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## Gianni Amelio



Review: [The Keys To The House](#)

**Renowned Italian film-maker Gianni Amelio talks to Xav about the making of the *Keys to the House* (Le Chiavi di Casa), in a special interview with Close-up Film.**

### **Why did you choose to shoot in Berlin and Norway instead of the original setting for the novel?**

If the story had been set in Italy, the father could have escaped and left the boy with someone. You know with relatives or friends etc. Because he's abroad, in a way it means that both characters are disabled. So he's kind of further obliged to stay in that place.

Also, I thought that out of all European cities, Berlin was the least related to a specific tourist image. I think that this is partly because the Nazis were there sixty years ago, and they did away with a lot of people. Indeed, if you notice there are war photos in the hospital. Lastly, Germany was perfect because I think there is a sense of violent authoritativeness in the sound of the accent.

### **Did you think about taking the Hollywood route and using an able-bodied actor?**

When I started the film the producer thought that I would take a normal kid and use some sort of trickery. I thought that I would take a normal kid to play the part. I wanted Andrea (Paolo) because it's fascist to say that disabled people can't do anything. He demonstrated how he could manage to be cheerful and look lively. I think that's one reason why the audience really rooted for him.

### **Did you think his disabilities would cause any logistical problems?**

Logistical problems are created by normal people because of their capriciousness and ego. Andrea reduces problems to a basic level. It's like getting dragged back to reality and you have to make sure he's on the right track. His problem was how to act the part, as he's a very different person in real life. He has got an enormous memory problem, so it was difficult for him to remember lines. And to respond to other characters. So it was a much more arduous process, but he brought other things to the production like innocence.

### **Did the finished film totally meet your expectations?**

I don't think any film ever satisfies the expectations better than this one did. I mean, from the point of view of public acceptance and as a commercial success. It's always difficult for a small film to compete with big box office pictures and to get shown at multiplexes. Normally only American films are. However, my film had a lot of

word-of-mouth so people talked about it.

**What were you trying to say by portraying Gianni in such a sympathetic way?**

For me, it's a question of attitude - a sense of trying to understand his feelings. I didn't want to be judgmental, but understanding because perhaps I could have ran away from that situation. I'm telling a story of his effort to try and understand the situation. His character is honest and perhaps weak; but it would be a very difficult situation for anyone. His son helps him.

**Had you seen Charlotte Rampling before she was cast and why did you choose her to be in your movie?**

Yes, I had seen her because she worked a lot in Italy. I chose her because she's a great person and a terrific actress. She's able to forget that she's acting. Especially in her biggest scene, when she's waiting for the train. She brought something more to the role. I look for that moment when they stop acting. It's difficult to find. But she's sensitive, so more likely to have it. And, I needed a foreign actress who can act in Italian. She has a nice way of speaking the language in a way that means you can't understand where she comes from.

**Were you worried about someone else making *The Keys of the House*?**

No, because I'd already made my film, so had got what I wanted.

**Why are you shooting your next film in China?**

Because in five to six years it will be the most developed country in the world. Factories and industry in general will mushroom, but they might not necessarily know how to make the machinery work. So I had an idea of a fantasy where a guy goes from Italy to China . He journeys across the country until he reaches the Tibetan border, and eventually meets up with an old machine that he had worked on for 30 years, in the past.

**What are your main film influences?**

Historically my main influence is Rossellini. However, from a personal perspective some of the directors I admire most are from my generation: Bertolucci, Olmi and Antonioni.

**Xav**

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