

CINEMIEN Film & Video Distribution
Amsteldijk 10
1074 HP Amsterdam
t. 020 - 577 6010
www.cinemien.nl
info@cinemien.nl

presenteert:

BENZINA



Een film van Monica Stambrini

Officiële Selectie
Toronto International Film Festival

Beeldmateriaal en persmappen van alle actuele Cinemien titels
kunnen gedownload van onze site: www.cinemien.nl

Link door naar PERS en vul in;
gebruikersnaam: 'pers', wachtwoord: 'cinemien'

BENZINA - synopsis

Teder maar dramatisch verhaal over twee hevig op elkaar verliefde meiden van begin twintig; de chaotisch levende, familieloze Stella en de conventionele Lenni.

Lenni is het benauwende leven bij haar moeder ontvlucht en bij Stella's benzinepomp op het Italiaanse platteland terechtgekomen. De twee beleven een vurige liefdesrelatie als Lenni's moeder opduikt om haar dochter tot rede te brengen en mee terug te nemen naar huis. In de ruzie die ontstaat valt Lenni's moeder, stoot haar hoofd aan de balie van de pompwinkel en valt dood neer. Omdat ze een grote hoeveelheid geld bij zich draagt realiseren Lenni en Stella zich dat ze van moord verdacht zullen worden en in paniek beslissen de meiden het lichaam te dumpen op een vuilnisbelt. Met Stella's hond Clio en het dode lichaam van Lenni's moeder gaan ze op de vlucht richting Milaan en Tunesië. Een wanhopige nacht volgt waarin een stel dronken, agressieve jongelui en de stem van Lenni's moeder de twee meiden blijven achtervolgen.

"The petrol station? The happy oasis where they can always be found, without searching for them. The real escape is their love, simple, nearly childish, like the rainbow that appears and shivers in the petrol-covered mud puddles at the service station." - regisseur Monica Stambrini



"Intensely and proudly romantic" - The New York Times

Benzina

90 min / 35mm / Italiaans gesproken / Italië 2001 / Kijkwijzer: 12 jaar

Nederlandse theatrale distributie: Cinemien www.cinemien.nl

Belgische theatrale distributie: ABC Distribution www.abc-distribution.be

DVD uitbreng : Homescreen www.homescreen.nl www.homescreen.be

BENZINA - crew

Regie : Monica Stambrini
Scenario : Monica Stambrini, Anne Riitta Coccone, Elena Stancanelli
Gebaseerd op de roman van : Elena Stancanelli
Camera : Fabio Cianchetti
Montage : Paola Freddi
Muziek : Massimo Zamboni, Luca Rossi, Simone Filippi



BENZINA - cast

Stella : Maya Sansa
Lenni : Regina Orioli
Moeder : Mariella Valentini
Padre Gabriele : Luigi Maria Burruolo
Pippi : Chiara Conti
Sandro : Marco Quaglia
Filippo : Pietro Ragusa

BENZINA - over regisseur Monica Stambrini

Monica Stambrini (1970, Mountain View, California) verhuisde als kind van de VS naar Milaan, Italië. Daar studeerde ze filmregie aan de CFP. Sindsdien werkte ze in verschillende functies met een scala aan Italiaanse regisseurs en draaide ze *The Making of* van *L'Assedio* (1998) van Bernardo Bertolucci.

Tussen 1991 en 1998 regisseerde ze een groot aantal korte speelfilms, zowel op film als op video, en was haar werk op een groot aantal Italiaanse en internationale festivals te zien. Tussen 1999 en 2000 maakte ze zes documentaires voor RaiSatArte. Benzina is haar eerste lange speelfilm.



Filmografie:

Rinvenimenti (korte film, 1991)

Riproduzioni (korte film, 1992)

Epitaffio (middenlange film, 1993)

Ambliopia-Punti di vista (korte film, 1993)

Vorrei urlare! (documentaire, 1994)

Animali domestici (korte film, 1995)

Monique publique (korte film, 1997)

Sshhh... (korte film, 1998)

Cent'anni di solitudine (videoclip, 1998)

Raccontoduepunti (korte film, 1998)

Punti di vista - Steve della Casa (documentaire, tv, 1999)

10minuti con George Segal (documentaire, tv, 1999)

Out of the House - Gerard Richter (documentaire, tv, 1999)

Made in Milan - Conversazione con Michele De Lucchi (documentaire, tv, 2000)

Conversazione con Vico Magistretti (documentaire, tv, 2000)

Conversazione con Marco Zanuso (documentaire, tv, 2000)

Benzina (2001)

Director takes an Italian lesbian road trip

- by Loren King

"So many lesbian films have a murder implied here and there. It's already a sort of cliché, or 'genre.' But of course, I had no idea what the reaction of the audience would have been. The unusual feeling I got is that they liked it! Especially girls," says the writer/director -- who, though at ease with gay sexuality, identifies herself as "openly heterosexual."

