



VENICE REVIEW DAILY

COMPETITION

COMANDANTE



Photo: Venice Film Festival

VERDICT: The true story of an Italian submarine commander in World War II who sank enemy ships yet saved defenseless men is told with old-fashioned gusto and retro sentimentality in ‘Comandante’, with star Pierfrancesco Favino injecting life into the film.

Deborah Young, August 30th, 2023

Swimming against the current of decades of anti-war films that have underlined the horrors of world

war — one of the most recent and terrifying being this year’s Oscar candidate from Germany, All Quiet on the Western Front — Italian director Edoardo De Angelis (Indivisible, The Vice of Hope) strikes out in a very different direction in Comandante, the opening night film in Venice and his first to make competition.

The time is 1940 and the film’s hero (drawn from real life) is an

Continues next page

3 Questions for Roberto Cicutto

VERDICT: The President of the Biennale di Venezia describes the Biennale as “a unique space for the exercise of cultural diplomacy”.

THE FILM VERDICT: You have often underlined the uniqueness of the Biennale di Venezia, which encompasses art, architecture, dance, music and theater as well as cinema. You stress that it “has never been just a showcase for talents and films, it has also been a mirror of political, social and environmental criticalities.” How have you been guiding the Biennale – particularly the cinema section – to reflect contemporary issues and what you have called “the transformation of history”?

ROBERTO CICUTTO: Ever since my arrival in 2020 I have realized how, through its relationship with the national Pavilions, along with the artists invited by the curators of the Art and

Continues next page

GERMAN FILMS IN VENICE



VENEZIA 80

THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING

by Timm Kröger



FUORI CONCORSO

HOLLYWOOD GATE

by Ibrahim Nash'at

From previous page

eccentric submarine commander who is enthusiastically engaged in sinking Allied ships and shooting down British planes because Italy is “at war”. But above all he is a “man of the sea” and a civilized Italian, so when faced with a rowboat full of drowning Belgians who survived his attack on their vessel, he lets himself be guided by a fixed moral principle: a defenseless man is not an enemy, and it is one thing to wage war and another to rescue a man in need.

In another intense and convincing performance, Pierfrancesco Favino (it is hard to imagine another actor in the role) gives Commander Salvatore Todaro a stern demeanor but a heart of pure gold, with an unexpected touch of visionary mysticism that allows him to predict story developments in advance. A seaplane crash has left him with a damaged spine so painful it can only be treated with morphine (which he heroically refuses). The visual sign of this is a complicated corset made of adjustable straps, a device he wears for most of the film and a constant reminder of his moral backbone, strong will and ability to remain alive.

The early scenes in Sandro Ver-

[Full Article, Click here](#)



Roberto Cicutto President Biennale Veneziaabera

Continued from previous page

Architecture sections and the directors of the various Festivals (Cinema, Theater, Music and Dance), the Biennale represents an observatory on many of the world’s realities, and not just from an artistic point of view. Also from a political and economic perspective, all the way to the respect for human rights and freedom of expression.

For this reason I would dare to say that the Biennale system is a unique space for the exercise of cultural diplomacy. As far as cinema is concerned, in my role as President I don’t intervene in artistic choices (or for any other Festival). But it’s obvious that

since the Biennale represents contemporaneity, the choices made by the festival director can’t help but privilege everything that contributes to the search for new languages (both expressive and technological) by affirmed filmmakers and new talents, bearing witness to the transformations and historical changes as they continue to happen.

THE FILM VERDICT: You have also brought something quite unique to the Biennale: your long experience as one of Italy’s top film producers, from films directed by Sally Potter to Jacques Rivette, from Spike Lee to masterpieces by Ermanno Olmi. How did your

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GIORNATE

OCEANS ARE THE REAL CONTINENTS

VERDICT: An exquisite love poem to Cuba, where three generations struggle to survive and dream of escape, depicted in a series of tableaux of daily life in a small rural town.

Patricia Boero, August 30th, 2023

In his first feature film, *Oceans Are The Real Continents*, Tommaso Santambrogio expands on a short of the same title that premiered at the Venice Film Festival in 2019 and now opens the Giornate degli Autori section of the current festival.

The plot unfolds in long, leisurely takes that resemble still photography, shot in beautiful black and



Wolf

white, over the course of two mesmerizing hours, although the editing could have been tighter. The film reflects on the lingering beauty and the deep sorrow of survivors of a social and economic catastrophe that has rendered them either paralyzed by grief or clinging to dreams of escape and success far from Cuba's shores. Separation

affects every Cuban family, and the film recounts the wounds inflicted by the difficult decision to part ways with loved ones.

