



FESTIVAL DE CANNES  
SPECIAL SCREENING  
2021 OFFICIAL SELECTION

# MI IUBITA MON AMOUR

A FILM BY NOÉMIE MERLANT



**NORD-OUEST**

PRESENTS



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# **MI IUBITA**

# **MON AMOUR**

**A FILM BY NOÉMIE MERLANT**

**2021 - FRANCE - DRAMA - 2.39 - 95 MIN**

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## **CAST**

Gimi Covaci  
Noémie Merlant  
Sanda Codreanu  
Clara Lama-Schmit  
Alexia Lefaix  
Kita Covaci  
Jean Covaci  
Wallerand Denormandie

**Nino**  
**Jeanne**  
**Katia**  
**Lola**  
**Helena**  
**Kita**  
**Jean**  
**Victor**

## **CREW**

Director  
Screenplay

Producer

Associated Producer

DoP  
Editor  
Original score  
Sound

**Noémie Merlant**  
**Noémie Merlant**  
**Gimi Covaci**  
**Pierre Guyard**  
**Noémie Merlant**  
**Christophe Rossignon**  
**Philip Boëffard**  
**Evgenia Alexandrova**  
**Sanabel Cherqaoui**  
**Saycet**  
**Armance Durix**  
**Emeline Aldeguer**  
**Valère Raigneau**  
**Pierre-Jean Labrusse**

Production  
International Sales  
French Distributor

**Nord-Ouest Films**  
**Films Boutique**  
**Tandem**



## **SYNOPSIS**

Jeanne is traveling to Romania to celebrate her bachelorette party with her friends when she meets Nino and his family. They are worlds away from one another, yet for the two of them it is the beginning of a passionate and timeless summer.



**INTERVIEW WITH  
NOÉMIE MERLANT**

***MI IUBITA MON AMOUR* is a very unusual first film: it was shot in Romania on a very tight budget with non-professional actors. How did the project come about?**

After making my short film *SHAKIRA*, I saw myself as being more legitimate as a filmmaker and also felt the need to express myself. Sanda, Alexia and Clara, who play in *MI IUBITA* are my friends in real life. They are actresses, and we support each other's personal projects. They were with me when I shot *SHAKIRA*. Gimi [Covaci], the girls and I are a close-knit group of friends, we speak a great deal about cinema and the idea of making a movie together came to us naturally.

Gimi suggested that we spend the summer in Romania, where he comes from, and while organizing the trip, we thought: "Why don't we make a film there

together?" I loved how spontaneous the idea was, but I hadn't a story in mind. A little while later, Gimi said to me: "Why don't we start with our friendships in the group and then speak about our love story?" And then we spontaneously started working, fueled by this sort of creative surge.

It was too late to put together a real crew and production team, but I had the feeling that it would be now or never. This impromptu way of doing things corresponded perfectly with our budding narrative: a story of freedom, immediacy, impulsion. I was also more comfortable shooting my first feature film without the pressure of having a big budget at stake, which would have paralyzed me. I needed to be free, without being too readily influenced, in order to keep our story as close as possible to what we wanted to say. So, we just pieced together our own small crew and we all left by car. Eleven people and fourteen days of shooting later, *MI IUBITA MON AMOUR* was born.

### **How did the writing process with Gimi Covaci go?**

We had a month. So I started with our friendship and romance as a base. Gimi helped me construct the dialogue and we worked as a team at a very intense pace. I felt it was vital to write a piece of fiction to address subjects that are important to me. I wanted to question the notions of belonging, social milieus, destiny, friendship, context, intimacy, marriage, consent, leaving space for silence, and the weight of certain actions. We drifted from reality to try and invent new narratives where we could deconstruct things to better understand each other and write even more freely.

### **The film shows a Roma family that takes a group of French women into their home in Romania. Did you want to flip the coin on events today where we often see Roma families being rejected in France and Western Europe?**

The idea was to unite two cultures, two ways of living and thinking, and to see what would happen. In the film, the girls become the destitute foreigners and it is Nino's family who takes them in. Suspicion gives way to observation and then sharing. The cultures suffuse into each other, walls crumble; emotions are



universal. We are always a foreigner to somebody. It really doesn't take much to see beyond the usual social dehumanization patterns. Gimi and I wanted to speak about the Roma community to shake up established biases and show people that we are all humans first and foremost, before being clichés.

