

TO DIE FOR  
TANO

a film by Roberta Torre

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# TO DIE FOR TANO

CAST	(Real Life Profession)
Tano Guarrasi	Ciccio Guarino (baker)
Franca Guarrasi	Mimma D. Rosalia (nurse)
Enzo	Enzo Paglino (electrician)
Caterina	Maria Aliotta (housewife)
Modesta	Annamarie Confalone (housewife)
Rosa	Adele Aliotta (housewife)
The Don	Vincenzo di Lorenzo (farm worker, dancer)
Salvo Cicero	Lorenzo La Rosa (stock breeder)
Anna	Francesca Di Cesare (singer)
Zio Filippo	Filippo Teriaca (deli owner)
Maurizio Testa	Maurizio Testa (peddler)

CREW	
Director	Roberta Torre
Screenplay	Roberta Torre, Gianluca Sodaro, Enzo Paglino
Camera	Daniele Cipri
Editor	Giogio Franchini
Music and original songs	Nino D'Angelo
Art Direction	Claudio Russo, Fabrizio Lupo
Costume Design	Antonella Cannarozzi
Choreography	Filippo Scuderi
Produced by	Donatella Palermo, Loes Kamsteeg
Sound	Glauco Puletti, Mauro Lazzaro

## **Awards:**

David di Donatello ("Italian Oscar"): Best Score, Best New Director  
Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists: Best Score, Best Supporting Actresses, Best New Director  
Venice Film Festival: FEDIC, Kodak and Luigi de Laurentis Awards for Director Roberta Torre

## **Festivals:**

Venice Film Festival, Berlin Film Festival, Montreal Film Festival

Running Time: 75 minutes, Color, 35mm  
Italian with English subtitles 1997 Not rated

## **SYNOPSIS**

A Mafia man of honor of the Passo Rigano clan, Tano Guarrasi was famous for his violent, passionate character and his four sisters, all doomed to spinsterhood because of his terrible jealousy. Tano was killed by a Corleonesi clan hit man during the bloody 1988 Mafia war, his death making brief headlines during those somber days.

One of Tano's sisters, Franca Guarrasi, a buxom woman as indomitable as her brother, had always been the object of much gossip due to her carefree attitude and a marked preference for high profile companions. Well into her forties, she decided to get married after Tano's death. Legend has it that Tano's determination to safeguard his sister's virginity continued far beyond the grave and that he returned for her on her wedding day. On such stories the legend of Tano Guarrasi has been built.

The story is told through the people of Palermo and some of his closest relatives. Non-professional actors, people who actually knew Tano Guarrasi, tell Tano's story in music, singing, dancing and playing. To Die For Tano is a Mafia story produced and recounted by people for whom the Mafia is an everyday reality.

The music and songs are by Nino D'Angelo, a hugely popular Italian composer and performer of Neapolitan songs. The Neapolitan roots tradition for music is the real soundtrack to southern Italy's gangster environment. Tano's story unfolds to the rhythms of rock and roll, rap, techno, the waltz, samba and Neapolitan folk songs.

## **Roberta Torre, Director of TO DIE FOR TANO**

### **BIOGRAPHY**

Roberta Torre was born in Milan. In 1990, after receiving a degree in philosophy and graduating from the Scuola di Cinematografia film school in Milan and the Accademia d'Arte Drammatica Paolo Grassi, she moved to Palermo.

During the 1990's, Torre directed several shorts, including "Angelesse" (1991), "Angels with a Twisted Face" (1992), "Short Souls" (1992), "The Train is a Black Beast" (1993), "Can You Feel My Love?" (1994), "Life at Angels-Eye View" (1995) and "Verginella" (1996), that won numerous awards at film festivals in Italy and internationally. She also founded the production company Anonimi & Indipenti.

Torre's breakthrough came with "To Die for Tano," a highly original movie musical that was presented at the Venice Film Festival and received the Luigi De Laurentiis prize for Best First Film as well as several other awards, including two David di Donatello awards ("Italian Oscars") for Best New Director and Best Music for composer Nino D'Angelo and three Silver Ribbons from the Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists for Best New Director, Best Music and Best Supporting Actress.

