



CINEMA FOR ALL

Director

Paolo Sorrentino

Cast

Tony Servillo, Anna
Bonaiuto

Certificate 15

Italy 2008, 1h58m, Ital-
ian with subtitles



In an interview with *La Repubblica*, producers Francesca Cima and Nicola Giuliano of Indigo Film discuss the unprecedented double success of Matteo Garrone's *Gomorra* and Paolo Sorrentino's *Il Divo* at Cannes 2008*. They view this success as part of a slow re-birth of Italian cinema as it once again attempts to compete with the suffocating domestic hegemony of Hollywood films, wresting a healthy 35% box office share. 'Garrone and Sorrentino were not forced to be instant successes,' argue Cima and Giuliano, '[we hope that] both *Gomorra* and *Il Divo* will encourage young filmmakers to take risks. Both are auteurist films but they were both commercially successful.' Indeed, only Hollywood blockbusters *Indiana Jones* and *Sex and the City* managed to fare better at the Box Office in Italy in 2008.

Despite the success of his previous film *The Family Friend* (2006), Sorrentino – perhaps unsurprisingly given the highly sensitive material - found it difficult to raise financing for *Il Divo*. 'When I pitched the idea to various companies, they all seemed interested at first but after reading the script they all complimented me and politely refused.' Financing however, was eventually found and Sorrentino looked to a recent film from the UK for inspiration, Stephen Frears' *The Queen* (2007). 'Frears found the solution of dealing with the biography of a person whose life has been very complicated by focusing on a very short time frame' observes Sorrentino, 'That's what I did too. I just dealt with the years 1991 to 1992, showing other moments in flashback montage.'

Il Divo is a dizzying snapshot of the 'The Spectacular Life of Giulio Andreotti', one of the most controversial figures of post-war Italy whose alleged Mafia ties dogged his career, linking him continually to scandals and corruption in Italian politics. The film deals with the turbulent final years of the DC (Christian Democrats), ending in Tangentopoli, the arrest of Mafia boss Toto Riina and new testimonies from Mafia pentiti (informants), some of whom allege that Andreotti met and indeed embraced Riina, the capo di tutti capi.

'*Il Divo* is not a political pamphlet' Sorrentino maintains, 'it is not a militant investigation, it reveals nothing new, it doesn't offer answers or new revelations'. It is, however, a formally dazzling, bravura piece of filmmaking centred on an extraordinary performance by Sorrentino regular (and star of *Gomorra*) Toni Servillo who physically evokes Andreotti's stoop, stiff torso and glacial, impassive face. Servillo admits that his portrayal was influenced by a viewing of Elio Petri's *Todo Modo* (1976) as well as by an article from Giorgio Manganelli in which the author describes the aura of notable DC politicians as akin to 'courtly widowers'.

The film's breathtaking montage of political murders - including that of Aldo Moro and Giovanni Falcone - highlights Sorrentino's characteristically scrupulous widescreen framing as well as idiosyncratic use of pop music. In the wonderful credit sequence of *The Family Friend*, it was Antony & The Johnsons' 'My Lady Story'; here, it is Cassius' 'Toop Toop'. Later sequences include a brutal shooting intercut with Andreotti at the races and accompanied on the soundtrack by The Veils' 'Nux Vomica' and Beth Orton's 'Conceived', which accompanies images of Mafia boss Toto Riina and his driver. Even familiar classical pieces such as Fauré's 'Pavane' are woven masterfully and innovatively into the fabric of the film. 'I had a dream of creating a sort of rock opera about politics' Sorrentino claims. 'Films by Fellini, Scorsese and others are there in the background as inspirations on how to use music. I wanted to alternate

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classical music with pop. That's why in the film you'll hear Sibelius and Beth Orton together. I tried not to see any films before this because I wanted to make my own prototype and also because the so-called political cinema is a very highly codified one and I wanted to break that code.'

A link with Scorsese (in particular, *Goodfellas* (1990) and *Casino* (1995)) is more than evident in the film's camera movement and editing and, especially, in the director's precise, often symmetrical framing – an overhead shot of two glasses of aspirin, a shot of the interior of an empty bus, Andreotti's joined hands as he kneels on a church pew. Like Scorsese, Sorrentino alternates between kinetic montage sequences and complex tracking shots. One such shot sails through several rooms, around dancers at a party celebrating Andreotti's election to come to rest on Andreotti sitting with his wife, receiving well-wishers. Several images, including those of Andreotti walking stiffly through long corridors, hands behind his back, are also reminiscent of Vittorio Storaro's work on Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (1970).

And what of the film's subject himself? What did 90 year-old Andreotti think of the film? 'Una mascalzonata' (or 'dirty trick'), according to Sorrentino. 'However' the director adds, 'as a long-time cinephile, he found it very well made.'

*Reference: Paolo D'Agostini, 'I Nuovi Produttori' in La Repubblica, 30 June 2008, p.36

Pasquale Iannone