EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

“Ten Years Isn’t About Making a Film. It’s About Not Giving Up on One.”

Co-directors Ervin Han and Raúl García talk with Paul Salfen about the decade it took to make The Violinist, a Spain-Italy-Singapore animated feature, and a human story drawn from a slice of Singapore’s history.

Interview by Paul Salfen · AMFM Magazine



Official key art for The Violinist, from violinistmovie.com.

Paul Salfen did not hide what he thought of *The Violinist*. “What a beautiful movie,” he told co-directors Ervin Han and Raúl García when they sat down with him on November 16, 2026. “You had to be just so proud. I know you worked on this for so, so long, and now we can finally talk about it. We can finally see it. But how long exactly did this take? And how many people did this take to do? Because I can’t imagine what it’s like.”

“Give or take ten years,” Han said. “I started writing the script on New Year’s Day 2017, but before that, a couple of years researching, and then we had Covid in between. And the actual production was about four years. So from the initial conception to the final finished film, about ten years. Took about over 400 people from different parts of the world. Massive, massive production. But yeah, it was an improbable film to begin with. I didn’t know it was going to take so long, you know? But I guess everything’s proven worthwhile.”

García called it “a labor of love that became our passion, became our obsession, and really takes a village to make this film.” That village, he said, became an international co-production among Spain, Italy, and Singapore.

“The movie suddenly opened the scope and became more universal. And that was a great thing, because there was a cultural change, of learning how to work together, learning history, learning how to tell the story with these two different points of view. For the European side of it, the Singaporean side.”

The official site for *The Violinist* describes “a sweeping story of friendship, love and music set against the upheaval of 20th-century Singapore and Malaya, including the Japanese occupation.” As a reporter investigates the mystery behind an aging violin legend and her instrument, the film turns back to two young violinists, Fei and Kai, whose lives are pulled apart by war. Music, the official synopsis says, becomes “a lasting thread between past and present.” Han and García directed the 1-hour, 54-minute animated feature. The screenplay is by Han and Jordan K. See. It is a co-production of Singapore’s Robot Playground Media, Spain’s TV ON Producciones, and Italy’s Altri Occhi, with international sales by France tv distribution.

The film’s festival path is now a matter of record. It won the Cristal for Best Feature Film at the 2026 Annecy International Animation Film Festival, along with the SACEM Award for Best Original Music. The official site also lists a win for Best Animated Feature at the Asia Pacific Screen Awards, three Asian Academy Creative Awards, including Best Feature Film, Best Animation, and Best Screenplay, and three nominations at the 63rd Golden Horse Awards, including Best Animated Feature. It played TIFF’s 2026 Centrepiece programme, in a North American premiere, and was an official selection at the Busan International Film Festival and the Animation Is Film Festival.

As of mid-November 2026, audiences can see it in theaters in more than one country. In Singapore, the official site lists the film as showing at Golden Village, after a September 3 gala premiere at Capitol Theatre and a nationwide opening on September 17. In the United States, the official site says an Oscar-qualifying run began November 13 in Los Angeles at Laemmle NoHo 7, with daily showtimes through November 19. Screenings in Spain, the same site says, will be announced soon.



Official still from The Violinist, from violinistmovie.com.

A STORY THAT DESERVES TO BE TOLD

Salfen asked what kept both men on the path for a decade. “Getting through the ten years of working on this to get it to where it is now takes a certain kind of mindset for both of you. What did you keep in mind that kept you on the right path during this whole process? Is there something you said to yourself every day that just made you get through it? Because I don’t know if I could have done ten years.”

Han answered with a line from a director friend. “Ten years isn’t about making a film. It’s about not giving up on one. And I never thought of it that way. And I never consciously said, I’m not going to give up, I’m not going to give up.”

“You just take it day by day, and you keep yourself busy doing other things, but you know that it’s a story you want to get out there. You know it’s going to eat at you. If you don’t continue, it’s really the conviction that this is a story that should be told and deserves to be told.”

> *“Ten years isn’t about making a film. It’s about not giving up on one.”*

That conviction, he said, was not a history lecture. “It is a story about a slice of my country’s history that I really wanted to bring to the world, you know, not as a history lesson, but as a human story. I suppose that was really the well that I continue to go back to draw from.”

