



Frederic Fasano illuminates **La terza madre**

La terza madre (*Mother of Tears*) is the last episode in director Dario Argento's trilogy and follows the master of horror's *Suspiria* (1976) and *Inferno* (1980). The long-awaited feature tells the story of an American student in Rome who rashly opens an antique urn and liberates a ghostly entity with immense power.

Argento attributes great importance to cinematography in his films. In the past he collaborated with fellow Italians Vittorio Storaro AIC, ASC (*L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (*The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*)), Luciano Tovoli, AIC, ASC (*Suspiria*) and Giuseppe Rotunno AIC, ASC (*La sindrome di Stendhal* (*The Stendhal Syndrome*)), but more recently he selected foreign cinematographers such as Ronnie Taylor and Benoît Debie. *Do You Like Hitchcock?* marked his return to an Italian cinematographer – Frederic Fasano (*Scarlet Diva*, *When Children Play in the Sky*, *B.B. e il cormorano* (*B.B. and the Cormorant*)). Argento has now chosen Fasano as his cinematographer on *La terza madre*.

InCamera asked Frederic Fasano about his photographic background and the challenges he faced lighting *La terza madre*.

Q

How did you start out in photography and develop your collaboration with Dario Argento?

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I opened a video production and post-production studio in Milan with some friends after working for eight years as a still life photographer. While assisting producer Gianluigi Toccafondo on the opener for the Venice Film Festival, I met the star of the film, Asia Argento. We had great synchronicity and two months later she asked me to collaborate with her on *Scarlet Diva*, her directorial debut film. Six years later, I met Dario after I was unexpectedly contacted about *Do You Like Hitchcock?*

Q

What were your creative inspirations for *La terza madre*?

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I was immediately inspired by Dario during our initial research into the surrealist Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch, whose dark and intense colours were a spot-on

reference during filming. After several meetings, we agreed that the film needed continuity of atmosphere and colour with the other films in the trilogy yet, through force of circumstances, we had to produce *La terza madre* very differently, particularly from the technical point of view.

Q

Why were there technical differences in the previous films?

A

Suspiria and *Inferno* were produced entirely on set, while 90% of *La terza madre* was shot on location. Moreover, *Suspiria* was printed in Technicolor, while *La terza madre* was produced at Cinecittà Studios where I really felt comfortable. The first two films in the trilogy date back 30 years when production and post-production tools were very different to those we use today.

¹ Cinematographer Frederic Fasano.

² Director Dario Argento talking to actress Asia Argento.

“I tried to maintain some elements from the earlier films, such as the intense saturation of colours and very dark atmospheres”

Q To what extent did you maintain photographic continuity with *Suspiria* and *Inferno* and on which aspects did you focus?

A I tried to maintain some elements from the earlier films, such as the intense saturation of colours and very dark atmospheres, and brought them into line with realistic, stylistic norms and a more personal vision. The colours in *La terza madre* are no longer primary, but rather unnatural. They are created by mixing warm and cool light using sources at 5500° and 3200° and thinking ahead in one shot to the final colour correction. There is a blending of realistic light at the most fantastic moments in the film.

Q What were your main choices for finalising the images during shooting and post-production?

A The main technical choice was to make the whole film in 2K Digital Intermediate; all the other decisions were in some way consequential. For me, it's about a general finalisation process for completing the photography, especially considering constant reductions in shooting time, so I voluntarily deferred many photographic choices until colour correction. A better understanding of the intervention possibilities and the intensity of collaboration with the colourist became more important factors. KODAK VISION2 500T 5218 offered us flexibility, versatility and an incomparable latitude for the DI route. I selected Zeiss Ultra Primes because we filmed mainly at night and I didn't want to lose continuity between consecutive technical sequences.

Q What tricks did you use to achieve an ideal negative for the digital work

A I nearly always exposed at 2.8, which meant that at times the light on set seemed particularly intense, with areas appearing too full of light. Dario did caution me, but I explained that it was my specific choice to barely expose the film by allowing more light in order to get a full negative that would be ideal for the next process.

Q How would you describe your interaction with Dario Argento on decisions of shot composition and camera movement?

A It was a completely shared responsibility and something I particularly welcomed, considering Dario's great experience and technical mastery. The decision to shoot on Super 35, for example, was the result of mutual analyses and discussions. Dario is a director who edits as he shoots and he knows exactly how every single shot will define the film. As a consequence, he never shoots double or additional shots. This process demonstrates his profound security and noteworthy assumption of risk that I believe only the greatest directors allow themselves.

Q Argento's films are often characterised by surprising special effects. *Phenomena (Creepers)* and *Profondo Rosso (Deep Red)* are two innovative films that fit this profile. What did you conceive for *La terza madre*?

A The Canadians at Antem created various digital effects for the film that are of a surprising quality. Post-production was undertaken in collaboration with Paolo Verrucci, a competent young colourist at Cinecittà, a lab that constantly upgrades and improves, yet holds faith in its reputation for the traditional.



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Q Which was the most difficult sequence from an operational viewpoint?

A A four minute night Steadicam sequence shot from outside an abandoned villa. The camera follows Asia Argento as she explores the whole interior in a crescendo of intensity and through very disparate environments. The major difficulty was finding a lighting balance between the exterior and the interior in a scene that had no intradiegetic light.

Q How did you integrate visual effects with classic shots?

A As always in Dario's films, great attention was paid to brutal scenes. One of the most complicated is of a man who bursts into flames and chases Asia through different parts of a building. In addition to traditional special effects, it was necessary to employ digital effects and required very precise coordination in order to create various layered images. For example, I had to visualise how a man on fire would illuminate the environs as he ran. We made a

concerted effort in our imagination and planning, with the objective of maintaining integrity and continuity from the first image to the last.

Q What was your greatest challenge in your collaboration with the master of horror?

A My relationship with Dario on set is very beautiful and inspiring, but it isn't easy. His vision and creative flow don't stop and he rightfully asks his collaborators to constantly follow him. I was happy to remain by his side, even in those intense moments, in the awareness that I was participating in the creation of absolutely extraordinary images. Being near a person who creates a rare world that is profoundly consistent with his own creative reality makes me feel like a star participating in something unique. It was an honour and a pleasure to work with him.

La terza madre was produced by the Italian company Medusa Film in collaboration with Myriad Pictures and was shot in Rome, Turin and the Papiigno Studios in Umbria.