



***THE RESOLUTE***  
a film by  
Giovanni Donfrancesco



*a coproduction*  
ALTARA FILMS  
LES FILMS DU POISSON

*With*  
RAI CINEMA  
NDR ARTE (la Lucarne)

*and the support of*  
CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINEMA

Media partner Rai Cinema Channel  
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**SCREENINGS**

Public screening **SALA PERLA 2** 6<sup>th</sup> september h. 22:00  
All accreditation **SALA PERLA 2** 8<sup>th</sup> september h. 22:00

**Press office - Lo Scrittoio**

via Crema 32 - 20135 Milano Tel. +39 02 78622290-91  
**Antonio Pirozzi** mob. +39 339 5238132; +39 347 4305496  
[ufficiostampa@scrittoio.net](mailto:ufficiostampa@scrittoio.net); [pressoffice@scrittoio.net](mailto:pressoffice@scrittoio.net)

## **THE RESOLUTE**

Italy / France 2017

HD, color

length: 159'

language: italian, english

Written and directed by : Giovanni Donfrancesco

Produced by: Giovanni Donfrancesco, Estelle Fialon

photography and editing: Giovanni Donfrancesco

Sound design: Olivier Touche

Mix: Dominique Gaborieau

Produced by: Altara Films and Le Films du Poisson with Rai Cinema and NDR / ARTE (la Lucarne), with the support of the CNC.

### **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

Almost the entire film is set in a remote house amidst the pine forests of Vermont, where an elderly man, Piero Bonamico, lives with his wife, Lee Aura. He spends his days sitting on the sofa, watching television; she cooks, they look after their kitchen garden; he reads avidly but writes as well, noting everything that captures his attention. He occasionally sings in the choir of the local Presbyterian church.

The meeting with the filmmaker awakens a desire in the old man to speak at last about a past that he has never before revealed. The profoundly disturbing chronicle is related for the most part in the underground cellar of the house and comes close to being a confession. From time to time there is a pause as the narration is punctuated by scenes from life today, a reemergence into a present seemingly retaining strong echoes of the past.

### **LONG SYNOPSIS**

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#### **Piero's childhood.**

Piero says that he was born in 1929, the year in which the Catholic Church and the Fascist government of Italy signed the Lateran Pacts, normalizing their relations and establishing a collaborative coexistence. He grows up with three brothers & sisters in an extremely poor family. His mother works as a maid. Piero has no real relationship with his parents. He feels that he is completely unnoticed and treated as if he were stupid.

When he is seven his mother puts him in a home for poor children, run by the church. He stays there for five years. In his childhood memories, Genova's narrow alleyways boom with the tones of the Duce bellowing from loudspeakers in the streets or radios kept on full volume by neighbours to demonstrate loyalty to the

values of Fascism. Sundays are marked by the marches of the Young Fascists. "For us, there was nothing else", Piero recalls. "Rich people had the cinema, the opera, cabaret. For the poor, there was no alternative to the incessant hammering of Fascist propaganda."

Once he leaves the boys' home, Piero's mother send him to work as a baker's boy. On 10th June, 1940, Mussolini declares war on England and France. Initial enthusiasm for war amongst the Genovese, who like Piero had been inspired by Fascist slogans, quickly wanes and is replaced by fear when after a few days the whole city is pounded in a British naval bombardment.

### **Adolescence and war.**

During the war Piero finds himself working for Attilio Corte, a man who had fought in the Italian navy, in the X Mas flotilla (The 10th Assault Vehicle Flotilla) headed by Prince Junio Valerio Borghese. The prince had distinguished himself in combat on many occasions, sinking several British ships.

One day in the spring of 1944 Attilio Corte introduces Piero to an old comrade in arms, Captain Felice Bottero, who has recently established a Fascist battalion dubbed the "Risoluti" (The Resolutes. ) The group forms part of the renewed 10th Flotilla, under the direct command of Prince Borghese. Its role is to fight the Resistance of the Partisans and to control the area.

A short time afterwards, during a trip into the Ligurian countryside, the truck on which Piero and Attilio Corte are travelling is halted at an SS road block. Something goes wrong during the inspection and Attilio Corte is shot dead on the spot, in front of Piero's eyes. A few days later Bottero organizes his men and takes Piero with him on a punitive raid to avenge Attilio Corte's death by killing the SS men who had been responsible for it. Piero is not yet fifteen, although he is strongly built and able to hold his own in a fight with his bare fists. From that day on he becomes a member of "The Resolutes".

He seems to find an identity in the group and at last feels he is important. The group is indoctrinated with Fascist ideology and taught to use force systematically. In Piero's own words, they are trained to become "a machine for violence".

