

Two wars. Two sides. Two families. Two deaths.  
Only one man:

# G A R B O

T H E S P Y

A film by  
**Edmon Roch**

87 minutes, Color and B&W, 2010  
35 mm, Dolby Stereo Digital, English, Spanish, Catalan, German



## **FIRST RUN FEATURES**

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*“After personal consultation on the 8th of June in London, with my agents Jonny, Dick and Dorick, whose reports were sent today, I am of the opinion, in view of the strong troop concentrations in Southeast and Eastern England which are not taking part in the present operations, that these operations are a diversionary maneuver, designed to draw off enemy reserves, in order then, to make a decisive attack in another place. In view of the continuous air attacks in the concentration area mentioned, which is a strategically favorable position for this, it might very probably take place in the Pas de Calais area.”*  
**-Excerpt from the key message Garbo sent to the Third Reich after the Normandy landings**

### Synopsis

There is perhaps no better embodiment of the double agent than self-made counterspy Juan Pujol García, the only person to have been decorated by both the Allies and the Axis for service during World War II. Edmon Roch's new docu-thriller *GARBO: THE SPY* profiles the enigmatic Spaniard whom British intelligence code-named “Garbo” and the Nazis dubbed “Alaric.”

Originally rejected by MI5, to whom he repeatedly volunteered his services, Pujol took it upon himself to fabricate a network of phantom agents across Europe and feed false information to the Nazis. British intelligence eventually took note and offered Pujol a job, sealing the fate of the most decisive secret agent of the Second World War.

Although he never fired a single shot, Pujol contributed to saving thousands of lives for both sides, most notably by misinforming the Germans about the timing and location of the Normandy invasion. He possessed a tremendous mastery of creative fiction (going so far as to secure death benefits from the Nazis for an imaginary agent's nonexistent widow), and his inexhaustible imagination also produced over 50 volumes of writings.

*GARBO: THE SPY* conjures forgotten and living memories, heroes, spies, secrets and lies through artfully interwoven fragments of propaganda footage, interviews with key players in Pujol's life, and clips from Hollywood films (including Patton, The Longest Day, Greta Garbo's Mata Hari, Mr. Moto's Last Warning, The Stranger, Pimpernel Smith, Invisible Agent, The Secret Code, British Intelligence, and Our Man in Havana, for which Pujol was Graham Greene's inspiration).

Featured are novelist and intelligence expert Nigel West; MI5 specialist Mark Seaman, who investigated Pujol's every step; journalist Xavier Vinader, who helped Pujol to deconstruct his memories and recall details; The Countess of Romanones Aline Griffith, who was a spy during WWII and worked for American intelligence in Spain; both of Pujol's families, his first in Spain and later one in Venezuela; and last but not least, Juan Pujol himself, with his own take on reality.

## **About Juan Pujol**

- Pujol became the only non-German, non-combatant to receive one of the most prestigious awards in Hitler's regime. As the Nazi spy Alaric he was awarded the Iron Cross. As the English secret agent Garbo, he was awarded the MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire). Pujol was the only individual during the Second World War to be awarded by both the Allies and the Nazis.
- The largest network of Nazi agents during WWII in Great Britain was called ARABEL. It was led by ALARIC, also known as Vertrauensmann 319 (Man of Trust 319), in other words, Garbo. He came to recruit 27 sub-agents, each and every one of them employed and maintained by the Third Reich. None of these sub-agents ever existed. All of them were inventions of Pujol's fabulous imagination.
- Pujol bluffed the Nazis into making the most strategic mistake of the war. He allowed the Allies to gain a foothold in France and mount an unstoppable drive that would end in Berlin.
- Through Garbo's ARABEL network, the German High Command ended up financing a large part of British Intelligence operations.
- While working for the MI5, Pujol's telephone was tapped and his private correspondence censored. He was constantly under surveillance, and was only allowed to write using invisible ink under the supervision of a MI5 official.
- Throughout this entire period, he never met other agents, visited the MI5 premises, nor knew his place inside the organization.
- Once in London, Pujol wrote no less than 315 letters with invisible ink, out of a total of 423 written by the MI5. None of these documents contained less than 500 words, and some of them were even composed with more than 8,000 words.
- They all reflected different personalities, following the framework of the 27 sub-agents that he had invented. But Pujol was also in charge of the cover letters written in normal ink, a very time-consuming and demanding activity that he learned to master. In addition, he was responsible for the final versions of as many as 1,200 radio messages, out of a total of the 1,339 transmitted to the Abwehr.
- Messages were divided into three categories: The letter A indicated that the information had been obtained through personal observation by one of the agents; the letter B that the source came from a third party who had provided the information involuntarily; the letter C represented for unfounded rumors. Next to the letter was the number assigned to the agent and the place of origin of the information.