Santambrogio, who was born in Milan, studied film there and in Cuba before making such award-winning shorts as *Taxibol* (2022) and *L'Ultimo Spegne la Luce* (2021).

[Full Review, Click here](#)

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GIRORNATE

LOS OCÉANOS SON LOS VERDADEROS CONTINENTES

CINE VERDICT:

Un exquisito poema de amor a Cuba, donde tres generaciones luchan por sobrevivir y sueñan con escapar, representado en una serie de cuadros de la vida cotidiana en un pequeño pueblo rural.

Patricia Boero, August 30th, 2023

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ways with loved ones.

Santambrogio, who was born in Milan, studied film there and in Cuba before making such award-winning shorts as *Taxibol* (2022) and *L'Ultimo Spegne la Luce* (2021). He recreates the atmosphere of Cuba poignantly as his eye and ear for detail reveal a familiarity with the treasures and travails encountered in daily life: street vendors

[Full Review, Click here](#)



DEBORAH YOUNG

MEET THE TFV CHIEF
CRITIC & EDITOR WHO IS
AT THE VENICE FILM FESTIVAL

THE FILM
VERDICT

Deborah Young, EDITOR & SENIOR CRITIC, is an American writer, film critic and festival director based in Rome. In 2008 she became The Hollywood Reporter's international film editor; formerly, she served as Variety's bureau chief in Rome. She directed the Taormina Film Festival for five years and has been a programming consultant for the Tribeca Film Festival and the Venice Film Festival, among others. As a screenwriter and adapter, Deborah has contributed to key Italian films including Ermanno Olmi's *The Legend of the Holy Drinker*, the Taviani brothers' *Good Morning, Babylon* and Valerio Zurlini's *Across the River* and *Into the Trees*. Her first novel, *Pirates in Black Tie*, is published by Europe Books.



BEYOND THE FESTIVAL



Columbia Pictures

EQUALIZER 3

VERDICT: The third film in Denzel Washington and Antoine Fuqua’s ultraviolent thriller series is the best one yet. (If only that meant more than it does.)

By William Bibbiani, August 26th, 2023

And so we return to the world of *The Equalizer*, a franchise whose title fittingly means “That Which Makes Things Average.”

There are now three films in Antoine Fuqua’s cinematic update of the popular 1980s vigilante TV series, and after a mediocre first installment and a subpar sequel, *The Equalizer 3* is here to even things out. It’s a slick and acceptable thriller with exciting cinematography and a plot you’ll probably only remember because it reminds you of *Shane*.

Denzel Washington returns as Robert McCall, a former DIA agent who helps people in trouble, usually from rich and violent a-holes. At the start of *The Equalizer 3*, McCall is in Sicily, murdering mobsters at a palatial villa in search of a mysterious something or other, when his plans are derailed after — like *The Ringo Kid* in *Blazing Saddles* — he lets a kid live, and the kid shoots him in the back.

McCall is saved by a small town police officer, Gio (Eugenio Mastrandrea, *From Scratch*) and a kindly doctor named Enzo (Remo Girone, *Ford vs Ferrari*). Now he’s convalescing in Altamonte, which conveniently for cinematographer Robert Richardson (*Air*) is one of the prettiest places in the world, and inconveniently for a man with a back injury and a cane, seems to be made entirely of staircases.

[Full Article, Click here](#)

VENICE FAST FACTS

Biennele celebrates 80 years

1951



The Golden Lion awarded to Akira Kurosawa’s *Rashômon*, ushering in a winning streak of Japanese film including *Ugetsu Monogatari* (1953) and *Sanshō Dayû* (1954).

1963



This year brought the legendary Luigi Chiarini as Director, who pent six years organizing series of films according to strict aesthetic criteria regarding selection, resisting the social & political pressures and the interference of the film industry.

