

"Reality" by Garrone Winner at Cannes Film Festival

Natasha Lardera (May 29, 2012)



The Italian satire was awarded the second-place grand prize at the closing ceremony of the 65th edition of the celebrated international film festival. Starring a convicted murder, Aniello Arena, the film tells the story of a Naples fishmonger obsessed with reality TV.

A while back, Italian film director Matteo Garrone in an interview to Italian press agency Ansa said "being selected to participate at the 65th edition of the [Cannes Film Festival](#) [2] is a great opportunity and a beautiful adventure." His film, Reality (initially titled Big House) was the only Italian film competing although Italy was also represented by two non-competing films *Io e te a mezzanotte* by Bernardo Bertolucci and *Dracula 3D* by Dario Argento.

Garrone was happy to be back at Cannes after having won the Grand Prix in 2008 with his film [Gomorrah](#) [3], the organized crime story based on the book by the same name by Roberto Saviano. "After Gomorrah I wanted to do something different, most likely a comedy but I am not sure I succeeded. As things progressed the comedy got a little darker," Garrone said during the interview.



The central topic of Reality is reality TV and what regular people would do to be in a show. "It is not a film on Big Brother," he specified, "It is not an exposè or something against TV. It is the folktale of a fishmonger with a great personality who, pushed by his family, tries to make it in the show business by participating to Big Brother, a sort of Paradise on Earth." Entering the Big Brother house becomes an idea that traps Luciano and gradually takes over his life. The idea comes from a real story and it is a satirical look into contemporary society.

Little did he know that he was going to win the Grand Prix once again. Not having seen the film, we are taking the synopsis from www.indiewire.com [4]. Luciano (Aniello Arena) is a Neapolitan fishmonger intent on landing a role on "Big Brother." Initially, he endures a low-key existence with his wife (Loredana Simioli) and young children, enthusiastically hawking fish from his tiny stand and running cheap scams for extra money on the side. Driven by some intangible combination of ego and alpha-male aggression, he strives to impress his family at every turn.

When his daughters come across "Big Brother" auditions at the local mall and beg him to take a stab at it, he barrels straight ahead. After harassing the jaded host Enzo (Raffaele Ferrante), a former contestant, Luciano gets a fleeting chance to address the cameras. From that moment, Luciano's perception of his opportunities start to shift and the movie's perspective moves with him. Increasingly obsessed with the possibilities of gaining fame and lifelong security for himself and his family, Luciano's type-A personality kicks in as he embraces the enthusiasm of his tiny community and lets it get to his head -- quite literally.

The grade given to the film is an A- and predictions for its American release are that "Although not bound for major commercial success, Reality should continue to play well along the festival circuit and land a mid-sized U.S. release where it could garner strong reactions in major cities in addition to VOD (akin to the popularity that greeted Gomorra)."

According to www.thewrap.com [5] "Oscilloscope Laboratories has acquired U.S. rights to Matteo Garrone's Reality. In a release announcing the acquisition, Oscilloscope's David Laub called the film 'a complex, provocative, and deeply compelling look at our media-obsessed culture, executed by one of the most interesting and talented filmmakers working today. Garrone pays homage to classical filmmakers such as Fellini and Scorsese while crafting a fresh and very relevant contemporary story.'

The company plans to showcase the film at additional festivals throughout the fall, and to follow with a theatrical, DVD and digital release in 2013."

The film has created buzz not just for its story but for another reason as well: its leading actor. Nominated for his starring role, Aniello Arena has a dark past and he is currently serving a life sentence in prison. The 44 year old Neapolitan was a member of a hit squad which shot dead rival clan members in the grimy suburbs of Naples in 1991, and wounded an eight-year-old child in the process. "I turned that black page in my life over a long time ago and I am no longer that man," Arena told the Corriere della Sera newspaper. "I would never have imagined that I would open a book, let alone recite Brecht or Shakespeare." Indeed Arena is an actor in the theater company of the Volterra prison. Garrone stumbled across him at one of the prison theater shows and was immediately struck by his talent. According to IMDB [6] he has been hailed as an unlikely blend of Robert de Niro Mr Punch and Totò, Italy's best loved comic actor.

"It was he (Arena) who really developed the character of Luciano. He gives an extraordinary interpretation of a very complex role. This is a man who, having been in jail for nearly 20 years, has discovered a world that he had no idea about," Garrone told the Telegraph. Arena was allowed out of prison on day release to make the film but he could not attend the festival.

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- [2] <http://www.festival-cannes.fr>
- [3] <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0929425/>
- [4] <http://www.indiewire.com>
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