- After the war, MI5 proposed Pujol to work as a double agent against the Soviets, but he turned down the offer for unknown reasons.
- In 1946, Pujol invested all of his fortune in land in Venezuela. Two years later, his property was attacked and destroyed, and he was forced to sell it at a quarter of its value.

### **Filmmaker's Statement**

*Garbo: The Spy* is a documentary thriller about forgotten and living memories, heroes and spies, secrets and lies, featuring fragments of Hollywood films, archive material, interviews and special effects – extending an invitation to choose our own version of the truth.

All of the major characters in this extraordinary story are present. Novelist and Intelligence expert Nigel West, who tracked down Pujol in Venezuela and brought him out of hiding. MI5 specialist Mark Seaman, who investigated Pujol's every step and how he managed to make the unbelievable believable. Journalist Xavier Vinader, who helped Pujol to deconstruct his memories and recall all of the intriguing details. The Countess of Romanones Aline Griffith, who was a spy during WWII and worked for American Intelligence in Spain. Both of Pujol's families, his first in Spain and later one in Venezuela. And last but not least, Juan Pujol himself, with his own personal take on reality.

There is no better medium than film to illustrate the story of the most important double agent of the 20th Century. Films have shaped our images of Mata Hari, of Charlie Chan and of Operation Cicero. In order to emphasize the most controversial aspects of the story, we juxtapose interviews with newsreels, cartoons, film clips and propaganda material, from both the Allied and the Axis sides. It is through movies *like Patton, The Longest Day, Our Man in Havana, Mr. Moto's Last Warning, The Stranger, Pimpernel Smith, Invisible Agent, The Secret Code, British Intelligence*, and Greta Garbo's *Mata Hari*, that we will discover why Pujol was considered "the best actor in the world."

*-Edmon Roch (Director, Writer, Producer)*

## **Filmmaker Bio**

Edmon Roch is a journalist and holds a PhD in Art History. He has written, directed and produced five short films, amongst them the multi-award winning *Blood* (1994). As a screenwriter, his works include *Away from the Flock* about the British artist Damien Hirst (1994), *Tic, Tac*, directed by Rosa Vergés (1996), *Smalls* for Immi Pictures (1998) and more recently, *Mia Sarah* directed by Gustavo Ron (2006).

His credits as a producer include: Whit Stillman's *Barcelona* (1994); Fernando Colomo's *The Butterfly Effect* (1995); Jean-Jacques Annaud's *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997) (where he served as UPM); and Whit Stillman's *The Last Days of Disco* (1998). He line-produced the first and third films of Peter Greenaway's trilogy *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* (2002/4), and was Delegate Producer of Tom Tykwer's *Perfume* (2006). He has also co-produced Sönke Wortmann's *Pope Joan*, and is the producer of Daniel Benmayer's *Bruc*, Andrucha Waddington's *Lope* and Enrique Gato's *Tadeo Jones 3D*.

In 2008, he published the book "Películas Clave del Cine Bélico" (Publisher: Ma Non Troppo). *Garbo: The Spy* is his first feature film as a director.

## **Interview with director Edmon Roch**

### **What is *Garbo. The Spy*?**

*Garbo* is an extraordinary story, true to the point of being almost implausible. It's the story of Alaric, the most trusted and valued secret agent that the Nazis had during WWII, whose network included the crème de la crème of Nazi spies in Great Britain. But it's also the story of Garbo, who worked for the MI5, and it's also the story of a deserter of the Spanish Civil War, and of a double agent who died in Angola in 1949. And it's the story of an English novelist who began to search for a dead man with the conviction that he was still alive, digging up the wrong corpse twice. And it's the story of a woman who knew too much, and about a network of agents that never existed. In a nutshell, it's the story of an unknown man: Juan Pujol, whom the British Intelligence services called "the best actor in the world," and for whom the British Mass Media coined the phrase, "the man who saved the world."

