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**Filmmakers Entertainment**

Production

# **ODYSSEY IN ROME**

a documentary film by

**ALEX GRAZIOLI**

**PRESS NOTES**

86 min.; 16:9; HD; Dolby SR

Sales

Martino Properzi

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**Cast**

ABEL FERRARA

FRANK DECURTIS

JULIETTE BINOCHÉ

FOREST WHITAKER

MATTHEW MODINE

HEATHER GRAHAM

GUIDO GEUNA

RICCARDO NERI

BRAD STEVENS

VINCENT MARAVAL

ROBERTO DENIGRIS

MASSIMO CORTESI

ANDREA GROPPERLO

FERNANDO SULICHIN

**Crew**

directed by  
ALEX GRAZIOLI

produced by  
MARTINO PROPERZI - ALEX GRAZIOLI

co-produced by  
ABEL FERRARA - T. WOODY RICHMAN - FRANK DECURTIS

cinematography by  
FEDERICO VITETTA

edited by  
T. WOODY RICHMAN  
CHAD BECK

original soundtrack by  
UNKLE

narrated by  
.ERIC STOLTZ

In February of 2004 Alex took the train from Milano to come and meet Franky and me in Rome. Through some mix up he had to stand the whole 5 hours of which I could have cared less. When I heard that his reason to meet was his desire to shoot our adventures in Rome as we tried to finance and hopefully shoot our next feature I said «thanks but... no thanks !!!» and left the room. Franky, being a more gracious host, offered him something to drink before he went back home. The truth of the matter is I had just been the victim of a very dishonest documentary on my work and myself and I did not want to trust my instincts anymore in this area. I know enough about filmmaking to know that the subject has to give himself totally to the filmmakers if there is any hope for the project, and at this point I could not trust anyone on that side of the camera but myself. To make a long story short Euros talk and bullshit walks and thanks to Massimo (Cortesi), Franky and Martino, an agreement was worked out for a specific amount of time and a specific amount of Euros, with me assuring one and all that if MARY does not get made the doc will be even more interesting. To make a long story short it is now the summer of 2005 and MARY is in its final stage of preparation for its premiere at the Venice Film Festival. Alex, Martino and their skateboard phenomenon Federico are three of the closest friends I've made since arriving here. Their confidence, encouragement and caring helped get the film made and hopefully their doc is as close to their heart as MARY is to mine. I don't know if I will be able to watch the final version because there were moments of tremendous heartbreak and disappointment. I don't want to go through it twice, but then... That's entertainment !



Abel Ferrara

## **Synopsis**

Alex Grazioli follows bad-boy filmmaker Abel Ferrara as he spends three grueling years battling obstacles in Italy to direct "Mary," a modern-reimagining of the life of Mary Magdalene. Featuring candid interviews and on-set footage with Forest Whitaker, Heather Graham, Matthew Modine, and Juliette Binoche, "Odyssey," brings to bear an impressive tableau of Ferrara's colleagues as they discuss his unique approach to creating dynamic films. But it is Ferrara himself who shines as the star of this oddly cautionary tale about the serious personal costs of making distinctive cinema. With music by UNKLE.

## ABEL FERRARA

A journalist once asked Abel Ferrara if he believed people could change. Ferrara's response was simple: "I think people are always changing. Constantly". Always changing. Constantly. These three words perfectly sum up Ferrara's films, which refuse to sit still and behave, to remain in one place long enough for ideas to form or judgements to be made about their characters. Ferrara never lets us sit back and relax, but rather insists we accompany him on the journey he is taking. Those who can keep up find the experience to be among the most exhilarating cinema has to offer. Born in New York on July 19th 1951 to Italian-Irish parents, Ferrara lived in the Bronx until he was thirteen, then moved to Peekskill, a suburb of the Big Apple. While still in high school, he began making short films with a group of friends that included Nicodemo Oliverio, who would go on to write many of Ferrara's features under the pseudonym 'Nicholas St. John'. After studying filmmaking in England, Ferrara returned to New York, where he directed a series of increasingly ambitious shorts. Even in an amateur effort such as 1972's **The Hold Up**, many of his themes are already present.