Torre's next film was "South Side Story" (2000), another musical that retold the story of Romeo and Juliet with a multi-racial cast of hundreds of immigrants, non-professional actors Torre discovered on the street and taught to act, sing and dance. The soundtrack was, among others, by the Italian singer-songwriter Pacifico and Dennis Bovell, arranger for the renowned Caribbean poet Linton Quesi Johnson. In 2002, Torre directed "Angela," a drama that was presented at Directors' Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival and New Directors/New Films in New York. "Angela" marked a radical departure in style, returning to the realism and classical narrative structure of Torre's first documentary-style shorts. Torre's next film, "The Dark Sea," premiered at the Locarno International Film Festival in 2006.

Torre is currently in post-production on her fifth feature, "I baci mai dati," a coming-of age drama about a precocious young girl who claims that she is a miracle worker, set in southern Italy.

## **Nino D'Angelo, Composer, TO DIE FOR TANO**

### **BIOGRAPHY**

Italian singer, composer and actor Nino Angelo (born 1957) is arguably the foremost pop icon to come from Naples. Born to a poor family from the Naples suburbs, D'Angelo quit school at an early age and started taking jobs including ice cream vendor and wedding singer. He was soon acclaimed in local circles for his beautiful voice, and his family raised the money to finance his first single, "A' Storia Mia". The success of this record surpassed all expectations and it was turned into a sceneggiata, a form of popular Neapolitan theatre, thus launching D'Angelo's acting and singing career simultaneously.

His records and plays made him a popular phenomenon with Southern Italian audiences almost overnight and his blonde mop top haircut made his image instantly recognizable. Starting in 1981, he starred in numerous film vehicles made around his persona. D'Angelo's popularity began to spread all over Italy when his 1982 album "A pair of jeans and a T-shirt" sold over a million copies. D'Angelo's fame kept growing through the 1980s. He also became a favorite with immigrant Italian audiences worldwide and he frequently toured internationally. D'Angelo always stressed his Neapolitan roots, the defining element of his persona, both musically and personally.

During the 1990s, D'Angelo acquired a more mature look and new musical direction. He took more creative risks and wrote more personal material. He won a David de Donatello ("Italian Oscar") award for his soundtrack on the film TO DIE FOR TANO. He also wrote a musical and became director of the Naples' Trianon Viviani theatre. Recently, he contributed two songs to the soundtrack of GOMORRAH and stars in the film UNA NOTTE, directed by his son, Toni D'Angelo. To date, D'Angelo has released over 35 albums, selling millions of CDs and records, and starred in over 25 films.

## **Roberta Torre on directing TO DIE FOR TANO:**

“To Die for Tano” was an extraordinary human experience for me and for everyone involved.

All of the actors were non-professionals, people literally off the street, and the environment couldn't have been more authentic. The story of this film is profoundly interwoven with the stories of their lives.

### **Living in Palermo**

I was born in Milan and I came to Palermo by chance. I arrived in 1990 on Christmas day, and I stayed in that city for approximately ten years uninterrupted. Over the course of those years, I asked myself what made me so attached to Palermo, and honestly I haven't found the answer yet. I believe that initially it was the fact that it was so hot that you could spend your life on the street -- a fact that completely transformed the experience of a city and its inhabitants. Then, the reasons changed, but they were still too rational because they were completely true.

### **The Story**

In those years I was always on the street looking for stories and people, and during one of my walks, I met Enzo Paglino, the man who would later become the narrator in “To Die for Tano”. People had told me that he was a man everyone in the neighborhood turned to for many different reasons, and that he knew everyone's history. We became friends and I asked him to tell me the story of his brother-in-law Tanino.

Every time he told me about it, the story changed: one day Tano was a good man, the next day he was a hardened criminal; one day he was a dedicated family man and another day a Don Juan. Thus, I began to see Tano as the protagonist of an operetta rather than the hero of a serious drama.

