

Films Grand Huit
presents

DISCO BOY

A FILM BY
GIACOMO ABBRUZZESE

WORLD PREMIERE
Berlinale 2023 - Competition

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SYNOPSIS

Following a difficult journey across Europe, Aleksei reaches Paris to enlist in the French Foreign Legion — a highly selective military corp that allows any foreigner, even undocumented, to be granted a French passport. In the Niger Delta, Jomo fights against oil companies that threaten the survival of his village. His sister Udoka, meanwhile, dreams of escaping, knowing that all is already lost here. Beyond borders, life and death, their destinies will intertwine.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES - GIACOMO ABBRUZZESE

Telling the enemy's story

Aleksei is a young Belarusian seeking a new life in France. On the run from a past that he buries when he loses his friend Mikhail, Aleksei throws himself into a dangerous enterprise: becoming a member of the French Foreign Legion. It is a Faustian pact that offers the promise of French nationality.

Jomo is his alter ego. An African revolutionary activist, he is engaged in armed struggle to defend his community. Whereas Aleksei is a soldier, Jomo is a guerrilla fighter. I have chosen to tell both Aleksei and Jomo's stories, up until the moment they find themselves face to face in the jungle.

We're used to seeing war told from a single point of view. The other, the enemy, rarely exists as a complex entity. I believe cinema is, above all, a question of gaze and shifting points of view. In this film, telling the story of both sides is a political as well as a narrative and staging issue. I want to show the horror of war by giving the same emotional dignity to both camps.

I wanted to move away from the stereotypes of virility and violence that characterize many war films. I like the idea that physical strength might be accompanied by a certain fragility and a tormented gaze. It's this contrast that interests me.

Aleksei's metamorphosis, Jomo's return

After the war, Jomo and his sister, Udoka, haunt Aleksei's nights. The dreams, hallucinations and solitude that gradually shut Aleksei off from others may be seen as symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. However, I'm not interested in relating them from an external, clinical point of view, but in using them as a springboard for magical narrative.

Something supernatural slowly and inexorably pervades the film. Jomo comes back from the dead to give Aleksei the gift of the dance he shared with Udoka. Aleksei was a worthy enemy for Jomo, one capable of feeling empathy and compassion. Aleksei buried him. Their two destinies meld into one. Jomo's dance with Udoka will be made whole again.

Immersive staging

The film's narration is pictorial, inscribed in the detail of each image, in the point of view of each shot. Its progression is fluid, punctuated by sudden, violent ruptures. *Disco Boy* unfolds in a porous present under constant pressure from the past, which manifests itself sometimes psychologically, sometimes in the form of hallucinations, dreams or supernatural events that escape categorization.

The film begins with a naturalistic aesthetic which progressively slides into a psychedelic and shamanic register. On the nightclub podium, Udoka appears as a mysterious priestess in the Parisian night.

I like to start from a documented reality, drawing from the real and then re-writing it. For me there is a mental dimension in film staging flowing from a character's perception.

From the outset, I have integrated the river as a motif. In mythology, the river is where the living cross over into the land of the dead; here it is where realistic situations become fantasy-like and sensorial. There is the Oder, then the Seine and the Niger. The presence of the river water progressively unhinges perception and brings the film in a more dreamlike dimension.

Foreigners

In my view, cinematographic images are neither subjective nor objective, but offer a vision in which the character is transformed and reflected.

The cinema allows me to relate the stories of two men, Aleksei and Jomo, one after the other, adopting their points of view, before having them meet in the flesh, as if their bodies carried the memory of their wounds, their feelings, and of History itself. They are both predators and victims at once. They don't give up. Their extreme, radical actions have a sacred aura.

Disco Boy is my first French film. Although I have been living in Paris for more than ten years, I couldn't make a film in France as a Frenchman would. But I can make a film as a foreigner, about foreigners, with a cast chosen without regard for passports.