**The romance between Jeanne and Nino develops very slowly and delicately. Nino is attentive and sweet. Did you want to offer a counterpoint to the cliché of a young and macho guy?**

The idea of time at a slower pace and progression is fundamental to this love story. We are caught up in predefined relationship patterns in which one person dominates and the other is dominated. I wanted to recount the blossoming of a love between two people who are separated by everything yet who end up finding each other, regardless. Nino is not a masculine stereotype, he is gentle and attentive, he listens. Jeanne is engaged to be married, she is surprised by their feelings, and so is he. This budding love that is shared by both of them is first expressed through mutual observation. And then the suspicion between them is soon swept away as they become acquainted and learn to know each other.

She tries to step out of her role as a soon-to-be married woman, which is already suffocating her. That is why I film Jeanne out of the frame at the beginning of the film: she sticks her head out of the car window because she needs to breathe. Thanks to Nino, she will free herself from her constraints, while Nino will escape a moment from his own constraints and together they will define a framework that is only theirs. He belongs to a marginalized community, but not by choice. Their house that is under construction symbolizes their aspiring to a certain normality. Meeting Nino's family is a reminder for Jeanne and the girls: you have to live in the present, seize the moment, life is a game. Nino knows how to observe, seize moments, and make them count.

**It seems that Nino needs to escape his family and community. They both have an irrepressible need to free themselves, don't you think?**

Exactly. Love also means stepping out of your comfort zone, it means looking for a connection between beings, watching and listening to another person. This is the reason why the film was constructed in two parts. In the first part, *Mi Iubita*, which means "my love" in Romani, we are in Nino's world. It's his language that is spoken. In the second part, *Mon Amour [My Love]*, Nino joins the girls, discovers the seaside, and enters these young women's world.

**Jeanne and Nino have different nationalities, different ethnicities, belong to different classes and age groups. This love transgresses a number of customs, social norms, and codes.**

Mutual love goes beyond differences. I also wanted to invert certain codes of representation. Often, it's the woman who is younger, whereas here it is the contrary. This love cannot be explained and is not under anyone's influence or hold. Depicting a love with so many differences seemed like an interesting way to have a conversation about consent. The balance of power is always an underlying presence, what is important is to be aware of it and not use it. Everyone needs to be aware of the power she or he has over the other and instead of using it, to defuse it. Each has to be attentive and receptive to words, body language and things left unsaid, and that is what happens between Jeanne and Nino.



**In the scenes at the beach, Nino and the girls make up a sort of ideal community. Was your idea to depict a sort of utopia come true?**

The scenes at the beach are at the heart of the film. This group composed of very different beings share things, listen to one another, laugh and desire... It's a slice of life, a moment of absolute happiness, where time is suspended and without conflict. We were all aware of the magic of these shared moments, of the richness of our exchanges. When we had to part ways at the end of the shoot, it was very upsetting everyone.

***MI IUBITA MON AMOUR* has very beautiful and delicate love scenes. Is this kind of scene difficult to tackle?**

This scene depicts Jeanne and Nino's relationship, their first time together, awkward and touching, like all first times. I didn't film this scene head on. More generally, I was attentive to making sure that all the scenes with rising desire would be delicate, modest, and represent an acute awareness of and attention to the other. This moment had to be built together, like a pas de deux, in a mix of attentiveness and sheer abandon. Jeanne whispers in Nino's ear, we don't know what she's saying but it doesn't matter, we understand that she is guiding him. Besides, she is also shy at that moment, and they show each other the way, reassure one another. It's important for me to shoot love and desire in this manner. I cleared away any conflict between them: their love scene is carnal, sensual, and singular.

**How was it working with your crew?**

We sent a rough script to young women who had just graduated from film school. One in photography and the other in sound. I was lucky to come across a wonderful cinematographer, Evgenia, and Armance for the sound. We got along very well, and we started shooting as soon as we arrived at Gimi's.

