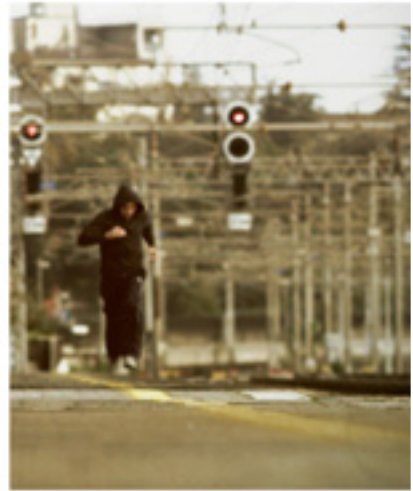




SOMETIMES THE HARDEST BATTLES



ARE FOUGHT



OUTSIDE THE RING



# ACQUA fuori dal RING {ring of water}



FESTIVAL  
INTERNAZIONALE  
DEL FILM DI ROMA  
PROSPETTIVEITALIA | 2012

# ACQUA fuori dal RING

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ACQUA  
fuori dal  
RING

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## FILM OVERVIEW

*A Film by Joel Stangle*  
*Produced by Angelo Di Guardia*  
*Executive Producer Sami Ibrahim*

Color / 110 Minutes / Stereo

Languages: Italian & Arabic

Subtitles: English / Italian

Not yet rated

A Scillichenti Films Production

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## CAST

<b>TOSCANO</b>	Enrico Toscano
<b>DELIA</b>	Elisa Pennisi
<b>BARCA</b>	Ahmed Faraone Ahassan
<b>ZARA</b>	Maria Benkhalouk
<b>MARIO</b>	Marco Pagliaro
<b>TAHIR</b>	Anwar Ong Bak
<b>ZIO</b>	Orazio Spampinato
<b>ALLENATORE DI TOSCANO</b>	Aroldo Donini
<b>PADRE DI DELIA</b>	Franco Leonardi
<b>FRATTELO DI DELIA</b>	Salvatore Pavone
<b>ALLENATORE DI BARCA</b>	Giuseppe Brischetto
<b>ANTONIO</b>	Emanuele Rausi
<b>CARMELO</b>	Carmelo Di Guardia
<b>MAMADOU</b>	Khalifa Assane Diop
<b>MARCO GIUNIO</b>	Carmelo Nicolosi

## CREW

<b>EXECUTIVE PRODUCER</b>	Sami Ibrahim
<b>PRODUCER</b>	Angelo Di Guardia
<b>DIRECTION</b>	Joel Stangle
<b>SCREENPLAY</b>	Joel and Esther Stangle
<b>ORIGINAL SCORE</b>	Simona Di Gregorio
<b>CINEMATOGRAPHER</b>	Clint Litton
<b>SOUND</b>	Doug Gallab
<b>ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/LOCATION MANAGER</b>	Stefania Milazzo
<b>ASSISTANT CAMERA/KEY GRIP</b>	Nunzio Gringeri
<b>ASSISTANT CAMERA/GAFFER</b>	Dan Gutt
<b>ART DIRECTION/PRODUCTION ASSISTANT</b>	Neena Litton
<b>SCRIPT SUPERVISOR/PRODUCTION ASSISTANT</b>	Judy Elliot

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the film  
**AT A GLANCE**

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*Sometimes the hardest battles are fought outside the ring.*

### ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Joel Stangle is a director who critics have compared to the old masters Luchino Visconti and Pierpaolo Pasolini. He returns with his second Sicily-based feature, *Acqua fuori Dal Ring*. His previous feature *Profumo di Lumia*, which he directed at the age of just 23, earned critical acclaim and selection in several prominent festivals.

### BRIEF SYNOPSIS

History repeats itself in an intertwined story of two boxers struggling to survive inside and outside of the ring. Toscano, a young Sicilian, is fighting against his past. Barca, an African immigrant, is fighting for his future. When the tide changes, they have to fight for the present, as they battle against the realities of life in Sicily. The film weaves the sights, sounds and emotions of a gritty boxing tale within the context of broken relationships, hardships, and the cycles of Mediterranean history.

### FILM ORIGIN AND THEMES

Working with the historical conquests and movement of people between Africa and Sicily, the film calls to mind a text by Ancient Historian, Polybius of Megalopolis, in which he describes Carthage and Rome as two boxers meeting in the ring. By playing on the current political tensions surrounding African immigrants in Europe, the story of two boxers connects the ages, from the First Punic War in 264 BCE to the current struggles of the main characters.

