



'L'Immensità' Sundance 2023 Review – Tender And Electric Family Portrait

© By Devin McGrath-Conwell 📅 January 21, 2023



Set in 1970s Rome, Emanuele Crialesè's *L'Immensità* is a tender and electric portrait of a family. Clara (Penélope Cruz) watches over her three children Adri (Luana Giuliani), Gino (Patrizio Francioni), and Diana (Maria Chiara Goretti). Husband and father Felice (Vincenzo Amato) is distant, and regularly physically and emotionally violent when he is around. Adri, who wants to be known as Andrew, is at a significant turning point in his life. Without a culture or gender vocabulary to express that he feels like a boy instead of the girl he was born as, he finds scattered avenues to grasp onto the self he yearns for others to embrace. In a parallel sense, Clara struggles against her isolating marriage and fights for her children however she can. Over the course of months, Clara and Andrew both strive for a clearer path to happiness.

L'Immensità, which Crialese wrote with Francesca Manieri and Vittorio Moroni, remixes and reimagines its family drama roots. The departure point is familiar enough. Clara and Felice's dynamic has populated melodramas for decades. Coming-of-age touchpoints for all the children are staples of youth-focused storytelling. Yet, just as Clara and Andrew are restless for change, L'Immensità pulls the tropes up, shakes them around, and sets them loose to reassemble in a refreshed form. Andrew's arc is the major narrative paired with Clara just behind. All the while, the writers braid in major beats for an ensemble of family members and friends. Not to mention truly exquisite doses of fantasy musical numbers centered on Andrew's imaginings. The period of time covered allows L'Immensità a series of interwoven vignettes that gradually reveals the family in totality. Some beats, like a head-scratching living room fire, fall into cliché, but they are the minority.

The uniformly superb craft work is crucial to the magic at hand in L'Immensità. In particular, Massimo Cantini Parrini's costume design and Dimitri Capuani's production design are continuously breathtaking. The family home is a period-piece dream, capturing the 1970s aesthetic without falling prey to the dustiness of time. The children's bedroom is a highlight with geometric green wallpaper and puzzle-pieced orange bedframes. Every other setting pops with color and personality from their furniture to glassware. And oh the clothes the cast wears as they swish and run through it all. Andrew often wears a red leather jacket checkered with pins. It conveys so much about this vibrant boy. For her part, Clara is dressed in a stream of outfits marked by vivid hues and patterns that scream at the top of their lungs that she will not be disappeared. The sum total is a feast of nimble artistry.

Crialese and cinematographer Gergely Pohárnok shoot it all with a balance of verve and elegance. Whether in the home, in the streets and neighborhoods throughout Rome, or in the glorious black-and-white fantasy musical sequences, Crialese and Pohárnok find ways to shape L'Immensità into a gorgeous aesthetic experience. Crialese favors a graceful camera that flows from character to character and beat to beat. When he throws on the breaks with a close-up or disorienting static shot in the more harrowing narrative sections they land all the harder. Pohárnok and his team lean into the lusciousness of the art design and light the whole thing with a tenderness that matches the foundational tone of L'Immensità. When we drop into one of the musical sequences you cannot help but beam. They place Andrew and Clara in replications of musical numbers they've watched, and each is a suave burst of delight.

For all of this flair, L'Immensità belongs jointly to Cruz and Giuliani. Whether in one of their many scenes together or separated out, each imbues their character with a depth of humanity that grabs you by the soul and never lets go. L'Immensità is Giuliani's first role,

and it is definitional as a breakout turn. You cannot take your eyes off her any moment she is on screen. Her ability to sift through Andrew's combination of love for his family, anger with an unwelcoming world, and every emotional flavor in-between is remarkable. Put her across from Cruz, who continues to be one of her generation's most accomplished and versatile actresses, and the results are titanic. Cruz has always had a knack for expressing micro-emotions within broader character strokes, and Clara gives her a vehicle to channel them all. They are both, in short, masterful.

L'Immensità is a testament to the power of settling into well-worn material with the energy and commitment to revamp it. While it could benefit from a little tightening up in the script, the sum total of its exquisite parts washing over you is simply staggering.

L'Immensità played in the Spotlight section of the 2023 Sundance Film Festival.

Director: Emanuele Crialese

Writers: Emanuele Crialese, Francesca Manier & Vittorio Moroni

Rated: NR

Runtime: 98m