Ferrara's official feature debut **The Driller Killer**, shot over an extended period of time during the late 70s, appears to be a gory genre piece in the **Texas Chain Saw Massacre** tradition, but is really a serious study of psychological breakdown, and the pressure of living up to those ideals defining the ways in which men are supposed to behave. But it was not until **Ms. 45**, released in 1980, that critics began taking Ferrara seriously. With its mixture of feminist politics, graphic violence, religious iconography, and New York location shooting, as well as a stunning performance from newcomer Zoe Tamerlis, this film defined the territory Ferrara would spend the next 25 years exploring.

In the 1980s, Ferrara made **Fear City**, **China Girl** and **Cat Chaser**. These transitional films were interspersed with various forays into American television, including two episodes of **Miami Vice** and the outstanding **Crime Story** pilot, which has a great deal in common with his more obviously personal work. But it was **King of New York**, the film with which Ferrara entered the 1990s, that began an unbroken series of masterpieces which continues to the present day. Although the lead role of drug dealer Frank White was originally intended for James Remar, the part ended up being played by Christopher Walken, who would appear in three subsequent Ferrara films, delivering a series of brilliant performances which, in their mercurial unpredictability, embody precisely that quality Ferrara seeks in his closest collaborators.

**King of New York**'s success resulted in Warner Bros. offering Ferrara the opportunity to direct a big-budget remake of Don Siegel's **Invasion of the Body Snatchers**. But it was during the pre-production of this film that Ferrara finally managed to finance and shoot a long-planned project entitled **Bad Lieutenant**. Co-written by **Ms.45** star Zoe Tamerlis, now known as Zoe Lund, this portrait of a cop searching for redemption features a searing central performance by Harvey Keitel. Casting aside the cloak of genre, Ferrara's themes appear in perhaps their purest form,

resulting in a film whose critical and commercial success helped establish its creator as one of America's most important independent directors.

**Body Snatchers**, shot immediately after **Bad Lieutenant**, once again demonstrated Ferrara's ability to explore his themes within the context of projects he had not initiated. In its portrayal of a world where individuality, affection, spontaneity and emotion are threatened by the forces of conformity, **Body Snatchers** expresses Ferrara's deepest concerns. Viewed from a certain angle, it can even be seen as an attack on those technically proficient but soulless Hollywood blockbusters whose dominance threatens the existence of genuine cinematic artists, a thesis ironically confirmed when **Body Snatchers**, despite its obvious high quality, received virtually no theatrical distribution thanks to internal squabbles among Warner Bros. executives.

In 1993, Ferrara directed **Snake Eyes**, sometimes known as **Dangerous Game**. Planned as a low-budget film about filmmaking, it mutated into a much more expensive project when Nick Oliverio's screenplay fell into the hands of Madonna, who expressed an interest in playing the female lead. The end result is perhaps the most extreme example of Ferrara's working method. Using the screenplay as little more than a starting point, he encouraged his cast to improvise, allowed the on-set atmosphere to influence the direction in which the film was going, and even used actual rehearsal tapes in the final cut. Yet nothing about this masterpiece appears random or undisciplined - it is a tightly constructed and carefully organized examination of the nature of identity, and of what it means to perform, both in front of and behind the camera. Harvey Keitel plays a director who may or may not be based on Ferrara himself, while the director's wife is played by Ferrara's real-life spouse Nancy, who gives a remarkably naturalistic performance. Even Madonna is good as an actress derided for her lack of acting ability.

Ferrara's next two films were the last he would make from screenplays by Nick Oliverio. In **The Addiction**, a philosophical vampire film shot in black and white, Ferrara once more explores the theme of sin and redemption, casting Lili Taylor as a philosophy student turned vampire who uses her intellectual knowledge to justify committing atrocities before finally begging God's forgiveness. In **The Funeral**, Christopher Walken plays a Mafiosi trying to find the person who killed his younger brother. Redemption is no longer an option: that mercy shown by **Bad Lieutenant**'s protagonist is here explicitly rejected by Walken's character, who insists on pursuing his quest for revenge to its logical conclusion.

