

# MARADONA



FESTIVAL DE CANNES

OFFICIAL SELECTION  
OUT OF COMPETITION



BY  
**KUSTURICA**





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OFFICIAL SELECTION

OUT OF COMPETITION

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# MARADONA

BY KUSTURICA

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Photos can be downloaded from the film's web site: [www.maradona-lefilm.com](http://www.maradona-lefilm.com)

# MARADONA BY KUSTURICA

In this film, Emir Kusturica celebrates the incredible story of Diego Maradona: sports hero, living God of football, brilliant artist, champion of the people, fallen idol and inspiration to millions throughout the world.

From Buenos Aires to Naples – as well as Cuba – Emir Kusturica traces the life of this extraordinary man, from his humble beginnings to his worldwide fame, from the most spectacular rise to the tragic fall.

A unique documentary about 'the player of the century', filmed by his greatest fan.

# THE MEETING

The beginning, 2005: Emir Kusturica officially announces his documentary project on Diego Maradona: "It's the first film that will tackle all aspects of Maradona's life."

The multi-award-winning director, with two Palmes d'Or and numerous international prizes, will film the greatest player of all time! The news makes headlines worldwide. The filming will start in Buenos Aires then continue in Naples, an important place for Maradona's footballing achievements, then Cuba, his adopted city, and Belgrade, the film director's city: "My intention over the next five months is to find and make reappear Maradona's true personality."

This film promises to be the unique meeting between two titans, united by excess, passion and genius. No director alive could have better understood the explosive enigma that is Maradona, no director other than Kusturica could have gained Maradona's trust and friendship: "I always dreamed of being a football player and, in my way, I was." For the first time, Maradona agrees to a full and intimate collaboration and bares himself before the director's camera, to reveal the man behind the myth.

Buenos Aires, April 2nd 2005: It's the birthday of Dalma, Maradona's eldest daughter. Kusturica is there, with two cameras and a very small crew. Maradona is battling with his demons and the traces left in his body: heart, weight and knee problems. Hard to believe that this man will experience a phoenix-like resurrection. "The day I met him was more momentous than anything I expected," says Kusturica. "He's a force of nature, he emanates emotion, charm and great strength. A unique being." Four days later, at the Soul Café, the biggest stars of Latin American music have gathered to celebrate 'El Pibe de Oro', the 'Golden Child'. Everyone sings and Kusturica is called on stage.

The director and the football player.  
The gypsy and the rocker.  
Two artists face to face. The trip can begin.

From then on, the two men continually express their mutual admiration. In May 2005, Diego Maradona goes to the Cannes Film Festival because Emir Kusturica is President of the Jury. The two spend crazy nights together. Invited onto Diego Maradona's TV show in November 2005, Emir Kusturica is introduced by the football player as the brilliant director, his brother. They even kick a few balls back and forth. On November 4, 2005, at the Summit of the Americas, Kusturica is part of the protest movement organized against George W. Bush's arrival in Argentina. He films Diego Maradona in full political combat: "I am impressed by his vision of the world, his humour and his humanitarianism." On February 1st, 2008, during a No-Smoking Orchestra concert in Madrid, Diego Maradona, who watches the show from the balcony, gets up on stage and dances with Emir...

The magic of this film is due to this human and cinematic chemistry.

# THE SHOOT

Two giants. Politically incorrect, larger-than-life rebels. They meet, get to know each other, compare tattoos and other battle scars. One was born 45 years ago, in the Buenos Aires slums, and becomes a football legend at a very young age. The other grew up in Sarajevo, in a country now erased from the world map, before winning numerous awards including two Golden Palms. One writes, produces, acts, directs and plays with the No-Smoking Orchestra. The other, once a living god, former fallen angel, has reinvented himself as a good father, TV presenter, coach and vice president of a football club.

Two irreverent and uncontrollable rock 'n' roll characters, united over riotous months of filming: a road trip through Diego Maradona's extraordinary past and present.

Villa Fiorito, Buenos Aires: After more than two decades, Maradona makes an unexpected return to the poor neighbourhood of his birth: "Maradona isn't one of those people who gets rich and forgets, he never lost his soul. It was deeply moving, he's their hero. It was like he never left," says Kusturica. In the house where he grew up, the star and the director discuss childhood, family, football. And politics. Both men admire Che, both oppose neoliberalism, imperialism and Bush.