CINECITTÀ



PROGRAM
31 AUGUST
4 SEPTEMBER
2023

THURSDAY, 31 AUGUST

- 09:00 - 11:00
FOCUS ON CHINA | VPB SPECIAL SCREENING | Sala Volpi
Blue Planet Sci-Fi Film Festival: Short Films Selection
- 10:30 - 12:00
VPB SPECIAL SCREENING | Sala Pasinetti
When Your Eyes Linger by Hwang Da-seul
- 12:00 - 13:40
FOCUS ON KYRGYZSTAN | VPB SPECIAL SCREENING | Sala Pasinetti
The Gift by Dalmira Tilebergenova
- 12:00-14:30
VPB SPECIAL SCREENING | Sala Casinò
Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms by Wuershan
- 14:00 - 15:30
FOCUS ON CHINA | The Most Beautiful Shooting Locations in China
in collaboration with Xinhua
- 16:00-16:50
PANEL | Co-Producing with Japan:
New Opportunities for the Italian Film Industry
- 17:00 - 18:00
FOCUS ON KYRGYZSTAN | Cooperation Strategies & Perspectives
in collaboration with the Cinema Department - Minister of Culture, Information, Sports, and Youth Policy of Kyrgyzstan & Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic to Italy

FRIDAY, 1 SEPTEMBER

- 14:30 - 16:00
PANEL | New Image, New Lifestyle. Cinema in the New Media Time,
Capture Your Own Story
in collaboration with Infinix

SATURDAY, 2 SEPTEMBER

- 11:45 - 13:30
PANEL | Spotlight on Hong Kong Film Industry:
The Past, Present and Exciting Future
in collaboration with Create Hong Kong
- 15:00 - 16:50
PANEL | The New Anti-Piracy Law:
Opportunities for the Audiovisual Industry
in collaboration with FAPAV
- 18:10 - 19:10
FOCUS ON CHINA | Blue Planet Sci-Fi Film Festival Cooperation Forum
in collaboration with Xinhua

SUNDAY, 3 SEPTEMBER

- 10:30 - 12:15
PANEL | Genre Trends in Global Film Production
in collaboration with C-stars Consulting
- 15:00 - 16:30
PANEL | Next Generation Movie Creatives: from Schools to Showbiz.
Spotlight on Animation
in collaboration with MPA
- 18:10 - 19:00
FOCUS ON CHINA | Unravelling China's
Cultural Tapestry through Wine and Film
in collaboration with LIPP & NYSH Productions

MONDAY, 4 SEPTEMBER

- 15:00 - 17:00
PANEL | We Are Stories Campaign: Protecting Creativity
and Supporting Young Talents
in collaboration with FAPAV

Events: Open to all
Focus on Kyrgyzstan: Italian/Russian with translation
All the other panels: Italian/English with translation

Screenings: Gold and Trade Accreditation
For info: italianpavilion.it

Gaia Furrer

Gaia Furrer on Anniversaries, Guests and Cooperation

VERDICT: TFV talks to the Artistic Director of the Giornate degli Autori, as the Venice sidebar celebrates its 20th edition.

Max Borg, August 30th, 2023

Gaia Furrer will never forget her first edition as Artistic Director of Venice's Giornate degli Autori, mainly because she kept thinking it might not happen at all.

It was in 2020. "Up until the start of the festival, I was expecting a phone call saying they were pulling the plug," Furrer tells The Film Verdict.

"It was very emotional to introduce the very first screening, with Andrea Purgatori by my side, as he had been appointed almost at the same time as me," she says, referring to the Giornate's late President, the acclaimed journalist and screenwriter who passed away in July. The Giornate also lost another of its legendary founders, Cito Maselli, this year. "There were a few setbacks, such as not being able to have certain directors in attendance because of lockdown rules, but overall I look back on those 2020 days quite fondly."

One memorable incident involved the premiere screening of the Franco-Algerian film *Honey Cigar*, with one attending member of the press not realizing the director, first-timer Kamir Aïnouz, was not to be



Giornate degli autori

mistaken for her similarly named brother (and fellow filmmaker) Karim. "That was hilarious, it may have been the most shared moment of the festival, because Kamir posted the video of that moment all over social media."

While the Venice Film Festival as a whole turned 90 last year (and is celebrating its 80th edition this year), the Giornate are also in a somewhat celebratory mood as they turn 20, although their shindigs are a much more muted affair.

Furrer explains: "We are showing the restored print of Jean-Marc Vallée's *C.R.A.Z.Y.* on the 31st, because he meant a lot to the Giornate, and we've always had a strong bond with filmmakers from Québec. But we're not making a big deal out of the anniversary or trying to get more media attention, because that's not who we are. If we wanted that, we could have slotted *Sidonie au Japon*, starring Isabelle Huppert, as our opening film." The French actress will be

attending the premiere, and Peter Sarsgaard will also be Lido-bound for the section's closing movie, *Coup!*. Because it's an independent production, Sarsgaard – also one of the producers – will not be affected by the rules of the current SAG-AFTRA strike, which did not impact the Giornate line-up in the slightest.

