



**79th Venice Film Festival**

**Orizzonti – Opening Film – In Competition**

**YOUNG FILMS, INDIGO FILM and RAI CINEMA**

present



written and directed by

**ROBERTO DE PAOLIS**

with

**GLORY KEVIN**

**LINO MUSELLA**

**SANDRA OSAGIE**

**SALVATORE STRIANO**

**MAURIZIO LOMBARDI**

a

**YOUNG FILMS, INDIGO FILM with RAI CINEMA production**

Italian Distribution

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## Synopsis

Princess is a young Nigerian woman, an illegal immigrant selling her body on the outskirts of a big city. Like an Amazon on the hunt, she moves through a pine forest that stretches to the sea where she finds shelter, laughs, quarrels with her friends and earns her daily bread. She sniffs out money, avoiding danger and dodging emotions, one customer after another. Until one day, Princess meets a man who genuinely wants to save her.

But first, she has to save herself.

## Director's Note

*Princess is the result of merging my points of view with those of the young Nigerian women I met over a long period of time whilst researching for the film. The women are real victims of trafficking, who wrote the script with me and then played themselves freely. This created a new, flexible working space: together we experimented and found what I believe to be a more authentic path than other representations we are often used to when talking about migration, illegal immigrants and prostitution. The narrative is always poised between the true story of a degraded reality and the lyrical tale of wounded humanity. The film's rather like a coming-of-age story: because Princess, before anything else, is a nineteen-year-old woman who, whilst clinging to her sense of self, is trying to resist the ferocity of the world.*

**Roberto De Paolis**

## Roberto De Paolis

Director, scriptwriter, producer and photographer, Roberto De Paolis was born in Rome and studied cinema at the London Film School. After directing his short films (including *Bassa Marea* and *Alice*, both presented at the Venice Film Festival), in 2013 he founded Young Films with Carla Altieri, with whom he produced the documentaries *Fuoristrada* by Elisa Amoruso and *Saro* by Enrico Maria Artale.

In 2017, he signed his debut film *Cuori Puri*, presented at the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs at the Cannes Film Festival and nominated for the David di Donatello awards for Best Debut Feature.

*Princess* is his second feature film, selected in competition as the opening film for the Orizzonti section of the 79th Venice International Film Festival.

## **In Conversation with Glory Kevin – Lead Actor (Princess)**

What were your first thoughts when you were approached to participate in the film project? Did you realise it would be so focused on your character and performance?

**At the beginning I was very hesitant. I didn't know what the film was about or why I had been chosen. Talking with Roberto I began to understand, and I also realised what this film could represent for me: the opportunity to recount via my physicality, to embody the stories of other young Nigerian women who have lived and are living such an experience. With this awareness, I fell in love with the story and the way it was written, because through it, the world could really see what we African women experience. I knew that if I put all my energy into the film that it would work and be successful, so I gave my very all. I was aware that its outcome depended on my performance and how I managed to communicate the meaning of this experience.**

What do you want people to know about your experience of coming to the West from Nigeria? What important things don't most people realise?

**Not everyone, but many Italians don't know the reasons why we are here, and they don't want to know. Some think that African girls like leaving their country to come to Italy and work on the streets, earn money and maybe enjoy life. Many think that's what it is all about. It's fundamental to understand that we are here for our future, to look for things we've never had, to build a better life for ourselves. The conditions in Africa and Italy are profoundly different: in Italy we have many more opportunities.**

In what ways has the experience of making the film changed you?

**A lot of things have happened that have changed me, working on this film changed me. First of all, it allowed me to learn so many things that I didn't know before, even things that I didn't know how to do before. In particular, learning how to read in Italian properly. Practising during rehearsals, reading the script, gave me the opportunity to improve my reading a great deal. Also, the fact that people will know who I am and see me as an actress. They will know my point of view: it's something that has never happened to me, I never expected it to. I could never have imagined that I would be acting in a film, let alone a film like this, in Italy. It has changed me in so many ways and I am happy to have done it!**

## **In Conversation with Roberto De Paolis**

What led to your interest in the milieu of Nigerian sex workers living and working illegally in Italy?  
How were you able to approach them and convince them to collaborate with you on PRINCESS?