As Piero describes it, "the Resolute" is more a criminal gang than a military unit. For months he takes part in violent incursions, terrorizing the people of Genoa. Nearly every day the battalion marches through the city streets, singing Fascist songs, attacking and clubbing any passers-by who fail to give the Fascist salute with outstretched arm or deferentially to doff a hat. Piero takes part in what are nothing other than raids on the homes of Jews on the coast or hinterland, seizing money, pictures, jewels, clothes - any object of value. The group abducts well-off citizens - doctors, engineers, businessmen, even young students - and demands a ransom from their families in exchange for the release of the captives. Piero seems firmly under Bottero's leadership and plays a direct part in many beatings including, he implies, in killings.

### **Mussolini's Treasure.**

Piero recounts that a few days before the end of the war he was involved in an extraordinary event, of which he has never previously spoken, connected with the Fascist treasure Mussolini was rumoured to have taken with him as he fled for the last time, known as the Gold of Dongo. These fabulous riches were much talked about in post-war years, but the hiding place of the treasure has never been found, neither has it been completely recovered. On 22nd April 1945 the war is coming to an end. German & Fascist forces are disbanding and the Allies and Partisans are at the gates of Genoa. Piero and a comrade of his are ordered to load five large leather cases on to their leader's ambulance ( Bottero's personal means of transport). The cases turn out to be full of copies of the "Corrierino dei Piccoli", a children's comic. Piero leaves Genoa with his comrade & Bottero himself. During the journey he is astonished to learn that they are bound for Lake Garda and Mussolini's residence....

The Duce himself is in Milan. A group of men in military uniform with five identical leather cases awaits them at the gates of the house. The new cases, which are of exactly the same weight and filled with money and jewels, are exchanged for those stuffed with the paper comics, and Piero leaves with them for Milan..

Chaos reigns in Milan as the city expects to be liberated from one day to the next. Piero's group is met by Junio Valerio Borghese, a prince of the Roman Black Nobility and supreme leader of the 10th Flotilla. Piero has already heard his chief Bottero talk of the Prince as destined to become the new Duce, heading a revival of Fascism. Together with Borghese they go to the Archbishopric of Milan, where they deposit the cases full of treasure.

Before abandoning Piero to his fate, Bottero comments on the accomplishment of the mission, saying "Now the cases which will be used for the renewal of Fascist Italy, have passed from the hands of Mussolini to the hands of God."

In 1970 Prince Borghese does indeed attempt a coup d'état.

For Piero the war ends with the operation in Milan.

### **The Postwar Years and Redemption.**

Abandoned to himself and completely alone, Piero goes to Piazzale Loreto, and mingles with the crowd which has gathered to look at the lifeless corpse of Mussolini. It is the death of Fascism. Piero hides for several weeks, but in the end he does not really know where to go. The only place familiar to him and where he has contacts is Genoa where he is afraid of being recognized. He takes a night train there, hoping to pass unnoticed, but as soon as he alights at the station he is identified by Partisans who manhandle and arrested him.

He is held in Marassi prison (where he finds Bottero is also incarcerated) for less than a month. Taken before a magistrate for questioning, he is released because of his youth: he is fifteen years old.

For some years Piero then works as a waiter on cruise ships and transatlantic liners. In this permanently rootless state he meets a very young passenger of Italian origin with whom he falls in love. Their relationship offers him hope of redemption from his restless life.

Since then, Piero has lived in Barre, in Vermont. His days revolve totally around Lee Aura. He has returned briefly once to Italy, a country he detests because of its indelible association with the pain of his past.

From time to time he sings for pleasure in the choir of the local Presbyterian church.

### **DIRECTOR'S NOTE**

I met Piero by chance, while I was in Vermont directing "The Stone River". He started to tell me his story, opening up in particular about the war. For some mysterious reason the time had come to bring to light events he had kept deeply buried all his life. Once he had begun, there was no stopping his account. Not even the incredulous gaze of his wife, stunned that over the years he had never unburdened himself, could halt him. One of the reasons which for a long time discouraged me from making a film about such an extraordinary story was the difficulty of representing the reminiscences of an eighty seven year old man. How could such distant events be shown on the screen without lapsing into banal, cliché-ridden commentary? After much thought, I realized that I had to go back to what had first made such an impression on me and gripped me so much: the power of the story itself and Piero's very personal way of telling it, shifting constantly between Italian and English as the layers of memories surfaced. I therefore decided to use the simplest of narrative forms, basing the film on a lengthy interview in which Piero recounts and ponders his life. This is not really the easy task it may seem, as a complex challenge underlies such an approach: how to bring out as strongly as possible the power of a tale which is also a long

