

Music Box Films presents

PIRANHAS

Dir. Claudio Giovannesi



ITALY / 2018 / RUNNING TIME 112 MINUTES / ORIGINAL TITLE: LA PARANZA DEI BAMBINI

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L O G L I N E

Based on the novel by Roberto Saviano (*Gomorra*), PIRANHAS follows teenage Nicola and his friends who, reaching for a life lush with designer clothing and status, enter the violent, power-hungry culture controlled by the Neapolitan mafia.

S Y N O P S I S

Based on the novel by Roberto Saviano (*Gomorra*), PIRANHAS follows fifteen year-old Nicola (newcomer Francesco Di Napoli) who lives with his mother and younger brother in the Sanità neighborhood of Naples, a place that has been controlled by the Camorra mafia for centuries. Dreaming of a life lush with designer clothing and elite nightclub bottle service, Nicola and his naive group of friends begin selling drugs, an entryway into the violent, power-hungry world of crime that begins to threaten their innocence, relationships, and safety of their families.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

PIRANHAS tells of the relationship between adolescence and the criminal lifestyle: the impossibility of experiencing the more important feelings of adolescence, love and friendship, in a life of crime.

The film shows how a fifteen year old and his friends of the same age lose their innocence. The decision by the protagonist, Nicola, to pursue a criminal lifestyle slowly becomes irreversible and all consuming, requiring the sacrifice of his first love and of friendship.

Experiencing the basic feelings of adolescence in the context of a criminal lifestyle is not possible: the need to do so comes forcefully to the fore in the protagonist, but can no longer be satisfied.

Although the path to the underworld is not an innate desire in youngsters, arising as a consequence of widespread illegality, the film does not wish to represent a sociological point of view. We choose the point of view of the youngsters, without judging them, and show their adolescent feelings in relation to the criminal lifestyle and the ambition of power: the narration of the criminal arc is always in relation to the story of their emotions, the friendships and loves that are destined to fail precisely because of the criminal lifestyle.

Despite the protagonists being fifteen years of age, they are forced into a daily relationship with death, viewing it as a very real possibility: they experience the ambition of conquest and choose war irresponsibly. The youngster's desire for power also hides the naive paradox, typical of their age, of wanting to do good through evil: the dream of a just power, the illusion of an ethical crime syndicate. Children kill fathers, replace them, and, in order to do so, are forced to shorten the time of their development, to sacrifice carelessness, to consider death or jail as very real and daily possibilities.

PREPARATION AND SHOOTING

Although inspired by current events, the film is not intended to be a description of events that actually took place. The aim is not to build a reconstruction of a specific time and event that took place in a particular neighborhood, nor to tell the story of juvenile delinquency in the city of Naples. Naples is only the setting, but the theme of the film is beyond the place of its staging: what is at the heart of our story is the protagonist's age and how this relates to his irreversible choice of becoming a criminal. An age of innocence in which we experience choosing what is good and what is evil.

These topics were at the heart of the work I did with my young actors while preparing the characters and the scenes. The desires fueled by today's consumer society: designer clothes, expensive watches, motorcycles, a table at a night club, bottles of champagne. The need for money, right away, to obtain them. And the real possibility, at their fingertips, of earning that money by committing crimes, as well as the unawareness of the consequences.

This is the path of the characters: the immediate satisfaction of desires, the euphoria, the ambition, the crimes, the passing of the point of no return, the impossibility of turning back, the fall

The characters construction was based on discussing these themes, on a collective reflection within the group of eight boys, emphasizing the characters' feelings: friendship, first love, family relations. How do you experience a criminal journey at the age of fifteen? What are the renunciations? The feelings considered pure, the bonds of brotherhood, a love that seems eternal and absolute, when they begin to

lose themselves, to destroy themselves, to conflict with ambition, with the struggle for power? These were the thematic reflections I carried out with Francesco and the other boys during the preparation and shooting of the film.

We chose to set the film in the district of Sanità and the Spanish Quarters, because Naples, unlike Rome or many other Italian cities, still retains a popular historic centre, which keeps its identity alive and has not yet been devoured by tourism, by the staging of folklore. The district is a character in its own right: the market, the crowd, the shops, the children belonging to a neighbourhood where they were born and raised.

