

= Miracle at St. Anna =

Miracle at St. Anna is a 2008 American ? Italian epic war film directed by Spike Lee , and adapted by James McBride from his eponymous 2003 novel . The film stars Derek Luke , Michael Ealy , Laz Alonso , Omar Benson Miller , Pierfrancesco Favino and Valentina Cervi . Miracle at St. Anna is set primarily in Italy during German @-@ occupied Europe in World War II . It tells the story of four Buffalo Soldiers of the 92nd Infantry Division who seek refuge in a small Tuscan village , where they form a bond with the residents . The story is presented as a flashback , as one survivor reflects upon his experiences in a frame story set in 1980s New York . Several real @-@ life events that occurred during the war , such as the Sant 'Anna di Stazzema massacre , are re @-@ enacted , placing Miracle at St. Anna within the genre of historical fiction .

Lee first learned of the novel in 2004 and approached McBride with the idea of a film adaptation . In Europe , the film 's development attracted the attention of Italian film producers , and Lee 's reputation as an acclaimed filmmaker helped secure the \$ 45 million budget . A majority of the film was shot in Italy , on several locations affected by World War II . Other filming locations included New York , Louisiana and The Bahamas . Frequent Lee collaborator Terence Blanchard composed the score , and the visual effects were created by Industrial Light & Magic .

Miracle at St. Anna premiered at the 2008 Toronto International Film Festival before it was released on September 26 , 2008 . It was met with mostly negative reviews from critics and drew controversy in Italy over historical inaccuracies . During its theatrical run , Miracle at St. Anna was a box office disappointment , grossing only \$ 9 @. @ 3 million worldwide , but gained further \$ 10 @, @ 1 million from domestic DVD sales .

= = Plot = =

In 1983 , Hector Negrón , an aged Puerto Rican World War II veteran , works as a post office clerk in New York City . After recognizing a customer , Negrón shoots and kills the man with a German Luger pistol . Several hours later , rookie reporter Tim Boyle and Detective Tony Ricci are at the crime scene seeking information . At Negrón 's apartment , Boyle , Ricci and other officers discover a finely carved statue head , the Head of the Primavera , a long missing segment from the Ponte Santa Trinita . Also found is a Purple Heart and a photograph revealing that Negrón was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and Silver Star .

Negrón , in a flashback tells of his war experiences as a young corporal of the segregated 92nd Infantry Division in 1944 Italy . A disastrous attack ensues on German positions across the Serchio River . An officer , Captain Nokes , calls down artillery on the 92nd 's own position , refusing to believe their reports of how far they have advanced . Many American soldiers are killed , leaving Negrón stranded on the wrong side of the river with three men : Staff Sergeant Aubrey Stamps , Sergeant Bishop Cummings , and Private Sam Train . Sam rescues an Italian boy named Angelo from a collapsing building , and discovers the Head of the Primavera , which Sam believes to carry magical powers . While traveling through the mountains of Tuscany , the soldiers enter a small village , where they form a bond with the residents . Sam grows especially fond of Angelo , becoming the boy 's father figure . One Italian villager , Renata , soon becomes entangled in a love triangle with Stamps and Bishop , which creates conflict .

After Negrón gets his damaged backpack radio working , the soldiers contact headquarters and are told to capture an enemy soldier . A local Partisan group arrives with a young German deserter , Hans Brundt , as their prisoner . Earlier , residents of the nearby village of Sant 'Anna di Stazzema were killed by German forces following a betrayal by a Partisan , named Rodolfo , who knows that Brundt can identify him as the traitor . After concealing the fact that German forces are approaching the village in a counterattack , Rodolfo kills Brundt and the Partisan leader before escaping . It is Rodolfo whom Negrón will kill 39 years later . Captain Nokes arrives in the village to interrogate Brundt and finds him dead . The Americans prepare to leave the village ahead of a German counterattack , but Sam refuses to leave Angelo behind . After promising to court @-@ martial all four soldiers , Nokes and his contingent drive out of town , but he is killed in the opening German

offensive .