### **It's a story made up of many stories...**

Exactly. When you pull on a string, you discover multiple ramifications, each of them more exciting than the one before: The story about the RAF pilot who carried love letters for a Spaniard who said his wife was in Lisbon; the one about the spy who mysteriously falls ill and dies right at the moment when he is needed most; or the story of a man from Barcelona who was working for the Germans in London, when in fact he was in Lisbon and had no notions of the English or German languages. Each story leads you to another, and there are more than a thousand stories, literally.

**But we are dealing with a mockumentary, aren't we?**

No, no, it's true to life. Even if the craziness and hectic pace might tempt those who are not familiar with the story to think that it contains a good dose of invention, it's all true. Maybe it's due to the fact that Pujol himself was a great storyteller, probably one of the best writers of the 20th Century. And not for his literary quality, which was Baroque and rather rough, but because he had a select group of readers who believed him blindly. Pujol didn't write for the public, but to convince and manipulate the enemy in order to win wars. True life is stranger than fiction.

**You define the film as a thriller documentary.**

Yes, but it's also a comedy, and also a sort of short story with touches of Graham Greene. Greene, as with John LeCarre, was very much involved with the British Intelligence services. In fact, it is said that Greene, who knew the story of Garbo, was so inspired by it he wrote "Our Man in Havana." And "The Counterfeit Spy" by Sefton Delmer also is based on Garbo's story.

**What did Garbo do?**

In his own words, he "made a contribution to the good of humanity." He saved lots of lives, and he actually became the great master of what is known as "the art of deception," which is basically to make your enemy believe in something that may be true, but isn't.

**He also claimed to have fought in two wars without ever firing a single shot...**

That's true. His family and children, both in Spain and in Venezuela, his cousins, they all remember this as the one thing that made him the most proud. This and the fact that he had saved thousands of lives during the Normandy landings as well as during the bombings of London towards the end of the war.

**He never got it wrong?**

On the contrary, he constantly made mistakes! Pujol had never been to London, he hardly knew any English, and was a "desk-based spy" who had little or no contact with reality. There was just no way he could avoid making mistakes, such as when he referred to the English who supplied information "just for the price of a liter of wine," or when he would get all confused with the English currency system and submit extravagant accounts. But his merit was that he played his role better than anyone else, and that's why the British called him Garbo. It's no coincidence that Greta Garbo played the role of Mata Hari, the great double agent of the screen. You could never reproach Pujol for anything he said. Whenever he was attacked for his mistakes, he would counter-attack and act indignant before what he considered to be trivial details in comparison to the important work he was doing. On the other hand, he would always end up telling the Germans what they wanted to hear; Pujol would constantly state that his motivation was his hatred for democracy and his devotion to the Third Reich. In fact, Pujol must have had a lot of fun inventing all these lies. With this corpus of more than 50 volumes of reports and messages, you could even say that he was one of the great authors of the '40s, and without a doubt, the one who most influenced the future of humanity.

### **The public is familiar with Mata Hari, but not with Garbo. Why is that?**

The best spies are those who remain anonymous; the exhibitionist spy is after fame, the greedy spy is after money. But not Pujol. You could say that he was very good at this job, that it was in his blood, so to speak, and he was very discreet. In fact, he probably would have taken his secret to the grave if it hadn't been for Nigel West. His German controller in Madrid, Karl Erich Kuhlenthal, passed away in the '70s absolutely convinced that Pujol had been his best secret agent, an insatiable fighter for the Third Reich. The German High Command awarded him the Iron Cross, which was an honor that only German combatants were eligible for. Hitler approved a special procedure in which Pujol was nominally enrolled in the Spanish Blue Division so that he could qualify for it.

### **But the story of Pujol begins during the Spanish Civil War...**

That's where he puts his acting skills to the test and realizes his enormous capacity for invention. During the Civil War, Pujol had been on the verge of death; he deserted because he didn't want to fight and he hid like a mole for almost a year in Barcelona. He was caught and jailed, but he managed to escape and to hide out in a flat behind the Barcelona Cathedral, where in a little less than a year, he lost 20 kilos and almost all of his hair. He looked like a decrepit old man at the age of 25. And that's when he took a step forward.