Shooting lasted nine weeks and took place in sequence: on the first day of shooting we shot the beginning of the film and on the last day of shooting we shot the final scene.

None of the boys read the screenplay or the novel from which it was taken, because the boys had to live the experience of their characters, day after day, from beginning to end. They didn't have to know the consequences of their actions, they simply had to live them: living the birth of brotherhood, becoming a group, the meaning of war, the illusion of ambition, the conquest of power, the irreversible consequences of criminal actions, the loss of innocence, the impossibility of going back, of remaining carefree teenagers, living defeat.

— Claudio Giovannesi

Roberto Saviano: 'I saw my first corpse in secondary school. It didn't shock me'

By Kathryn Bromwich, The Guardian

The Gomorrah author on his new book about Italy's teenage mafia leaders, why he risks his life for his writing, and the UK's shameful corruption

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/aug/26/roberto-saviano-interview-gomorrah-piranhas>

In 2006, Italian author and journalist Roberto Saviano published *Gomorrah*, an exposé of the organised crime network Camorra; since then he has had to live under police protection. The book was adapted for the big screen in 2008 and for TV in 2014. Other works include *ZeroZeroZero*, an investigation into the cocaine trade; his new novel, *The Piranhas*, a story about children's gangs in Naples, is published on 20 September by Picador.

How did you get the idea for this novel?

It was [such a powerful news story](#): children who suddenly became mafia leaders. Mafias have always employed *muschilli* – little mosquitoes – in minor roles. But for a few years, in Naples, kids aged between 10 and 19 were in charge: they decided the drug deals, the money laundering, the executions... I wanted to find out more.

Did you find some positive aspects in these characters?

Of course – these kids are highly talented. I interviewed the survivors in jail, and there was great humanity there. They managed zones generating up to half a million euros a weekend, selling weed, huge amounts of cocaine. Imagine a 15-year-old who has to import drugs, set a price, pay the police, pay a percentage to the locals to keep quiet. It's like giving a 15-year-old the keys to a supermarket and saying: "Manage it." Someone who can do that has great entrepreneurial spirit – if they'd had a legal opportunity they'd have been incredible businessmen.

What are their motivations?

None of them are doing it out of hunger. They're pushed by a complicated reality where it's almost impossible to make money legally: there are no decent jobs, unless a relative recommends you. So those with ambition are drawn to crime, even though they know they're going to die: "If you die at 90, you die old news. If you die at 20, you die a legend." Most of the kids the characters in the novel are based on are dead.

What was your childhood in Naples like?

I was born in '79, and at the end of the 80s there was an incredible Camorra war – 4,000 dead, three or four a day. I saw my first corpse in my first year of secondary school. Since then I've seen dozens. They didn't shock me. As soon as we heard of one, my friends and I would immediately go see it. It was a way of saying, "we're grownups" – anyone who didn't look at corpses was still a child. Once we saw a Camorrista drowned in milk, in a mozzarella vat. But for me it was unthinkable to be a Camorrista leader at 15. My family and upbringing protected me. These kids also have an idea of "everything, now" that my generation didn't have. They live on Facebook and Instagram, boasting about their feats...

Did you feel a responsibility not to glorify this world?

This is something I'm often accused of, but I think it's exactly the opposite. Criminals build their power on glamour, and you pull that apart not by denying it exists, but by showing what's behind it: the years in jail, the consequences, the ridiculous theatre of it. Imagine a dark room. You go in, turn on the light, and see a corpse. It's like blaming the murder on whoever turned on the light.

Do you think books have the power to change what's happening?

We are constantly immersed in words; the problem is that words have no weight any more. The American president can one day say [one thing about Russia](#), and then the next day overturn it with no consequences. Literature can return a specific weight to words. My battle with books continues, even though everything I've written has got me into trouble: *Gomorra* when I was 26; *ZeroZeroZero* was, disastrously, [found in the lair of El Chapo](#). Today, for Italy, it's even more necessary – we're in a dramatic situation where maybe books can do something. I'm not sure I'm going to win, but I'm sure this is the way to change things.