### FROM A DOCUMENTARY, CHARACTERS COME ALIVE

The project began as a short documentary entitled *Incontro a Librino*, which captures the stories of several boxers from Catania. One such boxer was Enrico Toscano, whose life story would become the basis for the feature, and who himself would play one of the lead characters.

### LOCATIONS

The film was set in the Librino neighborhood of Catania, Sicily, whose hulking cement structures originated as public housing projects. Shot in the grey of Winter, the visuals reflect the harsh realities of the characters' lives. Alternate scenes, such as the black lava fields of Mount Etna, provide striking visual contrasts.

### MUSIC

The original music score introduces audiences to a variety of traditional Sicilian music, capturing the collective sounds of the various peoples and cultures that have set foot on the island. The soundtrack also includes a traditional Sicilian song style called "Spartenza", whose sharp and chilling sounds reflect the female characters' own struggles with their male leads.

### FILM INFORMATION

Color / 110 minutes / Stereo

Languages: Italian and Arabic / Subtitles: English

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## SYNOPSIS



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### *History repeats itself in an intertwined story of two boxers struggling to survive inside and outside of the ring.*

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*Newspaper headlines cry, “Immigrants Flood the Shores of Italy,” “Crime Wave Sweeps the Streets of Catania.” History repeats itself in an intertwined story of two boxers struggling to survive inside and outside of the ring. Toscano, a young Sicilian, is fighting against his past.*

*Barca, an African immigrant, is fighting for his future. When the tide changes, they have to fight for the present.*

A car accident sends Toscano back to living with an unforgiving uncle in Catania’s roughest neighborhood. There, he tries to keep his younger cousin from getting seduced by mafia street life and to keep himself above water the only way he knows how, with his fists. A shipwreck forces Barca to confront reality. In helping a young, fresh-off-the boat immigrant, his personal dream of a better future is jeopardized by the strong currents of exploitation and the limitations of being “illegal.”

Behind the hard shell of these men, living in the shadows of masculine determination, are the women they love, Delia and Sara. While the men dream, the women discover their pending motherhood and are faced with the realization that they are bringing children into an uncertain world full of rising tides.

As the two boxers prepare to meet in the ring, their lives outside of the ring crisscross in the winding backstreets of Catania, where everything connects in more ways than one. They are part of something, something bigger, their lives are a cycle, a cycle that they are determined to break at all costs.

A timely portrait of a timeless struggle. The film is an energetic and insightful modern retelling of the 1st Punic War (264 BCE) between Carthage [present day Tunisia in North Africa] and the Roman Empire. Two thousand years ago, the African, Hamilcar Barca, arrived in Sicily to fight the Roman Empire, making his sons promise to follow in his footsteps. Today, thousands of boats leave Africa filled with immigrants hoping to arrive in Sicily, where, should they [actually] survive their journey, they must fight for a better life. The ancient history and modern issues are tightly woven into a story in which the island itself becomes the fighting ring. In this ring, surrounded by water, the question is, who will sink, who will swim, and will they learn from history.

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## DIRECTOR'S NOTES



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*The story wanted to say something that the script did not have, and for me it gives a glimpse into how cycles change.*

*This film is about people and a society stuck in a cycle. When we don't learn from history, it repeats itself. We repeat mistakes in our lives when we are not conscious of who we are and where we stand. Each of the characters lives within his or her own cycle. Some characters are trapped in the cycle. Others break the cycle only to fall into yet another. And some find a way to subtly change the cycle by changing themselves.*

I do not pretend to have answers for the characters nor for any of the vicious cycles society closes them into. My focus was on raising questions.

What was most interesting for me in this project was how the production of the film diverged from the script. The end of the film on paper never really translated in the filming process. Overall, this is the most faithful I have ever been to a script. Eventually however, the footage and the material came to have a life of their own. The story wanted to say something that the script did not have, and for me it gives a glimpse into how cycles change.

The film shifts its focus from the men and their conflicts to settle on the women. What surfaces is the strength of creativity when life is most challenging. Even though these women may not have the power to swim against the current, they learn to breath underwater.

# ACQUA fuori dal RING

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the origin of  
**THE IDEA**

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## *All of my films are the result of the environment that I am in.*

*The story was born from the similarities in the historical relations between Africa and Italy. The story is a reflection of the events of the First Punic War (264 BCE) and how they relate to modern African immigration.*

All of my films are the result of the environment that I am in. When fragments connect, I know it is time to start writing. I did not set out to make this film initially. It is a result of the times, current news, and the social climate of Europe.

