

From Vergiate to New York, via the Oscars

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"Seeing a short that **you** also worked on being awarded at the Oscar ceremony **was indescribable.**" **Lapo Melzi** is originally from Vergiate, but for seven years, has been studying in the United States, at the **New York University**, thanks to an international scholarship. Today, he is 36, and the short film in question is the degree thesis of his fellow student, **Luke Matheny**, entitled "**God of Love**". The short **was awarded during the last Oscar ceremony**, in which "**The King's Speech**" triumphed.

"I worked on that short as a stagehand," Lapo says, "and Luke worked on my thesis, the short film **Romeo contro Giulietta (Romeo versus Juliet)**, which was completed this year. It's great in the United States, because of this collaboration between the students, **everyone's willing to do anything** on the set of their colleagues/friends." Lapo returned to Italy a few weeks ago, because of health problems, "but it all turned out well, and **I'm ready to go back to New York in January.**"

After Film School, in Milan, why did you decide that Italy wasn't for you?

"I worked here for a few years, with Dario Piana, who had seen my work with special effects. Then I got the international scholarship, which gave me the chance to go to New York, and I left immediately. I've now submitted my degree thesis, and the world of fulltime work is opening up. During the course, I worked as a teacher and as an editor, and got a lot of experience in this field. I also made a commissioned documentary about a family home dedicated to the victims of family abuse. It was a difficult job, and it taught me a lot."

Is it very different from Italy?

Absolutely, they're two worlds apart. I'd like to do science fiction, but it's not possible in Italy. There aren't any investors here, there are no incentives for private individuals. An industrial culture of film-making doesn't exist. What's more, there aren't any real schools, not even for our actors. One of the things I've learnt most over the last few years is to respect actors and direct them, but it's rare that this happens in Italy."

It must have been a great thrill when your course mate won the Oscar.

"Yes, it was, especially because I had also contributed to that short, but beautiful film."

Now, your short “Romeo contro Giulietta” is ready. What’s it about?

“We’ve just sent it to festivals, and I’d like to make a full-length film from it if people like it. It’s about Romeo and Juliet, who survive the tragedy, but wake up in today’s world, and are forced to face reality with the ultra-romantic expectations they had. They end up fighting, and killing each other.”

In the last few years, you’ve also won prizes in a number of sectors, haven’t you?

“Yes, I can’t keep still, and I think you have to sow in order to be able to reap in the future. I really like stop motion animation (which was used in *Chicken Run*, ed.). I won an international prize for a screenplay of this kind; let’s see what happens. And I was awarded by the AICP for an advert made about the historical Afro-American month; this work also ended up in the historical archive of the MOMA, which was great.”

However, despite all of this, you aren’t guaranteed a job in the United States, when you go back ...

“Unfortunately, no. There’s a lot of competition, and you can’t take it easy or stop. You’ve always got to come up with ideas. Unlike Italy, the producers there listen much more to ideas. I’ve got a lot of possibilities when I go back: I should be one of the directors of a new reality show in an Afro-American dance school. It’s a project that the excellent producer I usually work with, Kiara Jones, has been working on. Then, I should work on a few TV adverts.”

Aren’t you turning your back on TV serials and story-telling, which are still your real passion?

“Yes, but I’m willing to do it. It’s all experience. Although I haven’t abandoned TV serials, I’m writing several projects with friends from the degree course, and many of them seem to be going well.”

Has the current economic crisis also affected this sector considered golden for the United States?

“Certainly. But there’s great respect for this work. Maybe, people are more optimistic and think that the situation can recover. What’s more, the television sector there is much more developed, and gives real opportunities for people in all jobs.”

What do you miss about Italy?

“From the point of view of film-making, nothing. Only my family, occasionally, but I know that my future is on the other side of the ocean.”

And your dream?

“Maybe a science fiction film. But also “Romeo contro Giulietta” as a full-length film might give me my first great satisfaction. I’ve already got the whole story in my head.”

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