Maradona's other 'home' in Buenos Aires is 'La Bombonera', the stadium where Maradona and Kusturica join the centenary party for the mythic Argentinian team Boca Juniors. The crowd goes wild, greeting Maradona like a god. In Buenos Aires, there are riotous fake weddings, with hookers and johns, organized and 'consecrated' in the legendary Cocodrilo, a lap dancing bordello sponsored by the Maradonian Church. This church, which reunites more than 100,000 fans, was founded in 2000. The congregation meets twice a year: at Christmas, October 30th, celebrating Maradona's birth, and Easter, June 22nd, the day Maradona scored a goal with his hand.

Belgrade, June 2005: Another crazy city, in some ways the twin of Buenos Aires. After meeting the Prime Minister, Maradona and Kusturica visit the famous Red Star stadium, where the former football player recreates one of the greatest goals of his career, bringing victory for his Barcelona team, Barca, in 1982. The two men play in the empty stadium, like brothers. Maradona looks young again: he has lost 40 kilos since filming began.

Naples, late June 2005: The hero who restored pride to his city has returned. In a few seconds, the streets are packed. It's a riot. Tears, hysteria, joy... from fans many of whom are too young to have seen Maradona in his glory days.

Back to Buenos Aires: The journey ends where it started: "The film will show 'the three Maradonas' I discovered during the filming: the football teacher, the politically incorrect citizen fighting against the unilateral policies of the U.S, and the family man," says Kusturica.

A new Maradona, revitalized, gives his last interview to Kusturica. The trip is over. A new life begins for Diego.

# THE FILM

The film takes us through Maradona's extraordinary trajectory, during the year that Kusturica called "Maradona's rebirth": his life and career, his triumphs and defeats, the key places in his life – Buenos Aires, Cuba, Naples – until the decisive moment of his rebirth. From his humble beginnings in the Villa Fiorito slums to Buenos Aires today, where he now lives with his wife and two daughters: "The idea was to shine some light on Maradona's unfulfilled wish, to establish harmony within his family," like a family film, always at the heart of the individual's intimacy – under Emir Kusturica's exceptional regard.

The two faces of Maradona. On one hand, the public man, the hero, the icon, but also the passionate, committed, political man – very close to leaders like Fidel Castro – and outspoken opponent of globalisation. On the other hand, Maradona as never seen before, the private Maradona: his family life, his hopes, his fears, joys and frustrations. Through Kusturica, Maradona invites us to witness his transformations, revealing the essential humility that never left him. The unique opportunity to also relive the happiness that Diego Maradona has brought us all over the years.

This 'golden child' fell, but he got back on his feet again and Kusturica's film tells us not only the great man that he was, but also the great man he still is today: "I am an idealist. For me, Maradona will always be greater than the effect that the drugs had on him. He's an artist. To be an artist, it means surmounting his own barriers, it has nothing to do with our society that places you on a pedestal, to then destroy and bury you." Maradona discusses his years of abuse, he reveals his humanity and his qualities as a great sportsman, which allowed him to overcome adversity.

In the process of filming, Maradona returns to health, confronts the past, exorcises his demons. This is the story of a man who lives again. Diego Maradona by Emir Kusturica.

The result is wild and uncompromising, lively, chaotic, rich in emotions. And musical. As in the scene where Manu Chao sings "La Vida Tombola", his last song on Maradona. The singer tells the magazine "So Foot": "In the beginning, Kusturica wanted "Santa Maradona" for his film. I wasn't against it. The idea of participating in a meeting between Kusturica-Maradona was enough for me. They are very different, but they represent two bulls in my eyes. A great match... I really wanted to be there. I asked Kustu to give me the chance to write a new song, to put myself artistically at risk. Then I met Diego in Naples. At the beginning I thought of "Mala Fama" ("Bad Reputation"), on my last album. Then I wrote "La Vida Tombola". I sang it with two guitars in Argentina to Diego, he had just gotten out of the car. Kustu filmed it."

Si yo fuera Maradona  
viviría como él  
...mil cohetes... mil amigos  
y lo que venga a mil por cien...

(If I were Maradona,  
I would live like him,  
a thousand fuses... a thousand friends,  
and whatever comes, at one hundred percent...)