"We barely screen any American movies, so we didn't have any issues like the Official Selection did." In fact, part of Furrer's philosophy is to give the Giornate their own identity, with a more varied selection. "I don't have a checklist of countries to specifically include each year," she says, "but we do try to go beyond the triangle of Italy, France and the US, which are conspicuously represented at festivals in general and Venice in particular."

The aforementioned Québec, for example, birthed the film with the single coolest title of the entire festival: *Humanist Vampire Seeking*

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Venice Memories by Peter Cowie



Peter Cowie is the former International Publishing Director of Variety, author of numerous books on the cinema, and chair of the annual panel on the Biennale College Cinema program in Venice. A long-time friend and colleague and an early supporter of The Film Verdict project, his enthusiasm and intelligence applied to film offers a constant source of inspiration for those seeking a “third way” between art and commerce. In this three-part series, he reflects on the history of the Venice Film Festival and those who have shaped it.

Peter Cowie continues his reflections on the Venice Film Festival with an eyewitness account of its inauspicious inception.

From the outset, the emphasis was placed on an international program that would reflect the most audacious and innovative experiments in filmmaking. Cannes may glory in attracting big stars and “Old Master” filmmakers. Berlin may stand for political commitment, and hence the meeting of Eastern and Western European cinema. But Venice has stayed loyal to the fundamental ideals of the Biennale itself. That much disdained cliché, “art for art’s sake”, can be applied to the Mostra without even a tinge of irony.

Few are alive who can recall the legendary heyday of the Mostra, prior to World War II. Bob

Hawkins, who was a colleague of mine at Variety, and had grown up in Italy, remembers being taken at the age of nine to one of the early editions of the festival, in the mid-1930s. What remained in his mind across the decades was the sound of jackboots crunching across the gravel as Nazi officers made their way to their chairs at the open-air screenings in the Hotel Excelsior. Indeed, for Josef Goebbels, the Mostra was seen as the ideal art forum, all the more so after Mussolini became an ally of Hitler. Under pressure from Berlin, Leni Riefenstahl’s *Olympia* was awarded the top prize in 1938 and aroused the ire and indignation of most

Western nations. The Mostra’s reputation suffered a savage blow, from which it would really only recover at the end of the 1940s.

And then in 1951, Kurosawa’s *Rashomon* landed like a UFO in the competition. Not only did it win the Golden Lion, but its aesthetic audacity and complex structure seemed perfectly in tune with the aims of the Biennale itself. Suddenly Japanese cinema was all the rage, and in successive years such masterpieces as Mizoguchi’s *The Life of O’Haru*, *Ugetsu*, and *Sansho the Bailiff*, as well as Kurosawa’s *Seven Samurai*, had their European premieres in Venice.

Continues next page



Venice Memories cont'd

First-time visitors to the festival can be startled to find that the Palazzo del Cinema (including the Sala Grande) dates back to 1937 – as does the Casino building alongside it. Of course, both structures have been refurbished, but each retains its period look. While the Hotel Excelsior kept its significance as a hub for social and business gatherings during the Mostra, the Palazzo del Cinema and the Casino fast became the engine-room of the festival. There is still something engaging about the 1930s modernism of these buildings, especially the Sala Grande, which was designed by the engineer Luigi Quagliata.

My long hours of research in the Biennale’s archives in Mestre taught me many things. First and foremost, that the commercial importance of the Mostra has long been underestimated. As early as 1950, a fledgling market came into being under the guidance of the artistic director of the period, Antonio Petrucci, and its offerings included Antonioni’s maiden feature, *Cronaca di un amore*. But for decades, Venice

declined to establish a “Film Market” of the kind launched in Cannes, in Santa Monica, in Berlin, and of course at the MIFED in Milan.

So the festival was unfairly dismissed as almost “anti-industry”. In fact, apart from what I’d call the “years of austerity” (1969-1978) following the decision to abandon prizes at the Mostra, the stars and their studios came to Venice by the score, revelling in the uniquely beautiful setting.

They found themselves under less pressure than at Cannes or even Berlin. And over many a Bellini or Campari on the terraces of the Excelsior or the Des Bains, agents and producers would confer, with ideas germinating and ready for discussion in the months ahead. Nor was the festival ever really restricted to the Lido: directors would give interviews on the terraces of the legendary Venetian hotels – the Danieli, the Bauer Palazzo, the Cipriani, the Gritti Palace – the list goes on.

Peter Cowie’s story of the Venice Film Festival concludes in tomorrow’s TFV daily.



