

NICOLA GIULIANO, FRANCESCA CIMA AND MEDUSA FILM
PRESENT



OFFICIAL SELECTION
COMPETITION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

LA GRANDE BELLEZZA

(THE GREAT BEAUTY)

A FILM BY
PAOLO SORRENTINO



TONI SERVILLO

CARLO VERDONE

SABRINA FERILLI

CARLO BUCCIROSSO IAIA FORTE PAMELA VILLORESI GALATEA RANZI

FRANCO GRAZIOSI GIORGIO PASOTTI MASSIMO POPOLIZIO SONIA GESSNER ANNA DELLA ROSA LUCA MARINELLI SERENA GRANDI
IVAN FRANEK VERNON DOBTSHEFF DARIO CANTARELLI LILLO PETROLO LUCIANO VIRGILIO GIUSI MERLI ANITA KRAVOS

WITH MASSIMO DE FRANCOVICH WITH ROBERTO HERLITZKA AND WITH ISABELLA FERRARI

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RUNTIME : 142 MIN

DISTRIBUTION

PATHÉ DISTRIBUTION

2, rue Lamennais
75008 Paris
Phone : +33 1 71 72 30 00

INTERNATIONAL SALES IN CANNES

Résidences du Grand Hôtel
IBIS Entrance - Apartment 4A/E - 4th Floor
06400 Cannes
Phone : +33 (0)4 93 99 88 83
www.patheinternational.com
sales@patheinternational.com

PRESS

LE PUBLIC SYSTÈME CINÉMA

Alexis Delage-Toriel / Agnès Leroy
40, rue Anatole France
92594 Levallois-Perret Cedex - France
Phone : +33 1 41 34 21 09
adelagetoriel@lepublicsystemecinema.fr
aleroy@lepublicsystemecinema.fr
www.lepublicsystemecinema.fr

IN CANNES

13, rue d'Antibes - 4th floor
06400 Cannes
Phone : +33 4 93 39 66 21



Photos and press kit can be downloaded on www.pathefilms.com

Rome, in the splendor of summer. Tourists flock to the Janiculum Hill: a Japanese man collapses, felled by such beauty. Jep Gambardella — a handsome man with irresistible charm, despite the first signs of ageing — enjoys the city's social life to the full. He attends chic dinners and parties, where his sparkling wit and pleasant company are always welcome. A successful journalist and inveterate seducer, in his youth he wrote a novel which earned him a literary award and a reputation as a frustrated writer. He masks his disenchantment behind a cynical attitude, which makes him view the world with bitter lucidity. On the terrace of his Rome apartment which overlooks the Coliseum, he hosts parties where “the human apparatus” — that was the title of his novel — is stripped bare, and where the comedy of nothingness is played out. Weary of his lifestyle, Jep sometimes dreams of taking up his pen again, haunted by memories of a youthful love which he still hangs on to. But will he ever manage it? Can he overcome this profound disgust for himself and others, in a city whose dazzling beauty sometimes leads to paralysis?

SYNOPSIS





INTERVIEW WITH PAOLO SORRENTINO

By Jean A. Gili
Paris-Rome, April 2013

How did you come to make a film that delves so deeply into the undergrowth of Rome, after the experience of making films in Ireland and the United States?

I have long been thinking about a film which probes the contradictions, the beauties, the scenes I have witnessed and the people I've met in Rome. It's a wonderful city, soothing yet at the same time full of hidden dangers. By dangers, I mean intellectual adventures which lead nowhere. Initially, it was an ambitious project without limits, which I

kept putting off until I found the binding element that could bring this whole Roman universe to life. And that element was the character of Jep Gambardella who was the last piece of the puzzle, and who made the whole concept of the film possible and less confused. I thought the moment had come for me to bring this undeniably ambitious film to life. After two wonderful years of travelling between Europe and the United States to make *THIS MUST BE THE PLACE*, I really felt the need to stop moving. I wanted to maintain my idle lifestyle with a job that allowed me to go home every evening; but in reality, *LA GRANDE BELLEZZA* was an exhausting film, despite being a passionate experience.