What do you find most worrying in Italy at the moment?

This is a dangerous government, which risks being the first clearly authoritarian government in [Europe](#) [this century]. Salvini's words are close to the words of Orbán, of Putin. He based his whole campaign on attacking migrants, while never saying anything against the mafia, of which he understands nothing.

[The word "fascism"](#) should be used with caution, but when politicians like Salvini start quoting Mussolini ("so many enemies, so much honour") is it appropriate?

I realise that the word "fascist" denotes a specific historical period, but there are some expressions, some hints, that bring to mind a continuity with fascism. We don't have blood yet. In Italy, for now we don't have night-time arrests, the murders of journalists, as is happening in Russia, Jordan, Venezuela. What we have is isolation, civil and legal attacks – Salvini criticised me [\[threatening to remove his police protection\]](#) as a minister, not as a person, which is unusual. [Salvini's party] Lega is close to neofascism: from his ridiculous T-shirts to his choice of words, he draws on neofascist ideology, because he doesn't have one of his own, only a generic street populism, not a doctrine. So the word "fascist" is perhaps too quick, too easy, but it's not far from describing a genetic link.

What are your thoughts on the collapse of the Morandi bridge in Genoa?

In the past few years in [Italy](#) there have been several incidents in which infrastructure collapsed, crushing people, so there are clearly issues with maintenance. What's not clear is whether people's safety has been sacrificed only for profit or also for political gain. From the moment the bridge collapsed we've seen an unedifying political clash, which advanced like a steamroller over the entire nation's mourning.

Would you ever go into politics?

Never. My role is different, and it's possible only because I'm not a politician. If I were to run for office it wouldn't be the same.

Do you get tired of being the person who has to comment on Italian crime and corruption?

[Laughs] Yes. It tires me to the point where I sometimes feel hopeless. I never manage to stay distant, so I've suffered a lot. I would sometimes like to not be who I am any more, to have a decent life, but I do it – some people think out of ambition, others narcissism – for honour. A word that fascists have plundered from us. For me, it's an honour to fight those who are running the greatest defamatory

campaign of recent years, against migrants. I do it knowing full well that it generates hatred, isolation, contempt. There's no advantage: the easiest thing would be to stay quiet. But I go on.

Which writers or investigative journalists do you admire most?

I have a great respect for Turkish journalist Can Dündar. He was arrested for revealing in his newspaper [*Cumhuriyet*] that Erdogan was secretly taking part in the war in Syria. I followed Daphne Caruana Galizia's work, and I'm friends with her sons. In life she was systematically vilified, and in death, the same people started to retract, to speak of a person full of dignity and courage. I'm on the side of whoever, when they write, knows they will pay a price – losing happiness, often freedom – but continues to write.

What do you think of Elena Ferrante's representation of Naples?

Our cities are both protagonists of our books – Naples is never just a backdrop. But I'm not interested in telling the world about Naples, rather the world through Naples. The relationship dynamics in Ferrante's works are emotional, so readers recognise themselves in them; I'm obsessed by how humans are crushed by power. That's our difference. Elena Ferrante provided an endorsement for this book – something she's never done – and it immediately generated interest. In America they asked me, how come Ferrante gave you this endorsement?

In May 2016 you said the UK was the [most corrupt country in the world](#). Do you still think so?

Absolutely. I'm not sure why, but the UK thinks of itself as not particularly corrupt. It doesn't have a political class that's more corrupt than South America or Italy, and it doesn't have a more corrupt police force than Greece or Morocco. But it's the country with the dirtiest capital in the world. Because London has no financial rules: money laundering is the primary source of British financial wealth – the money from Russian or South American coke. And it's all legal. Maybe that's why Britain doesn't see it as particularly shameful – creating an economic system substantially based on the absence of financial regulation. It doesn't matter if it's blood money, from arms trafficking, from drugs. When I spoke about this in the UK, the perception was that it was something marginal.

What do you like most about Italy?

