

OFFICIAL SELECTION
COMPETITION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

Maria Alexandra Lungu
Sam Louwyck
Alba Rohrwacher
Sabine Timoteo
and **Monica Bellucci**

LE MERAVIGLIE

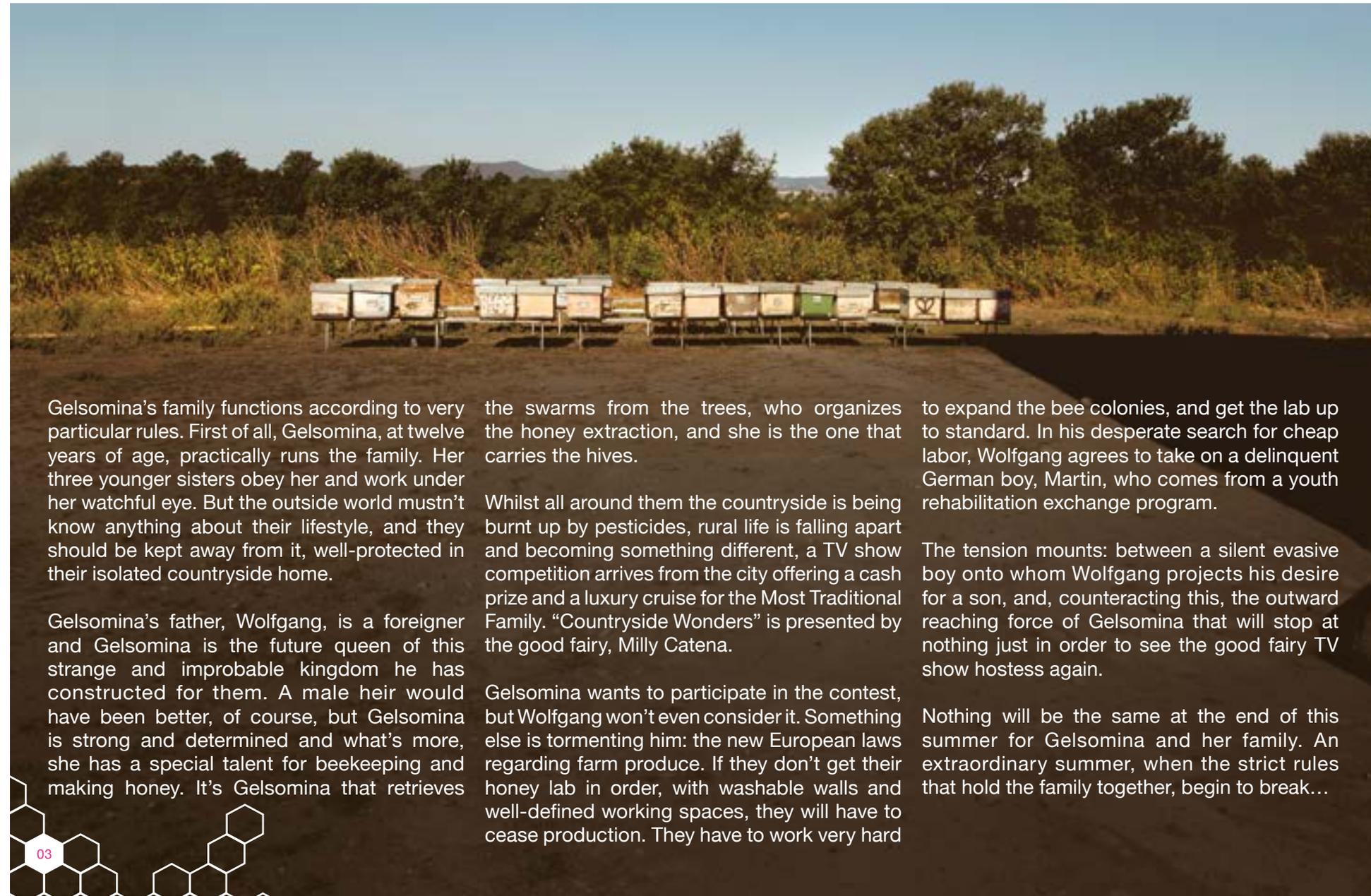
(THE WONDERS)

written and directed by
Alice Rohrwacher



SYNOPSIS

02



Gelsomina's family functions according to very particular rules. First of all, Gelsomina, at twelve years of age, practically runs the family. Her three younger sisters obey her and work under her watchful eye. But the outside world mustn't know anything about their lifestyle, and they should be kept away from it, well-protected in their isolated countryside home.

