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and much cheaper than a ticket to Italy!"*
-Screen International

FROM THE DIRECTOR AND STAR OF **MID-AUGUST LUNCH**

THE **SALT** OF LIFE

A FILM BY GIANNI DI GREGORIO

GIANNI IS BACK AND LOOKING FOR LOVE...



The Salt of Life

(Gianni e le donne)

a film by Gianni Di Gregorio

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In his warm and witty follow-up to the 2010 sleeper hit *Mid-August Lunch*, writer-director-actor Gianni Di Gregorio has created another sparkling comedy—this time with a dash of the bittersweet. In *The Salt of Life*, Gianni plays a middle-aged retiree who has become invisible to all distaff Romans, regardless of age or relation. He contends with an aristocratic, spendthrift mother (again played by *Lunch*'s great nonagenarian Valeria de Franciscis); a wife who is more patronizing friend than romantic partner; a daughter (played by Di Gregorio's daughter Teresa) with a slacker boyfriend whom Gianni unwillingly befriends; and a wild young neighbor who sees him merely as her dog walker. Watching his "codger" friends snare beautiful younger women on the sun-kissed cobblestones of Trastevere, Gianni tries his polite, utterly gracious best to generate some kind of extracurricular love life—with both hilarious and poignant results.

The view from Trastevere: a lunch with Gianni Di Gregorio

What's the central focus or theme of the film? It seems to me that women play a significant role in the film, especially the mother who seems to be the most important and certainly the most intrusive female character? The Italian title (*Gianni e le Donne*) could almost be changed to *Gianni, His Mother and Other Women*.

In the film, I try to describe the confusion of a middle-aged man who realizes that women do not look at him like they used to. In this female universe the character of the mother emerges as being very powerful, once again. She's very much alive and present to my character, the only son of a widowed mother. She is much loved and often discussed, and I think many Mediterranean men feel their fates are directed, through life's ups and downs, by their mothers.

The cast here, as in *Mid-August Lunch*, is full of acutely rendered, original and eccentric characters, especially female characters. And all of them, including you, are addressed by their real-life names, as if to not separate the characters from the actors' actual selves. Can you explain the reasons for this?

Since my movies describe day to day life, I always try to work with actors that are as "genuine" as possible and that have exuberant personalities and a natural generosity which shows in their performance.

This is why the characters in the film continue to be called by their real names. There is a continuity between real life and fiction, and, as you suggest in your question, I don't want the actor's roles to detach them from their real-life personas. When this technique works, it allows you to capture some extraordinary moments.

In your films, there are recurring elements that, although apparently superficial, can almost be called co-stars: the food, the cooking, the lunches and dinners at the table, and the many glasses of white wine you consume! Are these touches narrative necessities? Do they simply reflect your personal passions or are they there to add to a 'home-made flavor'?

As a boy, I learned to cook out of necessity because my mother was a terrible cook. When I was older I started cooking seriously and I still cook for my family. Of course, I accompany the work with a good glass of wine! It's become a part of my life, which is why it's so important in my films.

The film is set in Trastevere, an unusual part of Rome which isn't seen on screen very often, even though it's in the very heart of the city. Why did you choose to set the film in this particular urban microcosm, where you were actually born and raised?

Being born and raised in Trastevere means I am very attached to the area. The people change over time, but the atmosphere is always magical.

My starting point is that I love my films to be close to reality, so it was an instinctive choice to set the movie in my world. It was my only choice really - probably because I don't move around much!

As a film director, you debuted late, although with immediate success. But over

the years you have worked widely in the theater as an actor, and in film as an assistant director and scriptwriter. In what ways does all this experience influence your filmmaking?

I started out in theater. Then I jumped into film, doing many things, including extensive work as an assistant director. Then, yielding to the more shy and introverted side of my nature, I started writing, because it's a way of being involved in making films in which you don't have to expose yourself too much. Then, circumstances made me jump back out of the trench. But I'd say that all my previous experiences come together in my films.

As an actor, you always play the lead in your films. Would you act for other directors or are there writers you would love to work with?

