



A CIAMBRA

A FILM BY JONAS CARPIGNANO



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2017, 120 min, Colour, Italy, US, France, Sweden

Synopsis

In A CIAMBRA, a small Romani community in Calabria, Pio Amato is desperate to grow up fast. At 14, he drinks, smokes and is one of the few to easily slide between the regions' factions - the local Italians, the African immigrants and his fellow Romani. Pio follows his older brother Cosimo everywhere, learning the necessary skills for life on the streets of their hometown. When Cosimo disappears and things start to go wrong, Pio sets out to prove he's ready to step into his big brother's shoes and in the process he must decide if he is truly ready to become a man.

Cast

Pio Amato, Koudous Seihon, Iolanda Amato, Damiano Amato

Crew

Director: Jonas Carpignano

Production: Stayblack Productions, RT Features, Sikelia Productions, Rai Cinema
In Association with DCM, Haut et Court, Film i Väst and Filmgate Films with MIBACT
and the Aide aux Cinémas du Monde, CNC, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères et du
Développement International, Institut Français and LU.CA

Producers: Jon Coplon, Paolo Carpignano, Ryan Zacarias, Gwyn Sannia, Rodrigo
Teixeira, Marc Schmidheiny, Cristoph Daniel

Executive Producer: Martin Scorsese

Executive Producers: Emma Tillinger Koskoff, Sophie Mas, Lourenço Sant'Anna,
Daniela Lundgren Taplin, Alessio Lazzareschi, Dario Suter, Joel Brandeis

Co-Producers: Carole Scotta, Julie Billy, Tomas Eskilsson, Sean Wheelan

Cinematographer: Tim Curtin

Editor: Affonso Gonçalves

Production designer: Marco Ascanio Viarigi

Sound design: Giuseppe Tripodi

Costume Designer: Nicoletta Taranta

Music composer: Dan Romer

Music supervisor: Joe Rudge

World sales: LUXBOX





Jonas Carpignano Interview

Both your films take place in Southern Italy in a city called Gioia Tauro. In **MEDITERRANEA**, you brought us into the world of two African immigrants finding their way after a dangerous journey. In **A CIAMBRA**, you introduce us to the Amato Family, members of the Romani community. How did you first encounter the Amato family? Can you also talk about the Romani community in Italy in general?

The first time I met the Amato family was in 2011 after the Fiat Panda filled with my crew's film equipment was stolen. We were in Gioia Tauro shooting *A Chjana* (the short film which would later become *Mediterranea*). In Gioia Tauro, when a car disappears, the first thing you do is "go to the gypsies."

That's when I saw the Ciambra for the first time. I immediately fell in love with the energy of the place. Whenever I tell this story, Pio says that he remembers seeing me, but at the time I didn't notice him - there was too much to take in. We had to wait three days to get the car back because Pio's grandfather (the Nonno Emilian character is based on him) had just died and they wouldn't negotiate the ransom for the car until after the funeral. Clearly that funeral procession made a big impression on me because five years later I wrote it into the film. Needless to say the entire situation had an enormous impact on me and soon after I wrote the first draft of the short version of *A Ciambra*.

It's hard to generalize the position of the Romani in Italian society, and I don't have the space here to really get into the complexities of their situation in Italy or in Europe in general. The fact is that they are not a monolithic group. There are those who have risen to the top of the organized crime pyramid like the Casamonica in Rome; or the hard working blue collar Romani who have everyday jobs and are indistinguishable from other Italians; or the nomads who live in squalid trailer camps created by local governments on the periphery of many major Italian towns; and countless other examples. What is relevant for the film is the role the Romani of the Ciambra play in Gioia Tauro and their relationship with the newly arrived African immigrants in Southern Italy. While I think that looking at this example can, hopefully, speak to a more universal condition, the goal with this film was never to shine a light on these broader sociological factors. I am interested in Pio and Ayiva and I think the film clearly articulates their relationship - specifically, its potential and its limits.

Pio Amato stole the show in **MEDITERRANEA** and your short film. Was it always your intention to go back and write a film around him and his family? How much of this is biographical for him? Can you describe the inspiration for the film and how you wrote it?