The remaining American soldiers and Partisans fight the Germans . Sam is fatally wounded after being shot twice while carrying an unconscious Angelo and dies from his injuries . Bishop and Negron hold off the Germans while Stamps tries to move the villagers to safety , but they are too heavily outnumbered . Renata and Stamps are killed , and Bishop dies after successfully reviving Angelo . Negron , in the retreat , is shot in the back and is saved by the radio . After Angelo gives him the Head of the Primavera , Negron gives the boy his rosary and tells him to leave . Negron is spared by a disillusioned German officer who hands over his own Luger and tells Negron to defend himself . American soldiers arrive and secure the village before evacuating the wounded Negron and Angelo , the sole survivors of the German attack .

In 1984 , Negron is the defendant in a court proceeding , facing a life sentence for his killing of Rodolfo . He is successfully defended by a powerful executive attorney acting on behalf of a wealthy man . Hector is brought to the Bahamas and is reunited with the Head of the Primavera , accompanied by its new owner who takes out a rosary and reveals himself as an adult Angelo . They both hold Hector 's rosary and happily burst into tears .

= = Cast = =

Derek Luke as Staff Sergeant Aubrey Stamps :

One of four stranded Buffalo Soldiers from the 92nd Infantry Division . Director Spike Lee described Stamps as ? the leader ? of the men , while screenwriter James McBride stated that , ? Stamps is a well @-@ educated college graduate who has both faith and disappointment in the American system . He ? s deeply divided as to what his place and the place of the Negro in American society is or should be . ? Wesley Snipes was originally cast as Stamps , but could not commit due to his financial troubles .

Michael Ealy as Sergeant Bishop Cummings :

One of the four soldiers , a womanizer and card player . The character is also known for being arrogant and distrustful , and shows hatred towards his white commanders . Lee stated that the character is ? a happy @-@ go @-@ lucky guy . He does not like to be under the thumb of authority . He likes card games and women . ? Ealy described the character ? s indifference : ? I think Bishop is the voice that doesn ? t believe change is going to come , and doesn ? t believe that he belongs over there fighting . ? Terrence Howard was originally in talks to play Bishop , prior to Ealy 's casting .

Laz Alonso as Corporal Hector Negron :

Negron first appears in the film 's frame story as a bitter , 70 @-@ year @-@ old World War II veteran living in Harlem , New York who reflects on his experiences during World War II . Negron , a black Puerto Rican , is fluent in English , Spanish and Italian , which enables him to serve as a translator for the Americans and Italians . Alonso first learned of the novel from his agent and read it prior to auditioning for the role . He had to convince Lee that he was fluent in Spanish , and created an audition tape of himself speaking the language , which won him the role . Alonso found difficulty in portraying Negron as an elderly World War II veteran : ? This role was very emotionally draining . Ninety percent of the time , the elderly have outlived most of the people they have loved . When I played Negrón as an old man , I had to focus on everything I ? ve lost in my life : my dad , friends and love lost , and that was a really depressing thing to do . ?

Omar Benson Miller as Private First Class Samuel ? Sam ? Train :

The ? biggest ? of the four soldiers , Sam is known for his child @-@ like personality . He befriends a young Italian boy , Angelo Torancelli , and becomes a father figure to the child . Sam is first to discover a finely carved statue head , the Head of the Primavera , which he believes to carry magical powers . Miller was a fan of McBride 's novel prior to learning of the film adaptation by Lee . He fought hard to win the role of Sam , which resulted in him physically preparing for the part : ? My physical prep was a little different than everybody else ? s , because Spike wanted me for the movie , but he told me I had to lose weight to do it . I had nine weeks to lose 60 pounds . We got it done . ?