He also kept coming back to the people who stayed with the film. “All my team in Singapore, they have spent so many years on this. They continue to inspire me during very, very difficult times. And at the end of the day, it’s these relationships that I actually value a lot compared to the finished film, because the finished film is done. It’s up there, you know, but this journey is something that we’ll look back on with a great fondness.”

Han, a Singaporean filmmaker, co-founded Robot Playground Media, the Singapore production company on the film. In earlier interviews he has described *The Violinist* as his first feature, grown in part from a 2015 short, *The Violin*. García, a Spanish animator, is credited by Channel News Asia as having worked on films including *Aladdin*, *The Lion King*, *Pocahontas*, and *Hercules* during Disney’s Renaissance era, and as having taught animation at LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore. In this conversation, neither man lingered on a resume. They talked about the work, and about staying with it.

MAKE IT REAL, MAKE IT BELIEVABLE

If Han’s well was a human story from a slice of national history, García’s production mantra was simpler still, and just as stubborn.

“The mantra was like, make it real, make it believable, make the people feel what the characters are feeling, make them be empathetic, and do the thing as much anchored in reality. So the characters are really good. That was our mantra in the whole production.”

> *“Make it real, make it believable, make the people feel what the characters are feeling.”*

That insistence on the real sits next to a story that moves across decades, through occupation and aftermath, and through music. The official score is by Ricky Ho and Isabel Latorre. The principal voice cast, as listed in festival and screening notes, includes Tan Kheng Hua, Ayden Sng, Fang Rong, Kazuya Tanabe, Adrian Pang, and Enrique Arce. The co-production itself, García told Salfen, forced a kind of learning: how to work together, how to tell the story from European and Singaporean points of view, and how a film that began as an improbable local undertaking became, in his word, more universal.

Salfen had already felt that pull. Before he let them go, he asked what they hoped people would take away, “because there’s so much going on here.”

PEACE IS FRAGILE

Han kept the hope simple. “I hope you watch the film. It makes you think of someone important in your life, right? Maybe someone you have lost, someone you have waited for. And, you know, I think to ask those stories of the generation that came before us and pass them on, and to know that peace is fragile. I have a real sense that things are more fragile than ever. And we have to keep these conversations going and be aware of it.”



Official still from The Violinist, from violinistmovie.com.

García did not add a long speech. “Art is important for survival,” he said, “and stories and music is all we have.”

> *“Art is important for survival, and stories and music is all we have.”*

Salfen closed by pointing audiences toward the theatrical experience. “We’re gonna tell everybody to see it, see it on the big screen, and just love it in the way that we did.” The thanks came back quickly. “Thank you. Thanks, Paul.”

Ten years, more than 400 people, three countries, a story Han would not treat as a history lesson and would not let go. *The Violinist* is in theaters now in Singapore, and in an Oscar-qualifying run in Los Angeles. The finished film, as Han put it, is up there. The journey, he said, is what they will look back on with fondness. The invitation he left with Salfen is plainer still: watch it, think of someone, and keep the conversation going.

FIND THE VIOLINIST

Official site / where to watch: violinistmovie.com

United States: An Oscar-qualifying run began November 13, 2026, at Laemmle NoHo 7 in Los Angeles, with daily showtimes listed through November 19. Tickets: laemmle.com/film/violinist

Singapore: Showing at Golden Village. The film had a gala premiere at Capitol Theatre on September 3, 2026, and opened nationwide on September 17. gv.com.sg

Spain: The official site says screenings will be announced soon.

Official trailer: youtube.com/watch?v=xN_6V5QkSRs

The film: Directed by Ervin Han and Raúl García. Written by Ervin Han and Jordan K. See. A Singapore-Spain-Italy co-production from Robot Playground Media, TV ON Producciones, and Altri Occhi. International sales: France tv distribution. Music by Ricky Ho and Isabel Latorre. Running time: 1 hour, 54 minutes.

Paul Salfen is Managing Editor of AMFM Magazine and a veteran interviewer of film, television, music, and sports figures. He is the author of Going For It!, a collection of Hail Mary moments from the artists and athletes he has spent two decades putting on the record.