Sequencing started during the journey. On site, an assistant director joined us. We immediately started shooting with this minimal configuration. We had very little preparation, no idea of what the scenery would be beforehand. We had the

leading characters but not yet the supporting roles. We organized ourselves once we arrived and took turns acting as production manager. Gimi's mother cooked for us. I would get up early and map out the day's shooting order based on that day's available scenery, which Gimi handled. Then with the girls he'd go and scout for actors. We rehearsed with Gimi's parents. These constraints and the atypical decor generated a lot of joy and freedom which I hope will be felt throughout the film.

**The Covacis are very natural on screen, despite the fact that making a movie was something completely new to them.**

It was entirely new for them, and they were of an extremely generous nature. They loved the experience. The film is very specifically written, they had dialogue they had to learn, we encouraged them a great deal. The meal scene, where Nino's father speaks to the young women about their life experience, is a long 45-minute take that we shot in one evening. They forgot the camera's presence. I like leaving room for improvisation when I work, but within a given framework. I had asked specific things of them, and under everyone's kind and attentive eyes, this scene gave rise to a truthful slice of life captured by Evgenia's camera.

**Gimi Covaci is a young Roma who started in cinema with your short film SHAKIRA. He cowrote this feature film with you. Can you tell us about him?**

Gimi has a natural talent for cinema. A natural ease when he acts despite his lack of experience and never having taken an acting class. He also has a director's vision and is a true actors' director, he is excellent in what he does. He was the one to direct his parents. When I showed him the first rough cut, he also had intuitions about the editing. Yet he's only seen very few films, but he has a gift, a real feeling for cinema. In the role of Nino, he shows all the facets of a young man: ultra-sensitive, having both a masculine and feminine side. He also has responsibilities in his family. He's many things at once. Gimi has a lot to say, he has many wishes, including becoming an actor but also a director.

**Can you also introduce to us your group of actress friends who bring a great deal to the film?**

We met at Cours Florent acting school. Sanda Codreanu was in my first short film, *Je Suis #unebiche*, and she will have the leading role in my next film. We have a marvelous artistic relationship, and we support each other in our respective lives. I'm also very close to Clara and Alexia, who inspire me. We have a common energy, a desire to tell stories, stories told through women's eyes, to bring other worlds into being. The film is very feminine, as much in the content, the notion of desire, as in the form: two women, alone, leading a project, who dare, work, dream and who aren't afraid.

**In addition to the lighting created by your director of photography, there are a number of different musical scores that carry the film: where do your choices come from?**

Music plays an important role in the film. Saycet composed music that reflects the colors of the film, mixing acoustic guitar and gypsy sounds with modern-sounding electro. The music sweeps Jeanne and Nino away, accompanying these precious moments. We also were lucky to receive beautiful gifts from David Guetta, Sia, The Blaze, and Souad Massi. For me these were essential pieces. We were immersed in all of this music, and it accompanied us nonstop during that summer.



**INTERVIEW WITH  
GIMI COVACI**

**Before meeting Noémie Merlant and playing in her short film, *SHAKIRA*, were you interested in cinema?**

Of course, like all children, but I never believed I'd ever be able to work in cinema for a number of reasons: my ethnicity, my social standing. Being a Gypsy and a Romanian, talk about odds being stacked against you!

**Do you have a favorite film genre?**

It doesn't matter where the films come from, whether they're American or European. I don't pay attention to that. I love films as an art form, wherever they come from.

**You didn't study filmmaking or acting and yet you played in *SHAKIRA* and *MI IUBITA MON AMOUR*, which you also co-wrote. Was it difficult at first to act and write at the same time?**

I can't say that playing in *SHAKIRA* was easy, as it was my very first experience, but the story took place in an environment I was familiar with. I knew what it was like to live in the slums, to be in a precarious situation... In a certain way it didn't feel so much like I was acting, as the character and the context were so similar to the way my life used to be.

In *MI IUBITA MON AMOUR* as well, the film is fairly close to my personal experience. This said, nothing is easy, but if you really want to do something, if you are determined, then nothing is that complicated either.

**Noémie says you were the trigger for *MI IUBITA MON AMOUR*.**

Yes, it's true. She was making plans to come and spend her vacation with me and my family, in Romania, for two weeks, and she asked me to do some location scouting for a potential future film. And I answered: "Why not make one now?"

