

# PRESS KIT



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## Albertine Zullo & David Tutevoix

2017 | 14 min 25 s

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Animation technique: Stop-motion

In coproduction with



/// HELIUM FILMS //

PARMI  
•  
LES LUCIOLES  
FILMS



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# Selections and Awards



Locarno Festival  
Official selection

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## Synopsis

Madeleine the Human Cannonball and her husband are carnies. Their lives, like their show, seem to be perfectly under control. But in reality, Madeleine is unhappy and wants to break out of her routine. Without saying a word, she leaves her husband and becomes the Bearded Lady. Time passes, but their love for each other does not die.

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## Long Description

Madeleine and her husband are carnies who travel from village to village putting on a spectacular show: they fire a cannon that sends Madeleine hurtling through the sky as their audience watches on in awe. But the couple's domestic life is less than spectacular—every day seems to unfold just like the one before it. One morning, Madeleine makes a surprising decision that changes the course of her life. Time passes, but the couple's love for each other does not die.

Working together as co-directors for the first time, Swiss illustrator Albertine Zullo and French cinematographer David Toutevoix use stop-motion animation to bring this magnificent love story to life. Blending humour and tenderness in equal amounts, this superb, bittersweet short film examines universal questions about human relationships and the test of time.

*The Cannonball Woman* is an international co-production between Parmi Les Lucioles Films (France), Helium Films (Switzerland) and the NFB (Canada). The producer is Claude Barras, director of the hit animated feature *My Life as a Zucchini*.

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## Electronic Documents

### Press Kit

Including stills, trailer and making-of:  
[mediaspace.nfb.ca/epk/the-cannonball-woman](https://mediaspace.nfb.ca/epk/the-cannonball-woman)

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# Interview with Albertine Zullo and David Tutevoix

## What gave you the idea of directing your first film together?

**DT:** I had known Albertine and Germano [Ed. note: writer Germano Zullo, Albertine's husband] for a few years, because I had adapted their book, *The Genie in the Ravioli Can*, into a film produced and directed by Claude Barras. Since this was the first time that she and I would be co-directing a film, we decided to make the most of our complementary experience—hers on the writing end and mine on the technical. I really wanted to work with her.

**AZ:** Our skill sets are very different. I had no experience in filming, in lighting, or in positioning images in space. David has all that: it's his trade and his sensibility. What I brought was my experience as an author, with Germano: the film's intent, its characters, its graphical style.

**DT:** But we still had one thing in common: we create images. We work with colour, light, and framing. Our respective methods are very different, but our ultimate goals are the same.

## What is the biggest lesson that you've learned from this first experience?

**AZ:** Teamwork. All of a sudden, there are all these people on the set, with all their special knowledge and talents, and they're working toward a common goal. That's something new for me. When you're an illustrator like me or an author like Germano, you work all alone off in a corner. I also learned about the pace of filming. In fact, I really learned all kinds of things at every stage of the film's development!

**DT:** I had already been working closely with directors for many years. What I had to learn on this film was how to make the decisions that had usually been made by someone else. Faced with so many possibilities, I had to decide which ones I could make happen with the time and money I had.

## Why did stop-motion animation lend itself so well to telling this particular story?

**AZ:** In stop-motion animation, it's important to take things slowly, because everything is embodied and takes on life and meaning. You have to design and build every last detail, such as the plates on a table, or the curtains in the background. It's almost like playing dolls. I found this method really suited *The Cannonball Woman*, because there is something palpable and fairly realistic about it.

**DT:** Stop-motion animation is very interesting, because the sets and characters you're working with are real. Obviously, if you wait for them to move on their own, you're going to wait a long time [laughs]! But still, you're working with real material and real light in a real studio, and in the end that gives your moving images a special quality.

**AZ:** It's more like live-action films than animated drawings. You're in a studio with elaborate lighting and electrical systems. I see it as a kind of mini-shoot. Our puppets are our actors, sort of our own personal Gérard Depardieu and Catherine Deneuve.

**Does stop-motion let you maintain that delicate but important balance between the film's dramatic side and its lighter side?**

**AZ:** I think so, because it lets us play a lot with rhythm, silence, and the way the characters look at each other. The way we light them matters a lot too. I think that what's really remarkable about stop-motion animation is the lighting. You can convey a lot with very little.

