

## **SYNOPSIS**

Gad Elmaleh decides to leave New York and move back to Paris, to get baptized and become a Catholic. Despite his attempt to hide the truth from his Jewish family, Gad's parents discover their son's unconditional love for the Virgin Mary – and for them, it's a nightmare! Determined to bring Gad back to reason and to his Jewishness, they turn his conversion into a battlefield - as Gad tries to make them understand by any means necessary that his sincere beliefs do not change his identity and the love he has for his family.



## **INTERVIEW WITH GAD ELMALEH:**

### **Let's go back to the beginning...**

Did you know that 'Bereshit' means 'In the beginning...'? It's one of the first lines in the Torah, it is the Genesis. We are already getting into the theme (laughs)!

### **Have you studied the Talmud?**

Gad Elmaleh: Yes, I did. I went to a Yeshiva, which is a Torah studies center and took Hebrew classes. I read the texts and I still do read and study them today. It would have been impossible for me to make this film if I hadn't been personally exposed to the subject. I grew up in Morocco where the landscape always featured synagogues, churches and mosques. Jews, Christians and Muslims all coexisted. It was just natural. Everyone had their faith and beliefs. Everyone respected that. We were surrounded with that. Nowadays, when we talk about religion, it's usually in the context of opposition, in moments of tension or insecurity. I like to talk about it because it affects me, and because I believe that if we are exposed to other communities and are curious about the faith of others, we get to know ourselves better.

### **Was it that curiosity that first made you go to a church?**

Gad Elmaleh: Yes. I get the feeling with this film, that I am really playing with fire, with sensitive notions such as the sacred, idolatry, passion and temptation. Talking about my fascination with Mary, as a Jew, is in a way, a forbidden game. Idolatry is the ultimate sin in the Jewish religion! But I think by looking at what burns and not what shines, we can provoke reactions and debates.

### **Is this one of the stakes of your film: to surprise your audience and to provoke a debate on faith?**

Gad Elmaleh: In my new show, I talk about faith, religion, religions. I talk in particular about how Jews and Muslim can't enter churches. I talk about the beauty of Catholic funerals, their solemnity, which I don't make fun of but which amuses me as much as fascinates me. In fact, I've always tackled these subjects through my characters and my films, but I'm tackling it more head-on with this film. I'm not using the bling of Coco or the cap of the old Jewish grandfather with the Moroccan accent from my first show. I have always ventured elsewhere: I left Morocco as a young man for Canada, then for France and then for the United States. I've met people from all walks of life, from different faiths and embraced many cultures. It's in my nature. It's what makes me feel good.

## **You lay yourself bare and the form of the film is very bare, it flirts with being a documentary or mockumentary...**

Gad Elmaleh: I never said to myself 'Hey, what if I made a mockumentary about faith and identity?' ». But it's true that I wanted it to be lighter and not be a blockbuster like *Coco* for example. I didn't want to make a comedy about religion with gags and characters, others do that very well. I love *Would I lie to you?* even though it's not really a film about the Jewish religion or Jewish identity, but rather about Sephardic Jewish culture, traditions and customs. I wanted to do something else, a more modest film, closer to the subjects I wanted to discuss. I am fully aware that might be confusing to my audience. I'm not doing what they expect me to do but I wanted to take off the mask and speak from the heart about my existential doubts and my real love for religions and for Mary in particular. I wouldn't have been able to do this film when I was younger. I needed to take a step back, to grow up.

## **Weren't you afraid of self-portraiture?**

Gad Elmaleh: On the contrary, it prevented me from falling into caricature! But I must say that meeting with the scriptwriter Benjamin Charbit was a decisive moment for the film. Benjamin enabled me to find a structure; to inject fiction and cinema into what at first looked like a chronicle or a farce. He structured my ideas and created the framework of the film; the different stages I go through.

## **The film is about your relationship with the Jewish faith and your deep affection for Mary, but it is also a film about identity, and yours is definitely multiple...**

Gad Elmaleh: Yes, it's a film about identity in the broadest sense. In it, I am asking myself and with great sincerity, about my place, as a 50-year-old man, in society, in my family, in the world, in geography, in history, in my history, in my relationship to my Jewishness. As I said, I've been talking about the same things for thirty years, except that now I think I'm talking about them with more courage, without hiding behind artifice. It's like returning to my first love. If you only knew how much I took out during editing; the gags, the grimaces! There is humour in the film, but the humour arises naturally from the situations, it's not forced. I use the situation, but not so much for the comic effect as for the reflection it can provoke in everyone. I'll be honest, those expecting to see *Coco* or *Chouchou* will be disappointed! I took the reverse, the counterpoint, because it seemed more sincere to deal with these subjects. It's a really intimate film.