What part did Umberto Contarello play in writing the script?

I've known Umberto since my youth, when I wanted to be a screenwriter and he was already an acknowledged writer for the cinema. Along with Antonio Capuano, he initiated me into the job. He introduced me to poetic worlds that I was fortunate to be able to recreate later in a personal way, according to my own sensitivity. As a result, we share a way of approaching things which now goes back more than 20 years. Our way of working is quite straightforward. It consists of chatting regularly – sometimes quite fleetingly, sometimes in more depth, depending on the ideas that daily life provides us with. Even little things, or the irrepressible need to tell each other a joke that made one of us laugh, might prompt us to write or to call up or see each other. Then, when the writing process begins, we go our separate ways. Like a long game of ping-pong, we send the script back and forward between us. I write the first version, I send it to him; he writes the second version; I do a third, and so on until the shoot, because a script can always be improved. The word “end” doesn't exist in writing.

In terms of the staging, this film seems less baroque than your previous ones.

Probably. On the face of it, it's a film that's overflowing. During the preparation phase, I noticed the visual overload produced by the work on the sets, the costumes, and the great multitude of actors required for the narrative. When I turned to directing the film, I decided to keep a little distance from this. I thought the direction should merely accompany this density.

In certain aspects, the film could be called “Sorrentino Roma”. Was the idea of borrowing LA DOLCE VITA's approach one of the starting points of the film? As with Fellini's film, the protagonist is essentially an observer.

In reality, even in THE CONSEQUENCES OF LOVE and THIS MUST BE THE PLACE, I used the narrative structure which suits me best. The protagonist of the film is above all an observer of the outside world who becomes the main “raison d'être” of the film. Then, through a series of twists, incidentally and often for reasons linked to fate, he also undergoes a personal journey. For LA GRANDE BELLEZZA, I couldn't do anything else, because the core of the film was a huge mass of interlocked facts, characters and anecdotes, all

gravitating around Rome and which I wanted to transform into a film. Of course, ROMA and LA DOLCE VITA are works that you cannot pretend to ignore when you take on a film like the one I wanted to make. They are two masterpieces, and the golden rule is that masterpieces should be watched but not imitated. I tried to stick to that. But it's also true that masterpieces transform the way we feel and perceive things. They condition us, despite ourselves. So I can't deny that those films are indelibly stamped on me and may have guided my film. I just hope they guided me in the right direction.

The fact that the protagonist, played by Toni Servillo, is older than Marcello Mastroianni changes the nature of the story: there is greater disillusionment in his rapport with creativity.

A writer is constantly preoccupied with the idea of having to capitalize on his own biography on an artistic level. If that biography – as in the case of Jep Gambardella – is permanently drifting on the superficiality of high society, on futile chattering that is no more than background noise, on gossip reduced to instinctive pettiness, then that capitalization seems impossible. That's why he continually quotes Flaubert. Meanwhile, the years are rolling by for Gambardella and his greatest source of despair is the consequences of ageing. There's always less time, less energy, and happiness seems lost, or never to have existed. Pleasure has been reduced to a mechanism, which contradicts by its nature the principle of pleasure. All he has left is the rapport with the nostalgia of innocence that this character perhaps associates with a instantaneous form of something else, something very distant from his own experience: beatitude. An enviable state which, in a totally unexpected way, given his lifestyle, moves by channels of suspension and silence. That's why his encounter with the nun who devotes her life to poverty, and who is in a way close to beatitude, starts out following the usual path of a casual and irreverent social encounter. Then in the end, through her simplicity, she leads him elsewhere. Not somewhere capable of really making him change, but she at least helps him to glimpse the starting point of fresh artistic creation.

Is the presence of a cardinal who only thinks about trying out culinary recipes a critique of the Church?

