



NEW RELEASES

La chimera

La chimera

Directed by: Alice Rohrwacher

©: Tempesta SRL, Ad Vitam Production,
Amka Films Productions, Arte France Cinéma
A Tempesta, Carlo Cresto-Dina, Rai Cinema
production

In co-production with: Ad Vitam Production,
Amka Films Productions, RSI Radiotelevisione
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Presented by: Tempesta, Rai Cinema

World Sales: The Match Factory

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Alessio Lazzareschi, Tom Quinn, Michael Weber

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Produced by - for Rai Cinema: Paolo Del Brocco

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Production Manager: Alessandro Stella

Location Manager: Laura Petruccelli

Location Manager (Swiss Unit): Marco Parrella

Post-production Co-ordinator: Monica Verzolini

1st Assistant Director: Nicola Scorza

Casting Director: Chiara Polizzi

International Casting: Fiona Weir

Written by: Alice Rohrwacher

Story: Alice Rohrwacher, Pietro Marcello,
Carmela Covino

Story Collaborators: Maurizio Braucci,
Sabrina Cusano

Script Collaborators: Carmela Covino,
Marco Pettenello

Director of Photography: Hélène Louvart

Underwater Camera: Aldo Chessari

16mm Camera Operator: Ilya Sapeha

AI VFX Supervisor and Visual Artist: Fausto Vitali

Visual Effects: Chromatica Visual Effects Roma

Special Effects: Ghost SFX S.R.L.

Editor: Nelly Quettier

Assistant Editors: Shara Spinella, Giorgia Villa

Production Designer: Emita Frigato

Art Director: Elisa Bentivegna

Set Decorator: Rachele Meliadoro

Set Decorator (Swiss Unit): Cécile Grieder

Costume Designer: Loredana Buscemi

Make-up: Esmè Sciaroni

Hair: Daniela Tartari

Titles: Manuel Faticoni

Colourist: Thomas Bouffoullx

Choreography: Valentina Marini

Sound Recordist: Xavier Lavorel

Sound Mixer: Maxence Ciekawy

Sound Editor: Marta Billingsley

Sound Ambiance Editor: Henry Sims

Sound Effects Editor: François Wolf

Stunt Co-ordinators: Emiliano Novelli,

Michele Russo

Acting Coach: Tatiana Lepore

Animal Trainer: Carolina Basile

Cast:

Josh O'Connor (*Arthur*)

Carol Duarte (*Italia*)

At one point in Alice Rohrwacher's *La chimera*, Josh O'Connor's brooding English grave-robbler grips a makeshift divining rod with both hands and slowly, reverently, walks through the local Tuscan wood, both actively seeking inspiration and submitting himself to its vagaries. It could almost be a metaphor for O'Connor's approach to role selection: it's hard to predict where he'll go next, or to discern what exactly attracts him to the parts he chooses, but he has a knack for striking gold – a gruff Yorkshire farmer in Francis Lee's indie drama *God's Own Country* (2017), Prince Charles in the third and fourth seasons of *The Crown* (2019-20), an American tennis pro slugging it out against his former best friend in Luca Guadagnino's deft, delirious *Challengers*.

After seeing *Happy as Lazzaro*, O'Connor knew he wanted to work with Rohrwacher but was told by his agent, 'Get in line. And good luck trying to get in touch with her – she lives on the side of a hill.' Fan letters he sent never reached her but after seeing *God's Own Country* Rohrwacher contacted O'Connor and ended up reimagining the *tombarolo* role (originally intended for an older actor) around him.

Over a drink at a bar in Soho, O'Connor describes how he was intrigued during their first meeting when Rohrwacher asked him: "If we were to cut the world in half and take a cross-section of it, what would each generation have left behind?" The Greek temples, the Etruscan treasures, shells from the wars. Then plastic was invented. I'm not sure what the 60s would have left – maybe acid tabs? What are we leaving behind now – vapes and electric toothbrushes? The Etruscans buried themselves with their worldly possessions, and that's what they cherished.'

Which other directors have received Josh O'Connor fan letters?

Josh O'Connor: When I was 17, I read this book by Paul Auster called *Mr. Vertigo* [1994]. I still think someone somewhere should make a movie of it. As I was reading it, I was like, 'Oh my goodness, if Tim Burton had his hands on this movie...' So at 17 years old, I wrote a letter to Tim Burton saying, 'You should read this book and make it into a film.' I was like, 'There's a part for Helena Bonham Carter, there's a part for Johnny Depp.' And then there was this one boy, the main boy – who could that be?

How did you immerse yourself in the role of Arthur the tombarolo?

We'd just come out of lockdown. I was living in New York, feeling very homesick, a little displaced. My grandmother had passed away and I was struggling with that, trying to comprehend how to exist in a world that is missing a part of itself. That's what Arthur's about. He's trying to understand how to feel the void, how to join his fiancée who passed away.