**DT:** In this film, a lot of things work together in pairs—the husband and the wife, the earth and the sky—and we really had fun with that. It's a job where you really do get the chance to have a lot of fun. The challenge was always to find a way to evoke these pairs of things that sometimes come together and sometimes are separated.

**AZ:** You can really see the progression from *The Genie in the Ravioli Can* to *My Life as a Zucchini* to this film. I think that *The Cannonball Woman* benefitted from the experience that Helium gained and the techniques that it developed in the two earlier films. Not only in the production, but also in the sets, the clouds... I find this very touching: it means that we are growing along with our passions and our know-how.

**DT:** We are more and more demanding with ourselves. We learn a lot every time, but we're always asking ourselves how we can change and improve. Whether it's the sets or the props or the costumes, we never do the same thing twice—quite the contrary!

**How did you go about creating the sets?**

**AZ:** I came with some colour drawings and a few ideas. I was inspired by the Swiss films of the 1970s, and also by a certain kind of landscape in southern France. I wanted some roadside, some hills, some small, fairly modest houses, like in those villages in France that are neither ugly nor charming, but somewhere in between.

**DT:** We thought a lot about the trees and the sky, and how we should film them. Even though we had already created the sky in a similar way for *My Life as a Zucchini*, we tried to film it differently this time. We built everything, then used digital technology to add or delete certain things. Even for the smoke effects, we filmed little wads of cotton, then inserted them into the image. We had three shooting sets; they weren't huge, but they still gave us room to work, though it wasn't easy to convey a sense of infinity.

**When you adapt an illustrated book into an animated film, you also give the characters voices, and life through their movements. Are there any big differences between this film and the original book?**

**AZ:** Well, of course, in the script, we had to cut a lot of scenes that appeared in the book, or the film would have been too expensive and too long! The relationship to time is different too. And the book was in black and white, so getting to work in colour in the film was really liberating for me! The result is very faithful to what I had in mind—the emotions, and what the characters become on screen. And it's great to be able to design the characters down to the last detail—to dress them, to choose the voices, and so on. In fact, David does the voice of the bearded man in the film [laughs].

**DT:** I used a stage name [laughs]!

### **How was the rest of the sound in the film designed?**

**DT:** The film is set in a somewhat desert-like countryside, but a lot of the action takes place in the air. So there aren't many sounds, but the ones you do hear are very important: the sound of the air, and the woman flying through it like a cannonball. We were going for a very spare kind of sound, and our sound designer did a great job of achieving it.

### **While you were working on *The Cannonball Woman*, did you have any ideas that you just couldn't pull off?**

**AZ:** The scene at the end with the Vespa. We wanted it to keep receding infinitely, like in a Charlie Chaplin film. But it was too complicated, so we found another angle, and it worked out fine!

**DT:** I think that if you have the time and the resources, you can do anything. And if you can't, you invent another approach. For example, you don't want to show your characters walking too much, because it's complicated and it takes a lot of time. The stop-motion technique is somewhat surprising: on the one hand, it's very high-tech, but on the other, it requires a lot of hands-on craftsmanship. Making inanimate objects move is almost magic—sometimes complicated, but always fascinating!



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# Images



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# Images





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# Team Bios

## **Albertine Zullo**

*Filmmaker, Graphic Design*



Albertine Zullo was born in Dardagny, Switzerland, in 1967. She draws illustrations for print media, designs posters and other items, and works with directors of animated films and theatrical productions.

For 17 years, she taught silkscreen printing and illustration at the Geneva School of Art and Design (HEAD). She has published many books for children and for adults, including several in collaboration with author Germano Zullo. Their picture books have won numerous awards, including the New York Times Best Illustrated Children's Book Award, in 2012, and the Bologna Ragazzi Award in the fiction category in 2016.

Zullo exhibits her work regularly both in Switzerland and elsewhere.

## **David Toutevoix**

*Filmmaker, Cinematography*



Photo: Nicolas Demare

After earning his National Postgraduate Degree in Plastic Arts from the École des Beaux-Arts in Avignon, France, David Toutevoix pursued his education in the art of the image by working first as a camera operator and then as a camera operator/director of photography specializing in stop-motion animation.

He worked as assistant to director of photography Renato Berta on the animated feature *Max & Co.* and as director of photography for director Claude Barras, first on his animated short films and then on his animated feature *My Life as a Zucchini*.

In 2016, Toutevoix co-directed his first animated short, *The Cannonball Woman*, with Albertine Zullo; he also served as director of photography on this film.