## **A kind of personal diary...**

Gad Elmaleh: Exactly, and that's the title of one of my favourite Nanni Moretti films. I love that filmmaker. I thought a lot about him when I made the film, just as I thought a lot about Woody Allen, who also makes films about his doubts, his wanderings and his questioning about the world, God, love... Far be it from me to bite the hand that feeds me, but it's true that the films I've made so far are very different from the ones I enjoy watching: the films of Alain Cavalier, Nanni Moretti and Woody Allen.

## **How did you convince your parents and loved ones to appear in the film?**

Gad Elmaleh: I told them it was a film about a mid-life crisis. They didn't really know what it was about. I wanted to capture their surprise and confusion too. I kind of tricked them (laughs)! My mother is fantastic in the film, very natural. Everything was written in a script and there were dialogues, but I didn't give them a text to learn. That would have taken away their spontaneity. I gave them a certain structure and situations. My mother didn't think. She just acted, as children do, as actors do. My parents were in great form...we were at home, there were a few people around, we cooked. It was a very happy shoot. I'll tell you an anecdote: I was at my parents' house, I was doing location scouting with my director of photography, Thomas Brémond. My mother was in the kitchen, Thomas asked her to sit on one of the kitchen chairs, and she said, '*But I never really sit there!*' ». She wasn't just saying it, she was right, and that made us change the plan. The whole film was just like that. We adapted to my parents' life, to the settings of their life, the sofa, the Moroccan lounge. It helped me a lot to be with them and to be in their homes. I discovered a method of scene setting and directing that I love, and I think in the past I've wasted a lot of energy trying to build scenes on film with too many people. It was important this film was made with a reduced budget, a reduced crew, with two light cameras, with people close to me and not with well-known professional actors. I am certain of it.

## **What did you enjoy most?**

Gad Elmaleh: Getting the non-actors to act was the most overwhelming and most rewarding aspect. Father Barthélémy, for example. He's really driven by a thought. He wasn't originally going to be in the film, but as we met and talked and I thought he would be perfect to play the priest I go to to be baptised. I really love this guy. He is passionate. We had a real connection. Like with Sister Catherine, who I have a good laugh with in the film and who has a very endearing personality. I also brought in Delphine Horvilleur because I think she is brilliant and I'm often in touch with her. She read the script, understood my path but didn't immediately agree to act in the film. In the end when she said yes, it was worth it, it really touched me. As for Pierre-Henri Salfaty, the Talmud teacher and also director and scriptwriter. We go way back. Neither

Father Barthélemy, nor Delphine, nor Pierre-Henri, nor Sister Catherine are dogmatic. They welcome doubts, they understand them. When my father went to see Pierre-Henri Salfaty to ask him what was wrong with me, he replied with great spirit that nothing was wrong because I was seeking the presence of the divine and that there was nothing wrong with that! I didn't want to make characters out of my mother, my sister, the priests or the rabbis. I wanted us to be above clichés. I wanted to involve people who are themselves, whereas in the film I don't really know who I am anymore.

### **Your emotion is evident...**

Gad Elmaleh: Yes, because it's the film I'm most proud of. The film has a path and I too have a path. I am glad that the film exists, and I am delighted to show it in cinemas. I think the film will start a discussion, and I'm happy to be able to start a discussion with the audience members who want it. I think it's quite an unsettling film, and I realise that it's a huge luxury to tackle the subjects you really want to talk about. I really realise this now. I want to learn, and we learn a lot from others and from the faith of others. The sentence of Monsignor Lustiger that I put at the end of the film sums up my path as well: to go and see very far, to go and look very far from oneself in order to embrace what one is deeply.

### **You invite us into your childhood memories too, through family archive images in Casablanca...**

Gad Elmaleh: My father filmed a lot when we were children. He took a lot of photos too. I like having these images at the beginning of the film. I really like the opening sequence of Apatow's *Funny People*, because you see the bunch of actors, all young, doing gags on the phone. It's an archive, and when you see it, you think it's all there, that it's the matrix. My sister tells us in the film that we entered the Notre-Dame church in Casablanca as children which we were categorically forbidden to do. She says I was dazzled by Our Lady's statue, and it's true! Churches are places that move me. I am sensitive to their beauty. I don't feel the same emotion when I enter a synagogue because the emotion emerges with the fervour of the prayer. It is another connection, another relationship that is created.

