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'Passion' plays for laughs

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Mazzacurati tackles contempo issues in Venice competition comedy

Nick Vivarelli (<http://variety.com/author/nick-vivarelli/>)

International Correspondent

@NickVivarelli (<http://twitter.com/@NickVivarelli>)

There is somewhat of a paradox in Carlo Mazzacurati's comedy "The Passion," which screens today.

The film is about down-and-out director Gianni Dubois (Silvio Orlando) contending with some typically Italian adversities, including an agent who wants him to make a movie starring a young, snotty Silvio Berlusconi-era TV starlet. But unlike Dubois, Mazzacurati did not have to put up with the constraints that can make being a director in Italy demeaning.

Produced by Domenico Procacci, and co-financed by RAI Cinema, the 4.9 million (\$6.2 million) pic shot over nine weeks in Tuscany and briefly in Norway after the complex script was finely honed. Sales are being handled by Fandango Portobello.

"It's a very painstakingly made film," said Mazzacurati. "For me it's emblematic, because living in fear of a creative block has always been part of this job. So in that sense it is autobiographical."

While rooted in contemporary Italy, "The Passion" draws on age-old Italo-Italian cinema, avoiding the trap of any political leanings.

"I tried to work on material that had plenty to do with our times, but at the same time I tried to give the impression that gradually the film went into an almost timeless dimension," he said. "The dynamics of the story needed to be clear; not too tormented or clouded by current events."

After his small-town racism drama "The Right Distance," Mazzacurati said he "needed to make a fun movie," adding, "the film reflects that and also the rapport I developed with the characters, which is more emotional than ironic."

The only pure comedy in the Venice competition, "The Passion" is Mazzacurati's fifth time in the running for a Golden Lion.

His last contender was "La Lingua del santo" (Holy Tongue) in 1999.

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