The director of "When Father Was Away on Business", "Time of the Gypsies", "Underground" and "Black Cat, White Cat" has found both a soul mate and a perfect film subject: "Maradona's life is so rich, so full of nuances, that I would change nothing, even if I was making a fiction film."

# DIEGO ARMANDO MARADONA – THE LIFE

Born on October 30, 1960 in the poor outskirts of Buenos Aires, Diego Armando Maradona is a true pop icon today, ranking alongside Marlon Brando, Elvis, Marilyn or Bob Marley. With two differences: first, Diego Armando is a living star. Second, this star is a football player. However, Maradona possesses the aura of a Hollywood star and the charisma of the greatest rock singers. He hasn't had the career of an ordinary football player. Instead, this small Argentinian endowed with a foot of gold, and the hand of God, was elected 'Player of the Century' in 2000. A gifted sportsman, enthralling, elevated to the rank of defiant artist. A man born poor, who by his genius, work and unique character, will work his way up to the summit, experience glory and fortune, then decadence and decline, and come close to death, before experiencing redemption. Diego Armando Maradona, rebellious athlete, admired aesthete, has lived several lives; here is one of them.

Diego is born in 1960 in Villa Fiorito, a flowery name that refers to a ghetto outside of Buenos Aires. The Maradona family, which already has four daughters, is extremely poor. From his infancy, the kid proves to be particularly adept with a football. Aged 11, he joins the Argentinos Juniors team. He quickly becomes a center of attraction, the media and the public marvel at this small juggler capable of keeping the ball on his foot for a seeming eternity. During a TV interview, he reveals his plan: "I have two dreams, play in the World Cup and... win it with Argentina." This is a 12-year-old kid speaking. In three years he becomes a professional player. The Argentinos Juniors are a team renowned for getting clobbered on the field. Thanks to Maradona, who becomes the captain, the team becomes one of the most feared in the championships. Diego scores goal after goal – 116 in 166 games! Spotted by the national sport selector, he joins Argentina's team. This Mozart with a football is 16 years old, an amazing age, but also a handicap: he is rejected from the 1978 World Cup because he's considered too young. In 1979, as captain of the Argentine Juniors, he leads the team to win the Youth World Cup. Diego is crowned Argentinian Golden Ball. His rise is meteoric, and he becomes a national football legend in 1981 when he leads his new club, the mythical and very popular Boca Juniors, to win the Argentine championship against the rich players of River Plate. Diego is a hero.

The following year, he misses out on his first World Cup: manhandled by defenders from all countries, he is ejected and Argentina is eliminated. His unique talent is still internationally celebrated, and he is picked up by FC Barcelona for a small fortune. His exploits are known on the field (38 goals in 58 games) and increasingly in the nightclubs. He leaves Spain at age 23, exchanging his mantle of cool prodigy for that of crazy genius. He signs with SSC Napoli, a modest Italian team where the supporters welcome him as a living legend. The osmosis

is perfect here: Maradona still has a magic touch with the football. He brings multiple victories to the club, as well as prizes (Champion of Italy in 1987 and 1990, Italian Cup in 1987, UEFA Cup in 1989 and Italian Supercup in 1990). He also develops his social awareness here, refusing to side with the rich, honouring his humble beginnings, and hones his skills as a reveller, increasingly making the headlines of the tabloids, where rumours start about his alleged links with the Camorra, a mafia-style organization in Naples.

Without doubt, the high point of the legend's career comes in 1986, when, at age 25, Diego participates in the World Cup. He accomplishes his second dream: winning it. Thanks to his inimitable talent (no player had ever been such an impressive dribbler), and a really bizarre trick: Maradona scores a goal with his hand against England. The referee doesn't notice, and the player will justify himself by saying that it must have been "the hand of God".

In 1990, the Argentine is close to replicating his success of four years ago (winning the World Cup), but he is stopped in the final by the talented Germans. From that moment on, as Diego Armando celebrates his 30th birthday, his career plummets. Following a check by the Italian police, the whole world discovers that the player is a cocaine addict. He flees Naples, transfers to Seville, then returns to Buenos Aires. He is suspended from the 1994 World Cup after he fails another doping test. Disgraced, he plays for three more years, then retires from football.