### **Ibrahim Maalouf composed the film's score. How did that collaboration go?**

Gad Elmaleh: Ibrahim composed almost in real time. I sent him the footage, and we talked about the film together. I know Ibrahim well. I love this guy. I love his work and his music. We often talk together about Lebanon, the Lebanese culture, the history of this country, a cradle of several religions and cults. In short, Ibrahim was moved by my approach and by the film and he agreed



to do the music. It's very beautiful music, both gentle and powerful. It accompanies the film, without overloading it or suffocating the emotion. That's what we wanted. Nothing heavy.

## **INTERVIEW WITH ISAAC SHARRY (PRODUCER)**

### ***How long have you known Gad?***

**Isaac Sharry:** Actually, we've known each other for a long time. We both come from Morocco, he from Casablanca, I from Fez. I've always followed his career closely. I even went to see him in the United States, for his show at Carnegie Hall. Seinfeld came out and winked at him on stage. They were accomplices. It was magic. It was very emotional.

### ***How did you react when he approached you with his project and when he told you what the subject matter would be?***

**Isaac Sharry:** When Gad told me he wanted to make a film and then told me what it would be about - he said that he wanted to tell a love story: his crush on the Virgin Mary. To be honest, I almost fell off my chair. At first, I thought it had to be a joke! But he spoke so earnestly, with enthusiasm and from his heart. His desire to tell this story so urgently excited me and we decided that we'd make the film together as soon as possible. In short, he told me about his idea in April 2021 and the film was shot at the end of July 2021. We wrote it in a month and a half, prepared it in a month and shot it in a month.

### ***He had never mentioned it before?***

**Isaac Sharry:** No, I had no idea of Mary's place in Gad's heart, neither I nor his family, nobody suspected anything. Gad has always been one to surprise, but this time, he outdid himself! At the same time, he was completely sincere. Gad always does things 100%, he's naturally curious. He went to Talmudic school, he knows the Hebrew texts, he reads both the Old and the New Testament.

### ***Can you tell us more?***

**Isaac Sharry:** You can imagine what a challenge and privilege it was as a producer to produce a film on this subject with Gad Elmaleh. He let me into his heart and his personal world. That allowed me to be able to support him in the right way, I hope. When a producer is lucky enough to be able to work with a talent in this way, they are enriched, and thanks to him I discovered the Catholic world that I knew nothing about. At the beginning, nobody knew about this project. We didn't send the script to anyone. We wanted to do the entire thing ourselves in the utmost secrecy. Only Canal + read it and were on board immediately and I am extremely grateful to them. The further into making the film we got, the more I felt we were doing something special. Cinema is also a temple and we are all inhabited by this belief with Gad.

## **You mentioned challenges, so writing the script was one of them?**

**Isaac Sharry:** Yes, it was a challenge knowing that we only had three months to write, prepare and shoot a film. Writing the script was a crucial step. The first versions were a bit too content-heavy because Gad wanted to say a lot of things. We had to sort it out, get to the essential point. It was meeting and working with Benjamin Charbit that helped to channel all this. I introduced him to Benjamin, a screenwriter who I find incredibly talented. I knew that he and Gad would get on well. Within a month, the script was written, and we knew that the protagonists would all, or almost all, be played by people close to Gad.



**Gad's parents play themselves. Through this film in the form of a self-portrait, Gad shows his love for his parents, and he does so through acting, acting together.**

**Isaac Sharry:** I think Gad wanted to make this film for a lot of reasons, and one of those reasons is his parents, who he loves and who love him. Gad is in his fifties now and feels freer I think, but there are still things that are difficult to say to your parents, even when you are an adult, and admitting that you love the Virgin Mary is one of the things that is not easy to say, especially in quite a traditional Jewish family. For me, the challenge was to tell the truth, not to try to hide it. Making the film as a documentary made sense too.

## **How did the filming go?**

**Isaac Sharry:** We shot with a small crew that varied between 12 and 20 people depending on the day. Two cameras became necessary quite quickly because we needed a maximum of images and reactions from the protagonists.

So this small team, which became big through its involvement, helped Gad tell his story. Everyone on the set felt that something very emotional was happening on this shoot. The whole team was a

big heart that beat in time with Gad's. Something very strong happened on that set that I think will stay with us for a long time.