Matteo Sciabordi as Angelo Torancelli ? The Boy :

A young Italian boy who befriends Sam Train . Sciabordi appears in his debut film role . Lee issued a casting call for an Italian child actor . 5 @, @ 000 child actors auditioned for the role prior to Sciabordi ? s casting . Sciabordi described working with co @-@ star Omar Benson Miller : ? Omar was great fun . We were always playing and he even taught me how to play baseball . ? Luigi Lo Cascio portrays an adult Angelo in the film ? s final scene .

Pierfrancesco Favino as Peppi ? The Great Butterfly ? Grotta :

The leader of a Partisan group operating in the area . Favino was the filmmakers ' primary choice for the role . McBride suggested that the character represents the great Partisan leaders who led thousands in Italy throughout World War II : " He 's a deeply thoughtful young man . After witnessing several atrocities , he basically snaps and becomes one of the most ruthless and most clever and most sought @-@ after Partisans . Although he 's ruthless against his enemies , he 's always a fair @-@ minded person , deeply kind , fighting for his country ? not fighting to kill Germans , fighting to kill the enemy . He 's a leader with a heart . "

Valentina Cervi as Renata Salducci :

One of the Italian villagers , who proves to be an instant ally of the four soldiers . Renata soon becomes entangled in a love triangle with Stamps and Bishop , which creates conflict . McBride said of the character , " Renata exemplifies the difficulties Italian women faced during the war . Her husband was drafted and she hasn ? t heard from him in two years . She 's very smart and is one of the few people in her village who has learned some English . She tries very hard to make her father renounce his Fascist beliefs . "

John Turturro plays Detective Antonio " Tony " Ricci , who is charged with investigating a post office murder in 1983 ; Joseph Gordon @-@ Levitt plays Tim Boyle , the investigative reporter assigned to cover the murder and subsequent discovery of an Italian artifact ; and Kerry Washington plays Zana Wilder , a lawyer hired to represent the suspected post office murderer . Naomi Campbell was originally cast as Wilder in September 2007 , but later pulled out due to scheduling conflicts .

Other cast members include John Leguizamo , in a cameo appearance , as Enrico ; D. B. Sweeney as Colonel Jack Driscoll , an advocate for the Buffalo Soldiers ; Robert John Burke as General Ned Almond , a high @-@ ranking officer who opposes the 92nd Division ; Omari Hardwick as Platoon Commander Huggs ; Omero Antonutti as Ludovico Salducci , Renata ? s Fascist father ; Sergio Albelli as Rodolfo Berelli , a Partisan of questionable loyalties ; Lydia Biondi as Natalina , a village healer ; Michael K. Williams as a frightened soldier ; Christian Berkel as German officer Eicholz ; Jan Pohl as Hans Brundt , the German deserter ; and Alexandra Maria Lara as Mildred Gillars , nicknamed Axis Sally , an American broadcaster employed by the Germans as a propagandist .

= = Production = =

= = = Development = = =

The novel *Miracle at St. Anna* was written by James McBride originating from his late uncle 's experiences as a World War II soldier . Upon writing the novel , McBride conducted his own research and learned of the 92nd Infantry Division , which consisted of 15 @, @ 000 African @-@ American soldiers , who served in Italy during World War II from August 1944 to November 1945 . McBride interviewed several remaining members of the 92nd Division . " I studied Italian at The New School in New York City , " he explained . " I moved to Italy with my family for six months . I interviewed dozens of Italians ? Partisans and Fascists . I interviewed dozens of African @-@ American soldiers who fought in the war , most who have since passed away . I must have read at least 20 books . I went to the Army War College in Carlisle , Pennsylvania . I studied the whole business of what the 92nd did in Italy during the war , to try to get an idea of what really transpired . " The 92nd Division served as the basis for McBride 's novel , which was published in 2003 .

Spike Lee first learned of the novel in 2004 and contacted McBride about making a film adaptation . He felt that McBride was the perfect person to write the screenplay , believing that his novel would

serve as a guide . Commenting on the difficult process of adapting his book into a screenplay , McBride stated , ? As a novelist , you tend to think internally . You can guide what the character says and you can explore what he or she is thinking . Movies don 't have time to explain . You have to get right to the muscle . ?