## **Marianne Chazelas**

*First Assistant Director, Line Producer (Parmi les lucioles Films, France)*



Photo: Nicolas Demare

After having worked in the audiovisual world for four years in Paris, Marianne Chazelas turned to stop-motion animation with the feature film *Max & Co.*, by Samuel and Frédéric Guillaume. It was the birth of a newfound passion. She went on to work as a first assistant director on Vincent Patar and Stéphane Aubier's feature *Panique au village (A Town Called Panic)* and on a number of Belgian and Swiss short films. Having assisted Claude Barras for two years on the feature *My Life as a Zucchini*, Marianne joined Parmi les lucioles Films as executive producer on *The Cannonball Woman*, while continuing to also work as a first assistant director.

## **Maxime Fossier**

*Line Producer (Parmi les lucioles Films, France)*



Photo: Nicolas Demare

Maxime Fossier worked in the audiovisual industry for years as a technician and assistant director on documentaries, dramas and advertising. He first worked in animation in 2014 on *My Life as a Zucchini* and decided to pursue the genre further. Today, he is a camera operator and works in association with Marianne Chazelas as an executive producer with Parmi les lucioles Films.

**Maral Mohammadian**

*Producer (NFB)*



Maral Mohammadian is a Producer at the renowned National Film Board of Canada's English Program Animation Studio. She was recruited by the NFB in 2006 as the first Associate Producer of Hothouse, the celebrated apprenticeship program for emerging animation filmmakers that has spawned such gems as *Sweet Talk* (by Esteban Azuela), *Git Gob* (by Philip Eddolls) and *Orange* (by Sylvie Trouvé). Maral has nurtured artists in the Making Music emerging filmmaker program that created *The Mixy Tapes* (by David Seitz and Mike Wray) which toured as part of Best of Ottawa 2008.

Maral's recent projects include *The Weatherman and the Shadowboxer* by Randall Okita, an innovative animation/live action hybrid which won Best Canadian Short Film at the 2014 Toronto International Film Festival and Best Experimental Film at the NYC Shorts Festival, and *BAM*, an animated short directed by Howie Shia which follows a young boxer as he struggles to understand the violent rage within himself.

Prior to joining the NFB, Maral was the Workshop Programmer and Director of the Television Animation Conference at the Ottawa International Animation Festival. She studied Cinema at Carleton University.

## Claude Barras

Executive Producer (*Helium Films, Suisse*)

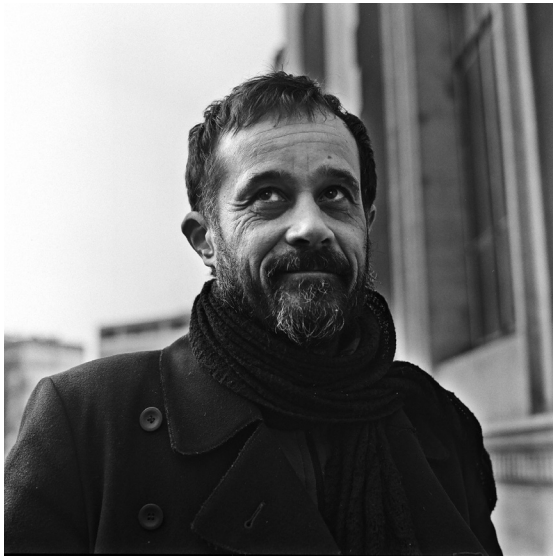


Photo: Mehdi Benkler

Originally from Switzerland, Claude Barras earned a diploma in illustration from the Emile Cohl School and took anthropology courses at Université Lumière, both in Lyon, before returning to his native country to study computer graphics at ECAL.

As part of the Helium Films collective he went on to produce about a dozen short animated films, many of which have won awards at numerous festivals.

In 2013, he began directing his first feature-length film, *My Life as a Zucchini*. Three years later, the film debuted at the Cannes Film Festival's Directors' Fortnight. To date, it has been seen by more than 175,000 viewers in Switzerland and 800,000 in France, in addition to winning some 50 awards—including two Césars, three Quartzes, a European Film Award, and two Cristals at Annecy—and receiving Golden Globe and Oscar nominations. *My Life as a Zucchini* has also been sold to 60 countries, including Russia, China and Japan. Barras is currently developing two new features while continuing his work as a producer.

