

A Food That Taste of Music and Caresses

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In the age of electronics there are no more children playing hide and seek. Especially in large cities where courtyards have disappeared, squares have become car parks and the streets remain clogged night and day, you only find them glued for hours to a small screen, isolated from the rest of the world. This is why it is completely understandable the wonder of the taciturn piano “master” Gabriele (Silvio Orlando) when he discovers that a little boy has holed up inside his house. His question is logical, his wonder is obvious: “How did you get in? You are Cyrus, the child upstairs!”

How *Ciro* managed to sneak in we find out right away: he found the door open. That’s it. More disconcerting is to learn why. He is not playing and, probably, he has never played in his life if we exclude the dangerous game of snatching that they taught him in the family and that has procured him the hunger for revenge of the underworld. He has missed the target and from a creature-puppet to be used at will of the bosses has become an infamous who must pay dearly for the sgarro of having chipped those who did not have to snatch. Hence the urgency to find a hiding place and an accomplice. It was by lot who led him to a man who barely knows him, despite living in the same palace. “You have to help me,” he tells him. He does not ask him for a favor but requires him to observe a law respected even in the animal kingdom: the adult is obliged to rescue the child. Gabriele has always thought of his cabbage, but this time, despite the opinions of his family (his brother reproaches him with the choice to go and live in a degraded popular environment and to have condemned himself to failure, the magistrate father advises him not to meddle) he cannot back down. He knows well what dangers he runs, but he cannot silence his conscience and accepts what he has never had: a son.

Sometimes it happens to see a movie and to dust from the memory drawer a *deja vu* always current. Even after 22 years. It is called association of images and in cinema it is more frequent than you might think.

It was 1998 when Fulvio Wetzl told the story of a 7-year-old boy “hidden” in his incomprehensible language, victim of his father’s madness and recovered by a nurse and a speech therapist with *du* and languages: that of colors (chromotherapy) and that of music (melotherapy). It would not be out of place, therefore, to subtitle this hidden child with that “First the music, then the words”.

From 1998 to today, from Wetzl to Roberto Andò, from the Tuscan countryside to a working-class district of Naples, from a mad father to a Camorra father, from the speech therapist to a piano teacher, from Giovanni to *Ciro*, from one escape to another, from one hiding place to another.

Another image and another association: that of “The child in the suitcase” by Philipp Kadelbach (Germany, 2015) hidden in the Buchenwald concentration camp and saved by a prisoner and a marshal in March 1945.

It will be said not to dramatize because we are only talking about cinema. So let’s resort to current news. In March 2018, 40,000 unfortunate people fled the town of Hamouria. They seek a safe haven to survive. The symbolic image of the atrocity of the Syrian war is all in the photo of a Syrian child hidden and with the head that emerges from the suitcase carried by his father.

Let's get back to the subject. Presented out of competition at Venice 2021, this new film by Roberto Andò, based on his novel of the same name, is only apparently a well-designed and well-acted mystery. In reality it is an essay on fatherhood and denied childhood, a reflection on the encounter-clash between adults and children, a page of crime on what can happen where the Camorra reigns, an invitation to solidarity, a lesson in alternative teaching.

Perhaps the stories of children who are born under cabbage or who are brought by storks were not entirely invented. Gabriele finds Ciro hidden (cabbage or table, it doesn't matter) and rained from the upper floor (don't storks live on the roofs of our houses?). He is not a father, but not even a camorrista can boast of this title if he has no scruples in throwing his creature into the fray of illegality. And anyway, even if you are not a natural father, you can always become a "putative" father. There is not only the family recognized at the registry office. Gabriele has experienced it on his skin and it seems right and proper to him "allev (i)are" weights and traumas rained like a sudden cyclone on the shoulders of an innocent. It does so by risking in the first person, aware of the code of delinquency that does not forgive the "infamous" and punishisc and who protects them day and. The seedling he decides to cure is no longer tender and flexible, it already has 10 years of life and a past that is difficult to erase. Rto add to it and direct it on the right path will not be easy; they require patience, sweetness and mastery.

Ciro is a child who has never believed in fairy tales also because no one has had the time and joy to tell him about them. He possesses, however, an extraordinary sensitivity and for a piano teacher no language is more appropriate than that of music to break into a sick heart. It is not a complex communication. On the contrary: it is the most beautiful lesson that an adult can impart to a lying lamb, especially if he combines music with caresses.

Like moms whispering lullabies. As Gabriele does.

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