An Italian would normally answer "food", with pride. But, rather than food, I want to say that it's Italy's humanist tradition, knowing how to spend time together. We're a country of emigrants. Every year the equivalent of the population of Verona leaves; the south of Italy is almost uninhabited. Italy can only be reborn from migrants, allowing the Mediterranean to have a single citizenship. I'm much closer to the writers of Tunis than London, Algiers than Berlin. It's an aberration, that the south, the heart of the Mediterranean, can't be a shared territory. Maybe that's what I was saying: this capacity to be convivial. This is an Italian quality that rancour, Salvini, and the hell we're living in still haven't erased.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Claudio Giovannesi is a director, screenwriter and musician, born in Rome, Italy, in 1978. He works in both fiction and documentary. His films have screened at numerous international festivals and have won a number of awards, including the Silver Ribbon Italian film prize.

Fiore, his last film, has been selected for the Directors Fortnight during the 2016 Cannes Film Festival. He was one of the nine directors to work on *9 x 10 Novanta*, a compilation documentary that screened at the 71st Venice International Film Festival. He has also directed two episodes of the television series *Gomorrah*.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

FIORE (2016): nominated in the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs section at the Cannes Film Festival, it was awarded the special Silver Ribbon, six nominations for David di Donatello and Grand Prix at the Cinéma Méditerranéen Festival in Brussels.

WOLF (2013): Special Jury Award at the 31st Turin Film Festival, nominated for the Silver Ribbons awards for Best Documentary.

ALÌ BLUE EYES (2012): Special Jury Prize at the Rome International Film Festival, Prix Jean Carmet at the Festival d'Angers, nominated for the Silver Ribbons awards for Best Film, nominated at the Tribeca Film Festival.

FRATELLI D'ITALIA (2009): Special Jury mention at the Rome International Film Festival, nominated for the Silver Ribbons awards for Best Documentary.

LA CASA SULLE NUVOLE (2009): Special Jury Award at the Brussels Film Festival.

C R E D I T S

Francesco Di Napoli... Nicola
Ar Tem... Tyson
Alfredo Turitto... Biscottino
Viviana Aprea... Letizia
Valentina Vannino... Nicola's mother
Pasquale Marotta... Agostino
Luca Nacarolo... Cristian
Carmine Pizzo... Limone
Ciro Pellecchia... Lollipop
Ciro Vecchione... `O Russ
Mattia Piano Del Balzo... Briatò
Aniello Arena... Lino Sarnataro
Roberto Carrano... Carminiello
Adam Jendoubi... Aucelluzzo
Special appearance by
Renato Carpentieri... Don Vittorio

Director... Claudio Giovannesi
Screenwriters... Maurizio Braucci, Roberto Saviano, Claudio Giovannesi
Director of Photography... Daniele Ciprì
Editing... Giuseppe Trepiccione
Original Score... Andrea Moscianese, Claudio Giovannesi
Production Designer... Daniele Frabetti
Costume... Olivia Bellini
Sound... Emanuele Cicconi
Sound Editors... Giuseppe D'Amato (A.I.T.S.), Antonio Giannantonio
Line Producer... Michela Rossi
Casting... Chiara Polizzi (U.I.C.D.)
Assistant Director... Nicola Scorza
Post Production... Gianni Monciotti

Producers Palomar... Marco Camilli, Margherita Murolo, Luigi Pinto, Davide Nardini
Executive Producer... Gian Luca Chiaretti
Producers... Carlo Degli Esposti, Nicola Serra
Produced by... Palomar, Vision Distribution
In Association With... Elle Driver
In Collaboration With... Sky Cinema, TIMvision
International Sales... Elle Driver
Released by Music Box Films



ABOUT MUSIC BOX FILMS

Music Box Films is a North American distributor of acclaimed international, independent, and documentary features. Recent releases include Christian Petzold's existential thriller *TRANSIT* and *HAGAZUSSA*, one of the year's most acclaimed horror films (released under genre label Doppelgänger Releasing). Upcoming releases include Thomas Stuber's romantic drama *IN THE AISLES*, Claudio Giovannesi's *PIRANHAS*, and François Ozon's *BY THE GRACE OF GOD*. Music Box Films is independently owned and operated by the Southport Music Box Corporation, which also owns and operates the Music Box Theatre, Chicago's premiere venue for independent and foreign films. For more information, please visit www.musicboxfilms.com.