



## NEW RELEASES

# L'immensità

### L'immensità

*Directed by:* Emanuele Crialese  
*©:* Wildside Srl, Warner Bros.  
Entertainment Italia Srl, Chapter 2,  
Pathé Films, France 3 Cinéma  
*Production Companies:* Wildside,  
Chapter 2, Warner Bros. Entertainment  
Italia, Pathé, France 3 Cinéma  
*Presented by:* Wildside, Chapter 2  
*International Sales:* Pathé  
*Executive Producer:* Olivia Sleiter  
*Produced by:* Mario Gianani,  
Lorenzo Gangarossa  
*Line Producer:* Erik Paoletti  
*Production Supervisors:*  
Saverio Guarascio, Mandella Quilici  
*Location Manager:* Paolo Gatti  
*Post-production Supervisor:*  
Franco Casellato  
*1st Assistant Director:* Ciro Scognamiglio  
*Casting:* Chiara Polizzi, Davide Zurolo  
*Screenplay by:* Emanuele Crialese,  
Francesca Manieri, Vittorio Moroni  
*Story by:* Emanuele Crialese  
*Director of Photography:*  
Gergely Pohárnok  
*Camera Operator:* Gilbert Lecluyse  
*Steadicam Operator:*  
Gian Piero Castellucci  
*Editor:* Cletlio Benevento  
*Production Designer:* Dimitri Capuani  
*Supervising Art Director:* Alessia Anfosso  
*Art Director:* Luca Filaci  
*Costume Designer:*  
Massimo Cantini Parrini  
*Make-up Designer:* Dalia Colli  
*Make-up Artist:* Pablo Iglesias  
*Music by:* Raulsso  
*Additional Music:* Emanuele Bossi  
*Music Consultant:* Roberto Corsi  
*Choreography:* Blanca Li  
*Sound Recordist:* Pierre-Yves Lavoué  
*Re-recording Mixer:*  
Francesco Tumminello  
*Supervising Sound Editor:*  
Marta Billingsley  
*Dialogue Coach for Ms Cruz:* Mario Pizzuti  
*Cast:*  
Penélope Cruz (*Clara Borghetti*)  
Luana Giuliani (*Adri*)  
Vincenzo Amato (*Felice Borghetti*)  
Patrizio Francioni (*Gino*)  
Maria Chiara Goretti (*Diana*)  
Penelope Nieto Conti (*Sara*)  
Alvia Reale (*grandmother*)  
India Santella (*Maria*)  
Mariangela Granelli (*doctor*)  
Carlo Gallo (*Alberto*)  
Rita de Donato (*Felice's friend*)  
Valentina Cenni (*Giuseppina*)  
Ilaria Genatiempo (*Paola*)  
Italy/France 2022  
98 mins

A Curzon release

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Penélope Cruz is unmistakably the selling point of Emanuele Crialese's *L'immensità*. It's her face with those trademark lashes in close-up on the Italian poster – but then, the Spanish star has long been closely identified with Italianità. She played a Roman sex worker in Woody Allen's *To Rome with Love* (2012), and starred in two notable Italian films by Sergio Castellitto, *Don't Move* (2004) and *Twice Born* (2012) (though in the former, her character was Albanian-born). But the fact that she can convincingly pass as Italian, even archetypically Italian, was what inspired Pedro Almodóvar to use her quite overtly as a latter-day Loren or Magnani figure – a sort of Mamma Roma *all'espagnola* – in his 2006 film *Volver*.

In the 70s-set *L'immensità*, however, Cruz is not the centre but the glamorous supporting player. The lead role belongs to Luana Giuliani as Adriana, a teenage girl who has begun to identify as a boy, preferring the male 'Andrea' ('Andrew' in the English subtitles). As well as coming to terms with his gender, Andrea is shouldering the standard burdens of an Italian Catholic upbringing; his Spanish-born mother Clara (Cruz) is increasingly depressed; and his father (Vincenzo Amato) is a short-fused authoritarian. A glimmer of hope appears when Andrea and his siblings, children of a wealthy middle-class family, push through a heavily symbolic border of tall reeds near their apartment to find a Romani encampment, where Andrea embarks on a tentative romance with a young girl, Sara (Penelope Nieto Conti).

Andrea's and Clara's discontent is offset by the constant presence of music, turning a potentially downbeat drama flamboyantly – and somewhat over-assertively – euphoric. The film begins in what appears to be a fantasy sequence – although this is left to our interpretation – as Clara leads her children through a joyous domestic dance routine. Later, a tuxedoed Andrea performs in black and white as a cabaret crooner, while Cruz appears in blonde wig and bleached eyebrows, weirdly transformed into the popular singer Raffaella Carrà. The strangest moment is built around 'Prisencolinensinaincisol' by Adriano Celentano, the pop star who appeared in *La Dolce Vita* (1960) and who in 1972 concocted this bizarre, horn-laden number with its nonsense fake-English lyrics. Celentano and a host of dancers perform the number on TV; later, Giuliani and Cruz star in a lavish reconstruction of the routine, with Clara as a go-go dancer and Andrea sporting Celentano's oddball get-up of raincoat, slouch hat and scarf.

