

CANONE EFFIMERO

Director Gianluca De Serio, Massimiliano De Serio

Italy | 2025

120 min. | Italian with English subtitles

Screenplay Gianluca De Serio, Massimiliano De Serio. Cinematography Piero Basso. Editing Diana Giromini. Sound Design Mirko Guerra. Sound Mirko Guerra. Producer Alessandro Borrelli. Executive Producer Alessandro Borrelli. Production company La Sarraz Pictures (Turin, Italien).

Synopsis

What begins as an ode to the slow pace at which a zampugna, a form of Calabrian bagpipe, is made, opens out into an ethnological musical tour into uncharted territory: an Italy of countless small traditions, often only passed on orally. In **CANONE EFFIMERO**, brothers Gianluca and Massimiliano De Serio present eleven local customs of performing music, passed down over generations which have survived to this day for them to find, from regions as different as Calabria, Marche, Liguria and Sicily. The square frames of the film continually find new ways to combine landscapes and their inhabitants into one unit. With calm and care and in suitably choral fashion, **CANONE EFFIMERO** conveys a sense of the transgenerational based on practising, listening, learning and the human skill for imitation. Despite of each tradition being deeply rooted in nature as well as the region from which it originated, the film is free of the sort of nostalgic campanilismo that gets drunk on its own localities. Instead, it gradually weaves together the different local traditions into a network of possible countercultures. A film that seems anachronistic at first glance, but proves to be radically contemporary. (Fabian Tietke)

Born in Turin in 1978, Massimiliano & Gianluca De Serio are twins who have been collaborating since 1999 on films, documentaries, installations, and theatre. Their work has been featured at national and international film festivals and exhibitions, earning them numerous awards and recognition. Their most recent work, SPACCAPIETRE, screened in the 2020 Venice Days competition at the Venice International Film Festival. Their award-winning fiction feature debut, SETTE OPERE DI MISERICORDIA, premiered in the international competition at the 2011 Locarno Film Festival.

Films: 2007: L'esame di Xhodi / Xhodi's Exam. 2010: Bakroman. 2011: Sette opere di misericordia / Seven Acts of Mercy. 2015: I ricordi del fiume / River Memories. 2020: Spaccapietre / Una Promessa. 2025: Canone effimero.

Director's Statement

A Vital, Secret Country

Searching for alternative popular culture in contemporary Italy

The Italian hinterland is made up of faces, voices, ancient stories, and daily practices that draw on a network of echoes and assonances. While looking for points of connection and internal references, one can glimpse a self-portrait of a vital, secret country.

By mixing performance and autobiography, the protagonists of **CANONE EFFIMERO** thus bear witness to cultures that are still alive. Their vocal and musical techniques travel in time through oral passage. In the crafting of ancient and mysterious instruments is reflected the direct extension of the spirit of nature and the celestial order.

Faced with the tendency to file away the margins, with **CANONE EFFIMERO**, we try to re-focus our gaze on a little-known landscape. Bodies and landscapes are bound in a 1:1 format. The faces are Byzantine icons or medieval miniatures, the composition eschews the naturalism of documentary filmmaking and approaches statuary or painting.

The film thus lives on as autonomous portraits, artifacts unearthed and brought to light, illustrated pages of a collective diary, a fragile code to be completed.

Massimiliano and Gianluca De Serio

Interview

A Glimpse of Utopia

An Interview with Gianluca and Massimiliano De Serio about documenting the passing down of oral traditions and Italian culture in their film CANONE EFFIMERO

Barbara Wurm: Gianluca, Massimiliano – what a wonderful film you made. CANONE EFFIMERO spans Calabria, Marche, Liguria and Sicily. What principles did you follow in choosing these regions and the people you portray in the film?

Massimiliano De Serio: It was not so simple. The film is produced by the Film Commission Torino Piemonte, but we didn't shoot in our region. We did a lot of research before shooting. We met with an ethnomusicologist who studied different kinds of musical traditions, not only in Italy. At first, we wanted to make a film on the whole Mediterranean area. Then we wanted to build a sort of universal narration that could take some fragments from all around our country. In the end, we focused only on these regions, because that's where we found contacts, songs, and landscapes that could be in our story from the beginning. We spent a lot of time in Calabria, a region that is very close to us for different reasons, and Basilicata.

