypsies have changed their way of life since the Holocaust. They evolved alongside society. Their music is subversive. It is a music that cannot be learnt through a score, but with the heart and the ear.