I wrote the story from Paglino's tales, often in his words, using his way of speaking. Then I met the producer, Donatella Palermo, who immediately sensed the story's potential and embraced the project.

### **The Music**

Then everything happened very quickly, and by chance I met Nino D'Angelo through a mutual friend. He was famous in the streets of Palermo for his songs that told the story of the people. I told him about the film that I wanted to make and asked him if he was interested in composing the music. He knew the milieu very well and was able to create music and lyrics that told the stories of that world.

We worked on the music in the screenplay and he would play the songs for me on the phone and ask me, “Do you like this?” And I would say to him, “Yes, but don't do a tarantella. Do a rap, “Tano's rap”. And thus, “U Rap e Tano” was born.

### **The Actors**

The actors in “Tano” almost all worked at the Vucciria, the famous market in Palermo: fishmongers, butchers, sausage vendors, people who earned money by illegally looking after parked cars, housewives, hairdressers... People who had never had anything to

do with cinema. Therefore the way of directing their performances was unique, and I learned as I went along. This method was helpful to me years later on the films that succeeded "To Die for Tano," as I was able to preserve many things even when I was working with professional actors.

Many of the actors were illiterate, therefore I didn't give them anything to read. And in order to help them understand what they had to say, I referred to the true stories they were living.

Many of the male actors were also delinquents and small-time crooks. For example, the narrator actually stole the lights for the film. He had been involved in robberies and scams, things like that. Others managed to get by, as they say in Palermo. In other words, they worked shady jobs here and there, petty theft, hold-ups, dealing, etc. There were also thieves and purse snatchers, all the dancers in Tano's Rap, all of the guys who worked at the market.

### **Directing the Actors**

The women who were performing in the hair salon were all talking about a wedding. I told them to think about a wedding they had experienced together, maybe a cousin's wedding or the wedding of a distant relative who was very unsympathetic. Thus, the dialogue was born. They repeated it until they no longer had to memorize it, and then we filmed them.

With the women it was generally easier -- the men were often unmanageable. In between takes they would run off to nearby taverns, get drunk and disappear from the set for hours. The PA's were sent out to look for them and when they returned they were inebriated and we had to lean them against the wall and film the scene anyway, hoping that they wouldn't collapse to the ground. Then, they would say their lines off-screen. In short, we had to be ready for everything.

Nevertheless, this was a film that was very well-prepared. We rehearsed the songs and dances for several weeks. The actor who played Tano, a baker, was committed to the dance rehearsals even though he was as fat as an elephant and couldn't walk down a flight of steps without falling each and every time.

In the scene in the hair salon where the women are singing and dancing with swordfish in their hair, I remember that I wanted to have real fish at all costs. This was incredibly difficult, because there were seven or eight enormous swordfish heads and it took two or three hours to transport them from the market to the set and position them properly. They were very heavy and in the end when everything was ready, the women were exhausted from the smell of the fish and their weight. They couldn't stop laughing when they had to dance with these enormous fish on their heads.

### **TO DIE FOR TANO's reception in Italy**

When the film was selected for the Venice Film Festival it was a real adventure. The actors disembarked at the Lido like schoolchildren on a field trip. During the press conference there were hilarious scenes.

Other scenes were much more embarrassing, like when one of the actresses from the hair salon said "it was mafia and fun," opening up a debate as to whether it was appropriate to laugh about the mafia. After the notorious murders of prosecutors Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino by the mafia in the early '90's, it was impossible

to use the words mafia and fun in one sentence, because at that particular time in history it represented -- and still does, but in a different way -- a real open wound for the country. You didn't laugh about the mafia. In the United States it would have been like making jokes about Vietnam at the time when the war had just ended, or right after Watergate.

At one point, the actor who plays the narrator, Enzo Paglino, fell out of a ferry into the Grand Canal. When people tried to pull him out, he was afraid that they were going to punish him and put him in jail. He tried to escape, hiding underwater, in the hedges and wherever he could. It took a long time for us to explain to him that no one wanted to put him in jail, they just wanted to help him. This created a lot confusion with security at the Venice Film Festival.

The actors may have been unmanageable but they certainly were very entertaining.