Gianluca De Serio: We started this movie in a very free way. No limits – except for the budget, which was extremely limited. But we were a very small team. So we said: Okay, let's go with a mini camper. Let's follow our feelings, the relations that we created in our first encounter. We found that there were a lot of connections.

BW: Isn't that somehow connected? The smaller the budget, the more freedom you have?

MDS: In some way it's true. It also depends on the relationship with the producer. Alessandro Borrelli, our producer, has worked with us for many, many years. So he said, "Go and do what you want and when you come back, you will tell me what the film is going to be." The same goes for the whole team. We are all friends. And we all worked together for many years.

GDS: Basically, we started to make films together 20 years ago with Piero Basso, the DoP, Mirko Guerra, the sound engineer. So we called them back together because we knew that this would be a very free and intimate project.

BW: Did you decide together to shoot in a square aspect ratio?

MDS: That was a discussion with the DoP a few days before we started to shoot, because we wanted to give the image sort of the sense of an icon and at the same time have an equal dignity between faces, objects, landscape, and details. The square aspect ratio could give us this sort of equality. It makes everything seem very similar and very close to us, like a sort of picture book.

Fabian Tietke: What fascinates you about these local music cultures and why are they important to you?

GDS: For different reasons, I think. In my opinion these local traditions don't just talk to us about our past, they talk about the future. They are a sort of resistance to the homogenization of culture in general. Not only in Italy, but in Europe and all over the world. So what we found in these very little, very particular and remote situations is that they are all struggling to survive. But it's not just a struggle to keep these traditions alive, it is something political, too. We worked with oral expressions a few years ago. But the protagonists in that case were teenagers who were freestyle rapping.

MDS: We are very interested in the oral expression of human beings. The same goes for the exchange of knowledge between generations. The older ones give their competencies and their knowledge to the younger generation. We find this very moving and also very important for our culture. We come from the south of Italy, too, even if we were born in the north. Our parents came from different regions. Italy is always a mixture of regions and of cultures and languages. We even have an Albanian oral tradition in the film. Some of these communities in the south of Italy come from exodus from Albany to Italy in the 15th century, the Abreu. This mixture of languages gives us a glimpse of utopia. We would like to live in a world where people can mix languages in such a way.

GDS: That's why we initially had the idea of portraying the whole Mediterranean area. I mean our whole culture in Italy is full of Arabic influences: in music, language, and poetry.

BW: At some point, I had the feeling it's also a film about Christianity and its importance in Europe, but from a kind of outer space point of view, and yet rooted in the earth or in a tree, or in nature.

MDS: I agree, because Christianity is at the centre of our culture. Our history of art is mainly Christian arts with influences from a lot of different cultures. And the kind of Christianity we found is not the Christianity we usually think of. Many politicians

say Europe is Christian. Yeah, but which kind of Christianity? We found that the essence of Christianity is love, as in other religions. Love for nature, love for our relatives, for other human beings, and respect for others.

GDS: And a belief in the invisible, in the afterlife. That is quite an important point that we found was common to all the situations we found... unfortunately.

MDS: It's normal that when you shoot a film with older people, some die. Three of our characters are now dead. The old man in the very last scene of the film, for example, died some months ago. Also, the woman who kept the diary. Thus, their presence in the film is very important for the film. To be able to say: "I was in this world and the world still bears witness to my existence – and it will forever."

BW: There is one structural thing I wanted to ask you about. The first part of the film is dominated by men male before a switch to the more feminine second part. Why you didn't decide to mix it up more?

GDS: We also noticed this division into two parts and maybe we were even looking for this in the editing.

MDS: Let me add that the film was edited by a woman, by my wife Diana Giromini.

GDS: I think that the women in the film bring something spiritual and immaterial. And we needed this as the turning point. Because we were approaching death, that is the final point, the passage between life and death.