Gelsomina's father, Wolfgang, is a foreigner and Gelsomina is the future queen of this strange and improbable kingdom he has constructed for them. A male heir would have been better, of course, but Gelsomina is strong and determined and what's more, she has a special talent for beekeeping and making honey. It's Gelsomina that retrieves

the swarms from the trees, who organizes the honey extraction, and she is the one that carries the hives.

Whilst all around them the countryside is being burnt up by pesticides, rural life is falling apart and becoming something different, a TV show competition arrives from the city offering a cash prize and a luxury cruise for the Most Traditional Family. "Countryside Wonders" is presented by the good fairy, Milly Catena.

Gelsomina wants to participate in the contest, but Wolfgang won't even consider it. Something else is tormenting him: the new European laws regarding farm produce. If they don't get their honey lab in order, with washable walls and well-defined working spaces, they will have to cease production. They have to work very hard

to expand the bee colonies, and get the lab up to standard. In his desperate search for cheap labor, Wolfgang agrees to take on a delinquent German boy, Martin, who comes from a youth rehabilitation exchange program.

The tension mounts: between a silent evasive boy onto whom Wolfgang projects his desire for a son, and, counteracting this, the outward reaching force of Gelsomina that will stop at nothing just in order to see the good fairy TV show hostess again.

Nothing will be the same at the end of this summer for Gelsomina and her family. An extraordinary summer, when the strict rules that hold the family together, begin to break...

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**COMMENTS FROM
WRITER-DIRECTOR
ALICE ROHRWACHER**

A FABLE

LE MERAVIGLIE is a film about the countryside, about the somewhat peculiar love between a father and his daughters, about missing male sons, about animals and little people that live in the television. It is a film in the viterbese dialect, but when the characters are angry, they even respond sometimes in French and German. LE MERAVIGLIE is also a fable.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

The film is set in my hometown and among my countrymen: my hometown is the countryside (between the central regions of Umbria-Lazio and Tuscany) and bees are the animals which I know best. I also know a lot about cross-cultural families, not just because of my own German-Italian family, but because there are many in my region. Apart from these elements, the story and characters are not autobiographical, but certainly familiar to me. I wanted to speak of a firstborn daughter. Of course I was very inspired by my sister Alba, and how I viewed her during our childhood. At the same time, I think I would get very bored if I worked on something

completely autobiographical, with all the things I want to discover about human nature outside of myself. When you write a screenplay, it's necessary to find characters that can live on for years, that can fuel your imagination. It is better for characters to be somewhat unknown to me, so I will never get bored of getting to know them. I prefer the feeling that they are continuously re-invented, this is very stimulating.

THE FIRST IMPULSE

The moment always arrives when someone asks you where you are from. I would like very much to respond with one word like Rome or Milan, but instead I find myself explaining that I am from a border region between Umbria-Lazio and Tuscany in the countryside where the regional identities are all shattered. Perhaps the person with whom I am speaking knows this place? "But of course, of course," he tells me.

"I was in Civita last Sunday and I felt like I was living in the Middle Ages for one day." This was the first impulse that prompted me to work on LE MERAVIGLIE: the difficulties that one thinks when you think of the countryside, or of the small towns that make it up, as "pure" places, outside of time, and thus usable because they can never change. But seen from within (or maybe seen from the sidelines), these places are not like that and purity is only a prison to which they have confined themselves in order to have in exchange a warm meal per day.