At the end of the film when the credits started rolling, everyone came out and danced on the stage, and from then on, that happened at every public screening in Italy.

## THE NEW YORK TIMES - MUSIC

### The boy from Naples grows up

By Elisabetta Povoledo

Published: February 20, 2004

MILAN— For a generation of giddy teenage girls who thrilled to his saccharine serenades, the Neapolitan crooner Nino D'Angelo was better known as the "caschetto biondo," the blond mop-top, for the distinctive hairdo that conferred an air of impish mischief on the characters he played during a decade's worth of cheesy teen melodramas.

Girls wanted nothing more than to run their hands through D'Angelo's Dorothy Hamill-style locks, which he flicked through films with plot-revealing titles like "Betrayal," "A Neapolitan Boy in New York" and "I Swear That I Love You." A generation of teenage boys, mostly from poor neighborhoods in Southern Italy, adopted the look, which included a pair of jeans and a T-shirt, as per D'Angelo's 1981 hit "Nu jeans e 'na maglietta." This, like most of his films, was a variation on the "boy from the wrong side of Vesuvius done good" plot.

Throughout the 1980s, as local mob clans fought a bloody battle for control of Naples' mean streets and political corruption was a lucrative spin-off of the reconstruction contracts that followed the devastating 1982 earthquake, the city's soundtrack was a mix of blaring car horns and D'Angelo's love songs sung in Neapolitan dialect.

Fans set great store by the rags-to-riches fable that had brought Gaetano D'Angelo — the first of six children born in the rough San Pietro a Patierno neighborhood on the outskirts of Naples — everything he could want. Everything except respect. His cassettes and records may have been the hottest commodity to be traded on the sidewalks of Naples, Bari and Palermo, but in the rooms where it really counted — the offices of music critics and of snooty culture vultures — D'Angelo's low-brow screen stardom was snubbed and his music dismissed as schmaltzy trash.

"Sure, I used to make more money before. . . . But I wasn't seen as an artist, I was somehow diminished," said D'Angelo on a recent Sunday night. He was in his dressing room at the Teatro San Babila, where he is starring in "Guappo di Cartone" (roughly: "Cardboard tough guy"), a dark comedy by the early 20th-century Neapolitan playwright Raffaele Viviani about the difficulties a convict faces after he is released from prison.

The half-full 480-seat theater was a far cry from the stadiums he used to pack. But D'Angelo, 46, his blond mane now swept back and peppered with gray, didn't seem to mind. "Look where I am. I'm in a theater, in Milan. And for the son of a poor Neapolitan that's really something."

More unexpectedly, perhaps, in his trajectory from the floodlights to the footlights, D'Angelo found himself rehabilitated as a national cult figure and the darling of the cultural intelligentsia. Music historians now praise his work as an integral chapter of the glorious tradition of the Neapolitan song, and critics have watched his most recent forays into world music with real interest.

The film director Pupi Avati, who cast D'Angelo as a Neapolitan barber in last year's "The Heart Is Elsewhere," said, "I think he had the foresight to emancipate himself from a cliché that had imprisoned him in a certain kind of cinema and music that had very few prospects."

D'Angelo still bristles when he talks about the past. "I was a victim of racism," he said. "I had to live with the reputation of being the singer of a certain Naples, of a certain Italy. But Naples isn't a city of pizza and mandolins any more."

From the beginning, it was clear that D'Angelo had boundless empathy for his Southern Italian working-class audience and an understanding of popular sentiment, while songs that spoke to adolescent angst — and his boyish good looks — brought a younger crowd to the theaters.

The turning point was his score for director Roberta Torre's 1997 mocking lampoon of the Sicilian Mafia, the critically acclaimed "Tano da Morire" (Tano to Die For). The miscellaneous soundtrack mixing Mediterranean rap, catchy Latino beats and rock riffs got critics listening and won several awards, including the Italian Oscar for best score, spreading D'Angelo's fame to art houses around the world.