MDS: At the end of the film, the old man is singing to his own son. "Do you remember your mother?" And just before we see the image of his wife in front of the fire. It's like a sweet presence, but also important because they take us somewhere else. It was a debate between us with also my wife and Gianluca and me. How can we put the women in this film? For example, the female choir of Arbëreshë – it is very powerful in our eyes. Their song is a sort of fight. It's a very old song from the Middle Ages. And it says: we may be going to marry some fat man, but we stay together and sing together. For them, singing is an instrument of power.

GDS: Very modern and very contemporary. Like the other woman singing alone. This is very strong too in our eyes. This is a song about domestic violence. But it's an old song. She is in a very intimate space...

MDS: A very closed space.

GDS: ...and tries to cry. So we tried to protect her in a way. Somehow, the movie is a tribute to naive art, very frontal and direct, that speaks about life. That's also why there are some paintings by this Sicilian painter in the film.

FT: Hearing you talk, I was wondering how you work together. How is it working with your brother? And you, Massimiliano, seem to have your wife involved as well.

GDS: It's a quite a bit of psychological work every day. (laughs) I think we try to divide things up a bit.

MDS: Some people are closer to me than to my brother because I had talked to them. Sometimes it's the other way round. Gianluca knew the people in Calabria better than me. And so I followed him around and stayed closer to the director of photography while he was more involved in the situation. And sometimes it helps to have the two points of view. Sometimes we fight and we talk a lot.

GDS: But in the end, we just trust each other.

*FT: Southern Italy has gotten more interest in Italian film lately. But often it is shown as very exotic. It's very interesting to see how different southern Italy looks in **CANONE EFFIMERO**. It is not at all a stereotypical image.*

GDS: First of all, we made the decision to shoot very far from the cities. For example, in Sicily we shot in Capizzi, one of the most remote villages there. It takes three hours through forest and mountains to reach. And in the winter, the landscape totally changes. You see a whole different Italy in winter time. And it's something that you don't see if you just visit during the holidays.

MDS: Many of the songs you hear in the film were traditionally sung on holidays like Easter or Christmas. But we decided to take these songs out of context. And it's the same with the landscape and with the pictures of Italy. It might seem a little hard but for us it was as if we were exhibiting these songs as if they were an icon or a statue and not only a traditional song that anthropologists or ethnomusicologists might have studied. For example, in Liguria we met with the Compagnia Sacco di Ceriana, Lomax was the first to record them, so we find them in ethnomusicological collections. But we took them out of this context. And when we were editing in a very small room, we suddenly heard their famous high tones. The singers had told us that this couldn't be heard in a small space like ours – but there it was.

GDS: The tone has a funny name: Supranino.

MDS: It has to do with our perception of the song. The tone is something very mental, not really realistic.

BW: How did you find all these groups and all these people? Did they tell you about each other? Do they know each other?

GDS: As I said, initially we talked to some ethnomusicologists. But this was just a starting point. In Calabria we spent a night drinking strong wine with these musicians.

MDS: And they asked us what we were looking for.

GDS: And I said, I am looking for a shepherd. A shepherd singing. And they told us: I know someone like that in Sicily. I don't know if he's still alive. You'll have to go to this and that village and ask for him. So we went there and we found a friend of this man. It was like a chain of surprises.

MDS: In the Marche we met a young guy, the one who sings a song by his grandfather from the Resistenza in the film. And when we explained to him what we were doing, he said: "Oh, you can also go to another village next to the Sibillini mountain. I know an old man, he is almost 90 years old, but you can try. I don't know what kind of music he does. But he's the memory of the place, of his village, of this song." So we tried and we found the last man you see in the film who sings about this journey of the souls into purgatory. They gave us other contacts, sometimes we followed them, sometimes we didn't.

GDS: There are also things we left out. For example, there is this group of young men in Calabria, on Monte Reventino, right in the middle of Calabria. I went there and stayed quite a while, but when we came back to shoot, one of their grandfathers had just died. So they were in mourning and couldn't shoot them.