confession? The various chapters are punctuated by scenes of Piero in his life today, each of which is directly or metaphorically linked to the testimony we have just heard or are about to hear. It is common practice and at times all too obvious a device to include interviews in a documentary. Making a film of a long face-to-face interview became an extreme stylistic decision, with special meaning for me. The static frames allow the watcher to focus on the smallest changes in Piero's emotions. His search for the right word, his gestures, the way he shifts very slightly on his chair: all take on a profound significance. His whole manner is cinematographic: his confession, his words, his facial expressions, his movements, his pronouncements, even his long silences and the drumming of his fingers on the table. I chose to show Piero in his own environment, at ease in his own house, together with Lee Aura his wife. Her presence is tangible throughout though her vital role is revealed only at the end. The interview, or rather the interviews, were shot in the context of domestic scenes which changed to match the chronology of events. The most dramatic wartime scene takes place in the cellar which is feebly lit by a single bulb, thus providing a visual illustration of what is tantamount to Piero's confrontation with his conscience. It is unusual to hear anything about the survivors of the Republic of Salô and especially of the sadly infamous Fascist groups such as the brutal 10th Flotilla, as unusual as it is to hear a Nazi member of the SS bear witness to cruel deeds. This is partly because they themselves prefer to remain silent, and partly because we prefer it that way too and find their silence reassuring. If we are used to hearing from the victims of Fascist atrocities and it is thus easy for us to sympathize with their suffering, it is much more exceptional to hear an "executioner/butcher" speak so openly and to learn of the psychological mechanisms which lead to savage actions. On the few occasions when people do agree to speak, we often find we are listening to a nostalgic account which fails to grasp the reality of what occurred, or a soldier's attempt to face up to conflicts of conscience by invoking the excuse of obeying superior orders.

Piero, though, is aware of his own guilt, and has he has long pondered it critically. At the same time, he was fourteen when he joined the "Resolutes" and he is aware of being first and foremost a victim of the Fascist ideology for which he fought. His youth gave him the status of someone who was not fully responsible for his actions. Perhaps this is why he had less hesitation in frankly recounting those events in which a 'self', so different from that of the person he is now, was the dark protagonist.

Piero's personal history is in my view of particular value today as it is extremely representative of the lives of thousands of adolescents who were recruited into Fascist brigades in the dying days of Mussolini's dictatorship. A young man with practically no schooling, coming from a deprived family, found a niche and an identity in espousing the principles of Fascism. He joined a group whose spirit was forged by the exaltation of violence, filling the void left by family, school and society. Couldn't this be said to be the story of millions of Italians, bereft of any support, who had the misfortune to grow up in the Twenties and Thirties, but also of millions of Europeans who lived in the shadow of other totalitarian regimes or fell under their spell?

If we want to, we can see Piero's story as an integral part of the history of all forms of fascism, in the broadest sense of the term.

It was an understanding of this which decided me to go ahead & make the film, my intention being to come to terms with Piero's dark side, or rather his ability to embody the dark side we all have, and which is latent in our society.

It is also true that times have changed in such a way that a film about events which happened seventy long years ago has become contemporary and imbued with urgency. Over the last five years many things have altered the panorama of Europe: the Golden Dawn in Greece, the Front National in France, the Lega Nord in Italy, the Jobbik in Hungary...but there are also relatively new phenomena, like the deadly fascination which militant groups with strong identities and /or religious connotations such as Daesh manage to exert so swiftly on thousands of young people from the outer suburbs across the continent.

On one side there is the creation of an all-consuming identity, be it national, racial or religious, accompanied by relentless propaganda aiming at a paranoid definition of an enemy; on the other there is an education to obedience and violence as a way of annihilating first personality and then the enemy.

Hearing Piero talking of the past transports us unnervingly to the present. Listening to the way in which he describes his recruitment, his indoctrination, his paramilitary training, his induction into systematic violence, I suddenly realized how dramatically relevant his story is today. And I would not have made this film had I not been completely certain that it can speak directly to our world.

The episode of Mussolini's treasure deserves a special mention.

"What do you know about the gold of Dongo?" Piero asked me on the telephone one day. "Well, I've heard of it, but I've no idea where it is..." I answered, with ill-disguised sarcasm. "I however know where it is", he said flatly, "because I myself took it there..."

The tale Piero told me is so incredible and disconcerting that to a certain extent it is hard to believe that it is true. Does he want to reveal a secret or did he make it all up? Perhaps he was suggestible and his memory was playing tricks?

My investigations turned up a series of findings which appear to lend credibility to his account. Not all of it is invented; there is a good basis of truth.

I wish to make it clear that the film is not intended to be a journalist's inquiry seeking a historical scoop. Mussolini's gold is of marginal interest to me and only in as much as it is part of the odyssey of an adolescent dealing with matters which are beyond him.

