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# **SALVO**

**A film by Fabio Grassadonia & Antonio Piazza**

"The renaissance of Italian Cinema!" – ***Variety***

"A fascinating Italian film noir, immaculately made!"  
– ***Cineuropa***



**Italy / 2013 / Drama / 104 min / Italian with English Subtitles**

[Official Film Webpage](#)

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## **FULL SYNOPSIS**

A hitman for the Sicilian Mafia, Salvo is solitary, cold and ruthless. When he sneaks into a house on an assignment, he discovers Rita, an innocent young blind girl who must stand by powerlessly while her brother is assassinated. What follows is an intense exchange fueled by adrenaline and fear between the killer and his witness, one that changes their two lives in an instant. The darkness is lifted from Rita's eyes just as Salvo decides, against his murderous instincts, to spare her life. From then on, both haunted by their brief encounter, these two damaged souls will attempt to navigate their dangerous next steps side by side.

## **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

A Sicilian hitman, Salvo is cold and ruthless. When he sneaks into a house on assignment, he discovers Rita, a young blind girl who witnesses her brother's assassination. In an intense exchange between the killer and his witness, the darkness is lifted from Rita's eyes just as Salvo decides, against his murderous instincts, to spare her life. Both haunted by their brief encounter, the two will attempt to navigate their dangerous next steps side by side.

## **LOGLINE**

A hitman for the Sicilian Mafia spares the life of the blind sister of one of his victims, and their lives become inextricably linked.

## **ASSETS**

Official trailer coming soon.

Downloadable hi-res images:

<http://www.filmmovement.com/filmcatalog/index.asp?MerchandiseID=352>

## **FESTIVALS AND AWARDS**

### WINNER:

**Cannes Film Festival** - Grand Prix, Critics' Week

**Cannes Film Festival** - France 4 Visionary Award

### OFFICIAL SELECTION:

New Directors/New Films

Atlantic Film Festival

BFI London Film Festival

Festival de Rio

Busan Int'l Film Festival

Chicago International Film Festival

Ft. Lauderdale Int'l Film festival

San Juan Int'l Film Festival

Naples Int'l Film Festival

Palm Springs Int'l Film Festival

Portland Int'l Film Festival

## **AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTORS**

### **What did you take as the starting point for your project? How did you develop it in terms of narrative?**

Is a miracle, in a world where miracles are banned, still possible? This is the first question we set about answering in order to give Salvo's story its meaning. We are both from Palermo and we naturally chose to set our story in our home town. Palermo is a world where freedom is hazardous. A world that feels the need for a tyrant, an oppressor, a totally unacceptable state of affairs but somehow understandable.

What's more mysterious is the presence of a silent majority that wishes to be oppressed, that needs to live in a "state of exception", a state of constant emergency, where violence and oppression are the only laws. A situation where an unencumbered meeting between two human beings is inconceivable.

The meeting between the two main characters creates a dangerous rift, a temporary release from this state of emergency: the very risky option of freedom of choice. An unexpected moment of grace. This is the kind of miracle this world fears and needs the most. To avoid the pitfalls and the risks of an excessively conceptual kind of filmmaking, we have placed the film within a traditional dramatic framework and used the tools of genres, especially the "noir", even though the film gradually develops nuances and narrative twists that are unexpected for the genre in question. Just as the meeting between the two main characters goes against the expectations of the world they belong to, it seemed consistent to us that we should go against genre expectations.

### **The film takes place in Sicily, a land of Mafia. How important was it for you to shoot the film there, you native land? Or what made it necessary?**

When, after spending over ten years writing and editing other people's stories, we decided to start working on our own, we naturally and necessarily felt drawn towards a Sicilian story, which might reflect our own personal and cultural relationship with Sicily, and how it is often portrayed and how these narrative forms have gradually become trapped in form and content that has become 'old hat', and very often passé. The vast majority of literary, television and film fictions involving mafia themes tend towards oversimplifications, stylistic uniformity, and a repetition of stereotypes that have generated ambiguous mythologies and have anaesthetized everything: both reality and real life. We felt the need bring new life to these aspects.

