

**STRAND  
RELEASING**

*presents*

# **SICILIAN GHOST STORY**

**A FILM BY  
FABIO GRASSADONIA & ANTONIO PIAZZA**

***Starring Julia Jedlikowska and Gaetano Fernandez***

## **PRESS NOTES**

*Official Selection:*

*Winner- Sundance Institute/Mahindra Global Filmmaking Award*

*Cannes Film Festival, Critic's Week*

*CPH: PIX*

*Zagreb Film Festival*

*Mumbai Film Festival*

*Chicago International Film Festival*

*Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival*

*Paris International Fantastic Film Festival*

*Belgrade Film Festival*

*Cinema Italia Oggi*

*Festival del Cinema Italiano Tokyo*

*Neuchâtel International Fantastic Film Festival*

Country of Origin: Italy/Switzerland/France

Format: DCP/2.35/Color

Sound: 5.1 Surround Sound

Running Time: 122 minutes

Genre: Drama/Crime/Fantasy

Not Rated

In Italian with English Subtitles

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**SHORT SYNOPSIS**

In a little Sicilian village at the edge of a forest, Giuseppe, a boy of 13, vanishes. Luna, his classmate who loves him, refuses to accept his mysterious disappearance. She rebels against the code of silence and collusion that surrounds her, and to find him she descends into the dark world which has swallowed him up and which has a lake as its mysterious entrance. Only their indestructible love will be able to bring her back along.

### **LONG SYNOPSIS**

When they get out of school, Luna quietly shadows Giuseppe, her classmate. She's holding a love letter she's written to him. Giuseppe takes a path towards the mountain woods and Luna decides to follow him through the dense greenery before losing sight of him. Then Giuseppe jumps out from behind her and snatches the letter from her hand.

Luna tries but fails to get it back, so she strides away from him in a fury. A vicious black dog appears in front of her and Giuseppe bravely rushes to save her by tricking the animal.

He gives the letter back to Luna and persuades her to join him to the stables where he practices horse riding. Fascinated, Luna watches Giuseppe jump obstacles with the horse. When he's finished, Luna calls out to Giuseppe and gives him her letter. He seals her declaration of love with a kiss, then heads off towards the stables. Luna waits for Giuseppe, her heart doing somersaults. She gazes at the chain of hills in the valley, framed by a dark lake on one end and a slope at the edge of the mountain woods on the other.

Giuseppe doesn't return from the stables, so Luna goes in search of him. In one of the stalls, Giuseppe's horse seems distressed, but there's still no sign of the boy. After Giuseppe's disappearance, his family chooses to remain silent and the world around him and Luna seems indifferent, even concealing the reason for his mysterious disappearance, something that Luna simply can't accept. Even when the truth is revealed months later – Giuseppe was kidnapped by the Mafia – Luna still doesn't give up hope and stubbornly carries on her search for him.

Giuseppe struggles with the physical and psychological strife by clinging on to Luna's love letter. The letter forms the basis of a secret connection between the two teenagers, a conscious and subconscious communication that inexplicably allows them to meet up in the world where Giuseppe is imprisoned, mysteriously accessible through the dark lake. Luna, however, is unable to return from that world of death through the lake until Giuseppe, in a harrowing and miraculous race against time, finds an unexpected escape route. He's able to save Luna and ensure her return to the bright open space of life.

### **DIRECTORS' STATEMENT**

“Sicily is all a realm of fantasy: and what can anyone do there without imagination?”  
—Leonardo Sciascia

“Sicilian Ghost Story” was inspired by the true story of Giuseppe Di Matteo, whose father Santino Di Matteo was a Mafia supergrass.

Giuseppe was kidnapped on November 23rd, 1993 by men wearing police uniforms. They went to the riding stables where Giuseppe often spent time and told him they were taking him to his father, who was working with the police in a secret location. Giuseppe hadn't seen his father for months so he got into their car. This was the start of the kidnapping of the 12-year-old.

Mafia chief Giovanni Brusca ordered the kidnapping; he'd known Giuseppe since he was a baby. Brusca was Santino Di Matteo's friend and his boss. He was sure that Santino would stop talking to prosecutors to save his boy. Brusca expected Di Matteo to withdraw statements accusing him of countless murders and of being the mastermind behind the assassination of prosecutor Giovanni Falcone. But Santino went on talking.

The Mafia kept Giuseppe for 779 days. He was blindfolded and chained as they moved him from one hiding place to another, traveling all over Sicily.

The desperate kidnapping was a hopeless plan and came to an inevitable end in a bunker out in the country, just two kilometres from where Brusca was born, and 20 from the boy's home. On the night of January 11th, 1996, Giuseppe was strangled and his body dissolved in acid. He was little more than a skeleton weighing 30 kilogrammes (66 pounds).