Neither do I believe that it is for me as the author to take a stance on the truth of the story. Further research is a task for historians, should they wish to take it on. I bestow on the audience the same perplexity I felt, with the freedom to provide answers or remain doubtful.

Essentially, my interest lay in portraying the personal experience of an 'adolescent' of 87 grappling with his troubled past, not in representing objective reality.

I think the best key to the film comes from Piero's own utterance at the end: "unless you look beyond what is in front of your eyes, you will see nothing."

*Giovanni Donfrancesco*

## **BIO-FILMOGRAPHY OF THE DIRECTOR**



GIOVANNI DONFRANCESCO lives and works between Florence and Paris. His films have won several awards in international cinema festivals. He is one of the founders of Altara Films, a company which produces his films as well as those of other directors, with particular emphasis on international co-productions of creative documentaries. His last film, *The Stone River*, was awarded with the Poggiali award for best documentary at Rome IFF, the Young Jury award at the Cinéma du Réel in Paris, the Golden Apricot at the Yerevan IFF and the Italian Golden Globe for best documentary.

## **Selected filmography:**

### **2013 : *THE STONE RIVER***

Prod. Altara Films / Les Films du Poisson/ RAI Cinema, with the support of Regione Toscana and CNC.

Main Festivals and awards:

- Rome International Film Festival, **Poggiali award for best documentary**;
- Cinéma du Réel Paris, Centre Pompidou, **Young Jury Award**;
- Winner of the Italian **Golden Globe** 2014 for best documentary;
- Yerevan International Film Festival, **Grand Prize Golden Apricot** for best documentary;
- Cinemambiente Turin, **Jury's special award**.
- Doc/It professional award, **Issaverdens award**
- E Tudo Verdade Film Festival Sao Paulo/ Rio de Janeiro, International Competition;
- Anuu-Ru Aboro Film Festival, New Caledonia, **Jury's special award**;
- Reykjavik International Film Festival, official selection;
- DOK Leipzig, International Competition;
- Minsk International Film Festival, section The Best;
- RIDM Montreal, Official selection;
- ZagrebDox, Official Selection

### **2011 : *LE VERE FALSE TESTE DI MODIGLIANI (Modigliani's Genuine Fake Heads)***

Prod. Altara Films / Les Films du Poisson / ARTE France; with the support of Regione Toscana, CNC and Procirep. In association with YLE / SVT / SF/DR/ SBS Australia

- Nominated at **Globo d'Oro 2012** for **best documentary**
- Official Selection - Noir in Festival Courmayeur
- Official Selection - Bellaria Film Festival
- Official Selection - Filaf Perpignan
- Official Selection - Epos Tel Aviv

### **2009 : *ORO SPLENDEnte - RITORNO IN CAMBOGIA (Shining Gold - Back to Cambodia)***

Prod. Altara Films/ Graffiti Doc.

Official Selection - Festival dei Popoli Florence.

### **2008 : *LA GUERRA SPORCA DI MUSSOLINI (Mussolini's Dirty War)***

Prod. GA&A/ ERT/ History Channel/ RTI

In association with RTSI, Histoire.

Official Selection - International Image Festival Beijing.

As a D.O.P. he recently worked on:

### ***VIENNE AVANT LA NUIT*, by Robert Bober (90' - FR/GER/AU)**

Les Films du Poisson/ KGP Wien, in coproduction with NDR/ARTE (la Lucarne) with the support of Eurimages e CNC.

- Official Selection FID Marseille
- Official Selection Hamburg International Film Festival
- Official Selection Lussas IFF.

## **THE COPRODUCTION**

*"The Resolute"/ Il Risoluto* is a co production by Altara Films (Florence) and Les Films du Poisson (Paris) with RAI Cinema and NDR-Arte ( for the prestigious platform for creative documentaries "La Lucarne".)

ALTARA FILMS was founded in Florence by Giovanni Donfrancesco. It produces his work & that of other filmmakers, focusing particularly on international co productions of creative documentaries. Altara Films has partenered many international television channels such as Arte, YLE, SVT, DR, SF, SBF Australia and others. LES FILMS DU POISSON is a French production company which has won a string of international awards, among which five Cesar (French Oscars) for *Voyages* directed by Emmanuel Finkiel and *Since Otar Left* directed by Julie Bertuccelli, Best Film in Cannes Film Festival for *On Tour* by Mathieu Amalric and Golden Camera in Cannes Film Festival for *Jellyfish* by Etgar Keret & Shira Gefen. Estelle Fialon is in charge of documentaries within the company since 2006. Her films have also received numerous awards in France and abroad. In 2013 she has been nominated for an Academy Awards for Best Documentary Feature and nominated by the Producers Guild of America for *The Gatekeepes*.