During Winter months spent wandering through the mazes of Catania's streets, I kept getting visions of boxers training in front of specific locations. The local news was constantly showing images of immigrants arriving on boats from Northern Africa in drastically rising numbers. The government was at a loss on how to control the sea. I had recently read about the Punic Wars [264 BCE], a different kind of war but also about controlling the sea and hard-fought borders.

I could not help but see a connection between the historical relations of Africa and Italy, Carthage and Rome.

Just as there had once been a treaty signed between Rome and Carthage to control the waters, presently a new treaty was signed between Italy and Libya to control the waters. I saw history repeating itself and the symbols of antiquity still resonated.

Under the lava rock statue of Catania's symbol, the elephant, I imagined the famous Carthaginian caravans riding elephants. Next to the fallen pillars of the Roman Empire there were the crumbled newspapers filled with today's politic strife.

As it all began to mix in my mind, I thought it would be captivating to retell the history of the nations through two boxers whose fights are both literal and figurative. I started more research and came upon a two thousand year old text by the Roman Historian Polybius.

After reading a text by Polybius in which

he recounts the Punic Wars using a boxing analogy, describing Rome and Carthage as two boxers meeting in the ring, it was clear this was the way my story needed to be told.

Walking the streets, looking at the connection between the people and time, brought the themes of the film together. But themes are themes, what I was missing was the universal element; the personal drama and existential battle to live, which is shared not only by people in Europe or Africa, but by people all over the world. Since the themes of the film disclosed themselves to me, I was confident the personal dramatic motives would, as well.



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from a documentary into a  
**FEATURE FILM**

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*I knew that if I was going to write about the reality of themes like repetition and cycles, then I needed real stories, but never imagined what I would find once I set out looking.*

I still had the visuals of boxers training in specific locations in mind. In my vision there were large cement buildings. I took my camera and went to a boxing gym in the Librino neighborhood of Catania, an area characterized by these types of large cement structures, which originated as public housing. I started interviewing people there, while keeping an open mind and letting things take whatever course they wanted. This experience developed into the boxing documentary titled *Incontro a Librino*.

One of the people that I met through this experience was Enrico Toscano, whose story and life would become the basis for the story in *Acqua Fuori Dal Ring* and he himself would come to play one of the lead characters. The documentary developed, rich with stories, and took me into all the side streets of Librino. The locations and people continued to mix into the story and became inseparable. The film was ultimately shot in the gym in Librino using many of the people I met along the way.

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## CATANIA, SICILY



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### *Locations as Characters*

I work with locations the same as I work with actors. I do not try to change them, I just try to pull out their potential and let them express what lies inside of them. The locations in this film are very important. I believe that structures and architecture have a massive influence on how we live and in turn, who we are. In the film they are reflections of the way that the characters feel. They also unite antiquity and modernity, a substantial theme in the film.

For me, production is really an exploration of how locations and the characters connect. The composition and framing is

always dictated by the relationship between character and space. We tried very hard to create a language with the different elements and often I rewrote scenes to incorporate these elements. An example of this is the horse. In the film, near Toscano's house, there is a horse. I did not put that there; it is there because illegal horse racing is part of the culture. The existence of urban neighborhoods with horses is an odd and distinctive quality of Catania. I just restructured the story to use that element and it became a very strong symbol of Toscano's inner conflict.



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casting and working with  
**THE ACTORS**

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***I always  
roll the  
first takes  
without  
any  
direction...***

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*The film gets its authenticity from the actors. The immigrants are immigrants, the uncle who sells olives is Orazio, who has sold the best olives for decades in Catania's market. The boxing coaches are boxing coaches. The police are even policemen. When I film in a foreign country, I am even more dedicated to this approach.*

As a foreigner, I have the outside perspective to make certain objective observations. Yet, I run the risk of misinterpretation or being victim to some learned or preconceived notions, so my philosophy is to only connect the dots. The story, the emotion and the message, come from the people in the film, which is why I try to work with people who are living the life of the characters in the story, or who are at least very familiar with them. For instance, the character Tahir, is a young immigrant on his own. I found Anwar, who plays Tahir, in a center for minors who have immigrated illegally, mostly by boat.

When we filmed the scene where Tahir gets on a boat for the first time since his grievous journey to Sicily, Anwar came to me telling me how he had never wanted to see a boat again and about how straining this situation was for him. Anwar acted the scene the way that he felt, based on his experience, not based on my own notion of

what that experience must be like. The scene really brings up the issue of the PTSD suffered by so many immigrants due to their difficult and dangerous voyages. It is an issue that is not talked about enough, and Anwar is a courageous kid, to say the least, for tapping back into that painful experience so that the world can get a glimpse of the trauma endured by so many others just like him.