- Giacomo Abbruzzese

PRODUCERS' NOTES - LIONEL MASSOL & PAULINE SEIGLAND

Giacomo Abbruzzese, the birth of a filmmaker

Giacomo is an Italian filmmaker who grew up in Puglia, studied in France at Le Fresnoy, was a photographer in the Middle East, and now lives between Paris and Madrid. The relationship with the "other", the meeting of languages and cultures, is at the heart of his cinema.

Since the release of his first short film, *Archipelago*, Giacomo has succeeded in establishing a unique color in the landscape of independent cinema. *Cahiers du cinéma* wrote of his second short, *Fireworks*, that "before being radical, the cinema of Giacomo Abbruzzese is first of all lively and inspired".

His third short, *Stella Maris*, was selected for the César Awards in 2015 and won the Canal+ prize at Cinémed the same year. Once again, it stood out unlike any other. Each of these films builds upon a unique style, a special touch.

When we met Giacomo, we were happy to put a face to the creator of the images that had punctuated our cinephilia. He was already involved with a producer and then, some time later, a second one. We remained simply friends.

With the release of *America*, we discovered that Giacomo was also a great documentarian. The film, which runs a little less than an hour, keeps the viewer completely in suspense as they discover, at the same time as Giacomo, the revelations of an investigation into his grandfather, who lived a secret double life between Taranto and New York. Nominated for a César award in 2022, the film has long been featured on Tënk and Médiapart.

***Disco Boy*, an epic production adventure**

Giacomo wrote *Disco Boy* at the prestigious Cinefondation of the Cannes Film Festival and at a Clermont-Ferrand Festival residency. Ten years will have passed between the birth of the idea of this film and its premiere in Berlin. A long period of writing and development but also of financing: *Disco Boy* is an unprecedented adventure of producing as well as directing.

In the fall of 2019, Giacomo felt that the project had reached an impasse, considered too ambitious for a first feature film, and he expressed his desire to change producers. We decided to accompany him on his first feature film, convinced of our artistic affinity and of the free yet structured framework that we could guarantee him.

We then decided to rethink the co-production structure, relying on the partners already in place, such as Charades, Dugong Films (Giacomo's existing producers in Italy), and Donten & Lacroix in Poland. We brought Belgium (Panache Productions, already Giacomo's partner on another project) into the equation, and repatriated sets to France to maintain greater artistic control and increase financing possibilities.

The promise of a distinctly original film convinced KMBO, Canal+ and Ciné+ (whose support was decisive), the national funds of each country, and then Eurimages, to get on board.

The shooting, postponed for the first time because of the pandemic, finally started in the fall of 2021.

A world film

The film was shot in Île de France, Reunion Island and Poland. The image post-production took place between Belgium, Italy and France. The sound post-production was done in Italy and France. The technical team and the cast are of 14 different nationalities, from the Ivory Coast to Croatia through Germany and Nigeria.

Casting on five territories by eight people was carried out over two years. Morr Ndiaye, who Giacomo met through a documentary of his Italian producers Dugong, is acting for the first time, while it is only the second appearance on screen of Laetitia Ky, a feminist afropunk artist. Franz Rogowski, who is also a dancer in addition to being the formidable actor we know, and the great director of photography, Hélène Louvart, have been faithful allies throughout, even when the possibility of the film became uncertain.

Other valued artistic collaborators joined the adventure, such as the world-renowned electronic music artist Vitalic, who signed on here in only his 2nd film soundtrack (astonishing considering the visual power that emanates from his pieces). For the dance scenes in the Niger Delta and in France, Giacomo wanted to work with Qudus Onikeku, a Nigerian choreographer who draws inspiration from traditional dances and infuses them with contemporary influences. Qudus was also a consultant throughout the preparation of the film for the sequences in Nigeria, along with other specialists for all questions of artistic direction (costumes, music in particular).

Despite the years of challenges and difficulties, Giacomo carried this film with precision and ambition to the end: 33 days of shooting in three territories, then almost a year of post-production, image and sound, not letting go of anything and pushing the elements to the nearest photogram.

