

INTERVIEW WITH LAURA BISPURI

**DIRECTOR OF “DAUGHTER OF MINE”,
A FEATURE FILM SUPPORTED BY EURIMAGES**

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Italian born director Laura Bispuri has received critical success for her second feature film, “Daughter of Mine”, which premiered in the Competition at the Berlinale last year and won the Jury Prize in Hong Kong and the Golden Anchor in Haifa. It built on the triumph of her first feature, Sworn Virgin, which won the Nora Ephron Prize in Tribeca, the New Directors Prize in San Francisco and the Fipresci in Krakow. “Daughter of Mine” tells the story of a girl, Vittoria, torn between the love of two equally inadequate mothers: her adoptive mother Tina, who raised her with love, and her biological mother Angelica, who abandoned her without second thoughts. It is the story of an imperfect motherhood and a wandering childhood.

HOW DID THE IDEA COME TO MAKE YOUR SECOND FEATURE FILM?

I have thought about this idea for many years, even before “Sworn Virgin”. It came from a friend telling me that, despite having lived in a normal, quiet family, she desired to be adopted. This sparked some ideas in my mind. Of course, this story didn’t go directly into the film – the film is different. It was just a spark. But I felt that in there could be something that could be a reflection, 360 degrees, on maternity. I wanted to talk about ma-

ternity from different points of view, both mother and daughter. Telling this story from multiple angles was the most difficult part of making the movie because I wanted to have an emotional flow that went from one character to another, and for this flow to be fluid on screen.

WHAT WAS IT ABOUT YOUR OWN WAY OF GROWING UP AS A CHILD THAT MIGHT HAVE INSPIRED YOU TO MAKE THIS FILM?

I felt very close and associated strongly with all three perspectives. It is not an autobiography but I understand very well the feeling of Vittoria when she goes near this entity that attracts her and scares her. At the same time, I’m a mother. I have a daughter. As a mother I have parts of Angelica and parts of Tina. I try to mix parts of these two mum versions, which are different parts of femininity and motherhood. I would like to point out that at the beginning of the story they seem to be two opposite characters: one is only positive and one is only negative. But as the movie progresses, there is a development and you see that there are positive and negative parts in both of them. This opposition at the beginning is meant to create a parable, but I really wanted to show the complexity of these two women.



Shooting "Daughter of Mine"

I ENJOYED THAT ANGELICA IS GENTLE WITH ANIMALS BUT QUITE HARSH WITH HUMANS. SHE LAUGHS AT THE MADONNA BUT HAS A SACRED OWL. YOU HAVE THIS IDEA OF CREATING COMPLEXITY, BUT WHAT IS THE SECRET OF RENDERING THAT ON CAMERA?

It's mostly, if not all, in the writing. The writing process lasts a very long time. I do much of my research on the real shooting locations. With "Sworn Virgin" it was in the Albanian mountains. With "Daughter of Mine" it was in Sardinia. The writing and the research into reality overlap and this creates levels of perception. I get to know the characters very well and I aim to show the sincerity of these characters. If we come up with an idea for a scene that is very good but wouldn't suit those characters, we reject it. The first step is to be truthful to the characters. Plus, knowing the reality where the story takes place is very important. When the shooting begins, the actors come to these places and it is easier for me as the director to lead them. We talk a lot about the characters with the actors but we don't do many rehearsals. This was one of the things that helped create the magic when we shoot, because this way I don't stop the feeling of the actresses and I get to work in the most truthful way. In comparison to the scene as written in the script, I give a lot of free rein when shooting. In these moments, surprises happened. We work on creating the atmosphere for a long time, so we can have these surprises.

IF YOU COULD CHOOSE ONE MOMENT IN SHOOTING THIS FILM THAT YOU COULD RETURN TO, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

The one night scene with Valeria Golino, where she got drunk, because her character, Tina, had to work a lot on controlling herself while the actress herself does not really love control. We had a plan regarding working on this control. I kept reminding Valeria that Tina

doesn't move her hands much and she walks in a certain way. In that scene, we needed her to burst out and I think that compression helped her come out with that special burst. I asked for the music to be on the set and this also helped her. With Alba Rohrwacher, I have done two movies so there is a special relationship with her. In "Sworn Virgin", the whole first part of the movie comes from an improvisation we did together. In "Daughter of Mine", there are many sequences with Alba that are not in the script. Most of them are the ones shot inside the house. With her, we really have that magic.

HOW DID YOU CHOOSE THE GIRL THAT PLAYS THE LEAD ACTRESS?

It was a long and hard search. I went personally into Sardinian schools to look for her. In general, I don't like the director who sits in their office and waits for people to come to them. Sometimes it is a bit strange because people are not used to the director going to different places and looking for people. With Sara Casu, she was a big surprise because it was the first time she had done any acting.

I READ THAT YOU WORKED WITH BOTH ACTORS AND NON-ACTORS ON THE SET. WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE ON THE SET?

In all of my films, I always like to mix actors and non-actors. I like working with both very much. I think they can each bring something credible. I truly believe it is the director who has to adapt to the people in front of them and try in both cases to bring them where you want but in different ways. In general, since the real places and the real people are the starting point, I care about bringing my actresses into this real world.



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For example, in "Sworn Virgin", Alba learned Albanian and we worked with people who really lived in

these mountains. In Sardinia, we involved the fishing community and all the people from that place. All the sound work on "Daughter of Mine" was made by having the voices of the actors on the same level as the world around them. In the bar scenes, one of them is seven minutes long and the hard thing was that I wanted the dialogue to be clear but I also wanted to capture the background sounds of the bar. When they finished the visual editing of the film, I went back to Sardinia myself to record the sounds of the bar and of other surroundings to have them on the same level.

WERE YOU SURPRISED BY THE REACTION TO THE FILM?

There were very important highly rated reviews of the film, both during the Berlin International Film Festival and when the film was distributed in the United States. This made us very happy. In Italy, it was good but there was also some critique of the male character — the father. Some people were a bit taken aback by him, both because he is in the background and because people don't seem to be used to a man whose strength is shown through sweetness rather than toughness. I also got some comments that at first made me angry and then they made me smile. I was asked why I had chosen three women protagonists. I said the history of cinema is full of stories that have the opposite and no one raises a problem.

HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE THE WAY THAT ITALY REACTS TO YOUR FILM? DO YOU THINK IT IS AN ITALIAN STIGMA, A HOLLYWOOD STIGMA, OR BOTH?

I think it is very important to bring up the ques-

tion about the female gaze and creating an imagery that promotes women. This is an issue that goes beyond cinema and involves women in every setting all around the world. If I take a map of the world and I try to pinpoint a place where I believe that real equality is in place, I have a hard time. I think all of this is absolutely important and real but, exactly for this reason, we have to think about cinema beyond "female cinema" but, instead, on the same level.

WHAT IS YOUR NEXT PROJECT GOING TO BE ABOUT?

I'm writing a second draft. It will be located in Rome. I am extremely excited and my head is at full speed on the project. I should be shooting at the beginning of January. I've been working on this for months and there will be female protagonists. I guess you'll have to discover for yourself what it's about when information becomes available soon!



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