We never rehearsed; we just filmed until we got it right. I remember at one point the Assistant Director came to me and said that one of the actors did not understand something in the script. I think she was shocked that my response was, "Good, that way he has to think about it." I always roll the first takes without any direction other than minimal blocking, then it is just a process of building on what they bring to the table.

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## THE MUSIC

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### ***The true music of Sicily. Not the cliché folk that is sold to the world.***

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*The music is a vital part of this production. I wanted the music to reflect the themes in the film. I love that everyone's first reaction is to think the music is Arabic, when in fact, it is about as Sicilian as it gets. The music of Sicily, not the cliché folk that is sold to the world as Sicilian, but the real sounds and rhythms, are a beautiful mixture of all the cultures that have been on the Island. When I think about how beautifully the sounds of the different cultures harmonize, it gives me hope for society as well.*

Through Simona Di Gregorio I knew I could express the fusion of people, her raw passionate vocals capture the spirit not only of Sicily, but of the Mediterranean.

I asked her to record before the filming even began, because I like to direct with an idea of rhythms and melodies and I always edit to the music, rather than make the music match the cuts. I gave her only a few guidelines, telling her at what moments in the story I would use the music.

Together, Simona and I envisioned the type of instruments that would best enrich different parts of the film and decided the Maranzano (mouth harp, a traditional Sicilian instrument) should be used. In stretching the tone to prolong the vibration, it became another reflection of the film's theme, in that it is an old traditional instrument with a new touch.

I handed Simona some lyrical lines I scribbled, asking that the lyrics we use be related to the story. She then went on to build a type of poetic narrative in the lyrics, for those who speak Sicilian, it is a beautiful touch that makes the film much richer, for everyone else, I think the emotion is felt just the same.

Simona has a real knowledge of Sicilian music history and introduced me to a type of song called a "Spartenza," traditionally sung by women when they were angry with their men for going on their various adventures and leaving the women to fend for themselves. Such a "Spartenza" became the opening song, and is the only track she sang that is not original in the film. The film ends focusing on the female characters, so I decided to begin the film with the Spartenza of a woman singing to her man to create a circle.

A day before she went into the studio, I handed Simona a track of a boat motor that the Sound Designer Doug Gallob had recorded. The motor has a rhythm. Simona surprised the other musicians at the end of recording with a jam session to the rhythm of the motor. This track became the theme for the character Barca.

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## CREW BIOS

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**Joel Stangle** is a young director born in the US to European parents. Accordingly, he lives and works with his feet on both continents. His fiercely independent production style is a rejuvenation of auteur cinema. He began as an apprentice in theater, learning the trade under some of the most seasoned directors of the American West. He began working on films in 2006. His global touch has led to the creation of documentaries, short and feature films, in languages that range from German, Arabic and Italian, all the way to Nahuatl [Aztec language]. His Italian projects with *Scillichenti Films*, include direction of the music video **Cummari** with Matilde Polite, and the feature film **Profumo di Lumia** which received notable recognition at the *Starz International Film Festival* and the *Napoli Film Festival*. **Acqua Fuori Dal Ring** is his second feature film shot in Sicily.

**Simona Di Gregorio**, Sicilian singer and instrumentalist, studied piano as a child. She continued her studies, after graduating from high school, in Rhythmic Education and Percussion in Stuttgart, Germany. Upon returning to Sicily, she began a research and study project of folk music with special attention directed at the songs belonging to the peasant world of the early 1900's. She prefers self-accessible instruments (frame drum, accordion, classical guitar, marranzani, etc.) that enable instant sharing and have a fair resonance with vocals in the traditional method of execution. It is in this "circle" that the musician hopes to rediscover her own roots and to highlight a hidden heritage using all related components: singing, dancing, instruments, language and the functions related to them.

**Doug Gallob** is a Sound Designer and Film Score Composer dabbling in all forms of the sonic arts for over 30 years from sound engineering to musical performance. He has been responsible for the sound of several features, shorts, and documentaries. He has been involved in almost every project with Director Joel Stangle, including **Profumo Di Lumia**, 2010. He writes non-film music as well, producing instrumental music and penning songs for his acoustic / bluegrass group, **Just Desserts**. If it makes air molecules vibrate, Doug wants to be a part of it.

**Clint Litton** is a New York based cinematographer. He is a graduate of the master's program at Savannah College of Art and Design. He has worked on a number of films and television shows. Though beginning with 35mm, he has become a specialized digital cinematographer, utilizing the new technologies to take the cinematographic art form to frontiers formerly not possible.