Andrea announces, 'I come from another galaxy,' but Clara feels just as much an alien in Rome, both at home and on the streets, where she's hassled by over-insistent admirers. Together, the pair unite in adolescent-style rebellion, as they race through a crowd yelling, 'Viaaaa!' ('Let's go!'); elsewhere Clara snubs the stuffiness of the Italian haute bourgeoisie, getting under the table and joining in her children's mischief at a formal family dinner.

Crialese is known as an accomplished director of serious-minded films executed with polished elegance – among them, 2002's *Respiro*, with Valeria Golino as another woman whose free spirit is stifled by society, and 2006's ambitious Charlotte Gainsbourg vehicle *Golden Door*, a period piece about Sicilian immigration to US. His first feature in 11 years, *L'immensità* is particularly personal, Crialese has said, based as it is on his own experience as a trans man; asked about Andrea, he has said, 'There is no doubt that that's me.' Crialese has chosen to cast a cisgender girl in the lead, on the grounds that it would be distressing for a teenager to be filmed while actually going through what their character was experiencing; he says of Luana Giuliani, 'She simply had to pretend that she wanted to be a boy.'

The result is a performance of imposing charismatic toughness, with Giuliani sporting a mesmerising glare and exuding proto-punk defiance in a red leather jacket emblazoned with badges. She and Cruz make an engaging duo in what is more than anything a mother-child story of friendship and complicity against the odds. Undeniably, though, *L'immensità* – named after the 60s pop ballad that features in the end credits – is one of those sleekly staged crowd-pleasers that go down so well with domestic audiences at the Venice Film Festival. Its kitsch exuberance is something you either buy or don't, but it's Crialese's personal investment that makes *L'immensità* distinctive, even when the themes of conformity, rebellion and the search for the true self are laid out with a kind of feelgood – and sometimes play-safe – obviousness.

Jonathan Romney, *Sight and Sound*, 6 September 2022

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From Fri 4 Aug

### L'immensità

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## Director's statement

*L'immensità* is the film I have been trying to make my whole career: it has always been 'my next film', but it always seemed to give way to another story, as I hadn't quite matured enough to feel ready to take it on. It is certainly my most personal film to date, a journey through the past, via memories – at times crystal clear, at others cloudy – and perceptions of times now firmly rooted in the past, that have been revisited and revised through the optics of the present day.

Families are often at the heart of my films; they are almost always fragmented, problematic, even dysfunctional. I think *L'immensità* is the high-point of a theme I have been tackling for a long time, an exploration of a type of family that can't seem to offer protection, where the children have no sense of security, where conjugal love, teamwork and mature individuals to look up to are absent.

*L'immensità* is not only a film about gender identity; nor do I believe that such a complex and raw subject matter can be pigeon-holed. It is an issue that is personal to each and every individual, one that cannot – and should not – be reduced to a leitmotif.

The film is set in Rome in the 1970s. I decided to portray those years by first of all stepping back from too strict an attempt to reclaim the 'memory of that period'. I asked all the cast and crew to use their own memories: family photographs, Polaroids, all the things that belong to our childhood. A vast family album of the crew whose very heart and soul would be the building blocks of the film. We let ourselves be guided by designing a map of memories that we consulted during the planning process. The visual result is a synthesis of our pasts, our families, the places, colours, atmospheres that belong to us.

We carried out an extensive search for our younger cast members. Today's children have a very different perspective, a very different relationship with reality compared to the children of my recollections, to the child I was. Today's children demand a more equal relationship with the adult world. They are more involved, their opinions are listened to and sought with intent. The children of my recollections liked to be with other children, rarely participating in adult interactions. Somehow the adults remained adults, and the children quietly got on with the task of being children. After searching far and wide in Rome for suitable child cast members, I decided to cast the net further afield into the provinces, those near the sea or the countryside. And that is where I found my young performers, children who were less urbane, children who lived in contact with nature, far from mobile phones and therefore more 'naturally' credible as children of the 1970s.

The search to cast Adri led me to reflect on whether or not I should find a girl questioning her own gender identity. After several casting sessions it was clear that I had an issue on my hands, one that, in a different vein, I had already had to face in the past: experiences lived on a set, the depiction of oneself, can be a detonator that explodes, thereby disorienting and disrupting the life of a teenager. By casting a girl actually undergoing that experience, I would have risked 'forcing' a process that needs time to define itself, I would have risked contaminating or accelerating the natural course of events by interfering in her process of identification, which is so vulnerable at that age of life. So I simply decided to look for my Adri among girls who practice so-called 'masculine' sports. Luana is a motorcycling champion and competes against boys in the SuperMoto circuit. In that sport, there are no gendered categories, all that is required is a lot of grit and courage, two of the qualities needed to play Adri.

I think that the power of Penélope Cruz's performance also stems from her willingness to lose control, to work 'without a safety net', to keep situations on a loose rein, to act and react without too many preconceived ideas. Children never repeat the same thing twice, and Penélope, besides her extraordinary talent, was able to react to every variation of the children's expressiveness. Thanks to her responsiveness and presence, the scenes remain vibrant, authentic. I had already experimented with this method in the past, and I am convinced it works. Of course, it is a method based on trust, reliability and willingness, and Penélope proved herself to be an extraordinary ally: she is an actress who is both instinctive and rational, open to allowing herself to be possessed by something that transcends her.

Production notes