It is rather a critique of the propagation of the culture of food, of gastronomic cuisine, and so on. Sometimes it seems we can't talk about anything else. I find the subject amusing too, the tyrannical arrogance of some who want to

impose these themes everywhere is starting to annoy me. That's why – partly in jest – I wanted to show how this trend has spread even to the most unexpected places, to those dedicated to spirituality.

Luca Bigazzi's splendid color photography forms an echo of the black-and-white work of Otello Martelli.

My relationship with Bigazzi is now long-standing and established. I have total trust in him and we are fortunate to understand each other without speaking. So I give Luca the script and I let him interpret it and work it out in terms of lighting. He knows I'd rather go down new, unexplored paths than to rely on what we know and what we've already done, and so I think he works accordingly. I'm increasingly satisfied with this method and I'm always happy to discover the lighting he has created, rather than giving him guidance in advance.

In the film, there are many allusions to Flaubert and the feeling of nothingness.

The great writer and director Mario Soldati used to say that Rome, for obvious reasons, was the capital which more than any other could communicate a feeling of the eternal. But, he would add, what is a feeling of the eternal if not the feeling of nothingness?

LA GRANDE BELLEZZA reminds us Ettore Scola's LA TERRAZZA, with its endless chit-chat on the writer's terrace.

Yes, the exhibition of prattling, the recourse to the lowest form of scuttlebutt, the proverbial ability to demonstrate meanness even towards one's close friends, the disenchantment and cynicism that is currency amongst the Roman bourgeoisie – all of this borrows undeniably from Scola's universe. That's why I wanted to show him my film, and I was moved to see that he was deeply touched. At the end of the screening, he stroked my face for a long time, repeating how much he'd liked the film. And myself, after many years, I was moved to feel again a feeling that I had completely forgotten: to feel like a son.

It seems that the film makes some nods to other filmmakers, without going so far as quoting.

Effectively, in my view it's not a film which employs quotation in the strict sense, but it's a film that is totally indebted to the great Italian cinema of Scola, Fellini, Ferreri, Monicelli, etc.

Original music and repertory music sit alongside one another in the film. How do they co-exist?

In thinking about this film – an inevitable mix of the sacred and the profane, just as Rome famously is – I immediately



The shadow of Fellini floats over Sorrentino's homage to the splendidly indifferent city of LA DOLCE VITA.

thought that this flagrant contradiction of the city, its capacity to miraculously combine sacred and profane, should be echoed in the music. So from the start, the idea came to me of using sacred music and Italian popular music. In that sense, it was necessary to fall back on repertory music.

The film features many very well-known actors in Italy, notably Toni Servillo, with whom you have made four films, but also Carlo Verdone, Sabrina Ferilli, Isabella Ferrari, Iaia Forte, Serena Grandi, Dario Cantarelli, Roberto Herlitzka, and even a small role for Giulio Brogi.

Whatever you say about it, Italy has an extraordinary pool of actors of every sort. They are all very different, from many different backgrounds, but all with often under-exploited potential, all just waiting to find good characters. From that point of view, I had great pleasure in calling on actors with whom I had already worked, and other very popular actors, like Carlo Verdone and Sabrina Ferilli, who usually play other types of roles. But I was sure – and this was confirmed during the shoot – that a good actor can do anything. Due to the considerable number of characters, I also had the possibility of working with actors with whom I had wanted to work for a long time, but who I had not been able to use in my previous films, like for example Dario Cantarelli, Roberto Herlitzka, Iaia Forte and Giulio Brogi. I've always loved Brogi and it was with great regret, for reasons solely due to the pace of the film, that I had to sacrifice the very long scene in which he was the main character. Toni Servillo is really a separate case. He's the actor I can ask anything of, because he is capable of doing absolutely everything. I can now move forward with him with my eyes closed, not only as far as work goes, but also in terms of our friendship, a friendship which over time becomes more joyful, lighter yet deeper at the same time.

The film opens with a quote from Céline. By evoking that writer, you allude to a conception of life seen as a journey from birth to death.