A hallucinatory journey

Political and pop, dark and luminous, imbued with a magical realism, Giacomo makes us share the experience of otherness.

The two destinies that we follow are those of young men in search of a better future.

Alex: a lonely refugee with the hope of a European passport. Jomo: a committed revolutionary, fighting for the survival of his village.

Two youths that are sacrificed, that are smashed against each other.

But against all odds, and beyond the finitude of the bodies, both lead a battle to live free, to exist in the noblest sense of the term, with the same emotional commitment.

Disco Boy is a war film against war; a film about brotherhood.

By deploying all the possibilities offered by the medium of cinema, Giacomo allows his characters to find a path to salvation in their initiatory quest, up to the dance floor of a nightclub, to the rhythms of electro music: this is the outcome of this hallucinatory journey.

- Lionel Massol & Pauline Seigland

FILM TEAM

Director & Writer - GIACOMO ABBRUZZESE

Giacomo Abbruzzese was born in 1983 in Taranto, southern Italy, and lives and works between Paris and Madrid. A graduate of France's Le Fresnoy, his short films were selected and awarded in many international festivals including Oberhausen, Palm Springs, Clermont-Ferrand, Viennale, Mar del Plata, Tampere, Indielisboa, Nouveau Cinéma Montreal, Winterthur, Angers, Torino, and Leeds. They have been broadcast on such TV channels as Canal+, Arte, France3, France2, Sky Art, and SVT. Giacomo was an Artist-in-Residence at the Cannes Film Festival Cinéfondation, the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris and at the Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival.

In 2022, he was nominated for a César Award for his documentary *America* and completed his first feature film, *Disco Boy*, a France-Italy-Belgium-Poland coproduction, starring Franz Rogowski.

FILMOGRAPHY

I Santi

30 min, fiction, 2021

* Arte TV

Rome International Film Festival (Italy) - Best Short Film

Cinemed Montpellier (France) - Audience Award

Coté Court (France) - Jury Special Mention

Palm Springs Int. ShortFest (United States), La Cinémathèque de Paris, Festival de Contis, Festival Tous Courts (France), Svaneti Int. Film Festival (Georgia), MedFilm Festival (Italy)

America

59 min, documentary, 2020

* Tenk *CNC Quality ward

Nominated for the César Awards - Best Documentary

Laceno d'oro (Italy) - Audience Award

Milan Gold Award - Best Film

Pancevo Film Festival (Serbia) - Jury Special Mention

Cinemed Montpellier, La Rochelle Cinéma (France), Biografilm Festival, Monde Fest, Vicoli Corti (Italy), In the Palace (Bulgaria)

Fame

57 min, documentary, France-Italy, 2017

* France 2 * Sky Art Italie *CNC Quality Award * Etoile SCAM

Biografilm Festival, Bologne, Italy - Audience Award

Muscat Film Festival, Oman - Best Documentary Award

Milano Film Festival, Italy - Closing Film

Schermo dell'Arte Florence, Italy - Opening Film

Mar del Plata (Argentina), Bergamo Film Meeting (Italy), Festa do cinema italiano Lisboa (Portugal), Lichter Filmfest, Neisse Film festival (Germany)

Programmed at the Museum of Mart Rovereto (Italy)

Stella Maris

27 min, fiction, France-Italy, 2014

* Canal+ * SVT

Cinemed Montpellier, France - Canal Plus Award

Kustendorf, Serbia - Best Short Film Award

Ciudad de Soria, Spain Special Jury Award

Premiers Plans Angers, France - Best Musical Creation Award

Villeurbanne, France - Industry Award

Contis, France - Special Jury Award

Clermont-Ferrand, Festival Européen du film court de Brest (France), Leeds (UK), Curtas Vila do Conde (Portugal), Next (Romania), 2016 César Awards selection