In their wrestling with specifically Catholic interpretations of reality, these films reveal a tension between director and writer, and it is hardly surprising that Ferrara chose this moment to seek out new collaborators. In **The Blackout**, there is no trace of the religious subtext evident in so many of Oliverio's screenplays. Here, Ferrara is concerned with the nature of masculinity, casting Matthew Modine as an alcoholic actor who suspects he may have murdered someone during one of his blackouts. The character's macho behavior conceals a deep-rooted fear that he has slipped into a traditionally feminine position of powerlessness. By casting Modine in a role which required him to actively suppress his natural gentleness, Ferrara created a film wherein many of the most revealing lines of dialogue were improvised.

Though it divided the critics and was barely released, Ferrara's **New Rose Hotel**, a science fiction film based on a short story by William Gibson, proved to be among his finest achievements. Initially, this comes across as a messy, almost unfinished work. But, as Marsall McLuhan has pointed out, "When they are initially proposed, new systems of knowledge do not look like improvements and innovations. They look like chaos". And it is in this sense that **New Rose Hotel** is genuinely innovative, an attempt to tell a story in a new way, in which viewers, rather than

being passive consumers, are asked to become active collaborators in the construction of meaning.

**R Xmas**, a Christmas movie shot during the Summer of 2000, superficially appears to be one of Ferrara's simpler films, but is actually among his most complex. Lillo Brancato Jr stars as a drug dealer whose wife attempts to raise ransom money when he is kidnapped on Christmas Eve. Essentially, the film is a variation on Charles Dickens' **A Christmas Carol**. But Ferrara's point is that the moral certainties of Dickens' story are no longer viable, and that Scrooge's change of heart, his decision to do good rather than evil, is simply not possible in a world where there is no absolute standard by which selling drugs might be regarded as bad. The final scene is typical of Ferrara's mature work, since it is impossible to say if its tone is upbeat or downbeat, happy or sad, optimistic or pessimistic. We must make these choices ourselves, but they can never be anything more than provisional. Like Ferrara's actors, and like Ferrara's characters, his viewers must be! willing to improvise. To consider all possibilities. To be always changing. Constantly.

## **The Company**

### **Filmmakers Entertainmnet**

Founded in Milan, Italy, in *2003* and with the exciting recent addition of U.S. headquarters in New York City, Filmmakers Entertainment is a production company and multimedia outlet devoted to upholding the highest standards of documentary and feature filmmaking. F\_E produces films as compelling, complex, and uncategorizable as the world around us, along with the ancillary video and visual arts materials necessary to announce, promote, and disseminate them around the world. Having a sensitive nose for the intriguing stories and pressing issues that address broader contemporary themes, and as a result it's uniquely capable of making a major splash that is both creatively and commercially viable. As fellow natives of Milan at the top of their respective creative fields, the talents of Producer Martino Properzi and Producer/Director Alex Grazioli united to form one of the most intriguing indie production company around.

## **Crew Biography**

### **Alex Grazioli**

Producer/Director

Born in Milan, but living between New York and London, debut director Alex Grazioli began his training in the visual arts as an honor student with a double major in Communications and Advertising at Milan's Accademia di Comunicazione, followed by a double major in Psychology and Communications at Delgado College in New Orleans, and then advanced study in Design at the School of Visual Arts in New York.

As a graphic designer first and an art director/director later, either freelance or working in leading design and advertising agencies, Alex for over ten years has created and produced promotional materials as well as video concepts and productions for high-profile clients in America, Europe, Africa, and Japan including Sony Music, Mtv, Diesel, Vodafone, Dodge, and Renault.

In 2000 was instrumental in winning DVAG Milano the competition amongst Italy's most renowned design and advertising agencies to design Pope John Paul II's book commemorating the Vatican's 2000 Jubilee.

In 2001 with Studio K-7, New York, Alex was providing art support to over 40 international independent music labels.

In 2003 founded Filmmakers Entertainment with friend and producer Martino Properzi and started working on the feature documentary *Odyssey in Rome*, starring Abel Ferrara, Juliette Binoche, Forest Whitaker and Matthew Modine.