"The film was a media phenomenon, and so it helped to emancipate Nino," said the writer and social anthropologist Goffredo Fofi, who lived in Naples for many years and was one of the first to advocate a more serious analysis of his music. "He broke through the racist barrier of a certain part of Italian culture that's always been against the marginal culture of the South."

Since then, and because of a growing appreciation for the work that Peter Gabriel has conducted in promoting world music, D'Angelo's compositions have dug at his Mediterranean roots. And his work is finally getting the recognition it was denied for so long.

Breaking with the past meant venturing into new territory, hence the film with Avati, and another film three years ago, "Aitanic," which he wrote and directed in which he plays Leonardo Di Capri-Neon. The movie was a flippant response to the mega-hit "Titanic" and an affectionate parody of the cheesy B flicks of D'Angelo's past.

His next role will be in the American director Abel Ferrara's comedy "Go Go Tales," due to start shooting at Rome's Cinecittà studios in the spring. D'Angelo will play a character called "the Baron" according to Vittorio Squillante, his agent. D'Angelo's oldest son, Tony, 24, has been hired as Ferrara's first assistant director.

## **NEW YORK TIMES - ARTS ABROAD**

### **In a Changed Sicily, a Film Dares to Laugh at the Mob.**

By Celestine Bohlen

April 20, 1998

Feature films about the Sicilian Mafia used to be predictable fare, like cowboy or kung fu movies. Stock characters included the stern patriarch, the nasty killer, the silent wife, the corrupt businessman and, of course, the lonely anti-Mafia crusader. Put them together in a mournful struggle of good versus evil, and, poof, there it was: another in a long string of movies that regularly crowded Italian theaters and television screens.

Now along comes a Mafia movie that has none of these characters, not even a moral dimension to speak of, and that is, of all things, a musical comedy. It was filmed in one of Palermo's most notoriously mob-infested neighborhoods, featuring characters literally drawn from the street; and to some extent it's real life.

With its sing-along tunes ("We are the Mafia" is one, sung in Sicilian dialect), nutty dance numbers (featuring Mafiosi waving dead chickens) and chorus of overweight Mafia women complaining about their overbearing men, "Tano to Die For," is a sometimes surrealistic film by Roberta Torre, a 36-year-old director in Palermo. The film does more than challenge cliches about Sicily's Mafia culture, it ridicules them.

"The movie reflects a historical necessity, which 10 years ago would have been impossible," said Franco Maresco, an avant-garde Sicilian filmmaker whose movies, made with his partner, Daniele Cipri, present a bleaker vision of Sicily, Italy's southernmost island. "Ten years ago, the actors from the Vucciria neighborhood would not have participated. They would have been afraid to make fun of a Mafioso, to make fun of 'omerta,' " the Mafia's code of silence. "They were the same people who used to see dead bodies in the streets." There was no space for satire then. "It was a war," recalled Goffredo Fofi, a film critic who once lived in Palermo. "People were losing their lives."

By breaking what had become an invisible cultural barrier, "Tano to Die For," which is a big hit here in the Sicilian capital, is seen as a cultural monument, a sign of Palermo's recovery from its smothering oppression by a criminal organization that six years ago was brazenly executing Italy's most celebrated prosecutors.

The murders of two of them in 1992 were the turning point in Italy's war against organized crime. Spurred by popular outrage, the Government dispatched army troops to Sicily, and the pace of prosecutions picked up. Mafiosi were encouraged to break their vows of silence and turn state's evidence. Today most of the top bosses of the Cosa Nostra are in jail. And while the Mafia is still a pervasive force here, its mystique has been tarnished.

That's where "Tano to Die For" enters the picture. " 'Tano' is the first denunciation of the Mafia as an ambiguous phenomenon," says Leoluca Orlando, the Mayor of Palermo. He is a big booster of Ms. Torre's movie, which he calls "an act of liberation."

No one -- not Mr. Orlando or Ms. Torre -- would ever argue that the war against the Mafia in Sicily was over. All they are saying is that the time has come for another look at the enemy. In the old days, Mr. Orlando recalled, Mafia bosses had nicknames like "the Pope," "the Prince," "the Baron." By the 1980's, he said, when the violence and brutality had gotten out of control, the nickname for Toto Riina, the boss of bosses, was "the Beast."