Retired, Maradona fights off boredom with drugs. In April 2004, a mild heart attack sends him to the hospital. Will he straighten up after his brush with death? Not immediately. For Diego, these years are fairly chaotic: he regularly falls back into drug use, has gastric ring surgery, returns constantly to the hospital. Maradona finds refuge with his friend Fidel Castro, and returns to the limelight with his very popular talk show "La Noche del 10". Between two trips to Cuba, he continues to defend the destitute, becomes a figure of anti-globalisation, and is seen with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez during the anti-Bush protests, flaunting his tattoo of Che to whoever wants to film it. In March 2007, Maradona must stop all activities for a short while to return to the hospital – officially due to overindulgence in alcohol, cigars and food. Diego's state of health remains alarming, as his doctors also detect hepatitis. But for the past year his medical bulletins give rise to optimism. His fan clubs no longer merely praise his past brilliance, they regularly announce the superstar's new projects. It's hard to keep count of the number of songs lauding him, in numerous countries. Programs are continually devoted to him. Football lovers or not, people around the world haven't stopped admiring him. His eldest daughter works in the film business, and Maradona, who no longer has anything to prove, is the star of a film by Emir Kusturica!

# INTERVIEW WITH EMIR KUSTURICA

## **Why did you want to make a film about Maradona?**

The first reason is that I am one of the millions of people around the world who jumped with joy when he scored his two goals against England in 1986. That game exemplifies justice in the world for the first and last time. Argentina and Serbia are two countries who have been crushed by the IMF. Argentina and Serbia fight against the IMF, which is a Western power. Therefore, I feel a closeness with Maradona. Moreover, Maradona is very popular in Serbia, our football resembles that of the Argentinians. Sometimes it's said that I'm the Maradona of cinema. The second reason is that I read some books that came out about him, some newspaper articles, I listened to the radio, and each time I found that the authors were not doing him justice.

## **You're interested in the rebel more than the player?**

That's part of it. The idea formed at the time of this summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, in Argentina, when Maradona spoke to criticize Bush. I found that very powerful. But one mustn't forget the magnificent player. I still remember the first time that I heard about him, in 1979, at the Junior World Cup in Tokyo. He did some amazing things. Recently, he came to see us in Serbia, to tell us about the goal he scored with Barcelona against Red Star Belgrade. A pure moment of genius.

## **In "Black Cat, White Cat", your character Matko the Gypsy plays cards alone, still cheats, wins a game and cries out: "Maradona!". Why?**

My idea was to give the feeling of ultimate victory. In the beginning, the actor cried out "Goal!". And then, stronger than "Goal!", there is "Maradona!", because a goal by Maradona is above that, it's not just any goal.

## **At what moment did you choose to make a documentary rather than a work of fiction?**

Because it was necessary to make a portrait. A portrait is the truth. And yet, it's exactly what I criticize other films about Maradona: they use him to tell another story. In the end, they miss the impact that he had on the whole world. Maradona is a true story, there's no need to add fiction.

## **Do you think that Diego Maradona is a true film character?**

As an actor, he's an incredible entertainer. He was born for the show. But it's more than that. If Andy Warhol had lived in our era, he would have been painting Diego instead of Marilyn. If Maradona hadn't been a football player, he would have found another way to become a star and he would have succeeded. Maradona is an icon. Without a doubt, the biggest icon of the past twenty or thirty years. And it's not a popularity manufactured by the media, or Coke, or Pepsi, like for the present-day players. Today, you can't even take a piss without seeing an ad for Coke or Pepsi.

## **Yes, but Maradona made an ad for Pepsi and Coke...**

Perhaps, but in a minor way. What I want to say is that Maradona has become an icon, due to his games and his goals. Not because of what he did off the field. Of course he had sponsors, he made ads, but that came later. For a player like Beckham - who's a good player - it's the opposite: it's what he does off the field that made him so famous. His games, less so.

## **How did you come into contact with Diego?**

Through the production. In the beginning, he wasn't very keen. I think that he's a bit fed up with all these media requests. Sometimes, he likes to be quiet. But as he also has another side of his personality that irremediably draws him towards the media, he finally said yes.

## **He had seen your films?**

None, no. But I believe that he had already heard about me.

## **Was it easy to film him?**

It's a bit complicated. Sometimes, he forgets his duties and responsibilities. Once, we came to Argentina, he had forgotten, and we missed him. That's why I've been working on this film such a long time, for several years. With Diego, one time it's yes, one time it's no.