BEEES & HONEY

I know bees very well and I worked for a while in honey production. I adore bees, even if it was not easy to convince the industry insurance companies that nothing bad would happen during the shoot. I insisted on using only real bees in the film without resorting to any visual effects. I wanted to capture the feeling of the materia and also for the actors to really work with real bee hives and swarms. The only way to accomplish this was to do





many tests. I remember that the parents of Maria Alexandra Lungu (who plays Gelsomina in LE MERAVIGLIE) were very happy: they said that if the film wouldn't work out, at least their daughter learned a real skill and could become a beekeeper!

MARIA ALEXANDRA LUNGU AS GELSOMINA

I didn't know exactly how I wanted the character of Gelsomina to be, but I knew that I would recognize her when I saw her. And that's how it was. After months of searching for the actress to play Gelsomina, we had no doubts from the moment we saw Maria Alexandra Lungu in a catechism class. (That's pretty funny when you consider the story of my first film HEAVENLY BODY). Working with her was a joy, because she has such a generous spirit and she enjoyed working with us, which is perhaps the most important thing. She was 11

years old and she had never done any acting, not in film nor theater. She is of Romanian origins, but she has always lived in Italy. She had never worked at beekeeping before, so we spent much time with the bees before shooting the film: we wanted her to dominate the work, to make it really the character of Gelsomina who does all the work with the honey processing and the bees. It was not particularly difficult, it was actually fun. She did get stung several times, but luckily she is good-spirited and curious which keeps her going.

THE HOUSE

In order to find a pure image, we need a point of view that has to be hybrid. And of a home, of course. And of a family that has gone to inhabit it. The house that we chose for the film had always been there. It is a house that

has old parts and parts that are more recent as no one has ever renovated it in a uniform style. Until recently it was normal to live this way: you entered a home and you became part of a history that preceded you, that could not be controlled all the way. The draughts of air were repaired with foam rubber, the tiles were replaced where necessary, but the house was adapted to a world already in existence. Only the latest generations have desired to give the place where you live a single layer of interpretation, whether ancient or modern. It was not easy to find the house where to film: all the places that we saw were either destroyed by ill weather or too renovated. During these pilgrimages we had in the car with us the beautiful book by Roberto Innocenti "The House", which in a way guided us.

THE FAMILY

The family in LE MERAVIGLIE is made up of Wolfgang, the father from a land up North, maybe Belgium or Germany, and Angelica, the Italian mother. They have four girls: Gelsomina, the oldest, Marinella, Caterina, and Luna. They have a vegetable garden, a permanent guest, Cocò, sheep, and bees. What are they doing there? The answer is almost embarrassing, but true: they want to protect the girls. From something they know that they have seen because everything is in disrepair, destruction, and corruption, and only the countryside can save you. Only by staying together. Their intentions are sincere, even if sometimes they express themselves in rage. But how to explain it to Gelsomina, the eldest daughter, the Crown Princess, daddy's little girl? She wants a simpler life, more serene, a family with less ideals and more wisdom like those of her friends. Wolfgang feels that the daughter on which he

places everything, that daughter that is better than him with the bees, who is grounded and responsible, is slipping away from him. But if the girls want to go away – to Milan? to Florida? – then what is the point of all this effort?

MY SISTER ALBA

Working with Alba (who plays the mother in LE MERAVIGLIE) is very exciting and necessary, not only because she is a great actress, but also because she is a great sister. I was confronted with thoughts about my sister during the whole screenwriting process, and, of course, it was very important for me to try and see this story through the eyes of an older sister, thus through Alba's eyes. We share the same sort of imagination, so there is no need to discuss much. And even when we often think differently, our intuition unites us. In our work, there is always a

move toward some reference imagination. What binds us most is that we will always be "half-breeds," united in belonging to a world that is somewhere in between the two (German and Italian) and a need to continually search for something. As Elsa Morante wrote in "Arturo's Island," a half-breed is a thief with his back to the treasure. He cannot see it in front of him, so he continually looks for it. We see it from the inside, from the roots, so there can be neither tricks nor deceit. This is a strength and also a reciprocal push to improve.