I met people who had all kinds of opinions while I was on the road with *Mediterranea*, but one thing that was consistent was the complete, utter love and appreciation for Pio. He has, as my friends in New Orleans say, it. Whatever it is, Pio has enough to burn, and I realized that the second I met him.

That said, I had intended to make a feature in the Ciambra before I ever met Pio, even before we started shooting *Mediterranea*. Casting the short version of *A Ciambra* was exactly like casting the short version of *A Chjana*. I went into the Ciambra with a rough idea of a story. Once I met Pio, I revised the story to take into account him and his family. Biographical elements of the Amato family ended up reshaping and altering the story in the same way that Koudous Seihon's story shaped *Mediterranea*.

In both cases, after meeting the protagonist, I tried to make the films as true to their protagonists' experiences as possible, while keeping some semblance of dramatic structure. In the case of *A Ciambra* (the short), I was interested in telling the tale of two brothers. In the winter of 2013 I started going to the Ciambra regularly to cast the film and the first person I was drawn to was Pio's older brother.

At first he was completely against the idea of being in a film. He was so reluctant that one of the producers encouraged me to find someone else. However, I couldn't see anyone else playing the role, so I kept after him for months.

A week or so later, Pio and I began becoming closer. He had shed his initial distrust for an outsider and it became clear that he and I had a special bond. It's hard to describe what and how it happened but both of us knew, pretty quickly, that we would be important to each other. In a lot of ways his relationship with Ayiva in the film is a combination of his relationship with Koudous and with me. The first testament to that was when Pio helped me convince his brother to be in the short. It was our first success, kind of.

Kind of?

I say "kind of" because in reality Cosimo is played by two twins, Cosimo and Damiano Amato. I was always after Damiano, but for the short film I had to use Cosimo because Damiano wasn't having it. Finally, by the time it was time to make the feature, Damiano came around to the idea and the film is all the better for it.

You have managed to get remarkable leading performances out of non-professional actors Pio Amato (and his family) in A CIAMBRA and Koudous Seihon in MEDITERRANEA, as well as from all the locals in the supporting roles. What's your approach in working with cast?

It's different for each cast member. My approach to working with Pio was very different from my approach with Koudous, lolanda, Pasquale or even my father, who played the guy at the train station. If there were one consistent element in working with all of them I'd say it was the atmosphere I tried to create. I am very militant on how many people



are allowed on set, who is watching, and so on. Since we are always shooting in real locations, often in people's houses, I never want to feel like we are altering the natural rhythm of the place. I always said to the crew that we need to adapt our approach to them, instead of trying to impose a traditional filmmaking infrastructure upon them. That would have never worked. So I think that by going with the flow, we were able to create a very safe atmosphere where people didn't feel exposed. I'm not sure I could have gotten the same performances if I brought the A Ciambra cast to shoot those scenes on a soundstage in Rome, for example.

I also spent a lot of time breaking down barriers between the cast and myself. It was not a "professional" relationship. There was a deep familiarity between us which I think is why they were willing to go places when I asked them to. I can't remember who said it recently, but I recall hearing: "There are two styles of directing. One where you stand still and demand that the actors come to you. And one where you go where they are and try to steer them in the direction you think is best." I clearly fall into the second category.

You enlarge the world of MEDITERRANEA and your shorts in this film; it's both a continuation of MEDITERRANEA and a film that stands completely on its own emotionally and formally. A CIAMBRA clearly delineates the various tribes in Rosarno - the Italians, Romani and Africans - and shows how only Pio can move freely between them, which makes Pio's relationship with Ayiva one of the hopeful elements in the film. This calls to mind Koudous' relationship with the Italian girl in MEDITERRANEA. Can you talk about that parallel?

I fundamentally believe that besides the coercive political, economic and national structures, exposure to "foreign elements," whether they be people, food, or music is the only way to dissolve the artificial boundaries between us. To me, Pio can move freely through the complex layers of his world because none of them are truly foreign to him. He has grown up in a Calabria that has now Africans, Bulgarians, Romanians, and so on. For him they are part of the social fabric of his world. That was not the case for the previous generation.