This is the way

27 min, docu-fiction, France, 2014

Pancevo Film Festival, Serbia - Best Documentary Award

Coté Court Pantin, France - Experimental Competition

Regard sur le Court Métrage au Saguenay (Canada), Torino Film Festival (Italy),
Mecal Barcelona (Spain), Bergamo Film Meeting (Italy)

Fireworks

21 min, fiction, France-Italy, 2011

* France 3 * Sky Art Italie * SVT *

Pacific Voice Japon Premiers Plans d'Angers, France - Student Award

Nastri d'Argento, The Italian Film Critics Award - Jury Special Mention

Milano Film Festival, Italy - Jury Special Mention

Clermont-Ferrand (France), Viennale (Austria), Indielisboa (Portugal), Tampere
(Finland), Wintherthur (Switzerland), Leeds (UK), Molodist (Ukraine), Torino Film
Festival (Italy)

Archipel

23 min, fiction, France, 2010

Torino Film Festival, Italy – Best Short Film Award + Avanti! Award

Oberhausen (Germany), Nouveau cinéma de Montréal (Canada), Dubai Film
Festival (UAE), Belo Horizonte (Brazil), Premiers Plans d'Angers (France)

Programmed at the museums of Macro in Rome and at the MUCEM in Marseille

Cinematographer - HÉLÈNE LOUVART

Hélène Louvart is a prolific French cinematographer with over a hundred feature film credits globally. Among her earlier credits are Agnès Varda's *The Beaches of Agnès*, Wim Wenders' 3D documentary *Pina* (Oscar nominated for Best Documentary Feature), Alice Rohrwacher's *The Wonders* (awarded the 2014 Cannes Film Festival's Grand Jury Prize), and the Greek film *Xenia* by Panos H Koutras (selected for Un Certain Regard in 2014).

In 2018, she had two further films selected for the Cannes Film Festival: *Happy as Lazzaro*, again with Alice Rohrwacher, and Jaime Rosales' *Petra*. That same year, H  l  ne was nominated for Best Cinematography at the Independent Spirit Awards for Eliza Hittman's *Beach Rats*. She also shot Karim Ainouz's *Invisible Life*, winner of the award for Best Film in Un Certain Regard at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival, and *Rocks*, directed by Sarah Gavron, for which she received a BIFA nomination for Best Cinematography.

H  l  ne teamed up once more with Eliza Hittman in 2019 to shoot *Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Always*, which won Berlin Film Festival's Silver Bear in 2020, and for which she was nominated for a Spirit Award. That same year she also shot *The Story of a New Name* with Alice Rohrwacher.

In 2021, she shot Maggie Gyllenhaal's directorial debut *The Lost Daughter*, starring Olivia Colman, and Jessie Buckley, which won the awards for Best Feature and Best Director at the Spirit Awards. Her other feature, Antoneta Alamat Kusijanovi  's *Murina*, also won Cam  ra d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

The following year, she teamed up with Karim Ainouz again on *Firebrand*, a period drama with Alicia Vikander as Catherine Parr and Jude Law as Henry VIII, which was followed by two films with Alice Rohrwacher: the short *Le Pupille* (nominated for Best Short at the 2023 Academy Awards), and the feature *La Chimera* with Josh O'Connor in the lead.

H  l  ne is currently working with Israeli director Eran Riklis on *Reading Lolita in Tehran*.

Music - VITALIC

For twenty years, French producer and composer Vitalic has been redefining the notion of electro, employing his inimitable, energetic and melodic hand with tracks that have become classics of club culture. His powerful and unique music

is defined by a rich mix of disco, electro, new-wave, and EBM references, punk-rock, rave sounds and power-pop with unstoppable melodies.

Some of the biggest names in music have asked him for remixes: Daft Punk, Björk, Paul Kalkbrenner, Royksopp, Moby, Amadou & Mariam, Etienne Daho, Indochine, Jean-Michel Jarre, and, most recently, Mylène Farmer.