### **He went to the front?**

First he went to Sant Joan de les Abadeses to manage a chicken farm. But that was just a cover. His real intention was to cross the Pyrenees Mountains, and he trained daily for it. He was incredibly strong-willed. But he was also very cautious. Just when he was about to take the step to cross the border, he found out that the Republicans would shoot all deserters attempting to cross over into France. And that's when he came up with his first great lie: using a fake I.D. that doubled his age, he volunteered to enroll in the Republican army, claiming he was an expert in Morse Code and telecommunications. Which was of course the furthest thing from the truth. And what for? In order to cross the lines and change sides. But the thing is, he did it so badly. The day he escaped, he got lost and returned to his own troops, thinking that he was on the other side. He was met, of course, with a barrage of shots and it was a miracle he even survived.

### **And is that when he decides to become a spy?**

First he met his wife, Araceli González, who would later become a very important figure in his brilliant career. And with great naïveté he pays a visit to the British Embassy, who mistakes him for an infiltrated Nazi. But this does not intimidate Pujol, and instead, he forges an even bolder plan: to collaborate with the Third Reich in order to win the sympathy of the Allies. Surprisingly, the Germans believe him and give him an accelerated course on espionage techniques, as well as a salary. His objective? To obtain important military information from England. Pujol assures them that he can obtain the information and indeed, soon enough, the messages start flowing in from London.

### **That's when he goes to London?**

No! He was in Lisbon, watching newsreels and reading foreign newspapers to find out what was going on in England. Pujol couldn't afford to keep quiet since his job

depended on it. So with the help of a dictionary and an old railway timetable, he started sending messages pretending to be in London and using a friend who was a pilot in the RAF to deposit the messages at a postal address in Lisbon. Pujol tells his German controllers that in order to avoid the pilot's suspicions, he has tricked his friend into believing that the messages are love letters for a woman living in Lisbon. His controllers are very happy about this, without knowing that they are the first to be duped. There was no pilot friend: it was Pujol himself who'd leave the letters in the postal address, which the Germans would later pick up. This way, the envelopes didn't have to have a postage stamp, and Pujol could write the right information just by writing a date that was prior to the publication of the news. It was just perfect. Simple and perfect.

### **So that's when the British Intelligence services recruited him?**

Well it took a while. Pujol was actually getting quite desperate and was already planning to escape with his family to Brazil. By then, the British had rejected him four times because they thought he was a phony. Until one of his messages snowballed and provoked a diplomatic incident between Rome and Berlin: the story about the inexistent convoy that was heading to break the Siege of Malta and that the Italians had not seen. The British then asked themselves, "Who the hell is this spy, who claims to be living in London when he obviously isn't and despite sending false information enjoys the full trust of the German High Command?" When they realized this was the same person who had offered his services on so many occasions, they asked him whether he was still interested in collaborating with the Allied cause. Pujol was. So they took him to London, where they interrogated him to make sure he wasn't harboring alternative intentions. It was very odd and strange to come across a case like Pujol where his motivation wasn't money, or family situation, or patriotism. Very few spies can escape any of these categories. Pujol did.

### **You have an extensive career as a producer. Why debut as a director with a feature-length film like *Garbo*?**

What I'm interested in is stories. And this was an extraordinary story that needed to be told. So when Sandra Hermida offered me the María Hervera's script, there was no turning back. At that time, Javier Juarez's magnificent book *Juan Pujol, "The Spy Who Defeated Hitler,"* hadn't yet been published. So I started investigating and was surprised that there were but a few TV episodes on the subject. I fell in love with the character, what he had meant, and I felt it was imperative to dedicate my heart and soul to him. It was one of those rare cases where the story just had to be told.

