



**A man puts his life in danger by taking a stand for humanity
against the brutality of ancient tradition.**

FRANCE - ITALY / 90 minutes / DCP / COLOR / 5.1



SYNOPSIS

A contemporary reading of Antigone. Gaetano, a quiet young man, lives near the bedside of his father and works alone to manage the family bakery. Although his French baguettes are well liked, as the Paris-born son of a Sicilian mother and French father, the village has never accepted him.

When his wastrel elder brother dies committing a crime that results in the death of two others, Gaetano assumes his family responsibility to bury him next to their mother. But in this village, the weight of tradition is omnipotent.

The mayor Enza enforces the law like an underworld don, declaring there is no place for bad people to be buried beside the good in the municipal cemetery. She denies Gaetano access to his brother's body.

Enza's daughter Anna is Gaetano's lover. She witnesses his resolve and encourages Gaetano to take a stand for his family honor, even as doing so will put his life in danger.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Inspiration

In Palermo, Homer's narratives rub shoulders with new urban legends. In my eyes his beauties are matched only by his torments. This adaptation of the ancient myth of Antigone, is rooted in my love for Sicily. The island's character is itself the image of its violent geography, as the serenity of the sea clashes with the jagged mountains. In winter, Sicily is desolate and melancholy troubles the minds of its inhabitants. This love-hate relationship with the land, which is both hostile to Gaetano and beloved by him, informs the title «Amare Amaro», to love bitter.

Gaetano's defiance of the village's authorities highlights the meaning of Sophocles' tragedy, where the laws of the family come into conflict with those of the city. Having grown up between France and Italy I have always been obsessed with multi-cultural identity. My origins have pre-destined me to abide by strong family values, whose mythology fascinates me.

By placing a French family in a narrow-minded Sicilian village, the film explores the brutality of primitive fears which prevents Gaetano's integration. This small Sicilian village's xenophobia also resonates on a global scale, at a time when right wing politics grow stronger all over the world.

This film has thus both a global resonance and a very personal one for me as it investigates my own feelings as a young man made to feel like a foreigner in my own country.

Writing

With Samy Baaroun, my co-scriptwriter, we resolved from the start to render a literal adaptation of the tragedy, confident that such an approach would highlight how the meaning of the text still shines brilliantly. The screenplay quickly took shape as we gave flesh to the characters. In this film, the characters aren't good or bad, they are ambivalent. The characters were developed using the tragedy's imperatives rather than exploring their motives and dwelling on their shortcomings. I believe that this approach gives them a certain purity.

Seventy years of violent history have ensconced the Mafia at the heart of Sicilian stories, of which our Enza is a prime example. Gaetano undertakes the anti-mafia fight that has been taken up by the new generation, whose courage fascinates me. By extension, he represents the individual standing up to an enormous system, which will always end up crushing him. Enza symbolizes a political class whose tentacles hold firmly onto a throne that it wishes to retain as a matter of pride, quite like Sophocles's King Creon.

Directing and producing

What is beautiful in tragedy is that we can savor each instant more deeply and take a closer look at the subtleties of each character's journey, as the viewer knows already the ending, he isn't preoccupied with seeing it coming as much as with other forms of narratives.

When I started working on the script's breakdown, I knew that the Greek tragedy's DNA and the classical text would influence the film's direction. I wanted to concentrate the film on a series of strong scenes using the uncut expression found in theatre. I wanted to let the characters develop on screen without too many subterfuges. The direction and the edit had to be as invisible as possible to generate emotion and character development in each shot.

The production protocol on this, my first feature film was resolutely minimalist by necessity. We could not afford to shoot more than four takes per shot... and often no more than four shots per scene. Sequence-shots were often employed, as they encourage the flow of uninterrupted emotion from the actors. It was also important that each frame be a painting. Extensively-lit settings were beyond our means. So with my director of photography, Tristan Chenais, we carefully made use of precise slices of natural light to create a twilight atmosphere. This resulted in a level of lyricism that contributed to the rhythm of the film overall. The use of natural light for these long takes made the passing of time even more perceptible as we can feel the light waning on some twilight shots, bringing more realism and intensity to the scenes.

The atmosphere of our imagery was inspired by Italian Baroque painters and highlights the extra-realistic dimension of Sophocles' characters.