Yes, you might consider that I have this conception of life my own. But this quote from Céline, which is the opening line from *Journey to the End of the Night*, is also a declaration of intent that I followed in turn in the film. It comes down to saying: there's reality, but everything is invented too. Invention is necessary in cinema, just to reach the truth. It might seem contradictory, but it isn't at all. Fellini once said: "‘Cinema of truth?’ I prefer ‘the cinema of lies’". The lie is the soul of the spectacle. What has to be authentic is the emotion felt in watching or expressing."



PAOLO SORRENTINO SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHY

2013	LA GRANDE BELLEZZA
2011	THIS MUST BE THE PLACE
2008	IL DIVO
2006	L'AMICO DI FAMIGLIA
2004	THE CONSEQUENCES OF LOVE
2001	L'UOMO IN PIÙ

INTERVIEW WITH TONI SERVILLO

By Jean A. Gili, April 2013



You have worked with Paolo Sorrentino since his first film, *L'UOMO IN PIÙ*. How did you first meet?

My first meeting with Paolo Sorrentino took place in Naples in the theatrical community, with the “Teatri Uniti” founded in 1987 from the union of three companies: Mario Martone’s Falso Movimento, Antonio Neiwiller’s Teatro dei Mutamenti, and the Teatro Studio de Caserta, which I directed. “Teatri Uniti” produced Martone’s first films and also contributed to the production of Sorrentino’s first films. Sorrentino was a young writer back then who was hanging out with the “Teatri Uniti”, an enterprise which had relaunched theater

and cinema in Naples by creating a sort of “Factory”, where both were practiced. After various pieces of work, he finally offered us the script of his first feature film. Angelo Curti, who was closely involved in production work, took charge of him. I remember that at that time I was preparing to stage *The Misanthrope* by Molière. When I read this script, I thought it was fantastic, and that was the start of this relationship which now takes us to our fourth film together, out of the six that Paolo has directed. We have a very privileged relationship which has become quite singular in Italian cinema, because it seems relatively rare that a filmmaker and an actor work together over such a long time.

Do you stay in touch between films?

We have something in common which we both cultivate, and that's a taste for mystery. That has something to do with esteem, with a sense of irony and self-mockery, with certain similar sources of melancholy, and certain subjects or themes of reflection. These affinities are renewed each time we meet, as if it were the first time, without there being any need for a closer relationship between one film and the next. We meet and it's as if we've never been apart. And that means there's a deep friendship between us, and that's what is so great. When a necessity emerges, it's this necessity that becomes a film. This is fed by silences and by something mysterious that we like to leave as it is. The foundation of our relationship has this element of mystery that we don't want to unravel. We don't try to explain it.

Did you discuss the script before the shoot?

As with all the films I've done with Paolo, he keeps the surprise of the script for me. He calls me and says: "I've written a film and I'd like you to play the lead character." Then he

sends me the script right away. He does that every time. Afterwards, we discuss the script together. Once he sends it to me, I take part in the initial readings. He doesn't only want to rouse my curiosity about my character, he also wants an opinion on the script. From that point on, a conversation starts about the character and the film, which doesn't stop and carries on throughout the creative process. For my part, while I like suggesting or adding things, I think that Paolo has a great talent for writing a script and dialog. When you read the script, you can already visualize the film. Paolo is one of those directors who has the whole film in his head. He arrives on set very well prepared. None of which stopped us having conversations beforehand to develop the character. For this film in particular, I'm very pleased with the character. I think it's Paolo's most personal film, his most free.

Does he have a particular way of directing actors?

