

Disney has placed its first-ever wager on an all-Italian film. *Salvatore –Questa è la vita* (*Salvatore –This is Life*) was financed by the giant American company, which is also handling its overseas distribution. Director Gian Paolo Cugno and Paolo Di Reda co-authored the screenplay that persuaded Globe Films' Producer Pietro Innocenzi to finance the project and brought Buena Vista International's Paul Zonderland on board.

Cugno's debut feature, *Salvatore –Questa è la vita* was lensed by Gino Sgreva, AIC. During the course of Sgreva's career, he has created the look of many major films and television dramas such as *Antonio guerriero di Dio* (*Anthony, Warrior of God*), *Oltremare* (*Overseas*), *Il trasformista* (*The Chameleon*) and *Ferrari*. His latest film is based on the true story of Salvatore, a young Sicilian orphan, who faces the daunting task of finding a substitute father. Despite his tender years, he supports his elderly grandmother and little sister by catching fish and working in a tomato farm, but it leaves him no time to go to school. When a teacher from Rome (played by Enrico Lo Verso) arrives to take up a teaching post in Sicily, he hears of Salvatore's plight. He puts his own career on the line to give the boy lessons and helps him find his own path in life. Soon they become inseparable.

InCamera talked to Gino Sgreva, AIC about the cinematographic highlights of *Salvatore –Questa è la vita*.

Disney backs Salvatore

Q *What type of images did you create to accompany the splendid Sicilian setting and the dramatic storyline?*

A "We wanted to show Sicily without any clichés, an island that is not sun-parched, earth-coloured or Mafia-ridden, so the Director and I decided to use winter light which lends a certain crispness to the colours. You can feel the wind and the sea and it's often cloudy at that time of year. You also meet the real people with their daily routines of school, work and little everyday problems."

Q *The film is set at the southernmost tip of Sicily and Europe, where there is a tangible blending of Mediterranean cultures. How did the cultural and regional characteristics influence your cinematography?*

A "It's fascinating that philosophers such as Gorgias and Pythagoras grew up in Sicily. In fact, the pre-socratic philosophers' discourses on the four

elements – air, water, earth and fire – were often in my mind during filming. In Porto Palo, the elements are so intense that they almost have a physical presence, not to mention a spiritual one. Everything I perceived about being there – feeling the wind on my face, seeing the sea and sun, inhaling the scent of tomatoes, being able to touch the sand – strengthened the concept that this is life in the 'here and now!'"

Q *Is there a particular shot in the film that encapsulate those thoughts?*

A "There's a conversation on a terrace with a low angle close-up of Galatea Ranzi from which we see the island and the currents of Porto Palo. The clouds are scudding along at a hundred miles an hour, driven by an incredible wind and there's a bleak sun in an extraordinary sky. That scene is proof of everything I've just described. It's no longer an abstract concept or a piece of philosophy. These earthly elements are an integral part of the story and on screen they become tangible for the audience to assimilate."

Below: (L to R) Actors Galatea Ranzi and Enrico Lo Verso
Director Paolo Cugno
DP Gino Sgreva, AIC.



Q *What experiences did you have in terms of casting and locations?*

A "The aspects I've mentioned were also present in the people, in their colours and features, in the physiognomy of the individual Sicilians who make this island unique. They gave us an unconditional welcome and unconditional support. The elements have shaped their features and moulded their eyes and appearance as well as the appearance of the landscape. It made this film a unique and wonderful experience."

Q *Did you devise any specific lighting tricks to help you achieve a realistic winter light or did you simply use the existing environment?*

A "The sun was always at a lovely low angle and it created very beautiful gilded contrasts between light and darkness. We shot a spectacular scene in the fish market at Porto Palo with the fishermen coming in from the sea. I recall the red hues of a huge 35lb dentex and traps full of prawns and crayfish. The force of nature, of life, is more intense here than elsewhere. Colours, atmosphere and sounds tell a story that even people who aren't acquainted with the location can understand."

Q *What does 'consciousness' mean to you and what role does it play in your work?*

A "I had the good fortune of studying the myth of Plato's Cave at school, which is really a discussion of consciousness. Human experience often comprises consciousness of the shadows and not the light. Light raises an issue of spirituality, and therefore an issue of knowledge and an approach to the truth – or an examination of faith. If human dimension is anything more than merely abstract and a reflection of our daily experiences, it should be something tangible."

Q *How did you decide on the shooting medium?*

A "The imaginative and intellectual effort of making a film demands a medium that can relate thoughts, emotions and sensations on the screen, and what constitutes them, day after day, every time the camera rolls. You need a medium with a certain richness and the ability to record and recreate it for the audience. I believe that even today film is still the best medium."

Q *Which stocks did you choose?*

A "I used KODAK VISION2 50D 5201 for the first time and it's the stock I've wanted for years! It conveys the same dynamics and tonal richness in the highlights and the shadows that my eyes can see. It

allowed me to preserve crisp shadows and capture clouds without any graininess, even in strong light. The result was clean, brilliant and colourful and watching it on screen gave me unparalleled pleasure. I chose KODAK VISION2 250D 5205 for daylight interiors. The stock has almost no competition; when it was paired with Zeiss Ultra Primes I often thought: 'I'm seeing something here; now does the film see something more?' With KODAK VISION2 500T 5218 for night interiors and exteriors, I could turn off the lights and work in the borderline area of what was visible and what was not, which was enormously satisfying. The stock conveys a rich contrast between light and dark, with tonal richness in the lowlights as well as the highlights. Kodak film is getting closer and closer to what the eye of a sensitive person can discern."

Q *How does Salvatore –Questa è la vita fit into your own creative journey?*

A "The challenge with every scene is to use less and less light; to work towards transparency in the penumbras and the glimpses. I suggest ideas to the audience and then it's up to their sensitivity, their capabilities and their imagination to see everything. Experience gives me the confidence to take risks and face controversy in a very personal way. The more I learn, the more courage I have to make mistakes. I also have the ability to acknowledge them. It's fundamental if one wants to grow." ■

Director's comments

I first worked with cinematographer Gino Sgreva at the end of the 1990s. At the time I was a director's assistant and I was struck by Gino's artistic qualities and his human touch which were parts of his outstanding passion for the job. He doesn't simply light a picture; he tells a story through the lighting, entering into the very soul of the film. His professional contribution to *Salvatore* is significant because he has interpreted the emotions and feeling of the film with sensitivity and respect. His cinematography encourages viewers to share this small but important story that I, as Director, have imagined for them.

Gian Paolo Cugno