

Good stories trump big budgets at Italian fest

BY PATRICK DUNN
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It's not uncommon for a Hollywood film to be budgeted in the hundreds of millions of dollars, and tens of millions is just standard procedure. But Pietro Sarcina says the Italian film industry works a little differently.

"In Italy, a big-budget movie would be a \$5 million movie," Sarcina says. "Italian movies, they don't quite go into the shoot and chase and special effects. It's really basically focused on the storytelling, and for that you don't need big money. You just need good stories, and you need a good person telling the story."

Sarcina chairs the Italian Film Festival USA's Detroit chapter, which will offer free screenings of a variety of contemporary Italian films April 1-26 at five area venues. The festival got its start in 2005 in St. Louis and has since expanded to include chapters in 11 American cities. This year Detroit will screen 14 of the 16 film options selected by the festival's national organizing committee.

The selected films represent a variety of genres, subject matter and film-making styles, as clearly represented by the movies that bookend the Detroit festival. "Il capitale umano (Human Capital)," screening April 1 for the festival's opening night at the Detroit Film Theatre, is a dark morality play about two financial magnates who find both their fortunes in the balance after a car accident. The film was Italy's submission for the Oscars' Best Foreign Language Film category this year, and Sarcina describes it as "probably the most-awarded film in Italy" in 2014.

"La mafia uccide solo d'estate (The Mafia Kills Only in Summer)," which closes the festival April 26 at the Detroit Film Theatre, takes a different tack. The comedy satirizes the Mafia, depicting one man's childhood and early adulthood over 20 years in the mob's shadow.

"We try really to bring the whole variety of what Italian cinema is doing today," Sarcina says. "Obviously we have



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Pierfrancesco Diliberto and Cristiana Capotondi play lead roles in "The Mafia Kills Only in Summer."

biographical films (and) historical (films). It all depends on what the industry is producing that particular year."

The festival engages its audiences by offering moviegoers in each city an opportunity to rate films after each screening. The ratings are used as feedback to influence the next year's round of selections, and to determine the winner of the festival's Best Film Award in each city and at the national level.

In Detroit, that can mean counting up quite a few ballots. Detroit has become the most robust city in the festival's lineup since it joined in 2008, drawing an average attendance of 300 at each screening last year. This year it will offer more films in more venues than any of the other 10 cities. Sarcina says the festival's popularity in Detroit and beyond reflects audiences' enthusiasm for delving into Italian tradition in an "intriguing and entertaining" way.

"It offers an opportunity for people to see places and customs and language and culture that are quite different from their own, sitting in a theater seat," he says. "What better way to communicate and engage people and allow them to see the world that is far away than through pictures?"

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