SAM LOUWYK AS WOLFGANG

For the father character in LE MERAVIGLIE, I wanted to work on a brutal but also very human hero, someone who has no idea about himself and who gets lost in his own ideals. So even when he makes mistakes and behave badly, it's difficult to judge him. Wolfgang



knows nothing about strategies. He's like a very small child, or like certain animals. It was very important for me to tell this story with characters that cannot be psychoanalysed, who existed before psychoanalysis, or else all their gestures would become dark and twisted. Especially the love of a father for his daughter could become nebulous if it is over-rationalized. I wanted the relationship between Wolfgang and his daughter Gelsomina to be about an instinctive love, in which he protects his lair and knows only the seasons. It was very difficult to find an actor who had the necessary spontaneity and clarity. It's not by chance that Sam Louwyk is first and foremost a professional dancer. All his research stems from the body, and if the body knows where to go, the head follows it.

THEY ARE ALL EX-SOMETHINGS

The family in our story was not there from the start, is not from the region, and did not even know from the beginning that it was a family. They are people that arrived in the country as a political choice because in the cities there were no more jobs and years of demonstrations had been stifled by violence and disillusionment. So they read books, learned to make a vegetable garden with handbooks, tried hard, and fought the seasons alone. They are all ex-somethings, with different languages, distant pasts, but with common ideals. I have met many families like this in Italy, but also in France, in Greece. Small communities untethered to the rest, with autonomous rules and a parallel life to that which we read about in the newspaper. But it is not a simple life: you have to work

hard and it is difficult to survive without the comfort of belonging to a movement. You are not a true farmer because you are not from the land, but you can also not be defined as a city person because you have severed ties to the city. You are not hippies because you break your back from sunup to sundown, but you are also not agricultural entrepreneurs because you reject the use of more efficient agricultural technology in the name of a healthier life. Not having a movement, a definition which can be ascribed from the outside, all that remains is one word: family. Precisely the word that in the demonstrations of 1968 they wanted to destroy is now their Noah's arc, their only shelter. They are a family.

SABINE TIMOTEO AS COCO

Working with Sabine was a great experience because she is an actress who works with her body and she succeeds with little space in creating a character so real, comical and terribly dramatic. We do not know the story of mysterious Coco. She is a relic of this family's past, but her presence is important because it opens up a wound in their history. She has taken refuge there and maybe she never planned to remain, but she became part of the family without any intentions, as sometimes happens to a piece of wire that was tied to a tree, incorporated slowly into the bark. We see it's now impossible to remove, and we can go back to a story, to

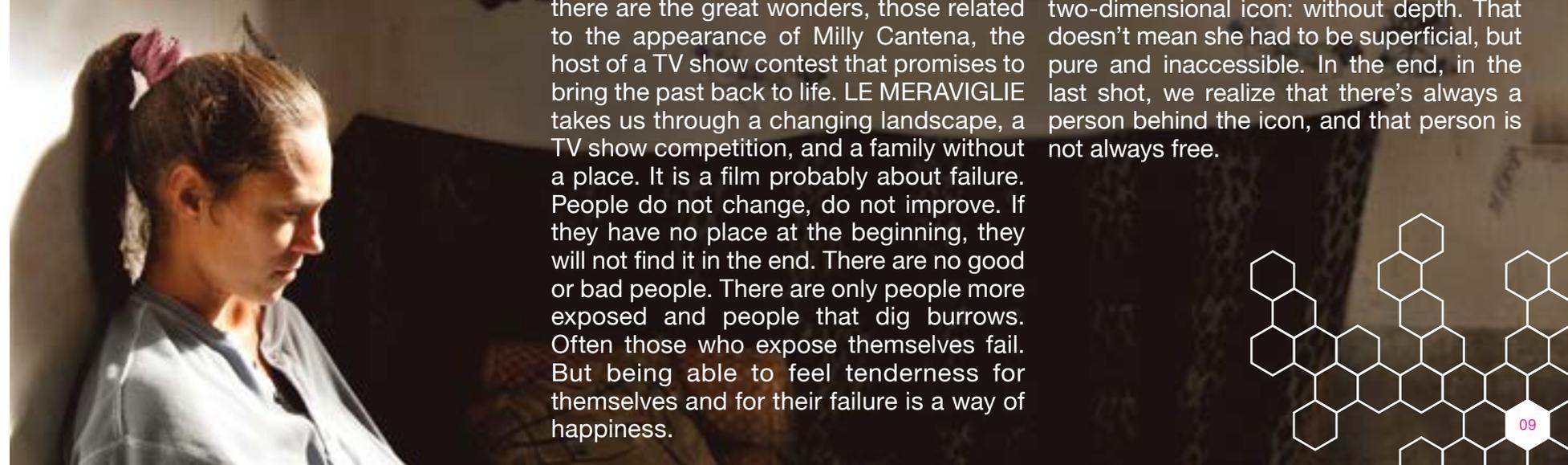
someone's gesture that tied it to the tree. That's Coco, a sort of family scar. Sabine Timoteo was able to delicately bring this character to life who performs questionable acts but we never judge her.