Casting

I was looking to build colorful characters with archetypal characteristics, reminiscent of Western movies. The petulant mayor of the small town, and its authoritarian Marshall, the beautiful and fragile young woman, the tormented foreigner with his raw energy... All this typology makes the film's numerous confrontations intense and dramatic.

However, I wanted to counterbalance this construction with very nuanced interpretations. I aimed to make all characters endearing, in order to steer away from the traditional usual characterizations of good and bad, of heroes and antagonists.

Gaetano's part was imagined for Syrus Shahidi. He is an actor of refined sensitivity in a great hulking body. I built his role to highlight two disparate character traits, as someone of imposing presence and wild beard, taciturn and hard-working, a stubborn man that cannot be stopped. On the surface grief did not shake Gaetano. Nobody ever saw him cry. But when his mask finally collapses, we see the full extent of the drama playing inside him, in all its lyrical power.

Celeste Casciaro has embodied in international cinema the strong woman of Southern Italy. She also starts off as a strong, monolithic figure, but throughout the film we can feel her gradually crumble as the choice she made is hurting her beloved daughter. While she remains inflexible as the town's strong-willed mayor, she is failing as a mother and becomes increasingly fragile.

Tony Sperandeo is a legendary Sicilian actor, renowned for his mafia roles. I was very excited to be able to cast him as the police marshal role as the dynamics between him and Enza make this role really nuanced and complex, and therefore unusual for him. He is an actor that embodies very well the male ego and the Italian machismo but in this role he has to take orders from Celeste. The fact that he, who normally plays roles in which he gives orders, has to execute her will against his own, gives Enza's character extraordinary power. Her stubbornness and his frustrated ego generates remarkable tension on screen, making them a fantastic duo.

The village itself is almost like another character in the film. I have adapted the recurring chorus in Sophocles' text by replacing it by the village, creating breathing spaces in our drama. The village is stuck in the past, primitive and prone to violent reactions. It's a good metaphor for what's happening in the world at the moment, with the rise of xenophobia and nationalism on a global level.

I looked for strong individuals to play the smaller, villagers roles. Some of the supporting cast were known profiles of Sicilian cinema, others were raw talents discovered in the streets of Palermo. Each of these smaller parts bring the locations to life and add a quirkiness and an authenticity to the film.

BIOGRAPHIES

Director - Julien Paolini

Julien Paolini left Italy at the age of 8 and grew up in the Paris suburbs. He was a finalist for the 2009 Sopadin Prize in 2009 for his feature script "*Conduite nocturne*". His many short films shot between France, Africa and the United States toured most of the festivals and have been broadcast around the world. He directed actors such as Ahna O'Reilly, François-Xavier Demaison, Pierre Arditi and Shiloh Fernandez and adapted Boris Vian for France Television's Vian collection. Representative of the new generation of French directors, his exploration of today's society led him to adapt the bestseller "*I spit on your grave*" with Boris Vian Cohérie and to develop the TV series "*Le Doute*" for Arte about the sectarian universe. A retrospective of his work took place in November 2017 in Paris at the Carreau du Temple.

Syrus Shahidi plays GAETANO

Syrus Shahidi, actor of Franco-Iranian origins, studied at the Paris Theatre School and first performed on stage. After his first feature film, "*Quantum Love*" with Sophie Marceau and François Cluzet he was cast in "*24 Days: The True Story of the Ilan Halimi Affair*". He then starred in Robert Guédiguian's 2015 "*Une histoire de fou*" (Don't Tell Me the Boy was Mad) based on the real story of the Armenian genocide and presented out of competition at Cannes. He is one of the lead roles of the new Netflix French TV Series "*Plan coeur*".

Tony Sperandeo plays MARESCIALLO

Tony Sperandeo began his career in 1983. In 1985, he made his film debut in "*Pizza Connection*" and was featured in 1987 in Michael Cimino's "*The Sicilian*". Legendary actor of Italian and especially Sicilian cinema, he has starred since in numerous films, such as Ricky Tognazzi's "*La scorta*", "*Ragazzi fuori*" and "*Mery per sempre*". In 2001, Sperandeo won the David di Donatello Prize for best supporting actor in "*I cento passi*", directed by Marco Tullio Giordana.

Celeste Casciaro plays ENZA

Nominated for the Nastro d'Argento for Best Actress in 2014 for "Quiet Bliss", Celeste Casciaro has appeared in the last three films of Edoardo Winspeare, which brought her to the spotlight at festivals around the world, from Sundance to La Mostra of Venice.