We shot the film in the hottest summer months in Sicily so we could tangibly and even physically show the burden of daily existence. We wanted our characters to be immersed in a particular atmosphere. A mood that was not just purely a photographic frame. The kind of heavy, sticky, sickly conditions that might have helped to shape the souls we meet in our story.

### **Rita is blind. Her meeting with Salvo makes a miracle possible. What is the metaphorical value assigned to this event?**

In a world populated by souls chained to their daily non-existence, in a world which to a greater or lesser level of pretence wears the mask of death, in a world where a true

encounter between two human beings is inconceivable, the miracle is nothing more than a simple meeting: the meeting between the two main characters which binds them together forever and allows the need for freedom and life to blossom within them. The relationship between the two characters is essentially developed through the relationship between the visible and the invisible. And this is where sound comes into play. The ear is an integral part of the experience and the understanding of this story which revolves around Rita, a girl who - at least at the outset - is blind.

**How should one show the point of view of someone who doesn't see? Of a girl who can avoid being seen by others, or at least believes she can, by hiding away in her home? Of a girl who is both the queen and the prisoner of her own mansion?**

The kind of shot framing we have chosen at the beginning of the film to describe what happens from her point of view, we feel provides a very profound parallel with blindness, a clear indication of Rita's claustrophobic existence and generates the feeling of anguish which we want the audience to feel during this part of the film. A girl who at first refuses to use the miraculous gift of sight, and who later has to learn to manage it. The noises and sounds are therefore of extreme importance because Rita moves in her world and endows meaning to it through the medium of hearing.

Thanks to the two different levels of blindness, Salvo's moral blindness juxtaposed to Rita's physical form, and the definition and evolution of the gaze on the world and on the story, we have tried to arouse feelings and desires in the spectator by removing the sense of sight, to produce emotion by resisting emotion, without ever emphasizing it. An essential element is the song Rita is listening to when Salvo first walks into her home and which Salvo will play at the end to bind Rita forever to him. As a result of these considerations and the choices we have made in terms of staging, we have therefore done away with any external sound commentary, no backing music of any kind.

**Your short film RITA is based around a blind girl. Is there a connection between these two films and the two characters?**

The short film was made when the script of SALVO already existed. Two different stories with key elements in common: a blind girl called Rita, Palermo, a stranger sneaking into Rita's house as a turning point in the plot. The making of the short film has had a major influence on our idea of the character of Rita for Salvo's story as well, and especially on our choice of how to stage her blindness. While preparing the short film we were flirting with crucial questions: how to stage the point of view of a blind person? How to induce an experience of blindness in the spectator? In our short film the camera is focused on Rita, without reverse angle shots. Rita is under everyone's gaze, the gaze of others acting also as a controlling element, a form of surveillance. We can't see what Rita has before her because she can't either. This experience was then used in our work for the feature film too.

**Salvo is played by a Palestinian actor. What led you to this choice?**

We discovered Saleh Bakri thanks to *The Time That Remains*, a film directed by Elia Suleiman, presented in Cannes in 2009. The character he plays in this film, like our Salvo, says very little, yet reveals a deep and tormented humanity. We loved his performance so

much that while we were leaving the movie theatre we already saw Saleh as Salvo. Then we discovered that Fabrizio Mosca, Salvo's Italian producer along with Massimo Cristaldi, already knew Saleh Bakri and had already met him through Saleh's father, the famous Palestinian actor Mohammad Bakri. A fortunate coincidence. And from our very first meeting we found Saleh to have the qualities we were looking for: purity, charismatic presence, feverish intelligence, strength and tenderness. His gaze and acting have revealed the miraculous ability of being able to open up to revelation, along Salvo's tortuous path towards redemption.

**The first part of the film has the rhythm of a thriller. Yet slowly the film veers towards a more abstract representation. Is this a narrative or a formal choice?**

The film starts off powerfully, with a long action and chase scene, which we intentionally tailored according to the thriller genre though some indications of the future developments are already present. We wanted the spectator to be driven into the film by the fast succession of scenes that begin with the assassination attempt made on the main character and his boss, right through to the long sequence shot in Rita's home, where some of the key elements of our story become apparent. Something amazing happens, that completely overturns the life of our two main characters. And even the story and its filmic representation abruptly change course. We thought we were in one kind of story and we suddenly find ourselves in another story born of the first one. As spectators we are gradually drawn into this new story, just as Salvo and Rita are plummeted into it, forced to get to know each other and come to terms with this experience.