"That shows to what extent the Mafia had become barbarians," said Mr. Orlando "And that's what 'Tano' does. It reveals their barbarity, their vulgarity, their ambiguity."

Nonetheless, after its release last summer at the Venice Film Festival, the movie stirred debate over whether the Mafia could ever be seen in a humorous light, whether, for instance, scenes of wedding guests being mowed down by machine gun fire are appropriate in musical comedy. That debate coincided with a similar one over the Italian film "Life is Beautiful," directed by the comic actor Roberto Benigni and due to be released in the United States later this year, in which a Jewish father, in an attempt to shield his young son from the horrors of the Holocaust, turns the ordeals of a Nazi death camp into a humorous game.

The argument is an old one, circling the question of whether comedy and humor are appropriate for subjects that are deeply painful and tragic. Ms. Torre, a northern Italian who moved to Palermo seven years ago, has little patience for a debate that she says was resolved by the ancient Greeks.

She said she did not set out to make fun of the Mafia. "Within the tragedy of the Mafia, there is also a cultural side, a subculture that exists," she said. "That is what I wanted to explore. To see what is really happening in the Mafia neighborhoods, in the homes of the Mafiosi themselves."

The story of Tano Guarrasi, a butcher and small-time neighborhood Mafia boss who tyrannizes his unmarried sisters, is a true one that Mr. Guarrasi's brother-in-law originally told her in embellished form, with the quasi-mythical details that have given the Mafia a special aura. Discovering the truth, she said, was part of her immersion into the Mafia culture as it really is.

"I really entered into this story, and I was lucky, because it is not an easy world to get into," she said. "You can only enter if you have a middleman to introduce you. It helped that the people who acted in the film coexist daily with the Mafia. That is the part that I found most fascinating: taking people who were quasi-Mafiosi and putting them into a film about the Mafia. They loved it."

The film, with its snappy music by Nino D'Angelo, a Neapolitan, views Mafia culture and traditions as more grotesque, more exaggerated than the old glossy images usually seen in the genre but also more realistically. In "Tano to Die For," the Mafia initiation rites don't involve pricked fingertips, candle wax and images of saints, but rather a gaudy song-and-dance of male bonding with a strong homosexual undercurrent.

Similarly, family honor, the tie that binds Sicily's mafia clans, is reduced in the movie to an incestuous relationship between Tano and the sisters he would never let get married.

None of these scenes are very flattering to Sicilians, let alone Mafiosi, a fact that has disturbed some people in Palermo. Giorgio Castellani, a local filmmaker whose father, Michele Greco, was a notorious Mafia boss, found the movie distasteful, saying "It isn't realism, it is a comic book." He added: "They made a caricature of Sicilians, which I found offensive because we are presented as ugly and monstrous. There are no beautiful women in the film."

Even if the Mafia image is changing, the old stereotypes are still in demand. In his latest movie "The Grimaldis," the story of a Sicilian family, Mr. Castellani had to insert a Mafia

figure at the insistence of his producers. "I didn't want to talk about the Mafia in this film, but I was forced to, because you have to meet the needs of the market," he said.

Still, there are signs that even the Italian public is growing weary of a genre that has been outstripped by reality. This year, ratings for the ninth installment of the hugely popular Mafia television serial "The Octopus" were the lowest ever.

"The world has changed," said Mr. Maresco, the filmmaker. "Children in Palermo play with computers. A hundred years ago, this was truly an isolated island, where cultural development had stopped a hundred years before. Now the children of Mafiosi have the same idols as children in the States."