Vitalic's productions have been used in campaigns for prestigious fashion houses such as Louis Vuitton, Guerlain and Chanel. They have also been used in numerous feature films, series and TV commercials.

He also performs under other aliases such as Dima for purely techno projects, and KOMPROMAT (EBM project as a duet with Rebeka Warrior).

Choreographer - QUDUS ONIKEKU

Qudus Onikeku is a world-renowned Nigerian choreographer, artist, researcher, innovator, and social impact engineer, who subliminally uses art for non-art outcomes. His artistic practice intersects between his interest in visceral body movements, kinesthetic memory, disruptive practices, and finding new forms for performances that aren't Eurocentric approaches. He embraces an artistic vision and a futurist practice that both respects and challenges Yoruba culture and African diaspora dance forms. His substantial body of acclaimed work ranges from solos to group works, as well as artist-to-artist collaborations with visual artists, architects, musicians, writers, filmmakers, multimedia artists, data scientists, and technologists.

Qudus has been a favorite on major international stages, biennials, and festivals including the Venice Biennale, Biennale de Lyon, Festival d'Avignon, Roma Europa, TED Global, Torino Danza, Kalamata Dance Festival, Dance Umbrella, Festival TransAmerique, and Centre Pompidou. He has been a visiting professor of dance at the University of California Davis and Columbia College Chicago,

and is currently the first “Maker in Residence” at The Center for Arts, Migration and Entrepreneurship of the University of Florida.

MAIN CAST

FRANZ ROGOWSKI

Franz Rogowski is an award-winning German actor of international renown. He most recently starred as Hans in the critically acclaimed *Great Freedom*, which premiered at the Cannes Festival, and in Gabriele Mainetti's *Freaks Out*, which won the Leoncino D'Oro Award at the Venice Film Festival. Other notable credits include Christian Petzold's *Transit*, *Undine* and Terrence Malick's epic *A Hidden Life*. Franz is perhaps best known for *Victoria*, *Love Steaks* and *In the Aisles*, for which he won the Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role at the 2018 German Film Awards. Franz has also won the EFP Shooting Star award at the Berlin International Film Festival. He will next be seen in Ira Sachs' *Passages*, which is premiering at the Sundance Film Festival. Next up will be *Luzifer*, directed by Peter Brunner, and A24's *Wizards*, directed by David Michod and produced by PlanB/See-Saw Films.

MORR NDIAYE

Morr Ndiaye was born in Gambia in 2000. At the age of fifteen he left Africa for Europe, like many others, in search of a better future. **After a seven-month journey, he reached Libya where he was caught by Libyan guerrillas and taken into a detention center controlled by Nigerians.** He finally landed in Sicily where he was placed in a reception center for underage boys. It was there that Morr participated in a documentary project that involved unaccompanied foreign minors making a participatory film shot with their smartphones.

The documentary was produced by Dugong, the Italian production company that had been producing Giacomo Abbruzzese's work. It was at a screening of

the film in Paris that the director noticed Morr for the first time. He was deeply moved by the way of Morr spoke, his sensitivity, and the mixture of strength and fragility he saw in him. It was the beginning of an adventure where Giacomo had to first convince Morr to interpret the role of the Nigerian Jomo, which was a challenge given the nightmarish memories that haunted him from the Libyan experience. Meeting after meeting, casting after casting, Morr today is Jomo.

LAËTITIA KY

Laëtitia Ky is an Ivorian artist and activist born in 1996 in Abidjan. In love with African culture, her personal research on the subject made her discover an Africa with an impressive aesthetic, inspiring and original in every way, especially in terms of hair. She realised that hair could represent a means of expression for her. The hair sculptures she creates on her long braids, and photographs afterwards, convey a message of self-love, gender equality, acceptance of differences, and tolerance.

Her popularity boomed when one of her photo series, featuring her hair sculpted into the shape of hands, went viral worldwide. It led her to becoming the first winner of the influencer section of the famous Elite Model Look contest and she is now signed to the Elite international modeling and talent agency.

