

Italy Triumphs at Berlinale

Natasha Lardera (February 20, 2012)



Two films shot in documentary-style that denounce some of the gravest issues of the Italian system win top prizes at the 62nd edition of the Berlin film Festival. *Caesar must die* by the Taviani brothers features the inmates of Rebibbia prison and *Diaz. Don't clean up this blood* by Daniele Vicari recounts Genoa's violent G8 Summit.

Italy's veteran directors Paolo and Vittorio Taviani won the Golden Bear at the 62nd edition of the [Berlin film festival](#) [2] with *Cesare deve morire* (*Caesar Must Die*). The last time Italy won this award was back in 1991 with *La casa del sorriso* by Marco Ferreri.

Described as “a fully scripted semi-documentary work,” the Taviani brothers’ film documents a staging of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* in Rome’s high-security Rebibbia prison, featuring a cast comprised of actual inmates, many of them serving time for Mafia-related crimes. *Caesar Must Die* was written by the Tavianis with the collaboration of Fabio Cavalli, and it stars Cosimo Rega (as



Cassius), Salvatore Striano (as Brutus), Giovanni Arcuri (as Caesar) and Antonio Frasca (as Mark Anthony).

In accepting the prize, both brothers thought of the prisoners “in the solitude of their cells” who starred in their film. “Among the inmates were a lot who had got life sentences, serious criminals,” Vittorio Taviani said. “This play was a kind of liberation for them.” He then added “I hope that, after seeing the film, people will see inmates, no matter what their crime was, as men first and foremost.

Produced by [Kaos films](#) [3] in collaboration with [Rai Cinema](#) [4] and distributed by Sacher, the film seduced the international press from the very beginning. In his review, David Rooney of [The Hollywood Reporter](#) [5] wrote: “Theater director Fabio Cavalli, encourages the men to perform in their native dialects – Roman, Neapolitan, Calabrian, Apulian, etc. – and with minimal coaxing, he pushes them to seek out common ground between the drama and their own experiences.

Given that the play deals with the corrupting influence of power and ambition, those parallels are not hard to come by. All the cast seem to respond to its themes – life and death, rivalry and hate, collusion and treachery, loyalty and betrayal, the nature of crime and the codes of honor that shape the world of men. Occasionally, those connections feel forced in the Tavianis’ scripted elaboration, but there are enough powerfully raw moments to keep it gripping.”

Long Island City based [Adopt Films](#) [6] has acquired *Caesar Must Die*. Adopt’s co-managing executive Tim Grady said of the deal, “As a longtime fan of the Taviani brothers, we couldn't be happier with this acquisition. *Caesar Must Die* is an incredibly poignant film. It portrays how art can liberate the soul and profoundly change one's view of the world. But it also shows how such a change can reveal an abyss of loss and regret. The film should be an inspiration for many students previously unfamiliar with the accessible work of these masters as well as for longtime admirers of riveting Italian cinema.”

The film has caught the attention of several territories: [Rai Trade](#) [7] has sold rights to the documentary for France to [Bellissima Film](#) [8], for Spain to [Golem Distribucion](#) [9], for Brazil to Mares Film, for Benelux countries to Cinemien, for Australia to Palace and for Israel to Nachshon Film. The company is also in negotiations for the U.K., Japan, Skandinavian territories and countries of the former Soviet Union.

The directors wish the inmates to partake in this victory. They have stated they are planning to go back to Rebibbia to show them the film. “we know it will be tough for them,” they have said “because they won't simply see their performance but they will have to face their crimes and their punishments one more time.”

In the past year Italy has indeed been struck by a sort of epidemic: inmates all over the country have fallen victims of depression and have committed suicide. Art could be a therapy, something that could help these men live with their burden, wake up in the morning with something inspiring to do.

But there were more victories for Italy: Daniele Vicari's film *Diaz. Non pulire questo sangue* (Diaz. Don't clean up this blood) has won the second public prize, the second of the three prizes awarded by a jury of spectators, in the Panorama section. The film is a co-production between Italy, France and Romania.

Diaz reconstructs “the G8 in Genoa, from the demonstration on Saturday 21st July 2001 to the police raid on the Diaz school where a hundred or so demonstrators were sheltering, the brutality of the aggression followed by the events in Bolzaneto, where the young people were seized and further brutalized, until the following Tuesday when the magistrate ordered their release,” www.cinemaevideo.it [10] writes.

The film features an ensemble cast with 130 characters and a number of important actors (among which we find Claudio Santamaria and Elio Germano). It is shot documentary-style and in a non-linear way as it reconstructs the events the way the public prosecutors presented them in court.



“Every one of my movies contains details of reality, even though I have always used different languages,” Vicari has declared. “In this case – the first time I have made a fiction movie based on real events – I tried in every possible way to prevent the news story from overpowering the theatrical language. Also I wasn’t interested in finding sociological reasons for certain behavior. I want viewers to question themselves without any restrictions or prejudices about how, in a civilized country, democratic rights could have been suspended for a few days: this is a fact of such enormity, so unacceptable that it cannot be forgotten (as is happening), but should be remembered and discussed.”

At the festival, the director dedicated Diaz to Italian cinema, “because it has now found the courage to tell the truth about what is happening in this country.” He also described his great emotion in being in the audience with other 1800 people at the first screening during the festival. “There were people from all over the world, and everyone had something to say. I was mostly struck by the comment of a German girl who was inside Diaz in 2001. She told me she lived through that nightmare and now, finally, someone will believe her.”

“We were sure that no one would pay for what happened in Genoa,” [Fandango](#) [11] producer Domenico Procacci said in an interview with Andreas Wiseman. “In Italy we have a habit of forgetting acts like these. What happened was too important to forget but hopefully this film will remind people.

The trials surrounding Diaz are ongoing and prosecutors now face the hard challenge to achieve convictions before Italian law can close the case due to a legal expiration loophole. Italy's gravest issues of the Italian system are not issues at all in the film industry, they actually are bringing it back to its former splendor.

“A tendency toward overwritten dialogue outside the context of the play detracts mildly from the overall effectiveness. For example, returning to confinement after the performance, 20-year inmate Rega grandly declaims, “Since I have known art, this cell has become a prison.” Footage of the principal cast being silently shut back into their cells expresses the same idea more eloquently. And the repetition of Brutus’ suicide scene at the beginning and end of the film contributes to it feeling a little stretched, even at a brief 76 minutes. But flaws notwithstanding, this is a stimulating marriage between theater and harsh reality.”

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