"I was very pleased, particularly touched. They came up to me thanking me for the film. There are still so few stories in which lesbian identity and love can be reflected. Openly, like in life."

"Although Benzina does have quite a dark subject matter, personified in the dead mother, most of all it's the love story of Lenni and Stella," says Stambrini. "This was my point, always, while working on this story. And I was particularly pleased to see that that was how the lesbian audience read it, as a troubled and tender love story."

Stambrini drew on a number of sources to create the striking visual motifs in the film. "With all the presence of night and fire [in the story], I couldn't not think of [David] Lynch," she says. "But also of the Coen brothers' 'Blood Simple' -- the clumsiness about homicide, the noir. And then the final explosion: The best explosion I had seen in film was Antonioni's 'Zabriskie Point.' So in Benzina, there's practically a quotation of it. I was trying to be playful and non-dramatic with that explosion. I never really wanted [Stella and Lenni] to die."

Stambrini studied directing in Milan. Throughout the 1990s, she made numerous short films, including several that played the gay and lesbian festival circuit. In 1998, she shot a film about the making of "L'Assedio" by legendary Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci. Her list of favorite directors, in addition to Lynch and Antonioni, includes such international names as Kubrick, Fassbinder, Bergman, Scorsese, Almodovar, Egoyan, Cronenberg, Wong Kar Wai, Wilder, Tarkovski, Capra, Hitchcock, Cukor and Campion.

Stambrini isn't sure what her next film will be. "Right now, I am isolated on a Greek island, working on an idea of my own," she says. "I hope this will be my new project, the feared and loathed second feature film."

BENZINA - production notes

Benzina, the directorial debut of **Monica Stambrini**, is a lesbian thriller based on the novel by Elena Stancanelli. Stambrini studied filmmaking in Milan and is known for her militant gay short films that were presented at festivals like Bellaria, and at Milan and San Francisco gay and lesbian festivals.



Stambrini calls *Benzina* "a static road movie." A petrol pump owner, Stella (Maya Sansa) murders her lover Lenni (Regina Orioli)'s mother by mistake (in the book, it was intentional). Lenni is convinced that she is being pursued by her mother's ghost and becomes catatonic after hearing her dead mother's voice. *"It is typical of the female psyche to be aware of your mother's ghost. I'd have trouble counting the times I've saved my mother instead of killing her. Symbolically, of course. And I am still not free of her,"* Stambrini informs us. In the film, the mother (Mariella Valentini) is a potent OTT sex symbol; all tight clothes, high heels and lots of make-up. *"I don't subscribe to the realist school. If anything, I am surreal,"* says Stambrini, who worked on this project for a number of years.

The lesbian aspects have been toned down but they still manage to upset some men. *"All these lesbians kissing is really boring,"* said one. *"Given that this is a love story between two women, it was inevitable that there be some love scenes with kissing,"* is Stambrini's angry response. She is right to be upset. It seems that films about gay women are more difficult to accept. *"Perhaps the men feel left out,"* continued the director. *"Or they envy us."* This is a genre film about how best to get rid of a dead body and Stambrini has included numerous references to the work of David Lynch, the Coen brothers, Jane Campion's *Sweetie* and *Go Fish*. *"I tried to avoid being provocative or voyeuristic. There is nothing sordid about the two lovers' sexuality. It is an innocent love between two girls in their twenties"* says Stambrini.

Benzina is less blatantly militant as one of the protagonist, Maya Sansa (Stella) tells us *"the sex scenes were more highly developed in the first screenplay I read. They were also much harder. I was still at the Academy and had just made Marco Bellocchio's La Balia (the wet nurse), a completely different character, and quite frankly, Benzina scared me."*



What was it like working on this all-female set, Regina?

One reason why I agreed to play Lenni was that I had never worked with a woman director before. I don't want to generalise but all the characters I've ever played resemble one another - and every film was directed by a man. Usually they ask me to play a shy timid little animal-like person. Monica saw another side of me: the little animal that realises it has a pair of sharp teeth and can bite.