He chooses the actors according to the talent he sees in them, and the esteem he has for them. Then he expects a certain interpretation from them. He counts on the actor he has selected; he has backed him, and so he expects the maximum. He doesn't just maintain a lasting relationship with me, although we have a deep connection running through four films. He really gambles on all the actors he picks, like you bet on a horse thinking it will win. Most of the time, he chooses an actor and imagines the character embodied by that actor. Naturally, on set there can be a small margin for improvisation, depending on circumstances. But what's special about him is this dimension for gambling, which makes him choose an actor for a given character and gamble everything on his talent. So, for example, in the film I think Sabrina Ferilli and Carlo Verdone are really very good. They are very well-known actors in Italy, and they illustrate exactly what I was explaining. Their talent and their nature had to serve the characters that Paolo had in mind. Personally, in this film, more so than in the others, I felt as though I was passing the baton from the writer to the character. With deep affection, I felt that Paolo really needed this character, this Gambardella he'd invented, to have my face. And he passed the baton onto me. He told me: "Put your face, your body, your way of being into it." What's more, he's a Neapolitan character who lives in Rome, with a Naples style that we both know well.

It's a film with a very rich cast, a spectrum of characters which goes from Neapolitans to Romans, but not just that. Even more than with IL DIVO, Paolo relied on actors with



stage experience – in other words actors who, for the main part, currently act in theater in Italy, and lots of them for many years. Paolo really appreciates the discipline of stage actors, the absolute preparation with which they arrive on set, a preparation comparable to his own. He demands the same thing from all his actors.

It's clear that for you, acting on stage and in the movies is not the same game.

To me, they are two quite different things. They are two profoundly different languages which are employed in completely different spaces and times. In my relationship with Paolo, the fact that he's been a very attentive spectator of my stage work for many years naturally enriches our relationship in cinema, which explains our great complicity.

Do you think that Sorrentino has, in a certain way, gained in maturity over the course of the years?

Yes, I've noticed that his writing ability, whether for a screenplay or dialog, which was already remarkable in L'UOMO IN PIÙ, has become increasingly refined, and at the same time he has developed his directing skills as a creator of images. I think this latest film, LA GRANDE BELLEZZA, is the most accomplished demonstration of this. Over the years, he has become more of a director, whereas for his debuts with L'UOMO IN PIÙ, he was more of a writer, an inventor of extraordinary stories and dialog, but less a creator of forms. But in the course of his career, including his US experience, his writing has matured. Paolo makes films with an absolute liberty, without taking into account the expectations of the market or any career strategies. Paolo has great freedom as an artist and, even when he has some huge opportunities like with his American film, or for this one which is a European coproduction with a major budget, it doesn't change anything about his way of filmmaking, nor his dimension as a writer. This has even grown over the years. Instead of his creative freedom softening or becoming anesthetized, it has augmented.

The film can be seen as a homage to Fellini.

Paolo has never made a secret of his profound love for Fellini. And I, like all the actors of my generation, have never hidden my love for Mastroianni, nor for Volonté. They are key references for us. I think this film and EIGHT AND A HALF,

Fellini's masterpiece, are linked to the same word: "dissipation". They are both films which develop this theme in an extraordinary way, the dissipation of the personality, of talent, of feelings, his own personal story, his social role. Gambardella has total indifference to his great talent, and instead squanders and destroys it. In my opinion these two films, which are completely different, from two different writers – an acknowledged master and a young talent who's carving out his reputation – share this same rhythm, this pacing linked to the theme of dissipation.

The film also conveys a certain anxiety.

It is in some ways the film which recounts the end of an era, without knowing what awaits us in the future. For me, it's the definitive film which recounts the last 30 years in Italy, with the worrying consequences it displays. The anxiety also comes from the fact that it's a film which doesn't look towards a future. Because we're all quite lost in the face of this uncertain future.

The terrace is the film's emblematic setting.

Yes, it's a magnificent terrace in an authentic apartment, in a red building which is easy to recognize, located in front of the Coliseum. You feel as if you could touch the monument with your fingertips from the terrace. It's Gambardella's apartment, the symbolic terrace where numerous important conversations take place on the themes we mentioned



earlier. Gambardella hosts lots of stupid and vulgar parties there. Every emotion finds a place there.