The same is true for Marta in *Mediterranea*. She doesn't see Ayiva as an invader. For her, Ayiva is a worker like so many others. She didn't know what Calabria was like before the arrival of the Africans. Both Pio and Marta see Ayiva as Ayiva. And while both films are realistic about the limits of this relationship, I think they both depict a path forward towards a more "integrated" Calabria.

Pio's Grandfather seems to represent a way of life that has disappeared. He talks about the days of being on the road free and of answering to no one. There is a wonderful cinematic moment in the film in which Pio has a vision of his Grandfather and his horse that is a departure from the realism your films are known for. What was the inspiration for this?

History has a certain weight. We like to contextualize ourselves and to feel that we are part of something larger than ourselves, that we have roots and that we are the continuation of something that has come before us. This is true, to varying degrees, for all of us, but it is especially relevant in the Ciambra. Yet, if you really think about it, our connection with the past is more

abstract that we would like to think. I mean, we cannot physically occupy the past, we can never experience it for ourselves. The past is something that is constantly reimagined, often to justify who we are or who we would like to be.

The collective memory of a common past is part of what makes the Ciambra such an insular community, and I felt that it was important to show Pio's connection with his past to better articulate his dilemma. I also wanted to convey this idea that his connection with the past wasn't as concrete as his connection to his immediate surroundings. So, when confronted with the problem of how to cinematically render this, I tried to conjugate the abstraction of an imagined past with the realism of the film. The barley perceptible slow motion and the magical feeling of those scenes are an obvious departure from the rest of the film, but at the same time they are shot within the "rules" of the visual language we established for the whole film.

How did producer Martin Scorsese get involved? His work is obviously massively influential, but what are the specific, personal ways he's affected your filmmaking?

RT Features and Sikelia have created a fund to support first and second films. The producers at RT saw *Mediterranea*, they liked it, and they brought it to Martin and his producing partner Emma Tillinger Koskoff who were immediately supportive and enthusiastic about the project.

The nature of making films in Gioia Tauro is such that everything outside feels very, very abstract compared to what is happening on the ground. I spent the last year knowing that Martin Scorsese was a producer of the film but it didn't really sink in until we got to the

editing process. I was lucky to have his notes on several versions of the cut, and his thoughts surely made an impact on the film. On a larger level, not only his work is massively influential, but his approach to and respect for the medium is what I particularly value.

We've discussed your process for working with cast - how do you approach collaboration with crew? Do you prefer to work with the same crew from project to project?

Yes. We've been making films in Gioia Tauro since 2011 and many of the people who were around at the beginning are still a major part of our filmmaking team. For example, my production designer Ascanio Viarigi has been part of the team from the very first short; one of the producers, Jon Coplón, had his first-ever filmmaking experience with A Chjana. My DP Tim Curtain was the operator of A Chjana and *Mediterranea*. It goes on and on. We are a tight knit crew for sure, and we've succeeded in creating a system for making films in a place where there was previously no film production. We all speak the same language now, and the basic grammar of our cinematic language is pretty well established.

Of course people sometimes have scheduling conflicts and not everyone can be around for every film, but we always get people who have worked with someone that was part of the original crew. It's great because the family keeps growing, but the vibe stays the same. Then there are also the people who see how we make films and steer clear of our unorthodox approach. It's sort of a natural selection in that way.

What was the process for creating the look of the film? What were some of the challenges in filming where you did?

While the building blocks were similar to the process for *Mediterranea* (and the shorts), the overall picture was very different and that came from the different perspective that the film inhabits. I always believe the film itself should feel like the main character. In that vein, *Mediterranea* feels very fragmented and closed in. The visual grammar is designed to mirror Ayiva's perspective: he only has a fractured understanding of his surroundings and therefore the film only presents a fractured portrait of the place. In *A Chjana*, Pio's grasp of his surroundings is more assured and, even though we used the same type of camera moves and editing style, the perspective is much larger, more comprehensive.

Shooting in the Ciambra was the challenge. It's impossible to fully articulate what the Ciambra is like, but from the film I think you get an idea. It is a wild and unruly place where anything that can happen will happen, often ten or fifteen times over. Luckily we knew this before going in, so we gave ourselves time. We ended up shooting for 91 days.

