

Emperor in exile

N marks the second collaboration between the renowned Tuscan Director Paolo Virzi (*Ovosodo*, *Ferie d'agosto*, *Baci e abbracci*) and Director of Photography Alessandro Pesci, AIC (*La seconda volta*, *Baci e abbracci*, *La lingua del Santo*). The ambitious Italian, French and Spanish co-production is set in 1814 during Napoléon Bonaparte's exile on the Island of Elba. The Film explores the relationship between Napoléon (played by Daniel Auteuil) and Martino Aquabona (Elio Germano), a young teacher who finds himself serving as librarian to the great Emperor. An idealist, Martino is in love with the beautiful baroness Emily (Monica

approach and my very specific lighting choices and he also recalled my avoidance of glamorous sequences for the sake of them."

Q. What guidance did Paolo offer to help you define the film's cinematography?

A "Paolo asked me to give the film a great visual impact, but I had to achieve it through subdued tones. He told me that the photography should accompany the story but not dominate it. I realised from his initial suggestions and indications that this would be a film in which I could express my skills as a cinematographer."

Q. What were the differences in your creative approach to *N* compared to the classic period film genre?

A "The atmosphere in *N* stems from my passion for that class of cinema so well represented in terms of visual freedom by *The Duellists*, extreme naturalism by *Barry Lyndon* and magnificence by *Master and Commander*. My creative approach to *N* is probably a fusion of these elements plus a determination not to fall back on a glamorous look. The cinematography in period films is often spontaneously glamorous and the look emphasises a different age and a historical environment which can also be achieved through lighting. I tried to create a more natural and realistic light in *N* that establishes the period without accentuating what is evident on the screen."

Q. What are the cinematographic implications of shooting a period film?

A "There are elements that are unusual in traditional cinema, for example, the management of light from candles and soft light sources. It means defining the light at dawn, at sunset and other points of light. They are not simple to manage in the context of the photographic continuity required for a long feature. The intrinsic nature of a period film means that it is an interpretation of the past in iconographic terms that sometimes tends to be pictorial. Incidentally, using candles, it renders an atmosphere that is not by itself of the modern age. Such shots do not need to look glamorous as the lighting alone can intensify the fascination of reconstructed scenes that stem from the story and the ambience. On *N*, Paolo and I settled for a realistic and rough natural look."

Q. Which technical choices helped you?

A "There were several fundamental factors. The first was the decision in agreement with Matteo De Laurentiis of Cattleya production company to put the film through the Digital Intermediate process at Proxima, where I was assisted by Fabrizio Storaro and Paolo Zeccara, and where I also found Andrea 'Red' Baracca, a Colourist who helped me a great deal. The second was the combination of two

Bellucci). He has always felt a deep hatred for Napoléon, but as he spends time recording the Emperor's memoirs, he begins to develop an understanding of the fascinating man behind the myth. **InCamera** talked to Alessandro Pesci, AIC about *N*, his cinematographic and technical choices and his lighting style.

Q. How did you become involved in *N*?

A "When Paolo and I worked together on *Baci e abbracci* (*Hugs and Kisses*), we developed an excellent relationship and as soon as he became involved with *N* – another classic tale – he wanted to involve me. It made me extremely proud as Paolo is one of today's most respected Italian film directors. He knew my visual



of Kodak's latest generation stocks: Kodak VISION2 250D 5205 and Kodak VISION2 500T 5218. Although *N* is a complex film, we have been able to complete the shoot in nine weeks of principal photography. I knew that the final look



would be completed in the DI suite, so I could introduce small changes and, if necessary, fine tune the colorimetry at that stage. When harsh images were required for specific scenes, I pushed 500T in the laboratory and used it as 1000T on set. I must admit that the scenes shot at 1000T are absolutely indistinguishable from the rest of the film, so my judgement on 5218 is completely positive. We selected Technicolor of Rome where Antonio Salvatori and Clementino Clementi supported me at a high level in the laboratory. In fact the collaboration between Proxima, Technicolor and Cattleya has been fundamental in creating the first Italian film with the DI entirely 4K acquisition and 4K recording, the best level available on the market today."

Q *Why did you decide on Digital Intermediate for N?*

A "So that we could integrate a variety of visual effects which were an important part of the project, but also so we could maximise the stocks' capabilities. The DI process allows you to work in an asymmetric way in assonance with the human eye. Combining this technology with an experienced colourist who shares your vision turns out to be an amazing experience."

Q *What other elements define the visual style of N?*

A "Paolo Virzi is a director with an extraordinary eye. He has a clear and detailed idea of every single sequence he is going to shoot which renders the filming a simple task, despite the hand held camera, Multi-Cam and Steadicam that were used in many scenes. A characterising element of the visual structure of the film is the extensive use of wide angles within the Cinemascope format. The wide angles are both challenging and forgiving for a cinematographer, they bring with them the true sense of classic cinema. The use of Zeiss 10 and 12 for many high fashion scenes has become the stylistic trademark of *N*. The wide angle lenses were Paolo's choice; he wanted to pay homage to Tonino Delli Colli, AIC, ASC, the legendary Cinematographer who created the images in several Pasolini,

Fellini and Leone masterpieces and who died a few days before we began work on *N*. He is considered by many to be the prince of wide angles because of those unforgettable films. The wide angles helped us to increase cinematic values



to a spectacular level and for that I am grateful to my Camera Operator Fabio Vicari for his contribution.

Q *What was it like to work with Director Paolo Virzi on N?*

A "Paolo is a true artist as well as a strong leader. His energy and sensibility have pulled the different elements of the film together. He managed to orchestrate the cast with great simplicity and enthusiasm and the result is a film of great visual impact. He engendered a creative tension in which everyone, from main actors, to his artistic collaborators, to the technical crew members and even the extras, felt emotionally encouraged to give their best. Working with Paolo Virzi on *N* has been a unique and terrific experience, as far as I am concerned." ■