At the start, there's the death of a Japanese tourist; by the end, you feel that the spectator might succumb too.

I interpreted that death as one of the many manifestations of the effects of beauty. We know that beauty can also kill. And I'd be pleased if the film attains that objective.

In IL DIVO, you acted with a mask; here, you act with your face revealed: two traditions of Italian theater.

Yes, despite the fact that I have a haircut which changes me, I'm perfectly recognizable in this film. I used no mask. The character often hides, he is often almost dislikeable due to his cynicism, but he's also very sentimental. When he has the opportunity, he reveals deep feelings. He's very human. I'd say my performance is the opposite of IL DIVO. Instead of working on the mask, I stripped myself bare in the circumstances which presented themselves.

Do you prefer either of those two films?

That depends on the aims, on the vision one has of the finished work. For me, both experiences were exciting, each having their own requirements in terms of the film's objectives. Each time I work with Sorrentino it gives me the opportunity to express myself in a very different way. That's also a demonstration of Paolo's rich inventiveness. The four films I've made with him – L'UOMO IN PIÙ, THE CONSEQUENCES OF LOVE, IL DIVO, and LA GRANDE BELLEZZA – are by the same director but, in a certain way, they are four self-sustaining universes, with characters which have nothing to do with one another. The only thing in common in the four films is a note that I really like in his movies: a disturbing sense of melancholy, which is also very seductive, and which corresponds to Paolo's deep personality. In one way, I feel a strong irony in my way of looking at life, but in another, this melancholy is something which binds us deeply, even though we never talk about it.



TONI SERVILLO SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHY

- 2013 LA GRANDE BELLEZZA by Paolo Sorrentino
- 2013 LA BELLA ADDORMENTATA by Marco Bellocchio
- 2011 IT WAS THE SON by Daniele Ciprì
- 2011 THE JEWEL by Andrea Molaioli
- 2010 UNA VITA TRANQUILLA by Claudio Cupellini
- 2010 NOI CREDEVAMO by Mario Martone
- 2010 GORBACIOF by Stefano Incerti
- 2010 A VIEW OF LOVE by Nicole Garcia
- 2008 IL DIVO by Paolo Sorrentino
- 2008 GOMORRA by Matteo Garrone
- 2007 LASCIA PERDERE JOHNNY ! by Fabrizio Bentivoglio
- 2007 THE GIRL BY THE LAKE by Andrea Molaioli
- 2004 NOTTE SENZA FINE by Elisabetta Sgarbi
- 2004 THE CONSEQUENCES OF LOVE by Paolo Sorrentino
- 2001 LUNA ROSSA by Antonio Capuano
- 2001 L'UOMO IN PIÙ by Paolo Sorrentino
- 1998 TEATRO DI GUERRA by Mario Martone
- 1993 RASOI by Mario Martone
- 1992 MORTE DI UN MATEMATICO NAPOLETANO by Mario Martone

CAST

TONI SERVILLO
CARLO VERDONE
SABRINA FERILLI
CARLO BUCCIROSSO
IAIA FORTE
PAMELA VILLORESI
GALATEA RANZI

with
MASSIMO DE FRANCOVICH

with
ROBERTO HERLITZKA

and with
ISABELLA FERRARI

CREW

A FILM BY Paolo SORRENTINO
WRITTEN BY Paolo SORRENTINO, Umberto CONTARELLO

PRODUCED BY Nicola GIULIANO, Francesca CIMA
CO-PRODUCERS Fabio CONVERSI and Jérôme SEYDOUX
ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS Carlotta CALORI, Guendalina PONTI
ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS Romain LE GRAND, Vivien ASLANIAN, Muriel SAUZAY
LINE PRODUCER Viola PRESTIERI

CINEMATOGRAPHY Luca BIGAZZI
EDITING Cristiano TRAVAGLIOLI
MUSIC Lele MARCHITELLI

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WITH THE CONTRIBUTION OF M.I.B.A.C. DIRECTION GÉNÉRALE CINÉMA
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