## Jérôme Duc-Maugé

Executive Producer (*Parmi les lucioles Films, France*)



Photo: Nicolas Demare

Jérôme Duc-Maugé studied at the ESRA International Film School before working on dramas as a camera assistant and then on documentaries as a chief camera operator. In 2001, after completing training in technical production at the Institut national de l'audiovisuel, he began working exclusively in production. He served as an executive producer on advertising films, and in 2002 founded cocottesminute productions, through which he has produced about 60 documentaries for television and the web. He created Parmi les lucioles Films in 2008 to produce dramas and animation. Duc-Maugé has produced several short films, including Hélène Friren's *Au poil* and *The Cannonball Woman* for CANAL+, and the animated series *Juliette Génération 7.0* for ARTE. In 2013, he graduated from the IAE École Universitaire Management with a master's degree in Management and Commercial Strategy.

## Michael Fukushima

Executive Producer (NFB)



Michael Fukushima has been making films since 1984. He joined the NFB in 1990 to direct the animated documentary *Minoru: Memory of Exile* (1992), winner of the Hot Docs Best Short Documentary award. Michael became an NFB animation producer in 1997, co-founding the NFB's flagship emerging filmmaker program, Hothouse, in 2002 and was appointed executive producer of the NFB's fabled Animation Studio in 2013.

Some notable films in his filmography include Genie Award winner *cNote* (2004), by Chris Hinton; Shira Avni's animated documentary *Tying Your Own Shoes* (2009), which won the Golden Dove at DOK Leipzig and the prestigious NHK Japan Prize; *Muybridge's Strings* (2011), by Oscar-nominated Japanese filmmaker Koji Yamamura; Oscar-nominated films *Dimanche* (2011), by Patrick Doyon, and *Me and My Moulton* (2014), by Torill Kove; and, most recently, Cordell Barker's *If I Was God...* and Ann Marie Fleming's *Window Horses*. Michael now mostly produces the producers and offers up sagacity, but he continues to keep his hand in—this year, on the first short film in two decades by Oscar winners Alison Snowden and David Fine, and on Oscar winner Torill Kove's new film, *Threads*.



# Credits

Story

**Germano Zullo**

Graphic Design

**Albertine Zullo**

Cinematography

**David Tutevoix**

First Assistant Director

**Marianne Chazelas**

Editing

**Valentin Rotelli**

Music

**Normand Roger**

Sound Design

**Pierre Yves Drapeau**

Line Producers

**Marianne Chazelas**

**(Parmi les lucioles Films)**

**Maxime Fossier**

**(Parmi les lucioles Films)**

Producer

**Maral Mohammadian (NFB)**

Executive Producers

**Claude Barras (Helium Films)**

**Jérôme Duc-Maugé**

**(Parmi les lucioles Films)**

**Michael Fukushima (NFB)**

A **Helium Films**, **Parmi les lucioles Films** and **National Film Board of Canada** production in co-production with **RTS Radio-Télévision Suisse**.

With the participation of l'**Office fédéral de la culture** (OFC), **Cinéforum** and the support of la **Loterie Romande**, région Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes.

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CINÉFORUM



La Région  
Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes

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## About the NFB

The National Film Board of Canada (NFB) produces groundbreaking animation at its studios in Montreal and at NFB centres across Canada, as well as via international co-productions with many of the world's leading auteur animators. The NFB is a leader in developing new approaches to stereoscopic 3D animation and animated content for new platforms. The NFB has created over 13,000 productions and won over 7,000 awards, with NFB animation accounting for 7 of the NFB's 12 Oscars, as well as 6 grand prizes at France's Annecy International Animated Film Festival, 4 Palmes d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival and 2 Golden Bears at Berlinale. To access acclaimed NFB animation, visit [NFB.ca](http://NFB.ca) or download our apps for mobile devices.

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## Helium Films

Founded in 2002, Helium Films creates and produces high-quality animation. Doubling as a stop-motion animation studio since 2010, Helium Films has developed a network of expertise that includes screenwriters, illustrators, technicians, producers and directors—all of whom share a common passion and enthusiasm for animation.

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## Parmi les lucioles Films

Jérôme Duc-Maugé's first company, cocottesminute, has been producing documentary films since 2004. In 2008, he founded Parmi les lucioles Films to produce animated and fiction films. While maintaining the same high standards for quality, Parmi les lucioles tells stories with fictional characters, sometimes inspired by real facts, but always with the goal of questioning the relationship between individuals and society.