In terms of learning the language, I was in New York and spent three months with [the language training company] Berlitz. You arrive at the studio and from 8am until 6pm you speak only Italian, and the tutor speaks to you only in Italian. Which was brilliant but hard. One of the big discoveries when I got to Italy was that when the plumbers, electricians and non-professional actors that Alice hires from her village were suddenly talking to me, I was like, 'Lads, I don't know what you're saying.' Even though I'd been speaking in Italian for three months. So then you pick up the dialect. It was such a joy.

Several characters in the film, including Arthur, look remarkably Etruscan.

Yeah. There's that early scene where I'm talking about that girl on the train, saying that she has a very Etruscan nose. I remember I did this movement [traces his finger from the middle of his forehead down to the tip of his nose], and Alice said, 'Josh, don't highlight your nose – it makes you look very Etruscan. It sounds like you're talking about yourself.' But I did it anyway. Also,

Vincenzo Nemolato (*Pirro*)
Lou Roy Lecollinet (*Melodie*)
the graverobbers
Giuliano Mantovani (*Jerry*)
Gian Piero Capretto (*Mario*)
Melchiorre Pala (*Melchiorre*)
Ramona Fiorini (*Fabiana*)
Luca Gargiullo (*the dock worker*)

the sisters
Yile Vienello (*Beniamina*)
Barbara Chiesa (*Nella*)
Elisabetta Perotto (*Vera*)
Chiara Pazzaglia (*Rossa*)
Francesca Carrain (*Sista*)

the storytellers
Valentino Santagati (*voice and guitar*)
Piero Crucitti (*triangle and accordion*)
Luciano Vergaro (*Katir*)
Carlo Tarmati (*policeman*)
Alba Rohrwacher (*Spartaco*)
Isabella Rossellini (*Flora*)
Milutin Dapcevic (*Spalletta*)
Maria Pia Clementi (*Spartaco's assistant*)
Italy-France-Switzerland 2023©
131 mins
Digital

A Curzon Film release

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my costume, which deteriorates throughout the film, seemed like it was becoming part of the ground. I lost lots of weight and I grew a beard. I feel like I did become this Etruscan relic.

Also, I was living in my camper van, so most of the time I stank. I was washing myself in Lake Bolsena. It was absolute bliss. People often misconstrue [this] as some sort of Method acting. It wasn't, it was like a fucking holiday. I loved it. It was an excuse to be dirty and filthy all the time.

Did you meet any tombaroli?

It's so illegal I can't say who they are, but there are real *tombaroli* in the film. So there you go. See if you can figure out which ones!

The *tombaroli* are normal people. What Alice is really interested in, and what I'm really interested in, is how our attitudes have changed over time. We can't find any evidence that Etruscans built homes to live in, but they built tombs. It's like they didn't build anything to live comfortably in, but they did build stuff to die comfortably in. And I always found that very interesting. For them, the afterlife, the stuff you can't see, held more importance than what we exist in now. We're so far from that today.

You've just worked with Rohrwacher and Guadagnino. Is there something that draws you to Italian filmmakers?

Well, Luca is a fantastic director, Alice is a fantastic director, so in some ways it's just a coincidence. But I've always been a big fan of Italian film. *Accattone* [Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1961] and *The Flowers of St. Francis* [Roberto Rossellini, 1950] are two of my favourite movies.

But also, it's the way the Italians make films. I sometimes wonder: what if we had an Alice Rohrwacher? She spends six months shooting, on film, with a huge cast of professional and non-professional actors and an entire crew she's got to keep available for half a year. That's expensive. And the Italian film industry backs her fully, time after time. I don't know if we would do that here or in America.

Did you watch any films in preparation for La chimera and Challengers?

I rewatched *Accattone* for *La chimera*. I felt that the way *Accattone* holds himself was quite Arthur-esque, or vice versa. Alice sent me a homemade book with over 200 films to watch. At the time I was like, 'I'm gonna watch every one,' but obviously I couldn't. I am making my way through them, though. There's all sorts in there. With *Challengers*, it was more straightforward; I knew what I was doing. *The Social Network* [2011] and *Superbad* [2007] were two films I drew on. But beyond that, nothing.

The roles you take on are so diverse. Do you think there's a single thing that unites all your characters?

I don't think so. People have asked me, 'What are you trying to figure out about the fragile nature of masculinity?' And for a while I thought, 'Oh, that's what's leading me to all these roles. I'm trying to figure out what the male problem is.' But I don't think that's true.

It's been really funny having *La chimera* and *Challengers* come out at the same time. These two roles could not be further apart. Though there are some similarities. I think they both have a bit of anger in them.

The way I see characters, particularly after having played them, is like I leave a little bit with them at the end of each project, and a little bit of them stays with me. So I've got this collection of souls that I care very deeply about, but I can't really group them together.

Article and interview by Arjun Sajip, *Sight and Sound*, June 2024