In addition to hairdressing, fashion, painting and content creation, she is interested in cinema and made her film debut in 2019 playing the role of "the queen" in *La nuit des rois* by Philippe Lacôte. *Disco Boy* is her second film project.

LEON LUCEV

Leon Lučev (born 1970 in Šibenik) is a Croatian actor. He had his feature film debut in Vinko Brešan's 1996 comedy *How the War Started on My Island*. Since then, he has amassed lead roles in numerous high-profile European films, including *Sex, Drink and Bloodshed* (2004), *What Is a Man Without a Moustache?* (2005), *Grbavica* (2006), *The Melon Route* (2006), *Behind the Glass* (2008), *On the*

Path (2010), *Silent Sonata* (2011), *Vegetarian Cannibal* (2012), *The Miner* (2017), *Men Don't Cry* (2017), Cannes Fortnight selection *The Load* (2018), and the Cannes Camera d'Or winning *Murina* (2021). He was awarded the Heart of Sarajevo two times, for *Buick Riviera* in 2008 and *The Load* in 2018.

Apart from his film work, he regularly performs in the Croatian National Theatre in Rijeka. He provides the voice of Lightning McQueen in the Croatian dub of the *Cars* franchise (2006-2017) and voiced Nigel in the Croatian-language version of *Finding Nemo* (2003).

MATTEO OLIVETTI

Matteo Olivetti was born in 1990 in Chatham, England. Son to a British mother and an Italian father, he spent his childhood in Italy, where he started to act at a young age, starring as 'Elia' in the successful Italian television series *Giorni da Leone*, and as 'Francesco' in the series *Incantesimo*. In 2017, Matteo was chosen by the D'Innocenzo Brothers to play the leading role of 'Mirko' in their debut feature drama *La terra dell'abbastanza (Boys Cry)*, which premiered at the 2018 Berlin Film Festival. The film went on to win numerous awards on the festival circuit and Matteo received widespread acclaim for his performance. In 2021 he acted in Michela Cescon's film noir *Occhi Blu (Blue Eyes)* and in the Disney's cult series *Boris*.

CAST

Franz Rogowski (Aleksi)

Morr Ndiaye (Jomo)

Laëtitia Ky (Udoka)

Leon Lučev (Paul)

Matteo Olivetti (Francesco)

Robert Więckiewicz (Gavril)

Michał Balicki (Mikhail)

CREW

Director: Giacomo Abbruzzese

Screenplay: Giacomo Abbruzzese

Cinematography: Hélène Louvart

Editing: Fabrizio Federico, Ariane Boukerche, Giacomo Abbruzzese

Music: Vitalic

Sound Design: Marta Billingsley, Piergiorgio De Luca, Simon Apostolou

Sound: Guilhem Donzel

Production Design: Esther Mysius

Costumes: Pauline Jacquard, Marina Monge

Make-Up: Géraldine Belbeoch

Assistant Director: Lucas Loubarette

Production Manager: Didier Abot

Producers: Lionel Massol, Pauline Seigland

Co-Producers: Giulia Achilli, Marco Alessi, André Logie, Gaëtan David, Maria Blicharska, Arno Moria

Associate Producer: Juliette Sol (Stromboli Films)

Production: Films Grand Huit (Paris)

Co-Production: Dugong Films (Rome), Panache Productions (Brussels), Donten & Lacroix (Warsaw), DIVISION (Paris)

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FILM INFORMATION

Original Title: *Disco Boy*

Title: *Disco Boy*

Genre: Drama

Country: France/Italy/Belgium/Poland

Language: French, Russian, Polish, Igbo, Nigerian English

Year: 2023

Duration: 91 min.

Picture: Color

Aspect Ratio: 1.85

Sound: 5.1 for the DCP, stereo otherwise

Available Format: DCP, ProRes, h264

WORLD SALES

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