I think if I had to boil it down, the hardest parts of making the film were waking Pio up in the morning, and directing the scenes that have tons of kids. I know they look all cute on screen, but when they don't feel like working, man... I've got some outtakes and behind the scenes stuff that wouldn't be out of place in *Burden of Dreams*.

Can you talk about the music? As always the score and the pop songs are on.

I love pop music. I got this question a lot while I was on the road with *Mediterranea*, and I'll say now what I said then: pop music is the common denominator. No matter what language you speak, no matter where you are from, when the beat drops on a song that everyone knows, everyone is suddenly on the same wavelength. Everyone is moving to the same rhythm and I find that to be a major icebreaker when venturing into less familiar territories.

The fact that Pio and I dig a lot of the same music explains a great deal about our relationship. We were born and we grew up in very different circumstances, yet when we are listening to music Pio and I understand each other way better than he and someone born and raised in the same city would. Even though that someone speaks the same dialect, knows the same doctors, and had the same teachers - but they don't share the same musical taste.

So I find it important to make the viewer listen to what the characters listen to. It's a way in, a way to bring the audience closer to the people on the screen.

The film ends with a boy becoming a man, but not without a cost. Do you consider it an optimistic ending?

Optimistic? In my own life I tend to be a very optimistic person, but I try not to think about my films in terms of optimism or pessimism. In the end the goal is to give the viewer my take on what life is like where I live, and to



leave them to decide for themselves how they feel about it. While my films are not “objective,” they don’t have a specific agenda, they are not a rallying cry for any specific cause. They are primarily designed to be character explorations. They are about characters who find themselves in conflicting and contradictory situations, who must try to cope with those situations as best as they can.

While this film touches on race relations, poverty, stereotyping, crime, etc., it is ultimately about Pio, about who he is and who I see him becoming. In life, I am optimistic about Pio. I love him very very much and I appreciate who he is now and who he will become. At the same time I realize that every place imposes certain structures that are often hard to shed when you live within them.

I think that if confronted with the choice he has to make in regard to Ayiva, Pio would do exactly what he did in the film. What happens is obviously very, very sad, but in the end I don’t think that the viewer will dislike him. Good people do bad things, and when our backs are against the wall we usually resort to tribalism and embrace the burden of identity, which is frequently the easy way out. People in the Ciambra have done all kinds of things that are viewed and judged as “bad,” but they are not bad people and I think this film is a testament to that.

So just like with the end of *Mediterranea* there are those who will view this ending optimistically and those who will view it pessimistically. In the end I think it’s important that, while Pio does what he does, we see how hard it is for him. It takes a toll on him, and ultimately if there is a path to some form of solidarity between the Africans and the Gypsies it will be through someone like Pio. You can be pessimistic about the social architecture imposed on Pio or you can be optimistic about seeing how he feels at home, and made to feel at home, in the African community.

Nobody is perfect, and I am personally relieved to know that Pio Amato is out and about, doing his thing.



Biography

Jonas Carpignano spent his childhood between Rome and New York City. He began making films at Wesleyan University and after graduating continued working on film sets in Italy and the US. His work as a director has been shown around the world and has won awards at Cannes, Venice, and Sundance. His first feature film *Mediterranea* debuted at the Cannes Film Festival - Semaine de la critique before receiving the award for the best directorial debut of 2015 by the National Board of Review. His second feature film *A Ciambra* will premiere in the Directors’ Fortnight at the 2017 Cannes film festival. Jonas lives in Italy where he continues to work as a writer and director.

Filmography

- 2012 **A CHJÀNA - Short**
SXSW Film Festival
Venice International Film Fest - Best Short Film - Contro Campo Italiano
New Directors New Films - Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists Special Mention
- 2014 **A CIAMBRA - Short**
Cannes International film festival - Discovery Award
Miami International film festival - Grand Jury Prize, Audience Award, Park Grove Award
Stockholm International film festival - Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalism
New York Film Festival
- 2015 **MEDITERRANEA**
Cannes Critics’ Week
Stockholm Film Festival - Best First Feature & Best Actor
Gotham Awards - Breakthrough Director
Film Independent Spirit Awards - nominated Best first film, Best Actor, Best first screenplay
NATIONAL BOARD OF REVIEW - Winner for Best Directorial Debut and One of the 5 Best Foreign Language Films of the Year

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