**It's an unsettling film because Gad gives himself away in a way he rarely has. He shows us a side of him that we didn't know existed. We laugh, because situations sometimes naturally provoke laughter, but not in a mocking way.**

**Isaac Sharry:** Yes, it's not a film that makes fun of anyone at all. On the contrary, it is a film that shows someone questioning himself, his faith, his religion, and by the same token, questions us as well. What is the purpose of our being on earth? Those who know Gad know that he is much deeper than people imagine him to be. Gad and I have several things in common, one of which is that we both went to a yechiva (centre for Talmudic studies) where the essence of study is to constantly question oneself, to question the world in which one lives and to be constantly searching for the truth. This film is in a way Gad's techuva, it is a process of repentance in Judaism, the return to the point from which one may have strayed.

**What do you take away from this experience?**

**Isaac Sharry:** It was a film that brought me very close to Gad. I learned a lot from him, he took me to places I didn't know where I met people who touched me deeply. It was very rewarding to work side by side with him. For this I am deeply grateful to him. This film and the way we made it was a challenge as a producer but it showed me that when a director and a producer work in harmony, anything is possible.



## **BIOGRAPHIES**

### **GAD ELMALEH (DIRECTOR, LEAD ACTOR)**

Gad Elmaleh was born on 19 April 1971 in Casablanca, Morocco. At the age of 17, he left Morocco for Canada and worked in Montreal for radio, television and in theatres. Then, in 1992, he left for Paris where he was selected for the free class of the Cours Florent, which he followed for three years. In 1994 - 1995, he wrote his first one man show DECALAGES. The public discovered the young comedian and showered him. He also started a career in the movies, in HI COUSIN!, by Merzack Allouache, in 1995. But it was with his second show, LA VIE NORMALE directed by Isabelle Nanty, that Gad really became a success, playing for a sold-out house. He then multiplied his film appearances and it was in 2000 that his consecration came with the role of the seducer Dov in WOULD I LIE TO YOU 2, one of the biggest French box-office hits of the year.

In 2003, with the support of Merzak Allouache, he transposed the adventures of one of his favourite characters to the screen: "CHOUCHOU". The film was a real hit, with over 4 million admissions. He followed this up with OLE, alongside Gérard Depardieu, played the lead in Pierre Salvadori's PRICELESS alongside Audrey Tautou and played "Pignon" in Francis Veber's THE VALET.

In 2004 and 2005, he was Master of Ceremonies for the 29th and 30th Cesar Awards. In 2006, Gad was made a Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters. He was still successful with his one-man show L'AUTRE, C'EST MOI, which he directed himself, and went on an international tour, playing in London, Miami, New York, Los Angeles and Montreal, making him the first French-speaking comedian to tour the United States. In the spring of 2007, Gad completed the writing of his new show PAPA EST EN HAUT, which he spent a year testing in small, intimate venues. He then embarked on a major tour of 60 dates in the provinces, then played at the Olympia for 7 weeks, to a full house. In 2008, he also played PAPA EST EN HAUT at the Palais des Sports for 7 weeks to a full houses.

At the same time, Gad wrote and directed his first film COCO in which he played the title role. Coco, a character inspired by one of his stage characters, is a flamboyant and megalomaniacal billionaire who wants to organize an extraordinary bar mitzvah for his son. In March 2009, Gad achieved a big dream: he left for Los Angeles to shoot under the direction of Steven Spielberg in THE ADVENTURES OF TINTIN, alongside Daniel Craig and Jamie Bell. In 2010, Gad will perform PAPA EST EN HAUT again with a tour of 70 dates in the provinces and 7 weeks at the Palais des Sports from 3 March to 24 April 2010. He will also be Master of Ceremonies for the 35th César Awards alongside Valerie Lemerrier.

In 2011 he shot HAPPINESS NEVER COMES ALONE with Sophie Marceau and THE DREAM TEAM by Olivier Dahan with Omar Sy, Franck Dubosc, Ramzy Bedia, José Garcia and Joey Starr. In 2012 he starred in the film CAPITAL by Costa Gavras. That same year he shot under the direction of Michel Gondry MOOD INDIGO with Romain Duris, Audrey Tautou and Omar Sy, film released in 2013. At the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013, Gad started writing a new show which became SANS TAMBOUR and was presented in Paris in June 2013 during 30 sold-out performances. In 2014 Gad celebrates his 20 years on stage with a show played 20 times at the Palais des Sports in Paris, the show 20 ANS DE SCENE is an adaptation of SANS TAMBOUR with

notably the return of Chouchou on stage. In September 2015 the show OH MY GAD was created at Joe's Pub in New York, a show 100% in English which is a new challenge in Gad's career.