We are both directors from Palermo, and this story haunts us. Giuseppe is a ghost who never ceases to cause us pain for the abominable suffering he endured. He stirs our anger against the world in which such suffering could take place. A ghost imprisoned in a story without redemption. A ghost trapped in the darkest depths of our consciences. A ghost that should be set free.

We got the idea for this film while reading Marco Mancassola's “Un Cavaliere Bianco” (A White Knight). In this story, as he's dying, Giuseppe Di Matteo becomes an imaginary knight in the imagination of a classmate: a supernatural presence that protects her. The idea that reality could intersect with fantasy gave us the two elements to tell Giuseppe's story: the element of ghosts and the culpability of a world that murders children. The elements of a ghost story.

A SICILIAN GHOST STORY and, as such, a fable, in terms of reality.

A SICILIAN GHOST STORY and, as such, a love story, in terms of fantasy.

A SICILIAN GHOST STORY that came from a real horror story.

A SICILIAN GHOST STORY that became a fictional love story.

Our narrative switches from one story to the other. One is factual, made up of human and historical truths; the other is fictional, describing the strong bond between the two lead characters. Perhaps love can work miracles, overcome death and save humanity. Luna is our central character; our imaginary Giuseppe was inspired by Giuseppe Di Matteo. Luna and Giuseppe are classmates. She's been secretly in love with him for a while. The story begins on the day Luna decides to tell Giuseppe she loves him. A few hours later, Giuseppe vanishes. Giuseppe's family says nothing. Nobody seems to care. Luna just can't accept

that he's vanished for no reason. The story revolves around Luna's instinctive need to find and save Giuseppe.

It's her "dream," but as the story progresses, we realize it's more than that: Luna is also Giuseppe's "dream." Luna's letter is the link that connects the two teenagers even though they aren't aware of it until later. When they do meet again, it's in another dimension where they are beyond dreams and nightmares, and the very real threat of death surrounds them. In this dimension, these two teenagers can save themselves and their souls, which are indestructible.

Luna's love for Giuseppe saves her as a person. Giuseppe's love for Luna saves his inner self and her life. In our film, the boy ghost trapped in the darkness of our consciences finally spreads his wings and soars into the brightness of life itself

### **SCREENPLAY NOTES**

Before we started working on the script, we read court transcripts of various trials for Giuseppe Di Matteo's kidnapping and murder. We read books offering historical reconstruction of the crime, some written by his murderers. We went to the places where the boy was held captive on his slow road to death. Our research made it possible to reconstruct many actual moments of his captivity, crucial for us to be able to develop our Giuseppe character precisely from these episodes.

We wanted his secret bond with Luna to give him the strength to transform events, allowing his spirit to resist.

We also concluded from our research that his captors were irrational and stupid. As a result, we didn't give the kidnapper's character status in our screenplay: They were merely brutal, ridiculous dummies. Hollow puppets, nothing more.

The first stage of work, drafting and assembling the storyline, was lonely and disturbing. After finishing, we contacted producer Nicola Giuliano to tell him what we had in mind to see if he was interested in developing it with us. Although our oral narrative was still hazy, Nicola trusted us immediately. He gave us suggestions and hints that were crucial to completing the script. His attention and his ideas were always with us, for all the script drafts and during film editing.

We also thank Nicola for introducing us to director of photography Luca Bigazzi. The quality and speed that hallmark the work of Luca and his team are impressive.

The third crucial meeting engineered by Nicola Giuliano and Indigo Film was with Cristiano Travaglioli, who became film editor for "Sicilian Ghost Story." Like Nicola, Cristiano read the screenplay attentively, so his work didn't start with the cutting room Moviola at the end of shooting, as it usually would, but well before filming began. When we went on set, we kept in mind what he thought of the overall structure of the story and aspects of the characters. And we wanted him close during shooting.

## **CASTING**

We started casting in Palermo in October, 2015. We knew it wouldn't be easy to find two young people who could bring to life the intensity, strength, range of sentiments and situations written into the script, from the innocent love interest at the beginning to the pain, loss and solitude the story imposes on the characters.

This was why we decided we'd work personally with casting director Maurilio Mangano, who'd been on our team for our first film, the short "Rita."

Getting involved in casting first-hand meant seeing every face, listening to each voice, visiting schools and sports clubs, getting to know the teenagers, meeting their teachers, parents and friends... And we didn't stop until we "saw and recognized" Giuseppe and Luna. We were also on the lookout for four more young actors for the film, apart from the leads.

The casting process was thorough. We spent nine long but exciting months going to schools in and around Palermo. Finally, we found them all and could start filming.

## **WORKSHOP AND REHEARSALS**

Six young actors with no acting experience. How were we going to manage something this challenging?