## **LA REPUBBLICA, Italy**

September 6, 1997

<http://www.repubblica.it/www1/cinema/tano/tano/tano.html>

### **TO DIE FOR TANO**

#### **Palermo as Broadway, the mafia in song**

A musical about the mafia, a cast of non-professional actors taken from the actual streets of Palermo, songs and dances at the famous Vucciria market, a set design colored by homicides and criminal gangs; a big production of tunes sung not in Sicilian, but in the more musical Neapolitan dialect. A wide range of "heresies," either cultural or more specifically cinematic, that could have made life difficult (in theaters) for "To Die for Tano," a film passionately conceived and directed by the Milanese Roberta Torre. And yet, once achieved, reality defied predictions: the film, presented in Venice, enjoyed a triumphant reception, and was highly praised by both audiences and critics. So much so that not enough prints were available for the film's release on the big screen, as requests from exhibitors abundantly surpassed the producers' expectations.

The film is inspired by the true story of Tano Guarrasi, a mid-level mafioso who was killed in Palermo about ten years ago. A member of the Passo Rigano family, he was gunned down with six pistol shots in his butcher shop at the Vucciria market. But his story is told not in cinema-verite and (fake) live sound, but through the lyrics and music of a man who understands the life of the street: Nino D'Angelo, heir to Mario Merola's Neapolitan melodrama and tradition, yet with a fresher and more modern flair.

Many cult scenes: for example, one in which the film skewers the Cosa Nostra code, presenting the protagonist's initiation ceremony in the style of "Saturday Night Fever"; not to mention the rite of kissing between Mafia bosses, which becomes a pretext to show gay mafiosi in garishly flamboyant shirts. Also the final scene of "Tano's Rap," in which greengrocers and fishmongers from the Vucciria dance and sing the refrain of the film in chorus.

Here and there appear citations from famous musicals like "West Side Story," all in a luridly colorful setting, evoking the films of the eccentric director John Waters, but also "Libera" by Pappi Corsicato.

In short, all the irony and cinefile appeal make a strong impression. Roberta Torre, a Milanese in love with Sicily, had previously directed "Life at Birds' Eye View," a film about [Nino D'Angelo] the singer-songwriter of Tano. And how enthusiastic he is about the experience: "I am a boy of the South," he explains, "I understand the codes and rules of the underworld."

## **The Dream of a New Sicilian Cinema (excerpt)**

CINEASTE

Written by Sergio Di Giorgi and Deborah Young

January 1, 1997

The Mafia's 'crisis of values,' as it were, allowed young Sicilian filmmakers to approach the subject of the mob from a new perspective. Perhaps the most striking example is the soon-to-be-released **Tano to Die For** by thirty-two-year-old Milan-born director Roberta Torre. A grotesque tragicomedy spoofing the Mafia, it is a film that would have been impossible to make a few years ago. It is also the first Italian movie musical made since the Fifties, set to music by popular Neapolitan singer-composer Nino D'Angelo.

Documentary and fiction mingle in the story of Tano, a small-time boss who was killed a few years ago in a famous market in Palermo's tough Vucciria neighborhood. Swinging and swaying to rap and techno music (though not always in unison), the nonprofessional cast, chosen from the district, tell how Tano was born in the Vucciria and inducted into the clan he eventually died for, and how he loved his four sisters so much that he kept them locked up at home, forbidding them to marry. A baker and a professional nurse play the two leads.

Significantly, many of the film's actors have lived through similar experiences. Several women had brothers in jail, and one man, said Torre, was still mourning the death of his padrino. "The story is real," Torre insists. "Martin Scorsese or Abel Ferrara would have shot it as a Greek tragedy, but that's not my register. I wanted to make a musical."

Building on her experience as a documentary filmmaker and her affection for popular art forms, she persuaded the cast to take part in scenes that would have been inconceivable a few years back, when the Mafia played a stronger role in the popular imagination. In one scene, overweight bosses wearing tons of gold jewelry rub noses in suggestive gay abandon while singing "We're the Mafia" in dialect. In portraying them as homosexuals, the film breaks one of the strongest sexual taboos surrounding the 'men of honor.'

Torre shot the film on a modest budget put together by producers Donatella Palermo and Loes Kamsteeg. It is interesting that neighborhood bosses actually protected the Tano to Die For shoot from outside gangs, allowing the production to rent out the legendary Vucciria fish market for three days of song and dance. "The Mafia doesn't have an image problem," explained Torre. "All they want is money."