The film adaptation of *Miracle at St. Anna* attracted the attention of Italian producers Roberto Cicutto and Luigi Musini , the co -@-@ founders of On My Own Produzioni Cinematografiche . Cicutto explained that they knew that Lee was " not just coming to Italy to make a film as an American director , but to make a film that belongs to his culture and to our history . " The film 's budget was an estimated \$ 45 million . Under their Own My Own production banner , Cicutto and Musini contributed \$ 8 @.@ 74 million . Lee 's reputation as an acclaimed filmmaker in Europe , where he served as a jury member of the 2004 Venice Film Festival , also helped the filmmakers obtain two @-@ thirds of the budget from Italy 's RAI Cinema and France 's TF1 (\$ 30 million) . Touchstone Pictures provided the remainder (\$ 6 @.@ 26 million) , and later released the film in North America .

Lee described *Miracle at St. Anna* as an " ensemble piece " and aimed for authenticity in his depiction of American and German soldiers battling in Italy . In casting Italian actors , he held a casting call in Rome . The Italian actors , all born in Rome , were coached to sound as though they were from Tuscany . The actors portraying soldiers underwent a two @-@ week boot camp , supervised by senior military advisor Billy Budd , a 15 @-@ year Royal Marine veteran who had served in the Falklands War .

= = = Filming = = =

Principal photography for *Miracle at St. Anna* lasted nine weeks , beginning in October 2007 and concluding in December of that year ; filming took place in Italy , New York , Louisiana and The Bahamas . The film was the first by Lee to be shot in Europe , and the director insisted on shooting on locations where the story is set . Filming began in Tuscany , where the Tuscan regional government gave Lee permission to film where the actual events took place . According to producer Luigi Musini , *Miracle at St. Anna* was shot along the Gothic Line , which was the major line of defense in the final stages of World War II : " The location is highly representative of what the war was in Italy , what our resistance was . True dramatic episodes took place there . ? The first ten days of filming took place on the Serchio River , covering the battle sequence that opens the film . A scene that recreates the Sant 'Anna di Stazzema massacre was shot where the atrocity took place ; the massacre ? in which over 500 villagers were murdered by German occupation forces ? is re @-@ enacted in the film . Filming then took place in Rome for one month ; in New York for four days ; in White Castle , Louisiana for two days ; and in The Bahamas for two days .

= = = = Design and effects = = = =

Matthew Libatique served as cinematographer , having previously collaborated with Lee on the films *She Hate Me* (2004) and *Inside Man* (2006) . Libatique relied on the use of natural light , which proved challenging for scenes shot indoors . The final battle sequence in the film was especially difficult as the film relied on the use of practical effects and difficult weather conditions . Libatique 's solution was to collaborate with Lee , military advisor Billy Budd , and first assistant director Mike Ellis in creating storyboards to choreograph the scenes . Production designer Tonino Zera was tasked with filling outdoor locations with greenery , rebuilding exteriors and constructing the interior of an Italian barn . Costume designer Carlo Poggiolo consulted with a former Buffalo Soldier of the 92nd Division , prior to designing the American soldiers ' outfits . He also provided contemporary and historical wardrobe pieces . Ernest Dickerson served as the film 's second unit director , cinematographer , and camera operator . The visual effects were created by George Lucas ' Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) . After Lee approached him , Lucas allowed ILM 's team of artists to work on the visual effects for the film .

== Music ==

Terence Blanchard composed the film score , marking his twelfth collaboration with Lee . For the score , he attempted to make a distinction between American and German soldiers . " That was first done through the use of percussion , using a higher @-@ pitched , tighter sound for Germans , and a fuller @-@ field drum sound for Americans , " he explained . " I also drew a distinction by using French horns for American forces , and a Wagner tuben for German forces . " Scoring the film required the use of a 90 @-@ piece orchestra , which was larger than in any of Lee 's previous films . Blanchard also relied on the use of instruments from the 1940s era , including a mandolin , accordion , slide guitar and rope drum .