We recruited Filippo Luna, a close friend and great actor from Palermo, who had been our acting coach when we were making our first film, "Salvo". Filippo pointed out that we were going to need plenty of time to get it right.

We needed time to get to know these adolescents and make sure they got to know us, guiding them as smoothly as possible into the storyline and preparing them for life on the set.

We left Palermo with Filippo and the cast for a workshop that lasted over two months, staying in two farmhouses deep in the Sicilian countryside: one in the Castelbuono woods and the other near Troina. We developed the characters, working with the young actors, keeping to the script but also letting their personalities come through. The screenplay and individual characters combined as we evolved their way of thinking and talking, their dreams, hopes, loves and quirks. We can say this was most significant experience of our professional and private lives so far.

At the workshop, adult actors and other crew began to arrive when it was time to begin shooting. They were extremely humble but also extremely surprised at what the young cast had already achieved.

## **LUNA— JULIA JEDLIKOWSKA**

After a long search we had chosen all the young people who were going to appear in the film, but one role remained unfilled: that of our female lead. Months went by without any trace of LUNA. Then one day casting director Maurilio Mangano showed us a video-interview with JULIA JEDLIKOWSKA, a girl of twelve he had come across in a middle school. Julia is of Polish origins but has lived in Palermo with her mother since she was three.

At the start of the video, Julia walked into focus in front of the camera. It was only a short distance, but it was like seeing Luna appear: a eureka moment. Even the way she walked, she was Luna, the girl we'd been seeking for months. Intelligent, older than her years, solitary, Julia did not let anything put her off: running through the woods, swimming in the autumnal lake, fleeing a dog, reciting a long monologue, running up the stairs, fighting with her father in a hallway, and repeating scenes: take after take, tireless and incredibly precise.

### **GIUSEPPE— GAETANO FERNANDEZ**

On Christmas Eve 2015, a Palermo kid knocked on our casting office door. Gaetano Fernandez turned up out of the blue. He was from Dannisinni, one of Palermo's most troubled neighborhoods. He'd read about the casting on Facebook so he got his cousin to come with him, but he had no letter of authorization from his parents. We let him in when we saw how smart he was, and instead of sending him on his way, we had a chat with him. But we knew from the get-go that we had our "leading man," GIUSEPPE.

When he came back for a screen test, Gaetano blew us away: He was natural, cheerful and easy-going. He came from the back alleys of Palermo and was proud to tell us it was where he did his schooling, not in a classroom surrounded by books. He loved Palermo more than anything in the world, but Neapolitan pop, soccer and spending time in the fresh air were close seconds. Gaetano is an enthusiastic member of the local parish community, which had a horse he looked after and had learned to ride

### **FABIO GRASSADONIA & ANTONIO PIAZZA (DIRECTORS)**

Sicilian screenwriters and directors Fabio Grassadonia and Antonio Piazza presented their first feature film "Salvo" at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival, where it won the Semaine de la Critique's Grand Prix and Prix Révélation. "Salvo" was released in 20 countries, including the United States, and shown at prestigious international festivals. In 2010, Fabio and Antonio made their directing debut with the short film "Rita", which they wrote and produced, and which garnered top awards in Italy and abroad. They are also script consultants for major European institutions like the Berlinale Residency, Locarno Open Doors, POWR Baltic Event, the Torino FilmLab, Semaine de la Critique's Next Step and Nisi Masa ESP.

## **FILMOGRAPHY**

### **SALVO**

*Fiction, 110 minutes, Italy/France, 2013*

Salvo is a body guard and hit man for a mafioso. After foiling an attack on his employer, Salvo hunts down the man who organized it and encounters the man's blind sister. She causes Salvo to question himself and his existence.

- Winner— Critics Week Grand Prize—Cannes Film Festival
- Winner—France 4 Visionary Award—Cannes Film Festival
- Winner—FIPRESCI Prize—Ljubljana International Film Festival
- Winner—Festival Award—Gallio Film Festival
- New Directors/New Films
- CPH:PIX
- British Film Institute Awards
- Rio De Janeiro International Film Festival
- Chicago International Film Festival
- London Film Festival
- Montréal Festival of New Cinema
- Cologne Conference - International Film and TV Festival
- Minneapolis-St. Paul International Film Festival
- Festival del Cinema Italiano Tokyo
- Abu Dhabi Film Festival
- Thessaloniki International Film Festival
- Stockholm International Film Festival
- Bimbi Belli Festival
- Sulmonacinema Film Festival
- La Rochelle International Film Festival
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### **RITA**

*Fiction, 18 min, Italy 2010*

Rita, a blind child, shelters a boy on the run who suddenly breaks into her home. It's a mysterious, enigmatic meeting that lets Rita experience a brief moment of freedom.