**Street prostitution has always fascinated me; it's always seemed a world apart, a crazy, absurd, extreme world, a perfect metaphor for a number of human issues. To think that two people engage in maximum physical intimacy without even knowing each other's names seems to me to bring everything back to an almost carnal, instinctive level. Yet there's money and power involved. I have never gone with a street prostitute in my life, yet then, as I began researching, I stopped to get to know them: we talked, they showed me the places where they 'work', we ate together at McDonald's, we went to church on Sundays. I stepped into their world, through the magic of cinema.**

**I always think that the only approach is to put yourself on an equal level with the person you're trying to relate to: if you want others to talk to you about themselves, start telling them about yourself too, if you want them to abolish judgement, abolish it yourself first. If you don't want people to be afraid of you, you can't be afraid of them. Following this simple golden rule, I honestly never found myself in any difficulty.**

How did you meet Glory Kevin and how did she contribute to the process and final shape of the film?

**I first met Glory on the streets. We turned to street casting to find our protagonists except for our three professional actors, Lino Musella, Maurizio Lombardi and Salvatore Striano. Initially, it's true that Glory was very wary of us. She didn't understand what we wanted from her but over time we established trust and began working together. The character I originally wrote before meeting her – which in any case was already based on the accounts of many African prostitutes – was then "adapted" specifically to her. We "wrote" together, rehearsing the scenes, talking about her life, the places she's worked in, and other subjects.**

**She was given full freedom to intervene, to change things and I am very proud of that: the freedom we gave her to represent herself was fundamental to tell her story.**

Tell us about the forest where most of the film is set. Where are we? Is this place real or imagined?

**The forest is a place that really exists near Rome, in Ostia by the sea where young Nigerian women have been working for years. It's a beautiful forest where some of them build little houses, others make fires. They work with their clients' outdoors, on the lawns, among the trees. From the very beginning it seemed to me the ideal location for the film, a magical setting that helped us to tell Princess's story. A wild place, far from the Society that reinforces the marginalization of immigrants. In this sense, the setting is both imaginary and real at the same time, made up of lost souls, animals, those who are prey and those who are predators.**

What were you looking to achieve in terms of the balance between reality and fiction, and how was it a challenge to integrate the Italian actors with the Nigerian non-professionals?

**I believe that a story must always include some sort of movement, a shift, even if it's small or only internal, an awareness. The more one sticks to reality, the more this change or shift is subtle, imperceptible. Speaking of prostitution, one angle of the story that immediately seemed**

credible to me was that of a young woman who's unknowingly reached her breaking point with the streets: she has no alternative, it's the only possible resource for survival. But inside she can feel that she's disintegrating, that she must change her life. But how?

I really enjoy working with non-professionals because they force professional actors into a new way of working, to explore, to struggle, to question themselves more personally. I told our professional actors to not think about their characters, but also to reflect on *how* they would truly react in this situation if it really happened to them. The Nigerian women were out of control and constantly changing everything. We were trying not to lose ground as a team, and I was trying to adapt the rest of the film to what they had done the day before. I think at the very most only 20 per cent of the scripted lines made it to the final cut. That's how shooting is for me; it has to go against the script, to destroy it.

If we hadn't listened adequately to the Nigerian women, we would have run several risks. If we'd only followed our point of view a stereotyped, plastic, perhaps retributive or perhaps too glib of a portrait would have been the end result of the film. I feel I've found the right balance, above all thanks to the extensive research and study, all the field work and the creative relationship we built with the film's protagonists.

Was it your intention to avoid the moralizing or miserabilism that often features in depictions of illegal immigrants in extreme situations? Was there also anything you felt you had to be conscious of or careful about, as a white man telling a black woman's story?