As a teenager I studied directing and also acting, in a very serious school. I was completely committed to the passionate study of certain plays I saw as sacred. But when I went to class to give my interpretation of Macbeth or of Hamlet, everyone laughed. The teacher, Alessandro Fersen, would turn off the spotlight and send me back to my place. I was depressed for months. Finally, at the end of the year, Fersen said: "I am not disappointed in you, but you just cannot do these plays. You are a natural comedian. But do not despair, a comedian can do many things ..."

For years I didn't act, because I was shy and not as in love with myself as an actor should be, but now I'm taking advantage of Fersen's lesson. Like the actors I choose for my films, I play myself in my work. But I believe that if a director really wanted me for a project, I could commit to a role with all my strength. But it would always have to be something that made people laugh!

An interview with Gianni Di Gregorio

I just happened to notice at a certain point, around the age of sixty women just don't look at you in the same way anymore, which causes panic. I think with this film my tendency was to make a joke about it. I'm not saying, by the way, that in a certain way, that in a year or two I won't buy a motor scooter and start dyeing my hair and running around again. But for now I hope I exorcised it.

The success of *Mid-August Lunch* at that level was completely unexpected by everybody. For ten years I had been running around with various versions of the script looking for producers. They read it, saw that there were four elderly women in there – the youngest one was 84 years old – and they just told me to go away. I think in this whole process the film matured to a point where it just connected to something. I really didn't want to do a sequel but as the characters developed and we developed the treatment the personalities became more and more similar. That's partly because it's so autobiographical in so many ways.

Unfortunately I don't really spend time with all of the beautiful women that there are in the film. But of course, many things are very similar.

I do have a daughter and her boyfriend lives with us in our apartment. Actually, I kind of forced my daughter to play the part of the daughter in the film. Every morning I told her: "Say exactly the same thing you say to me when we were in that situation."

In Italy (that) (it's) the men (that) try to pretend that they never get old. In my experience the women are more realistic and can deal with that situation far better. They are more rooted in reality. While men – even 20 years after the fact – still prefer that they are young.

I'm a little divided always between the part of me that's more intellectual and the part of me that's worked in cinema for many years in workmanlike roles. I try to bring that together, and what helps me in that is my rather formal upbringing. My parents were already quite old when I was born, so I lived in a house that was an old person's house already. It was very, very formal and my defense to all this was to laugh about everything. I just tried to cope with things by finding them funny. That's my character.

Even when I write something like *Gomorra*, I always think of jokes that I try to put into the script. Even when I write something like *Gomorra*, I always think of jokes that I try to put into the script. Of course, my co-writers tend to write those out again, but that's just how I work. It's my nature to be comical.

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Transcribed from video interview

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/video/2011/feb/15/salt-of-life-video>

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CAST

Gianni	Gianni Di Gregorio
Mother	Valeria de Franciscis Bendoni
Alfonso	Alfonso Santagata
Gianni's Wife	Elisabetta Piccolomini
Valeria	Valeria Cavalli
Alyn	Alyn Prandi
Cristina	Kristina Cepraga
Michelangelo	Michelangelo Ciminale
Teresa	Teresa Di Gregorio
Lilia	Lilia Silvi
Gabriella	Gabriella Sborgi
Twins	Laura Squizzato and Silvia Squizzato

CREDITS

Director	Gianni Di Gregorio
Screenplay	Gianni Di Gregorio, Valerio Attanasio
Producer	Angelo Barbagallo
Executive Producer	Gaetano Daniele
Director of Photography	Gogò Bianchi
Editor	Marco Spoletini
Composers	Ratchev e Carratello
Production Designer	Susanna Cascella
Costume Designer	Silvia Polidori
Sound	Gianluca Costamagna
1st Assistant Director	Guido Colla
Casting Directors	Fabiola Banzi, Francesca Borromeo
Production company	BiBi Film – Isaria Productions In collaboration with Rai Cinema

2011 - Italy - 90 mins - Color - 35mm - In Italian with English subtitles



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