The film 's soundtrack , titled *Miracle at St. Anna : Original Soundtrack* , was released in CD and digital downloading formats by Hollywood Records on September 23 , 2008 .

== Release ==

Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures released *Miracle at St. Anna* under Touchstone Pictures . The film 's world premiere was at the 2008 Toronto International Film Festival on September 7 , 2008 . The film later premiered in France at the 34th Deauville American Film Festival on September 10 , 2008 . *Miracle at St. Anna* premiered in New York City at the Ziegfeld Theatre on September 22 , 2008 . Disney released the film in the United States and Canada on September 26 , 2008 . The film was released in Italy on October 3 , 2008 ; in Romania on April 10 , 2009 ; in Bolivia and Brazil on April 30 , 2009 ; in the United Arab Emirates on May 28 , 2009 ; and in Lebanon on September 10 , 2009 .

== Box office ==

Miracle at St. Anna grossed \$ 7 @, @ 658 @, @ 999 in North America and \$ 1 @, @ 404 @, @ 716 from markets elsewhere ? a worldwide total of \$ 9 @, @ 323 @, @ 833 against a \$ 45 million budget .

On its opening day in North America , the film debuted at ninth place , grossing \$ 967 @, @ 329 from 1 @, @ 185 theaters . The end of the opening weekend saw the film take a total of \$ 3 @, @ 477 @, @ 996 ? for an average of \$ 2 @, @ 935 per theater ? finishing as the number eight grossing film of the weekend . Steve Mason of Hollywood.com believed that *Miracle at St. Anna* 's negative reviews and moviegoers ' declining interest in war films contributed to the film 's poor box office performance . On its second weekend , the film saw a 50 @. @ 1 % decrease in revenue , moving down to fourteenth place and earning an additional \$ 1 @, @ 736 @, @ 302 ? an average of \$ 1 @, @ 465 per theatre . *Miracle at St. Anna* was pulled out of theatres on November 25 , 2008 after 61 days (8 @. @ 7 weeks) of domestic release .

Following its release in North America , *Miracle at St. Anna* continued to perform poorly in international markets . Its highest gross was in Italy , where it grossed \$ 1 @, @ 363 @, @ 754 during its theatrical run . Also contributing to the film 's \$ 1 @. @ 4 million gross in international markets was Bolivia (\$ 9 @, @ 821) , Brazil (\$ 9 @, @ 821) , Lebanon (\$ 3 @, @ 184) , Romania (\$ 1 @, @ 465) , and the United Arab Emirates (\$ 26 @, @ 492) .

== Litigation ==

Following the theatrical release of *Miracle at St. Anna* , Spike Lee and the Italian production company On My Own Produzioni Cinematografiche brought a lawsuit against TF1 , alleging that the company failed in its contractual agreement with On My Own to distribute the film in international markets , excluding the United States , Canada and Italy . In its defense , TF1 refused to distribute *Miracle at St. Anna* , claiming that Lee had made a different film than the one promised , and refused to pay On My Own the ? 11 million advance needed to distribute the film internationally .

On June 21 , 2011 , a Paris court ruled in Lee and On My Own 's favor , believing that TF1 failed to

honor the contract , which proved " disastrous " for the film . TF1 was fined ? 32 million (US \$ 46 million) . TF1 was ordered to pay On My Own ? 20 million in damages , plus a further ? 1 million for moral prejudice ; Lee was awarded ? 1 million , while screenwriter James McBride received ? 200 @, @ 000 ; TF1 was also ordered to pay ? 13 million to BNP Paribas to cover the advance it had failed to pay .

= = = Reception = = =

The film has received mostly negative reviews from critics . Rotten Tomatoes sampled 119 reviewers with a 34 % of " fresh " and a weighted average of 5 @. @ 2 / 10 . The website 's consensus states " Miracle at St. Anna is a well @-@ intentioned but overlong , disjointed affair that hits few of the right notes . " Metacritic , another review aggregator , assigned the film a normalized score of 37 % based on 31 reviews from mainstream critics , indicating " generally unfavorable reviews " .