Immigrants generally seem to be portrayed on screen as really good, decent people, like innocent children. Maybe it's a way of clearing our filmmakers or producer's consciences because on a political level, immigrants are treated terribly badly. I wanted this character to be seen at 360 degrees, with all her beauty and anger, with her courage and her fears. Immigrants are real people, with real problems and grievances that are sometimes much more serious than ours so it's important to aware of this and stop giving immigrants such short-sighted narratives.

For me, cinema is escapism itself, both as a spectator and as a filmmaker. If I had to make a film about my own stories - or see them the big screen - I'd be bored to death. I've only made two films, but in both cases the themes had nothing to do with my own life and I knew nothing about them. If you can make period film set a thousand years ago thanks to thorough studies and research, you can also recount the lives of others, people who are completely different from you, who live another life entirely. Of course, this is provided you have the curiosity to subvert your own ideologies and prejudices and the courage to embrace new points of view. Unfortunately, at least in Italy, I still don't see many black people who've been able to find the opportunity to make films, and as long as this is the case, I feel we have a responsibility, regardless of race, to represent all members of society on screen and to tell it like it is.

## Characters and Cast

Princess	<b>GLORY KEVIN</b>
Corrado	<b>LINO MUSELLA</b>
Success	<b>SANDRA OSAGIE</b>
Taxi driver client	<b>SALVATORE STRIANO</b>
Rich client	<b>MAURIZIO LOMBARDI</b>

## Actor's Bio

### Glory Kevin – Princess

Glory Kevin was born in Nigeria in 1996 and came to Italy in her late teens after graduating from Ogwe College in 2015. Princess is Glory's debut role in Cinema. Directed by Roberto De Paolis, Glory also collaborated with Roberto on the film's script, as well as working extensively with him in acting classes.

### Lino Musella - Corrado

Born in Naples in 1980, Lino Musella has been in the performing arts for over twenty years. After graduating from The Academy of Dramatic Arts in Naples, Lino went on to become a Theatrical star in his hometown before touring Italy and debuting in feature film in 2012. In 2018 he was cast in Paolo Sorrentino's *Loro*, followed by *Favolacce (Bad Tales)* by Fabio and Damiano D'Innocenzo, *The Last Planet* by Terrance Malik, *The King of Laughter* by Mario Martone and *The Hand of God* by Paolo Sorrentino to name a few. Over his career in film, TV and Theatre, Lino has won many awards, including the Premio Ubu in 2019. He also co-founded a Theatre Company with fellow actor Paolo Mazzarelli.

### Salvatore Striano – Taxi Driver Client

Salvatore Striano was born in Naples, Italy, in 1972. His passion for Shakespeare and theatre led him to tread the boards in 2004 before his debut role in 2008 with *Gomorra* by Matteo Garrone followed a few years later by the Taviani Brothers' *Caesar Must Die*. Striano is also a familiar face on Italian television, taking part in series and films that have been aired the world over. Recently, Striano has starred in Leonardo Di Costanzo's *Ariaferma* and *Nostalgia* by Mario Martone.

### Maurizio Lombardi – Rich Client

Maurizio Lombardi, an Italian actor, theatre director and voice actor, was born in 1973 in Florence, Italy. Lombardi began his theatrical career during his adolescence and spent ten years in Ugo Chiti's company Acra Azzurra. He broke into film with Ridley Scott's *All the Money in The World* and went on to star in Paolo Sorrentino's *The New Pope* and *The Young Pope* as well as other Italian TV series and films that had international acclaim. He's been nominated for various awards including The Maschere del Teatro Italiano.