Lenni is persecuted by her mother's ghost...

Her ghostly presence allows Lenni to finally come to terms with the difficult relationship they had while her mother was alive. Lenni is allowed to grow and becomes stronger. She becomes a woman in her own right, and not just someone's daughter. Unlike Maya. After just ten minutes you know all there is to know about Stella. Lenni evolves during the course of the film. This is probably the first time I ever immersed myself so totally in my character. I even worked on the way I walk and adopted the rigid gait of an alien. I am quite pleased with myself.

Tell us this film's strong points.

I adore the dark atmosphere of the petrol pump and the rubbish dump. But most especially this film tells a story of lesbian love as if it was a "normal" love story and without the morbid voyeurism that all too often typifies contemporary society. This kind of film is rarely seen in cinema, especially in Italy. I hope gay and lesbian audiences will like the film.

Laura Muscardin attempted something similar with *Giorni - Days*. Is it a coincidence that both films were directed by women?

Perhaps women are better at portraying the sexuality that derives from love than men are.

Did you enjoy shooting the lesbian love scenes with Maya?

It was more embarrassing than shooting a sex scene with a male actor. Maya made it easy because we are friends and knew exactly what was required of these roles. We protected each other. I knew what she wanted and didn't want to do and the same was true for Maya. Of course we were tempted to giggle but kissing a woman's not all that bad: for once you don't get your face scratched by a beard but encounter skin that's as soft as yours. I am heterosexual and very proud of having played a lesbian. I would like to dedicate this film to those people who are discriminated against because of their sexual orientation.

Were you at all influenced by *Thelma and Louise*?

That is one of the films I saw with Monica and Maya. Our real reference points for this film were *Heavenly Creatures* and *Boys Don't Cry*. That is where we got the idea for a film with just a few characters but a strong storyline.

The New York Times

- reviewed by *Stephen Holden*

The ominous landscape in Monica Stambrini's surreal road movie "Gasoline" is a far cry from the inviting Old World paradise depicted in so many films from Italy. An oil-slick wasteland of highways, gas stations and sleazy roadside clubs, it resembles the American Southwest as portrayed in low-budget Hollywood thrillers, where innocent travelers find themselves terrorized by surly bikers. It is across such menacing terrain that the movie's fugitive lesbian lovers, Stella (Maya Sansa) and Lenni (Regina Orioli), flee with the dead body of Lenni's mother (Mariella Valentini) in their car trunk. The mother, a haughty, elegant matron has tracked down her wayward daughter at the gas station run by Stella, where the young women have been carrying on a volatile, furtive relationship. If the plot of "Gasoline" suggests a patchwork assemblage of elements from better-known movies, Ms. Stambrini, the director and co-writer (it's her debut), charges it with enough originality and character development to justify the resemblances.

The defiant fugitives resemble both Thelma and Louise and the lesbian lovers from "Bound" (and also those from "Mulholland Drive"), while their frustrated efforts to dispose of the corpse recall "The Trouble With Harry" (although "Gasoline" has none of Hitchcock's teasing humor).

The movie takes on a surreal dimension once Lenni is addressed by the voice of the corpse in remarks that are alternately complaining and affectionate and that ultimately prick her conscience. By the end of the trip she has outgrown her childlike indecisiveness, and her relationship with tough, combative Stella has tightened into a you-and-me-against-the-world bond.

"Gasoline," is tautly acted, fairly sexy and atmospheric. Its vision of Stella and Lenni as defiant, doomed outsiders desperately racing toward an elusive paradise on a treacherous highway may be bleak, but it's also intensely and proudly romantic.



Monica Stambrini's offbeat, stylish "Benzina" mixes modern and noir influences to create a distinctive tone, making the young-lovers-in-trouble premise feel fresh. Stambrini's thematic and visual influences recall such disparate sources as Alfred Hitchcock, David Lynch and, of course, "Thelma and Louise." The Lynchian light-and-dark motif is rendered especially well, as the film mixes moments of real fear (with echoes of "Straw Dogs" when the women are stalked by violent strangers) and giddy, if twisted, moments (such as Lenni's newly found empowerment when she brandishes her dead mother's pistol-shaped cigarette lighter). The film's finale is a moment of visual panache that establishes Stambrini as a director to watch.