FT: There is a whole tradition of Italian documentary films about fading rituals and local traditions. I am thinking of films like those by Cecilia Mangini, Lino del Fra or LA MACCHINA CINEMA by Silvano Agosti, Marco Bellocchio, Sandro Petraglia and Stefano Rulli. Would you inscribe yourself in this tradition?

GDS: To me, that tradition is more anthropological. Vittorio De Seta, for example, is a master of rituals. He also shot some rituals that involve singing. Fiorenzo Serra from Sardinia would be another example that we like a lot. But in our eyes this movie

is something different because it is more philosophical. The oral tradition is the material, but on a structural level it talks about human existence. We see this tradition with all due respect and we find inspiration in it. But our point is different.

MDS: A few years ago, we made a film called STANZE. It was composed of poems performed by a few guys from Somalia who lived here in Torino as refugees. We asked them to take their own tradition of poems and tell us their history of migration. In the form of poetry, they told us about their own lives, which on the one hand were linked to the traditions of another country that we didn't know very well, and on the other hand were very close to Italy – the former colonizer of Somalia. And today, when a few guys from Somalia make it here, we have them stay in our country without any rights. STANZE was a way to look at our history with different eyes. The people we portray in **CANONE EFFIMERO** are not at all considered by mainstream culture, by politics in Italy. They live in their own little villages, try to survive and to keep the traditions alive. But they are considered of little importance. Maybe a few professors study them. But for us it was important to look at them with a similar gaze as we did with the guys from Somalia – as someone else and yet very much linked to our roots.

BW: I would like to jump back into your film. You have very daring, close images, for example some very long, slow motion pans across the men singing. I remember them vividly. You make these people look like stars even if they are ordinary people.

MDS: Time is very important in our work. When you give time, you receive beauty. If you only stay five minutes in front of someone else, you can't really find beauty. So we decided to stay with them and to give them time for the songs. If we cut the songs, it wouldn't have been right. So we let them finish. And in the editing, too, we left the whole performance in.

GDS: It's also a question of respect...

MDS: But for us it's also a form, something that has to do with the style of the film. Before we started to shoot, we met our performers in everyday situations and they said, let's sing a song. And there you are in the middle of a square with people singing around you. It's very powerful. I cried a lot.

GDS: And I said, it would be wonderful to...

MDS: ...to keep them in the same situation, but it's impossible. The cinema is different.

GDS: Well, not so different. When you are in front of these people who are not, as you, Barbara, said before, stars or actors you have to understand that your job as a director has responsibility because after all you are giving an image of someone that usually is not an image. I mean, he lives, but in private, not in public. So there is a moral responsibility and thus every second is important, every detail is important, because you are giving a new life and some other people will look at this new life. It's a way to show respect and during the gesture of filming – because it's not just recording, but it's a physical gesture that you are doing – you have to show that you are really interested.

MDS: If you asked me to show you some photos of my life, I wouldn't know where to start. It's quite difficult. Because we are full of photos, etc. So when we asked them to show us some photos, they made a selection. It's a very ritual moment. Because for them, these photos represent their life, their self-portrait, their roots, their relationship, loves, etc.

GDS: That's why we dedicated some time to this moment of them showing us their photos.

MDS: The same with the instruments. They transform something from nature into something magical. We were really surprised

when they showed us how can they can create an instrument.
Isn't just about respect but also about our own surprise.

BW: Were they also surprised about people asking these questions and listening? Or are they used to sharing their knowledge?

GDS: The medieval monk who plays the organistrum is somewhat used to it. He does so for children, for example, for schools, and he has a kind museum in his house. But the others are used to singing, but not to answering questions.

MDS: For example, the old man at the end, he didn't want to sing at all. So we said, okay, don't worry, Domenico, if you don't want to sing, we just want to have some pictures of you and your wife next to the fire. Then after another drink he told us, okay, maybe I can sing you a very short moment of a song. And then he started and didn't finish. It was nine minutes of song. For us it was the most important secret that someone could tell us.