WONDERS & FAILURES

A wonder is something that makes you speechless, it makes articulating impossible. It is that which hinges between the earthly world and the fantastic. But like the word tradition, wonder has also become, in recent times, a word easily thrown around, often associated with promises of great emotions, wonderful emotions. In LE MERAIGLIE there are small wonders made of light, shadow, animals, and childhood secrets, and then there are the great wonders, those related to the appearance of Milly Cantena, the host of a TV show contest that promises to bring the past back to life. LE MERAIGLIE takes us through a changing landscape, a TV show competition, and a family without a place. It is a film probably about failure. People do not change, do not improve. If they have no place at the beginning, they will not find it in the end. There are no good or bad people. There are only people more exposed and people that dig burrows. Often those who expose themselves fail. But being able to feel tenderness for themselves and for their failure is a way of happiness.

MONICA BELLUCCI

For the TV hostess Milly Catena, we wanted an icon of beauty, someone that would come across as a good fairy, but also a real woman. Monica Bellucci has both those worlds in her – the magical and the carnal. She also has an extraordinary sense of humor, even about herself, which is a fundamental trait for an actor. Working with her on set also recreated the true dynamism of the film. The day players who participated in the TV show scenes were as excited about her as the characters needed to be about Milly Catena. This caused some very funny confusion about what was real and what was the film to the point where we didn't even know anymore. Monica's character needed to initially be a completely two-dimensional icon: without depth. That doesn't mean she had to be superficial, but pure and inaccessible. In the end, in the last shot, we realize that there's always a person behind the icon, and that person is not always free.



A DEEP AND PAINFUL CHANGE

In Italy today one speaks of the countryside only to describe destruction and imminent ruin, or to use it as a romantic and innocent backdrop for stories that barely examine it. Yet, what is taking place in the Italian landscape is a change a lot more deep and painful. The long fight for the land, that thousand-year old stage for the clashes between landowners and workers, has not resolved itself. It has only distanced itself, faded out. The battlefield has been left free and the profiteers have arrived. First they lit a match to everything that they found on their way, then they seized the few remaining areas that remained more or less intact, and have transformed them into an amazing

theme park in order to reassure us of our days of rest. A type of open-air museum.

THE LAYERS OF TRADITION

To live in the Middle Ages for a day: that is the territorial policy that was systematically advanced in the last twenty years. First, they tried to destroy everything that was culture – the piazzas, the hedges, the libraries and the small cinemas, the provincial theaters, the associations and all the places of meeting and exchange – in order to then transform everything that remained into culture, everything that was innocuous: eating (with a full mouth, you talk less) and the remote past (what danger can there be in Etruscan theater?). Suddenly everyone remembered that they have ONE tradition

and became loyal to it with all their strengths. But one cannot extrapolate tradition. It is produced in layers and it is often only the last manifestation of a process of change. It is not flat, it is like a well. You cannot salvage and protect only one layer.

I therefore began to travel in my region, finding farmers, agricultural entrepreneurs, country-folk. I began to ask myself: if aliens came, what would they understand about this place? Could a rural festival be the only thing that remains in an almost completely agricultural countryside? What does it mean to live in this landscape, to be part of it, to contain commercialization on one side and environmental difficulties on the other? Is there an image that can synthesize all of this?



ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

The shoot lasted eight weeks, after several months of pre-production to scout the right locations and cast, and to bring everything to life. We worked with a lot of enthusiasm and joy, and I can truly say that this movie exists thanks to an amazing group of people who left their own cities and moved to my very isolated area. We took the same path as the family: we found a house, we put it in order, we set up the garden and brought in the animals. Of course, all of this took months. I think that it can be seen, felt, in the film the very special relationships that arise between the actors and the location,

between the crew and the location. The experience still matters, in my opinion. I like working on a fictional story, a fabricated story with characters who do not exist, but with very real relationships. I think all of this, even if it is something invisible, is able to penetrate the images like some kind of magic dust, and then somehow be seen in the movie.

VERY GOOD HONEY

In LE MERAIGLIE, Gelsomina's family makes honey and we are sure that it is a very good honey. But their laboratory, the way they work, is completely illegal: the

walls are not sterile, it lacks a sewer drain, the bathroom is with the antechamber. And what about the child labor? In short, what they do is good, but if we look closely, they have no respect for the law and could really be thrown in jail ...

A similar thing happens in our work. Often good movies cannot comply with all narrative and production rules. Sure, there is the risk that audiences, a bit like the sanitation department, will shut you down. But I believe that before thinking about how much honey to sell, you have to ask yourself if the honey is good, especially if we would feed it to our own children.



**DIRECTOR'S
BIO- & FILMOGRAPHY**

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ALICE ROHRWACHER

was born in 1981 in Fiesole (Italy) and studied in Turin and Lisbon. She has worked in music as performing musician for theatre and in documentary filmmaking as editor and director.

Her first feature CORPO CELESTE premiered in Cannes (Quinzaine des realisateurs) in 2011, was then selected in Sundance, New York, London, Rio, Tokyo film festivals and released in the US, UK, France.

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FILMOGRAPHY AND AWARDS

LA FIUMARA
episode of the collective documentary "Che cosa manca", Italy 2006 (7 min)

CORPO CELESTE
Italy – France – Switzerland – Germany 2011 (98 min)
"Ingmar Bergman Int. Debut Award" 2012
"Nastri d'Argento" best debut film 2012
"Ciak d'Oro" best debut film 2012
"Premio Suso Cecchi D'Amico" best screenplay 2012



CAST & CREW



CAST
 Gelsomina – *Alexandra Lungu*
 Wolfgang (father) – *Sam Louwick*
 Angelica (mother) – *Alba Rohrwacher*
 Cocò – *Sabine Timoteo*
 Marinella – *Agnese Graziani*
 Martin – *Luis Huilca Logroño*
 Caterina – *Eva Morrow*
 Luna – *Maris Stella Morrow*
 “Second Life” representative – *Margarethe Tiesel*
 Adrian – *Andre M. Henicke*
 Milly Catena – *Monica Bellucci*
 Carlo Portarena – *Carlo Tarmati*

CREW
 written and directed by
Alice Rohrwacher
 photography – *Hélène Louvart*
 editing – *Marco Spoletini*
 sound – *Christophe Giovannoni*
 set design – *Emita Frigato*
 costumes – *Loredana Buscemi*

produced by
Carlo Cresto-Dina,
Karl “Baumi” Baumgartner,
Tiziana Soudani,
Michael Weber
 a tempesta / *Carlo Cresto –*
Dina production
 produced with *Rai Cinema*

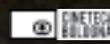
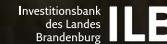
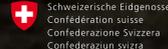
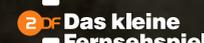
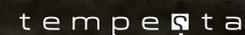
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Culturali e del Turismo – Direzione
Generale Cinema



Le Meraviglie is the first international film produced using “EcoMuvi”, the protocol of environmental sustainability for the film industry created by tempesta. “EcoMuvi”, first in Europe, is a real “production process” that can indicate the best solutions to achieve energy savings and environmental sustainability in film production. Not just compensation but an active step by step procedure to make films with lighter impact on our planet.





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TECHNICAL DETAILS

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Screening Format: dcp
Aspect Ratio: 1:1.85
Sound Format: 5.1
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Subtitles available: Italian, French, English

WORLD SALES

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