- Zagreb Film Festival -Winner- The Golden Pram
- Bratislava International Film Festival -Winner- Best Short Film
- Dresden Film Festival -Winner- Youth Jury Award
- Las Palmas Film Festival -Winner- Best Short Film
- Lume International Film Festival -Winner- Jury Award

- Newport Beach Film Festival -Winner- Achievement Award
- Tampere International Short Film Festival -Winner- Diploma of Merit
- Angers Film Festival
- Los Angeles Film Festival
- ERA New Horizons Film Festival
- Milano Film Festival
- Slamdance Film Festival
- Newport Beach International Film Festival
- Brooklyn International Film Festival
- La Rochelle Film Festival

## **ABOUT THE PRODUCERS**

### **INDIGO FILM**

Independent film production company Indigo Film vaunts a portfolio containing all of Paolo Sorrentino's movies, including "Il Divo", winner of the 2008 Cannes Jury Prize; The Great Beauty, 2014 winner of an Oscar, a Golden Globe, and the BAFTA Award for Best Foreign Language Film; "Youth – La Giovinezza", a Golden Globe nominee for Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role in any Motion Picture and for Best Original Song, and was an Oscar nominee for Best Original Song. Films produced in recent years include "Mario's War" by Antonio Capuano; "The Girl by the Lake", a debut work by Andrea Molaioli; "The Double Hour" by Giuseppe Capotondi; "The Mouth of the Wolf" by Pietro Marcello. The latest productions are "The Invisible Boy" by Oscar winner Gabriele Salvatores; "Me, Myself & Her" by Maria Sole Tognazzi; "The Wait" by Piero Messina, "One Kiss" by Ivan Cotroneo; and lastly, "Slam – Tutto Per Una Ragazza" by Andrea Molaioli, from the Nick Hornby's novel "Slam." Gabriele Salvatores' "Il Ragazzo Invisibile 2" is currently in post-production, and Paolo Sorrentino is working on his next film for Indigo, "Loro". Indigo Film will present Sergio Castellitto's Fortunata at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival in the Un Certain Regard section.

### **CRISTALDI PICS**

Massimo Cristaldi began his career in film production in 1976 as a production assistant for his father, legendary Italian producer Franco Cristaldi. Since 1983, he has worked as production manager as well as executive producer on numerous features involving renowned Italian and international directors, including Federico Fellini, Giuseppe Tornatore, Francesco Rosi, Gillo Pontecorvo, Giuliano Montaldo, Sergei Bondarchuk and Michael Anderson. Following Franco Cristaldi's death in 1992, Massimo Cristaldi took over CRISTALDI FILM and oversees the sales of its film library of classic titles. In 1993, Massimo Cristaldi founded CRISTALDI PICTURES (currently CRISTALDI PICS) with which he produces feature films, TV miniseries and short films. The most recent productions include the short, "Rita", the 2010 directing debut of Fabio Grassadonia and Antonio Piazza. The 2013 feature "Salvo", brought the two Sicilian directors a Cannes Grand Prix and a Prix Révélation.

## **CAST**

Julia Jedlikowska	Luna
Gaetano Fernandez	Giuseppe
Corinne Musallari	Loredana
Andrea Falzone	Nino
Federico Finocchiaro	Calogero
Lorenzo Curcio	Mariano
Vincenzo Amato	Luna's father
Sabine Timoteo	Luna's mother
Filippo Luna	U' Nanu
Baldassare Tre Re	Venatura
Rosario Terranova	Scannacristiani
Gabriele Falsetta	Giufà
Vincenzo Crivello	Il Tedesco
Corrado Santoro	Chiodo
Nino Prester	Giuseppe's grandfather

## **CREW**

DIRECTORS	Fabio Grassadonia & Antonio Piazza
WRITERS	Fabio Grassadonia & Antonio Piazza
INSPIRED BY THE STORY	“Un Cavaliere Bianco” / “The White Knight” by Marco Mancassola
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER	Francesco Tató
PRODUCERS	Nicola Giuliano Francesca Cima Carlotta Calori Massimo Cristaldi
CO-PRODUCERS	Antoine De Clermont Tonnerre Jean-Pierre Guérin Elda Guidinetti Andres Pfaeffli Walter Bortolotti
CINEMATOGRAPHY	Luca Bigazzi

EDITING	Cristiano Travaglioli
ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK	Soap&Skin and Anton Spielmann
PRODUCTION DESIGNER	Marco Dentici
COSTUMES	Antonella Cannarozzi
PRODUCTION SOUND MIXER	Guillaume Sciamá
SOUND EDITOR	Emanuela Di Giunta

A co-production of Italy-France-Switzerland

With Indigo Film, Cristaldi Pics, and Rai Cinema

A co-production with Mact Productions, JPG Films, Ventura Film, RSI-Radiotelevisione Svizzera

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