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TORONTO INTERNATIONAL  
FILM FESTIVAL 2024

DIRECTED BY PETER KEREKES

# WISHING ON A STAR



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a film by **Peter Kerekes**

**99 minutes - Italy, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Austria, Croatia - 2024**  
**Aspect Ratio: 16/9 // Picture: Color // Sound: 5.1 // Screening Format: DCP**  
**In Italian and Friulian with English subtitles**

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# CREDITS

**Directed by**

Peter Kerekes

**With**

Luciana de Leoni D'Asparedo

**and**

Valentina Angeli  
Alessandra Fornasier  
Barbara Lutman  
Giovanni Rugo  
Adriana Vangone  
Giuliana Vangone

**Story**

Erica Barbiani

**Written by**

Erica Barbiani, Peter Kerekes

**Produced by**

Erica Barbiani, Lucia Candelpergher  
Peter Kerekes, Anna Mach Rumanová  
Ralph Wieser  
Vít Schmarc  
Vanja Jambrovic, Tibor Keser  
Stefano Centini

**Director of Photography**

Martin Kollar

**Editor**

Marek Šulík

**Sound recordist**

Michal Gábor

**Music Composer**

Lucia Chuzková

**Produced by**

VIDEOMANTE

**In co-production with**

KEREKESFILM  
ARTCAM FILMS  
MISCHIEF FILMS  
RESTART

**With**

VOLOS FILMS

**In co-production with**

RTVS Radio and Television Slovakia

**In association with**

ARTE France - La Lucarne  
YLE

**With the support of**

Ministero della cultura - Direzione Generale Cinema e  
audiovisivo  
Fondo per l'Audiovisivo del Friuli Venezia Giulia  
Eurimages  
Slovak Audiovisual Fund  
Czech Film Fund  
Croatian Audiovisual Centre  
Friuli Venezia Giulia Film Commission  
JI.HLAVA / JB FILMS  
South Moravian Film Fund  
Creative Europe MEDIA



## SYNOPSIS

Luciana, a Neapolitan astrologer, has a method to make her clients' wishes come true. All they need to do is take a trip on their birthday to a precise destination to be reborn under a new sky. Whether it's Taipei, Beirut, or a nearby village, during these birthday journeys, the protagonists will go through unexpected transformations to help them discover what they truly desire.



## INTERVIEW WITH PETER KEREKES

**The original concept for the film came from producer Erica Barbiani. How did you first become involved in the project?**

As with most of my film concepts and collaborations, it began with good food. An Austrian producer, Ralph Wieser, invited me to numerous dinners in the span of three years. At the end of each one of these meetings he would very gently and subtly suggest I make a movie about an Italian astrologer. Every time I declined. For one, because at the time I was convinced the theme of astrology belonged only to the pages of a tabloid and not on a movie screen. At the time I had already finished a movie about the history of the 20th Century through the eyes of military cooks, and I was in the process of filming a documentary about censorship in prisons. In short, I was being a snob. However after a few good meals I was persuaded to meet with Luciana. Suddenly my stubbornness seemed laughable. I was mesmerized by her character and thought it a sin not to make a movie about her.

**The film continues on from your previous work in how it blends documentary with storytelling. Can you talk about how this informs the filming and editing of *Wishing On A Star*?**

The storytelling aspect of my movies wasn't intentional. From my dad, who came home with all the new stories from work, to my wife who made up bed-time stories for our kids, I developed my love for listening to different anecdotes and lives of others. It became a habit of mine, to listen in on stranger's conversations. Something that still hasn't changed. An older couple arguing about what they should order, a mother scolding her child, I find it fascinating. People write their own stories. I just like to listen and if possible record them for others to hear. Editing then becomes a grueling process of cutting out all the irrelevant parts, even if you are already attached to them.

**Before you worked on the film, how did you feel about astrology? And has this perspective changed since making the film?**

Before the filming of this movie I tried to avoid the conversation topic of esoteric experiences. If it came up in conversations I found my mind floating elsewhere. Now I listen, with bated breath, proven once again, that every story you listen to (whether you believe it or not) is worth it. You never know what your next film will be about. I don't believe in astrology. But I do believe in Luciana.

**The film has a lot to say about the conflict between what we desire, compared to what our families and loved ones want for us. Why was this subject important in making *Wishing On A Star*?**

At a risk of sounding cliché, movies are reflections of ourselves. Whether it is subconscious or intentional, the stories we try to record always bear a piece of us. I am an obedient son. A husband trying not to disappoint his wife. An older sibling that always wants the best for the younger. And I am also a father, who impatiently waits for the calls of his daughters. Somehow I found myself in each one of the characters in one way or the other, despite all of them being vastly different.

**The film contains a lot of subtle humour in a style similar to auteurs such as Roy Andersson. How did you find the balance between showing the real emotions of your actors, and also creating this sense of humour that runs through the film?**

I do not know! I would like to know, but I do not have a recipe for this.

**The film shows characters who make trips on their birthday to be reborn, but it also shows people who create 'symbolic' trips to achieve the same thing. Is it necessary to travel far to change ourselves, or do you feel that the inner journey is more important?**

In all of the religions a follower is destined to go on a long journey to deepen their faith and find their true selves. Pilgrimage to Rome, Santiago de Compostela or the immersion into the river Ganga. Even if you are an atheist you have to admit that there is something about traveling to a destination you dreamed of. It can be a journey by foot, plane or even city transport. The physical act of moving from one place to another



somehow gives your mind the illusion of moving forward. You feel yourself change with every ticket stamp and bus transfer, because every experience is somehow new in a different setting. The sense of being reborn after you finally got to your desired terminus. However, as Alexandro Jodorowsky writes, such magical rituals can be also performed at home, if realized with enough conviction of course.