## **After meeting him, did you discover anything about him that surprised you?**

My intuition was that he was intelligent, now I am certain. By speaking with him - and we still speak



on a regular basis today – I discovered that he was much more mature than people were led to believe. Particularly at the political level. He rallied behind Christina Kirchner for the elections in Argentina. It's not to be close to power, but because he knows that the previous government had done a good job by kicking out the IMF. He thinks that the country is doing well and he wants that to continue. That's the proof that he has political awareness, and that he knows how to analyze things.

### **And what about his darker side?**

Maradona truly has a split personality. Like all of us, for that matter, but with him it's obviously more intense. He can be great, therefore his negative side inevitably can prove to be extremely negative. We spoke earlier about his ads for Pepsi and Coke, or his political commitment. Diego doesn't have a problem with criticizing the United States one day, then taking money from Coke the next day. Or with cheating on the field. Finally, we always return to this match against England. One angelic goal, one devilish goal. These are the two sides of his genius. Maradona is a sort of saint. He has come close to death several times, he almost killed himself, but the truth is I think that God refused to take him in.

### **Did he seem happy to you?**

That depends on the time periods. One day, we brought him to Villa Fiorito, the slum where he was born, and we filmed his childhood home. He was so happy. At other times, it was more difficult. Maradona makes me think about Marlon Brando, or other great film actors. Once they've left the public arena, they don't know how to live. For Diego, the ideal life would have been a game where the referee never whistles the end of play.

### **How do you interpret the fact that the Marlon Brando of modern times is a football player?**

It's completely normal. Maradona has also become what he has become because he played football and not another sport, and because he played in the 1980s, the decade where the sport became incredibly popular, particularly on television. The era of Maradona is that of the peak of the individual in football. Maradona, with his dribbling, telegenic presence, power to single-handedly change a match, was perfect for this era. Moreover, this period ended precisely with Maradona's second goal against England. Since then, in football as in society, we've gone on to other things.

*Interview by Stephane Regy for issue 50 of the magazine "So Foot".*

# EMIR KUSTURICA

Born in 1954 in Sarajevo (formerly in Yugoslavia, now in Bosnia-Herzegovina). Abandoning a promising football career, he studied film at the Milos Forman Academy in Prague.

Upon returning to Sarajevo, Kusturica directed two TV movies and two feature films: "Do you Remember Dolly Bell?" (winner of the Golden Lion at Venice, 1981), and "When Father Was Away on Business" (winner of the Palme d'Or at Cannes, 1985). Immediately following the success of his next film "Time of the Gypsies", he moved to New York to teach film at Columbia University (having already taught courses at the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Sarajevo). Two years later, he directed "Arizona Dream" (1993), which won both the Silver Bear and the Special Jury Prize at the Berlin Film Festival.

Next came "Underground" (1995), for which he received his second Palme d'Or at Cannes. In 1998, "Black Cat, White Cat" was awarded the Golden Lion in Venice.

The musical group No-Smoking Orchestra has a very important place in the films and the life of Kusturica. In 1986, he officially joined the group and took part in a number of tours. His relationship with the group deepened when his son Stribor joined their ranks as a percussionist.

"Life is a Miracle" winning a prize at Cannes in 2004 as well as the 2005 César for the Best European Union Film. In 2005, Kusturica served as President of the Jury at the 58th Cannes Film Festival. In 2007, his film "Promise Me This" screened as part of the Official Selection at Cannes. In the same year, he successfully adapted his film "Time of the Gypsies" as a punk opera presented at the Opera Bastille, then at the Palais des Congres in March 2008.

When not directing movies, Emir Kusturica devotes his time to Kustendorf, a town he founded in the Serbian mountains, where he created the Kustendorf Film Festival and teaches film.

# CAST

**A film by**  
EMIR KUSTURICA

**DP**  
RODRIGO PULPEIRO VEGA

**Sound**  
RAUL MARTÍNEZ AVILA

**Original music**  
STRIBOR KUSTURICA

**Head of production**  
PAULA ÁLVAREZ VACCARO

**Film editor**  
SVETOLIK ZAJC

**A film produced by**  
JOSÉ IBÁÑEZ

**Co-produced by**  
BELEN ATIENZA  
ALVARO AUGUSTIN  
OLIVIER DELBOSC  
MARC MISSONNIER  
GAËL NOUAILLE  
VINCENT MARAVAL

**Stills photographer**  
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