Hotel Excelsior 1950



Rashomon



Sansho the Bailiff



Ugetsu



The Life of Oharu



The Seven Samurai

Today @ The Italian Pavilion



The Italian Pavillionat Berlin

August 3 |

14:00 – 15:30 / 16:00 – 16:50

SPOTLIGHT ON THE ASIAN AUDIOVISUAL INDUSTRY CHINA AND JAPAN 2023

will finally see the return of Chinese delegates to the Italian Pavilion, for the first time in attendance since the pandemic. It will begin on 31 August (14:00 -15:30) with the panel, in collaboration with Xinhua, Focus on China - The Most Beautiful Shooting Locations in China. Discover Changzhou Attractions which, after the opening speech by Roberto Stabile, will feature the participation of: Xiang Hui, Mayor of Cangzhou; Pan Zhi, General Manager, Xinhuanet Europe and Jia Yimin, Martial Art Coach. There will also be a moment dedicated to contemporary Chinese productions with a screening, at the Palazzo del Cinema, of the short films selected by the Blue Planet Science Fiction Film Festival (9:00 -11:00), China's first and most important sci-fi-themed festival (Venice Production Bridge, Sala Pasinetti and Sala Volpi, 2 September, 18:10 -19:10). Great attention will also be paid to Japan on 31 August, in the light of the historic film co-production agreement with Italy, signed last June with the aim of opening up new horizons of growth for Italian companies and its professionals, both on the domestic front and in terms of internationalization (31 August, 16:00 -16:50). In fact,

one of the goals of the agreement is to increasingly strengthen the presence of Italian cinema on the Japanese market. For this reason, the next edition of the Tokyo International Film Festival will dedicate a focus to our Country, bringing in the spotlights some of its protagonists, between past and present, from Franco Zeffirelli - to whom a special tribute will be reserved - to a master such as Pupi Avati, passing through young talents and emerging actors and actresses. These activities will also be flanked by business events to present funds and benefits, B2B meetings and a presentation in spectacular and multimedia form of the new Italian cinema and audiovisual industry.

17:00 – 18:00

SPOTLIGHT ON THE ASIAN AUDIOVISUAL INDUSTRY: KYRGYZSTAN

Among the many in-depth studies on Asian cinema in this year's programme, particular mention must be made of Kyrgyzstan, which will arrive in Italy for the first time with a delegation to present its cinematography and will host, from 3 to 5 October 2023, the new appointments of Italian Screens. The panel Focus on Kyrgyzstan - Cooperation Strategies & Perspectives (31 August, 17:00-18:00) will be introduced by the Undersecretary of State for Culture of the Italian Government, Lucia Borgonzoni, by Roberto Stabile and by the keynote of Bazarbaev Taalai, Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to Italy. Then will follow speeches by actors and important figures from industry and institutions: Taalaikan Abazova, Actress; Maksat Chunuev and Gulmira Kerimova, Film Producer; Elvira Mamytova, Head of International Relations of Cinema Department, Ministry of Culture, Information, Sports and Youth Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic; Gulkair Tilenbaeva, Chair, Association of Cinema Owner and Director, Ala-Too; Dalmira Tilepbergenova, Director and Screenwriter of the film The Gift, which will have a special screening at the Palazzo Cinema (Venice Production Bridge, Sala Pasinetti, 31 August, 12:00-13:40).



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Location Flashback

Santa Maria in Montesanto – Rome

My Own Private Idaho (1991)



Premiered at the 48th Venice International Film Festival

In this scene, Mike (River Phoenix) stands in front of a cathedral in Rome, while Scott (Keaunu Reeves) tries to get him back in the car so they can travel into the country and find the farmhouse where Mike's mother (Vana O'Brien) is said to have worked.

After its Premiere at the Venice Film Festival, *My Own Private Idaho* received largely positive reviews from critics. The film was a moderate financial success, grossing over \$8 million, above its estimated budget of \$2.5 million. Phoenix received several awards for his performance in the film, including the Volpi Cup for Best Actor at the Venice Film Festival, Best Male Lead from the Independent Spirit Awards, and Best Actor from the National Society of Film Critics. *My Own Private Idaho* is considered a landmark film in New Queer Cinema, an early 1990s movement in queer-themed independent filmmaking. Since its release, it has grown in popularity and been deemed a cult classic, especially among LGBT audiences

Santa Maria in Montesanto is a basilica in Rome, Italy located in Piazza del Popolo, in the Campo Marzio district, between Via Del Corso and Via del Babuino. This area is called Trident because of the shape defined by the three straight lines, which branch off from Piazza del Popolo. Under the twin churches are the remains of two pyramid shaped funerary monuments, probably dating back to the Augustan age.



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