### **Martino Properzi**

Producer

A native of Milan, Italy, Martino Properzi began his training in visual arts and design while pursuing Communication Science and Electronic Engineering at the Università Statale di Milano, and London Guildhall University, Having acquired the technical background and programming skills to match his natural flair for graphic design and digital video production, Martino immediately founded Shoogar Ltd., a multimedia design and development firm. With offices in Milan and London, Shoogar Ltd's international prestige and client list continued to grow, attracting the attention and patronage of companies across Europe and as far away as Belize. Martino turned his talented hand toward video production becoming the producer of choice in the skate- and snowboarding industries, responsible for numerous original works, including *Polyladis (2001)*, *European Lines(2002)*, *SlamTrick(2002)*, and *Capisc'(2003)*. Martino went on to found with partner Alex Grazioli and independent production company Filmmakers Entertainment.(2003- )

**T. Woody Richman**

Editor

T. Woody Richman has worked as an editor on Michael Moore's documentaries since 2001. He was the associate editor on the Academy Award winning *Bowling for Columbine* and Editor of *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the 2004 Festival de Cannes Palm D'Or winner. Woody has worked as an assistant editor on a range of films since 1992. He has honed his craft by working with some of the top indie filmmakers of our time: Nick Gomez, Abel Ferrara, Spike Lee, and Oliver Stone, among others. By working with such well respected editors as Tracy Granger, Jeffrey Wolf A.C.E., Barry Alexander Brown, and Evan Lottman A.C.E., Woody has had a front row seat with masters in the edit room. In addition to working with Moore, Woody has edited seven indie features, including the 1997 winner of the Hamptons Film Festival, *Destination Unknown*. Although he lives in Brooklyn, NY, and considers himself a New Yorker, he is a rabid Boston Red Sox fan. His latest work *Troubled Water* participated at the Sundance Fellow - Sundance's documentary and storytelling lab. He is currently editing Sooni Taraporevala, writer of *Salaam Bombay! / Mississippi Masala / The Namesake* all by Mira Nair, directorial debut in Mumbai.

**Unkle**

Original Soundtrack

UNKLE: James Lavelle's production collective that defies definition with its blend of electronic, hip-hop, dance and rock music. UNKLE albums have featured collaborations with vocalists such as Thom Yorke (Radiohead), Richard Ashcroft (The Verve), Ian Brown (The Stone Roses), Ian Astbury (The Cult), Mike D. (The Beastie Boys) and Josh Homme (Queens of the Stone Age). UNKLE single *Eye For An Eye* off the album *Never, Never, Land* was nominated for Best Video at the 2003 MTV Europe Music Awards.

UNKLE has to date produced two full artist albums, *Pysence Fiction* and *Never, Never, Land*, collaborated on numerous mix albums, produced other artists (eg South, Oasis), recorded music for movies (The Incredibles, Sexy Beast, GOAL) and is one of the big-gest remix names in the world. Mixes have been commissioned by Queens Of The Stone Age, Depeche Mode, Massive Attack, Beck, Oasis, Robert Plant and many more.

*War Stories*, the new album is out now.

**Federico Vitetta**

Cinematographer

From his first venture in film at the age of 14, Federico has shown diverse talents in the realm of film and visual arts. Federico found his love for cinematography in high school while learning and excelling in every aspect of the filmmaking process along the way. Always affected by the human relationship in stories, Federico, a keen skateboarder, seeks to lens projects where action and beauty are the principle elements of the film. Born and raised in Milano, Italy, Federico graduated Scuola di Cinema Milano in December of 1996 and has since been director of photography on numerous commercials, shorts and extreme sports videos. His talent was immediately recognized by directors of the caliber of Spyke Jonze and Ty Evans with whom he has been working for the last couple of years on the last Lakai skateboard video "Fully Flaired".

**Chad Beck**

Editor

Chad Beck is an Edit Center graduate and has been working in both film and television for 5 years. He has cut both narrative and documentary features. Most recently, he was the editor on the acclaimed indie feature *Half Nelson* and the award winning documentary *No End In Sight* (Sundance Special Jury Prize).

## **Discussion With Director**

**Alex Grazioli**

Director

Transcripts from the Venice Film Festival 2005 Press Conference.