**In spite of your lack of experience, you were this film's "engine," isn't that fantastic?**

I wasn't really the engine. You know, to make an engine work, you need parts. I was only one of the parts, the spark... the spark plug.

**Not only were you the spark plug but you also co-wrote the film and, according to Noémie, you directed your parents, and you took part in the editing. She says you have an innate flair for filmmaking. Do you feel that way too?**

It's hard to say. But if Noémie said so, ok. It's impossible to assess your own work. I can only say that I love cinema. I can also say that I'm demanding, and I like things to be perfect. It's true, I directed my parents and some people from the village. I scouted filming locations, I wrote the scenes that involve my family, and

the film was shot in my house. It was hard, we funded the film ourselves, but as I said, if you really truly want something, then everything is possible.

### **Did filming at home with your family, and your friends, make things easier?**

It was a happy moment as I was sharing the story of my life, memories with my family. Seeing them be part of this was pure joy. The filming conditions were the difficult part – we made it in fourteen days, fifteen hours a day, with minimal means. It was a lot of work. For my parents and my friends, it was a little complicated at first, as they needed time to adjust, and understand how things worked. Once they got used to these things, they were as happy as I was.

### **The love story between Jeanne and Nino is very delicate, modest, and respectful.**

For me, it was very important to recount this story, which is Noémie's and mine. We changed it a bit for the film, of course. But when we started this project, I told Noémie: "If one day we're no longer together, when we're old, we'll be able to watch this film and re-live our story through this film." It's a trace that will always remain.

### **Did you also want to depict the Romani community as warm, generous, and welcoming?**

From the ages of 8 to 13, I grew up on the streets of Paris, near Place de la République. I saw how mean people could be with Gypsies, even though in my family, no one has ever done anything wrong, no one has ever stolen anything. We were ill-treated, insulted, people would spit on us when I was a kid. Yet, my goal in cinema is not to play the star, nor to pretend that I want to become the greatest actor. I don't even have a vengeful mindset, like "look at us, we're in Cannes, 'F' you, we're the best...," not at all! My goal is to convey a message through films, to show what Gypsies truly are like and do away with this dark and obscure reputation that people tend to stereotypically associate with them. People act as if "thief... dangerous person..." were written on their foreheads.

I want to tear off the mask that stops people from really seeing them. Roma people are first and foremost human beings.

**Did you and your parents see the film?**

I didn't have the courage to watch it at first, but I finally I did, to prepare for our interview. I don't know if it's a good film, but it looks exactly like what I wanted, what I was hoping for. My parents saw it too and they're very proud of the result.

**Do you want to continue working in cinema, whether as an actor, playwright, or even director?**

Yes, I want all of it. I'm preparing another film: I wrote a story and I'm looking for a producer for it. I'd like to be in it and direct it. I want to continue telling stories about my community, but not just that. For example, if someone offered me a beautiful role, that had nothing to do with the Romani context, I wouldn't hesitate. As I said, I love art, I love what's beautiful.

**You said you weren't going to Cannes with a vengeful frame of mind or as a way to show off. But isn't it exciting and uplifting to find yourself in this renowned festival with your very first feature film?**

Of course it is! I said I'm not going there to show off, but Cannes is very important to me, to Noémie, and the entire film crew. It's the acknowledgement of the work we've done over the past two years. And it's going to give the film serious visibility. It's great! Maybe it'll help me with future projects, to make films that are even better.



**SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY OF  
NOÉMIE MERLANT**

***As an Actress***

- ***MI IUBITA, MON AMOUR*** by Noemie Merlant, 2021
- ***A YEAR, A NIGHT*** by Isaki Lacuesta, 2021
- ***PARIS, 13th DISTRICT*** by Jacques Audiard, 2021
- ***JUMBO*** by Zoé Wittock, 2020
- ***PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE*** by Celine Sciamma, 2019

***As a Director***

- ***MI IUBITA, MON AMOUR***, 2021
- ***SHAKIRA***, 2019 (short film)
- ***JE SUIS UNE BICHE***, 2017 (short film)





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