Ciro Petrone plays CIRO

Noticed in 2008 in Matteo Garrone's "*Gomorra*" for his incarnation of Pisellino, a tragicomic young militant of the mafia, Ciro Petrone won the prize for best actor at the Capri Hollywood Film Festival that year. He performed again for Garrone in 2012 in "*Reality*", in competition at Cannes; he appeared this year in Rupert Everett's "*The Happy Prince*".

Samy Baaroun, scriptwriter

Samy Baaroun is a French author, scriptwriter and dialogist. After studying philosophy, he joined the newspaper Mouvance, writing literary criticisms and biographical tributes, and wrote several philosophical articles articulating aesthetics and politics. He then wrote three books before to turn to cinema by writing the scripts and dialogues of "*Dealer*", "*Döner*" and "*Les disparus de Sait-Agil*".

PRODUCTION COMPANIES

LA RESERVE (executive producer) was created in 2018 by three young film professionals: Julien Paolini, director, Syrus Shahidi, actor, and Clément Lecomte, business affairs. The aim of this union is to produce a new French arthouse film cinema on the international scene, composed of universal stories, movements, and unknown territories.

ROSEBUD ENTERTAINMENT PICTURES (co-executive producer) is managed by Angelo Laudisa, a French producer of Italian origin, and worked as a consultant for the Italian government to promote Italian cinema in France. In 2012, he founded *Rosebud Entertainment Pictures* with which he produced “*Escobar Paradise Lost*” with Benicio del Toro, Josh Hutchinson, and “*Blockbuster*”, the first French Original Netflix film. In 2018, he obtained four nominations for the David di Donatello with “*Riccardo goes to hell*”. He is the co-producer of Aldo Baglio’s “*L’indesiderato*”, distributed in Italy at the end of 2018 by Medusa.

PICSEYES (coproducer) is managed by Xavier Plèce who began his activity in the musical production then the short films. In 2012, he coproduces Romain Levy’s movie “*Radiostars*”, will follow the “*Statesman*” by Pierre Courrege and “*The ones who stay*” first feature film from the young and gifted director Loic Paillard, the movie was released in march 2018. Lately he has been assigned the executive production of Erwan Marinopoulos’s movie “*Kill Ben Lyk*”.

SOLDATS FILMS (coproducer) Soldats Films was founded in 2016 by Pierre Cazenave and Grégoire Giral. The company was soon attracting the attention of the profession, in particular with «*Témoins*» by David Koch, short listed for the Oscars 2018 and supported by the Arte channel as well as by the CNC, which has since given Soldiers its support and has developed many other projects. Soldats Films addresses a genuine artistic and modern vision of feature film.

Director	Julien Paolini
Scriptwriters	Samy Barroun & Julien Paolini
Production company	La Réserve and Rosebud Entertainment Pictures (France)
Coproduction company	Picseyes and Soldats Films (France)
Producers	Julien Paolini, Angelo Laudisa, Clément Lecomte, Syrus Shahidi
Co-Producers	Xavier Plèche, Quentin Heneguelle, Pierre Cazenave-Kaufman, Grégoire Giral
Line Producer	Vincent Cusumano, Andrea Santoro (Italy), Gilles Monnier (France)
Cinematography	Tristan Chesnais
Production Designer	Lisa Paolini
Costume	Olga Richon
Editor	Gwen Ghelid
Music	Pasquale Filastò
Sound	Martin Lanot
Cast	
Gaëtano	Syrus Shahidi
Anna	Virginia Perroni
Enza	Cesleste Casciaro
Maresciallo	Tony Sperandeo
Gianni	Dino Favuzza
The Father	Fosco Perinti
Bebeto	Ciro Petrone
Carlo	Gabriele Arena
Tonio	Paolo Brancati
Giuseppe	Giuseppe Lo Nardo
Vaniglia	Francesco Russo
Andrea	Lorenzo Randazzo
Mouton	Gianfranco Damiano
Lucia	Giuditta Perriera
Daniela	Daniela Lo Nardo
Grazia	Nunziatina Lo Presti
Salvo	Salvo Lo Nardo
Rosario	Rosario Lo Nardo
Gabriele	Giovanni Zingale
Desi	Desire Lo Nardo
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