**How did you both work together to develop the film from the writing stage to its final production?**

We are used to working together. It is a decision we took years ago, when we started writing scripts. We are both from Palermo and we perceive the world we belong to in a similar way, from the same perspective. Directing together was just the natural consequence of a process, the culmination of a long journey. Right from the outset we decided to develop the project in a number of European workshops, so we could come into contact with a broader cultural context than a purely Italian one. Berlinale Talent Campus, Ateliers d'Angers, Binger Film Lab and TorinoFilmLab. This last event marked a fundamental stage in the project's artistic life and production prospects.

At the Torino Film Lab we worked with Franz Rodenkirchen, the story editor who has accompanied us, in a very sensitive way, through the script development process. And from the Torino Film Lab we also obtained the first significant film production contribution and we met Antoine de Clermont-Tonnerre, one of the film's co-producers along with Raphaël Berdugo. Their contribution along with that provided by Arte France Cinema has turned out to be crucial.

## CREW BIOGRAPHIES

### **FABIO GRASSADONIA & ANTONIO PIAZZA**, Directors/Screenwriters

Fabio Grassadonia and Antonio Piazza are both Sicilian writer-directors. They worked for a long time as writers and script consultants for Italian production companies Filmauro and Fandango. In 2004 they wrote for Fandango the musical comedy *Ogni volta che te ne vai*, set in the world of dance halls along the Romagna coast. They still work as freelance script development consultants, collaborating with a few European workshops, such as the Berlinale Residency, Nisi Masa ESP, Torino FilmLab. Their debut as directors was in 2010 with the short film *Rita*, presented in more than one hundred international film festivals (Rotterdam, Edinburgh, Chicago, Brooklyn, Angers, Abu Dhabi, Toronto, Aspen, among others), winning many awards. The short film was set in Palermo where Antonio Piazza and Fabio Grassadonia also shot *Salvo*, their first feature film as directors. *Salvo* premiered in 2013 at La Semaine de la Critique of the Cannes Film Festival, winning both top prizes Grand Prix and Prix Révélation.

### **FILMOGRAPHY**

2013 *SALVO*

2010 *RITA* (Short)

## CAST BIOGRAPHIES

### **SALEH BAKRI** (Salvo)

Bakri, the son of famed Palestinian actor and director Mohammed Bakri, began his career in theater. He is a graduate of the Beit Zvi School for the Performing Arts. In 2007 he performed roles in two films, *The Band's Visit* and *Salt of this Sea*, which launched his film career. He won the Best Supporting Actor Award in the Israeli Film Academy for his portrayal of Khaled, a young trumpet player in *The Band's Visit*.

### **SARA SERRAIOTTO** (Rita)

Sara, a native of Pescara, Italy, auditioned for many roles, mostly in television, before she obtained the role of Rita in *Salvo*. To prepare for her role as a blind character she was blindfolded for the better of two months. She attends the Experimental Center of Cinematography in Rome.

## CREDITS

### Cast

<b>Salvo</b>	Saleh Bakri
<b>Rita</b>	Sara Serraiocco
<b>Puleo</b>	Luigi Lo Cascio
<b>Boss</b>	Mario Pupella

### Crew

<b>Directors</b>	Fabio Grassadonia Antonio Piazza
<b>Screenplay</b>	Fabio Grassadonia Antonio Piazza
<b>Cinematography</b>	Daniele Cipri
<b>Editing</b>	Desideria Rayner
<b>Sound</b>	Guillaume Sciama
<b>Set</b>	Marco Dentici
<b>Producers</b>	Massimo Cristaldi Fabrizio Mosca

A production ACABA PRODUZIONI / CRISTALDI PICTURES  
Co produced by Antoine de Clermont-Tonnerre  
(MACT PRODUCTIONS) / and Raphaël Berdugo (CITÉ FILMS),  
ARTE CINEMA France

