

Giffoni Film Festival celebrates 50th anniversary

Claudio Gubitosi: “Changing the idea about the South”

Isn't that what defines the nature of truly famous people? We all know them, we know all the facts published in gossip magazines, but none of us know who they really are. The same goes for famous festivals: everybody knows the Giffoni Film Festival, one of the biggest children's film events, but little do we know about the beating heart of the festival, the founder and director Claudio Gubitosi. What we all know about the festival in Southern Italy is this: it's welcoming young people from around the globe through exchange projects, it's big in numbers, premieres and screenings, it attracts famous Hollywood stars as festival guests and... it's celebrating its 50th anniversary!

We know the Giffoni Film Festival as a massive event. Were you “born big”?

Claudio Gubitosi: The original event in 1971 was very small. We just had some films – the ones we read about in magazines or found with local distributors – and a jury: some hundreds of kids full of energy and curiosity. Over the first



10 years the event grew slowly, until everything suddenly changed in 1982: François Truffaut accepted my invitation to come to Giffoni for a meeting with our jurors. It was amazing! From that moment on, finally, cinema professionals became curious about us and started to accept my invitations.

The festival is impressive in terms of numbers: so many films, so many guests... “Size matters” for Giffoni?
Gubitosi: For us it is crucial that every

member of the family can find something interesting here. We have many sections in our programme, each one for a very specific audience or age group. Even for such a big event, it is important to really know your audience and their preferences. Over the years, we have closely studied the reactions of our young jurors and how they evolved. A 9 year old in 2021 is very different from a child of that age in 1989. But still we want to offer them all a film that moves and touch-



es them.

The path of the festival is closely intertwined with your persona as founder and director.

Gubitosi: I was only an 18 year old boy back in 1971. Now I am probably a wiser man, but my enthusiasm and energy are still the same. In the beginning I worked with a small team, while now there is a staff of professionals, often people who grew up in the festival and first came here as jury members in the eighties or nineties. I see it as my duty to coordinate and direct this staff, showing them the way and together giving shape to the festival of the future.

One of the festival's trademarks is the presence of big stars, like Hollywood celebrities. What is their role?

Gubitosi: In my opinion it is getting more and more important for youngsters to meet people in the “real world” – not only star actors, but writers, politicians, scientists, to better understand their human side. They are not idols, they are not untoucha-



ble, they are normal people with passions, desires and fears from who you can learn. A famous actor can tell you how much work and study are needed to master a role, or how many fears he had to overcome. This is important in a world where success seems so easy to reach.

Which one of these stars has made the strongest impression on the team?

Gubitosi: Many of them did, but we will never forget Meryl Streep. After a long day of meetings and interviews, at dinner she asked to take some pictures of the staff, because “only thanks to these people such a wonderful event was made possible”.

You're located in South Italy, famous for its splendid beauty and hospitality, but at the same time poverty, unemployment and organised crime are casting a dark shadow over the region. What role can a festival play in the lives of young people growing up there?

Gubitosi: The festival has an important impact on multiple levels. Economically all the festival funding returns to the region multiplied in different ways (taxes, impact on tourism etc.). Culturally the festival changed the idea about the South with all the gen-



Claudio Gubitosi with Meryl Streep

erations of jurors who have come here from other Italian regions or from abroad. Young people who, thanks to Giffoni, discovered the beauty and safety of Naples, Amalfi, Paestum, might return here as adult tourists. The same happened with those Hollywood stars. After Giffoni many of them returned here and called me to say how happy they were to discover all these wonderful places.

Italy has an interesting production tradition for young audiences, but the results are seldom seen in the international scene. Can the festival have an impact on the visibility of Italian production?

Gubitosi: We do our best to promote

Italian films but at the same time we think Italian producers should be more active, specifically for young audiences. European countries like the Netherlands or Germany produce so many good films for children and youth every year, while it is still a struggle to find one Italian title for our children's sections.

What is the common thread throughout the festival's programming? What makes a film “a true Giffoni film”?

Gubitosi: Quality and honesty. A Giffoni film should have visual qualities and an authentic story that can open a cultural horizon for our jurors. A film that motivates them to think,

and think further. It should be a film that our jurors can “feel” and - at the same time - a starting point for new thoughts, a new perspective on the world.

Are there any specific ambitions for the future that you can share with us?

Gubitosi: In 2020 the festival's 'Winter Edition' was our answer to the pandemic situation. Now I'm trying hard to create a new festival calendar with more appointments throughout the year. I'm sure this should be our future; I just need to convince my sponsors and partners. Different events could be dedicated to specific themes or types of production (like experimental film, video dance, VR). We have to be open to all new aspects of the world of imagination. At the same time I hope Giffoni will become more and more a place where youngsters from all over the world can meet, not just to watch films together but also to discuss their needs, their rights and their ideas for a better future.

We wish you good luck with these ambitions, and congratulate you on your 50th festival anniversary!

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Gert Hermans