## Credits

Written and directed by	<b>ROBERTO DE PAOLIS</b>
Director of Photography	<b>CLAUDIO COFRANCESCO</b>
Editor	<b>PAOLA FREDDI</b>
Original Soundtrack	<b>EMANUELE DE RAYMONDI</b> Edizioni Musicali Indigo Film srl
Line Producer	<b>SIMON MANZOLLINO</b>
Production Designer	<b>PAOLA PERARO</b>
Costume Designer	<b>LOREDANA BUSCEMI</b>
Sound Mixer	<b>ANGELO BONANNI</b>
Sound Editor	<b>ALESSANDRO FELETTI</b>
Acting Coach	<b>TATIANA LEPORE</b>
Assistant Director	<b>NICOLA SCORZA</b>
Script Supervisor	<b>MANUELA MIGLIORE</b>
Casting Directors	<b>VALERIO COSTA, STEFANIA DE SANTIS</b> with <b>ALESSANDRA CUTOLO</b>
VFX supervisor	<b>RODOLFO MIGLIARI</b>
Techno Music	<b>ANDREA DE SICA</b>
Credit Design	<b>EUGENIA LECCA</b>
Produced by	<b>CARLA ALTIERI, ROBERTO DE PAOLIS</b>
Produced by	<b>NICOLA GIULIANO, FRANCESCA CIMA</b> <b>CARLOTTA CALORI, VIOLA PRESTIERI</b>
Associate producer	<b>STEFANO D'AVELLA</b>
Production Companies	<b>YOUNG FILMS, INDIGO FILM con RAI CINEMA</b>
With the support of	<b>PIAM ONLUS – Progetto Integrazione Accoglienza Migranti</b>
Country	<b>ITALY</b>
Year	<b>2022</b>
Language	<b>Italian, Pidgin English, English</b>
Running time	<b>110'</b>

## Production

### Young Films

YOUNG FILMS is a dynamic, Independent film production company founded by Carla Altieri and Roberto De Paolis in 2014 in Rome following their collaboration on Roberto's shorts *Bassa Marea* and *Alice*, which were presented at the Venice Film Festival in 2010 and 2011 respectively.

Young debuted co-producing the documentary *Fuoristrada* directed by Elisa Amoroso in 2013. In 2014, Young produced the short film *Casarola* directed by Lorenzo Castore, a tribute to Bernardo Bertolucci's family home. In 2016 Young Films co-produced the documentary *Saro* directed by Enrico Maria Artale - that won Best Film at Torino Film Festival the same year - and Roberto De Paolis' feature debut *Cuori Puri (Pure Hearts)* was presented at The Director's Fortnight in Cannes, 2017. Both films were nominated in the final five of the David di Donatello Awards in 2018, respectively for Best Documentary and Best New Director.

In 2021, *Les Fils de Cain*, Keti Stamo's directorial debut was presented at the Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica di Venezia in Notti Veneziane. Also in 2021, Rachel Greenwood joined the team after 18 years in film distribution to work on PR, development and International sales. Young Films has just finished working on Enrico Maria Artale's next feature, *Julio Cesar*, co-produced with Ascent Film and Roberto's second feature *Princess*, co-produced together with Indigo Film and with RAI Cinema. *Princess* has been selected as the Opening Film, in competition, of the Orizzonti section at the 2022 Venice Film Festival.

### Indigo Film

Indigo Film is an independent production company founded by Nicola Giuliano, Francesca Cima and Carlotta Calori. Over the years, Indigo has produced feature films, documentaries and TV series, diversifying its production with great attention to quality and the search for new authors. Indigo Film produced all Paolo Sorrentino's works from his directorial debut *L'uomo in più (One Man Up)* to *Loro*, as well as *La Grande Bellezza (The Great Beauty)*, winner of an Academy Award®, a Golden Globe® and a BAFTA as Best Foreign Film in 2014 and *Il Divo*, awarded at Cannes Intl. Film Festival with the Prix du Jury in 2008. Indigo has worked also with other important Italian directors including Mario Martone, Gabriele Salvatores, Valeria Golino, Piero Messina, Fabio Grassadonia and Antonio Piazza, Giancarlo Fontana and Giuseppe G. Stasi, Claudio Cupellini, Ivan Cotroneo, Sergio Castellitto, Pietro Marcello, Andrea Molaioli, Giuseppe Capotondi and many others.