Todd McCarthy of Variety called the film " a clunky , poorly constructed drama designed to spotlight the little @-@ remarked role of black American soldiers in World War II . " James Rocchi , writing for Cinematical , gave the film a mixed review : " When Miracle at St. Anna falters , it 's in the moments that seem like they could have been crafted by any other film maker ; when Miracle at St. Anna succeeds , it 's in the moments that could only have been crafted by Lee . " Ann Hornaday of The Washington Post wrote that the film was " overwrought , overproduced , overbusy and overlong " and that " Miracle at St. Anna finally suffers from the worst filmmaking sin of all : the failure of trust , in the story and the audience . " Claudia Puig of USA Today wrote that the film " aspires to be epic , but mostly it 's just unfocused , sprawling and badly in need of editing " and that " [i] t tries hard to be inspiring , but it has jarring tonal shifts , stereotyped characters and a lack of narrative perspective . " Peter Travers of Rolling Stone described the film as " too long , lazily constructed , and crammed with too many characters and subplots for any director to develop fully outside of an HBO miniseries . "

Despite a mostly negative reception , Miracle at St. Anna received some praise . Eric D. Snider , writing for Film.com praised the film , writing , " This is beyond the scope of anything Lee has done before , and he rises to the challenge remarkably well , with battle scenes nearly as visceral and jolting as those in Saving Private Ryan and a multi @-@ layered story involving the U.S. Army , the Nazis , and the Italian resistance movement . " Snider criticized the film 's frame story , which he described as " unnecessary and definitely corny . " James Verniere of the Boston Herald awarded the film an " A " grade , calling it a " masterpiece " and a " classic American WWII movie that both acknowledges the rousing tradition of such war epics as The Longest Day (1962) and The Big Red One (1980) and adds something new : paying tribute to the World War II African @-@ American soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country . Roger Ebert , writing for the Chicago Sun @-@ Times , criticized the editing but praised the film overall , describing it as " epic " with " one of the best battle scenes I can remember , on par with Saving Private Ryan ... Miracle at St. Anna contains richness , anger , history , sentiment , fantasy , reality , violence and life . Maybe too much . Better than too little . "

= = = = Controversy = = = =

Protests were scheduled for the film 's Italian premiere in Viareggio , Italy , by unspecified organizations . The protesters objected to the plotline of a Partisan collaborating with the Nazis . This runs directly counter to the accepted historical version of events , ruled by an Italian military court in 2005 , that the Sant 'Anna di Stazzema massacre was entirely premeditated by the Germans with no reason except the aim to frighten the population . Giovanni Cipollini , deputy head of the National Association of the Italian Partisans , said the film was a " false reconstruction " and a " travesty of history " . However , Lee , unrepentant , stated " I am not apologizing . " He told Italians there was " a lot about your history you have yet to come to grips with . This film is our interpretation , and I stand behind it . " McBride , the novel 's author , stated : " As a black American , I understand

what it 's like for someone to tell your history ... unfortunately , the history of World War Two here in Italy is ours as well , and this was the best I could do ... it is , after all , a work of fiction . ?

In light of the film 's controversy , Lee was awarded honorary citizenship by the mayor of Sant 'Anna di Stazzema , Michele Silicani , who defended the film , stating , " It 's true that the film depicts a partisan who betrayed civilians . But above it is the tale of those partisans who fought to the death to defend civilians . "

= = = Home media = = =

Miracle at St. Anna was released on DVD and Blu @-@ ray disc formats by Touchstone Home Entertainment on February 10 , 2009 . The DVD is available in separate anamorphic widescreen and Blu @-@ ray editions , each with Dolby Digital 5 @.@ 1 and 2 @.@ 0 tracks . Upon its release on DVD , Miracle at St. Anna debuted in eighth place , selling 142 @,@ 782 units in its first week .