After more than 70 sold out shows in the United States between September 2015 and June 2016 he started a tour in France, Belgium, and Switzerland with Kev Adams for the show TOUT EST POSSIBLE. This show will gather almost 300 000 spectators in 39 performances from October to December 2016. In January 2017, Gad resumed the OH MY GAD tour in the United States, which will end in December 2018 with the world tour THE DREAM TOUR, which includes stops in Berlin, Oslo, Copenhagen, London, NYC, Los Angeles, Miami, Amsterdam, Singapore, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Dubai.

His 1st Netflix series HUGE IN FRANCE was released on the platform in April 2018.

In 2020, his 7th solo show D'AILLEURS will begin touring in French, reaching over 500,000 shows in 110 sold out shows, including 20 exceptional shows at the Dome de Paris.

## **FILMOGRAPHY**

<b>2022</b>	<b>STAY WITH US</b>
<b>2016</b>	<b>PATTAYA</b>
<b>2013</b>	<b>MOOD INDIGO</b>
<b>2012</b>	<b>CAPITAL</b>
	<b>HAPPINESS NEVER COMES ALONE</b>
<b>2011</b>	<b>THE DREAM TEAM</b>
	<b>MIDNIGHT IN PARIS</b>
	<b>THE ADVENTURES OF TINTIN</b>
<b>2010</b>	<b>THE ROUNDUP</b>
<b>2008</b>	<b>COCO</b>
<b>2006</b>	<b>PRICELESS</b>
	<b>THE VALET</b>
<b>2003</b>	<b>CHOUCHOU</b>
<b>2001</b>	<b>WOULD I LIE TO YOU 2</b>
<b>1997</b>	<b>HI COUSIN !</b>

## **ISAAC SHARRY (PRODUCER)**

After Drama studies at the French renowned school *Ecole nationale supérieure des arts et techniques du théâtre de la rue Blanche*, Isaac Sharry played in a lot of popular and author's French movies such as "Déjà mort" (1998) directed by Olivier Dahan, "La vérité si je mens" by Thomas Gilou (1997, and sequel in 2001 and 2011), "Les Kidnappeurs" (1998) directed by Graham Guit, "Le premier cercle" directed by Laurent Tuel and starring Jean Reno, etc.

In parallel he created the production company Vito Films in 2006, and worked as screenwriter on different productions.

With Vito Films, he notably produced "Neuilly sa mère 1" and "Neuilly sa mère 2", "Les seigneurs" by Olivier Dahan, "Je compte sur vous" by Pascal Elbé, "La ritournelle" by Marc Fitoussi, "Enorme" by Sophie Letourneur, the documentary "The State of Texas Vs Melissa" by Sabrina Van Tassel and soon "Reste un peu" by Gad Elmaleh (national release on November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022) and "Les Cyclades" by Marc Fitoussi (national release on January 11, 2023).

## **FILMOGRAPHY**

<b>2022</b>	<b>STAY WITH US</b>
<b>2020</b>	<b>THE STATE OF TEXAS VS.</b>
<b>2018</b>	<b>NEUILLY YO MAMA II</b>
<b>2012</b>	<b>THE DREAMTEAM</b>
<b>2009</b>	<b>NEUILLY YO MAMA COMES ULTIMATE HEIST EYES WIDE OPEN</b>
<b>2008</b>	<b>COCO</b>
<b>2005</b>	<b>LES MAUVAIS JOUEURS</b>
<b>2003</b>	<b>THE PACT OF SILENCE OSMOSE</b>



## **ARTISTIC LIST**

<b>GAD ELMALEH</b>	Himself
<b>REGINE ELMALEH</b>	Herself (mother)
<b>DAVID ELMALEH</b>	Himself (father)
<b>OLIVIA JUBIN</b>	Agnès
<b>WILLIAM AZOULAY</b>	William
<b>JUDITH ELMALEH</b>	Herself (sister)
<b>CATHERINE THIERCELIN</b>	Sister Catherine
<b>NICOLAS PORT</b>	Father Barthélémy
<b>MEDHI DJAADI</b>	Medhi

# **CREDITS**

## **SCENARIO ET REALISATION**

Gad ELMALEH, Benjamin CHARBIT

## **PRODUCTEUR**

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## **REGIE**

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## **SON**

Utku INSEL, Olivier le VACON