**The film has some wonderful characters - how did you choose who to include in the film? The actors were filmed over an extended period of time, have they seen the film since it has been completed?**

We had many research trips, during which I spent a lot of time with Luciana, observing her work and clientele. I saw many wonderful characters and it wasn't easy at all to choose only five. Especially with my story hoarding tendencies. Thankfully we had a great advantage by starting this project during COVID-19 and having problems with financing, along with many other obstacles. That is to say we had a lot of time to mull over all the possible characters and ways we wanted to direct this movie.

All the protagonists saw the movie and were very satisfied with their stories. I hope the audience will as well.

**In what sense is the Italian setting important to the subject and the characters? Did you have a different perspective given that you come from outside of the country?**

I think this movie couldn't possibly be made anywhere else. I don't know a country that has such strong and transparent family bonds as Italy. There is also something so authentic about Italians in front of a camera and how they remain their true self. And, of course, the food is wonderful and always a crucial point of deciding where I will film next. One amazing



advantage during filming was that I didn't know a word of Italian, so I had no idea what our protagonists were saying. Suddenly I could focus clearly on their hand gestures, body language and facial expressions, without obsessing over if they are saying the right thing. I had a similar experience when I was a child and was placed in a Slovak kindergarten after only speaking Hungarian at home. The only way I could understand what was being said was deduction and focused reading of miming. This skill proved very useful.

**Your previous film, 107 Mothers, won the Best Screenplay award for the Orizzonti section at the Venice Film Festival. How does it feel to return to Venice, and what does it mean to have the support of the festival?**

During the premiere of the movie "107 Mothers", I was already immersed in the filming of "Wishing on a Star". Naturally, I also invited Luciana to see the movie at the Venice premiere. She met with Irina, the main protagonist of "107 Mothers" and the moment I saw them together I felt as if my past and future movies met. I am so grateful that this mystical festival connection endured. The movie, "107 Mothers", was the first movie of the independent Slovak Republic to be presented in the Venice Film Festival. From then on, every year there is a Slovak director present at the festival. I think "it is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."



# INTERVIEW WITH ERICA BARBIANI

## **How did the idea for *Wishing On A Star* begin?**

The first time I heard about birthday trips was in 1995. Viviana, my maternal aunt, had left for a mysterious vacation in Cape Verde to celebrate her 40th birthday. Thanks to this trip, suggested by an astrologer – or so the family rumored – she would finally find the man of her life. At the time, I was 17 years old, and I followed this strange trip of Aunt Viviana with amazement. This sense of amazement, mixed with the skepticism that characterizes my nature, persisted throughout the years until the moment I thought, "Wait, it would be fun to make a documentary out of this." But I was an author and a producer, and I needed the right director.

## **Why did you approach Peter to direct the film?**

Since the story was based on entirely Italian characters, I spent years in Italy searching for a director who could tell this story. But I couldn't find an ironic tone that matched the film I had in mind. Certainly, there were Italian directors who could work well with comedy, but I was looking for something that was not only ironic but also had a touch of melancholic existentialism. Peter's documentary *Cooking History* kept coming to mind as an example, so why not reaching out? Ralph Wieser, the producer of the film, was a dear friend of mine, so I asked him if he could put me in touch with him.

## **How was your collaboration working together?**

After getting to know many of Luciana's clients in depth and understanding their driving desires, Peter and I envisioned ideal scenes that would best reveal their inner world. However, most of the time, the protagonists were ready to surprise us with something entirely different. But this improvisation is exactly what I love about documentary writing and something I share with Peter: we both get excited when we are hit by something unexpected and we are quick to adapt and tune in.

## **You have had consultations with Luciana yourself - can you share any of your experiences?**

For my birthday, my aunt had offered me yet another consultation with Luciana: So, I went. The astrologer told me that if I went to New Zealand, I would find love and publish the book I was working on. But at that time, I neither had the money nor the desire to go to New Zealand. "If you want to go somewhere closer, I can't give you everything; you have to choose: love or having your novel published?" I chose the book, and the astrologer told me that I could then go to Otranto, in Puglia.



At the time I was supposed to be in Otranto, unfortunately, the car tires got punctured, and I only managed to reach the city the day after my birthday. When I called the astrologer, worried, she told me, "You will publish your novel later than expected, and you'll have problems with your pets."

A few days later, my beloved love-birds flew away, from a window left unwillingly open. Even the book got published later. Is Luciana right, after all? I would love to believe so, but my skeptic nature does allow me to: a typical gemini contradiction.

### **Do you believe in astrology?**

I pride myself on not believing in astrology, yet when I read the traits of the Gemini sign, I find the most frequent criticism I receive: being able to feel strongly about two opposite things. However, isn't this precisely the essence of irony — expressing meaning through contradiction? That resonates with me. So, okay, I admit it, I am a Gemini.

## PETER KEREKES

### DIRECTOR



1973, Košice, Slovakia

Peter Kerekes is a film director, producer and teacher.

He directed & produced “107 mothers“ (2021), “Velvet terrorists”(2013), “Cooking History” (2009) and “66 Seasons” (2003),

Produced the omnibus documentary „Occupation 1968“ and co-produced the films „Stepne“(2023) by Maryna Vroda, Fragile memory „(2022) by Ihor Ivanko, „Caught in the net“ (2020) by Vít Klusák and Barbara Chalupová, „The Wind. Documentary thriller“(2019) by Michal Bielawski

Peter Kerekes is teaching at Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava and at the DocNomads – joint masters in Budapest.

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