"Odyssey in Rome" is a documentary on Abel Ferrara and the process of independent filmmaking. Inspirational amazing documentaries such as *Burden of dreams* and *Heart Of Darkness* paved the way in depicting the troublesome life of the artist as an indie filmmaker witnessing the psychological and creative troubles as well as the technical ones behind a movie production. I've always been a film lover and watching those two films, for the first time, I felt like I was part of it, with them, on and off the set, in this unbelievable journey. . I thought,, if I could only reveal to others and to myself what it really means to put a movie together not only technically ; because this is usually what happens when you see the backstage of a movie, you see how a scene is prepared and made technically but you never see all the psychological aspects related to the movie business.

In December 2003 I met Abel Ferrara, who just arrived in Italy to look for financiers for his new project, controversial religious film *Mary*. That was the chance i was waiting for!

Besides being an amazing director, Abel is also a very interesting, complex and charismatic character so I thought that if I could follow him with a camera 24 hours a day , during the whole filming process, from writing of the script until the completion of the movie, I would probably witness very interesting and unique situations, hoping to be able to catch the dramatic, psychological side of it as well.

Abel hadn't been shooting a movie for 3 years and had always been a controversial director, hard to produce because of the nature of his movies and because of his bad reputation.

The idea was to show the audience the incredible challenge and the endless struggles and determination to put this controversial indie movie together.

It took a bit of convincing, but then Abel agreed and has been phenomenal in allowing us total access to his life. For 2 and half years I was waking up every morning getting my camera and being around Abel all day, at his place, in meetings, in locations, with potential producers, actors, with Federico "Fedex" Vitetta, director of photography joining us with a second camera whenever possible.

Martino, the producer and I then set up a team. of experienced, passionate and hard working people. We worked on putting together a story with a nice rhythm, covering different topics : the difficulties in putting a movie together, the different reasons why it is so hard, also a story that would explore Abel Ferrara's character with his weaknesses and strengths. That's when I realized that not only had I been making a documentary that showed a set but also one that told the story of a movie maker.

## A Word by the Producer

**Martino Properzi**

Producer

### The Movie

“Odyssey In Rome and how it began. Well, it was a few years ago about autumn 2003 when Alex got this phone call from a friend of his saying that Abel was in Italy about to start shooting his new movie. I’ve known Alex for quite a while now, roughly ten years. Our friendship became also a work collaboration. I had a web company of which Alex was Art Director, later we worked on a few video projects I was doing, anyway in the last few years we’ve been always collaborating for one reason or another. In 2003 we were working on different things but sharing the same studio and always bitching about why we were not making a feature movie and in november he got the call. Short there after he went to meet Abel and his collaborators in Bologna then came back to Milan. Its at this moment that we sat together and decided to, following the footsteps of Hearts Of Darkness and Burden Of Dreams, put together a project that would allow us to apply everything we had learned. What better way to strengthen our knowledge than to make a movie about someone making a movie. As a matter of fact our first idea was for a small project. Something that had a story that would keep the audience’s attention, something that would allow us to enter this world without too many risks, obviously we did not foresee what we were getting involved in. After this, Alex moved to Rome to start shooting. I joined him only a few weeks later. It was only then that we started to see in what situation Abel was in. We started meeting people of all sorts that were trying to put up a production and immediately realized that it was not as easy as we thought for a credited director as Abel to start the machine that would bring his vision into reality. We kept on shooting anything we could, and thanks to Abel and Franky’s support we were able to follow their life with almost total access. As the project got bigger and bigger we decided to change what was intended as a support project to a stand alone feature documentary that depicted the struggle of and artist and the complexity of the movie making process.”

### The Production.

The real problems arose only later the expenses and mainly the people involved increased. We knew we could not pay them enough because this was a self-financed project with a tight budget, on the other hand we demanded from them a great effort. Against all odds everything went better than what we could have imagined. Everybody that was brought into the project showed an enthusiasm that we could only dream of, and honestly if everything goes well it will be also thanks to these people who have «devoted» themselves to this project.

As with everything we do, we try to learn from mistakes others have made earlier. From the editing, to the soundtrack, to the marketing we tried to find the best possible solutions. Fortunately

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we have managed to conquer the faith, not only of the people working for/with us but also of the people working around Abel. Our energy has probably been transmitted to everybody, what we lack in experience we compensate with devotion. I can only hope that we will be able to overcome future obstacles the same way we managed to overcome them in the past.