### **How long did the research phase last?**

Five years. With Patricia Ruiz we looked into all kinds of sources, reading, working hand-in-hand with those who knew the Garbo story firsthand, like his relatives, Nigel West (the man who brought him to light), Xavier Vinader (with whom Pujol had reconstructed his life), spies from that period like Aline Griffith or other experts on Garbo like Mark Seaman. We shot more than 600 hours of interviews; we shot during the course of months, traveled to London, Berlin, Caracas and Lisbon, and we spent almost a year in the editing room. It was like the matriushkas: we would begin a story and always end up finding another inside. It's fascinating to think that you know everything and then

to discover another revealing truth that sheds new light on the whole process. A director is like a detective in that sense, someone who must research the story he is telling and the motivations of his characters: to get into the skin of another until he comes up with the story. A documentary has a peculiarity in that it is always an open work that has to be written as you go along, with the archive material, the interviews, the new discoveries... a continuous shaping process. In fiction films the director creates the work, but in a documentary there is a dialogue between the existent material and the director, in which the editing is crucial. There the participation of Alexander Adams was also fundamental.

### **What was the hardest part in terms of telling the story?**

To tell the story of Garbo implies that you must leave out many other stories. It forces you to choose and select because there's enough material to make numerous TV series. Even if there were 13 episodes of an hour's duration, we would still only skim the surface of the character. It's tantamount to explaining the entire volume of Dickens' works in a film, with the only difference being that Garbo wrote 50 volumes of stories that were heading in one direction. You could say it's one of the most influential works of the 20th Century, that had eager readers amongst the high-ranking officers of the Third Reich, and the fact that they blindly believed him was what allowed the Allies to strike the key blows that enabled them to win the war.

### **Are there still any Garbo documents in existence?**

Very few. Just the messages, his memoirs and the testimonies of those who met him. But, ironically, the less material there is, the greater the freedom the director has since there is no need to subject himself to a preconceived vision and instead can find a path that's more faithful to the character. And with an inventor like Pujol, this path was the movies: those spy stories onscreen that influenced his personality in such a decisive way. A real spy explained through film spies; a spy named after an actress who had played a similar role. From other films of that period like *Mr. Moto*, *Mata Hari* or *Pimpernel Smith*. All of them intricately related to the story of Pujol: *Mata Hari* for having someone with the same name Garbo (Greta) interpreting the most famous double agent of the screen. *Mr. Moto* for Peter Lorre, who had to escape from Germany only to end up playing a German traitor in Hollywood. And *Pimpernel Smith* for Leslie Howard, who died when the plane he was in was shot down by the Nazis, the very plane that was supposedly carrying Pujol's mail to Lisbon, and allowed Pujol to complain vigorously so that no other passenger plane would ever be attacked again. And of course we can't forget the later films like *Our Man in Havana*, *The Longest Day*, or *Patton* that also touch upon the subject of Pujol.

### **Were you tempted at any point to use actors and re-enactments?**

Not in the way of a docudrama. To tell the story in fiction mode would have undermined the fact that we didn't invent anything. Pujol was already there to do the inventing.

### **You also avoid the voice over.**

The use of voice-over narration is a convention in documentaries: the omniscient voice that narrates it all. But this would have implied taking a stance, a certain direction, and would have significantly reduced the wealth of the multiple views. The challenge was to

have all these multiple voices conform to one single film. As with Rashomon, each spectator must find his own truth.

**Despite the seriousness of the issue, you take on a humorous tone.**

For Pujol, being a spy was also like a game. A very serious game, but we mustn't forget that he had no formal training, and that he was a self-taught man with great ingenuity and with an incredible capacity to survive the most difficult and threatening situations. In English, you use the same word "play" to mean both "to play a game" and "to play a role," and Pujol was a master of both. He fought in two wars, on two sides, had two families, two lives and even two deaths. There is no better definition of a double agent.

**Credits**

**Director, Writer, Producer**

Edmon Roch

**Screenplay**

Edmon Roch, Isaki Lacuesta, María Hervera

**Director of Photography**

Bet Rourich, Gabriel Guerra, Joachin

Bergamin

**Editor**

Alexander Adams

**Original Music**

Fernando Velázquez

**Producers**

Edmon Roch, Sandra Hermida, Belén

Bernuy

**Associate Producers**

Victoria Borrás, Alexander Adams, Patricia

Ruiz

**Delegate Producer TVC**

Jordi Ambròs

**Sound Design**

Oriol Tarragó

**Visual Effects**

Lluís Castells

**Music Supervisor**

Alexander Adams

**Songs**

Brian Eno, Sparklehorse, RiP

**With the participation of**

Nigel West, Mark Seaman, Xavier Vinader,

Stan Vranckx, Aline Griffith, Juan Pujol