

F I L M M A K E R

a Ravenna Teatro/Teatro delle Albe Production
in collaboration with Fondazione AVSI, Vita non profit magazine, Kamera Film, Antropotopia

THE SKY OVER KIBERA

a film by Marco Martinelli



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for the first time on screen 150 students from Nairobi schools (Kenia) supported by AVSI: Little Prince School, Ushirika Centre, Cardinal Otunga High School, Urafiki Carovana Primary School

subject Marco Martinelli *and* Ermanna Montanari

screenplay consultant Riccardo Bonacina

assistant director Laura Redaelli

editing Francesco Tedde

post-production Antropotopia

original music Daniele Roccato

general organisation Marcella Nonni *and* Silvia Pagliano

distribution Maria Martinelli

consulting and press relations Rosalba Ruggeri

executive producer Alessandro Cappello

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For the project THE SKY OVER KIBERA, directed by Marco Martinelli, Avsi was awarded the Italian Senate's 2019 Voluntary Work Prize, Culture section.



Synopsis

*Do you not recognise
that we are worms
born to take on the form
of the angelic butterfly?*

Dante Alighieri

THE SKY OVER KIBERA is an art film: it portrays how the *Divine Comedy* was “brought to life” in Kibera, an immense slum in Nairobi. Here, Martinelli worked with 150 children and adolescents to reinvent Dante’s masterpiece in English and Swahili. In so doing, he used his own poetic and visionary approach, interweaving footage from the performance with other images, sequences shot in the slum for the film, to alchemically transform theatre into cinema.

Three adolescents from Nairobi give body and voice to Dante, Virgil and Beatrice. They are the guides who lead the spectator through the labyrinth of Kibera. Here, the “dark forest” in which Dante gets lost is much more than a simple metaphor: in Swahili, Kibera means “forest”. All around them, a teeming chorus of bodies recites the tumultuous life of the damned, with wild beasts, thieves, murderers, devils, corrupt politicians – and poets indicating the way to salvation. Bringing together songs and recitation, wild races and frenzied dances, the 150 protagonists give life to a rich and touchingly poetic tableau, confirming once again the universal nature of Dante’s masterpiece.

Director’s intentions

“When I arrived in Kibera to start work on this project, invited by the Avsi Foundation, Dante and his *Divine Comedy* immediately came to mind. It may seem strange to link this famous piece of literature, at the origin of the Italian language and its literature, to one of Africa’s largest slums. Over half a million people live here with no safe drinking water, shacks heaped up one on top of the other, garbage everywhere and unbearable living conditions. But what else is the *Divine Comedy*, if not a courageous descent into the bowels of humanity? This work’s structure is the archetype of a universal voyage, and Dante, speaking of himself, speaks of all humanity. From a “dark forest” made of fear, rage and desperation, this poet, after accepting to be guided by redeeming shades, first descends to *Inferno*, then rises up the mountain of *Purgatory*, and finally comes to the light of *Paradise*. We began by telling the story of the *Divine Comedy*, like it was a fairy tale: and it worked. Our little accomplices played along. They felt like this story, which came from another world, was their own. We started out with games and improvisation, making everyone realise that this ancient tale needed their “world”, their experiences, desires and fears, to come to life once again and speak to spectators. The 150 protagonists of THE SKY OVER KIBERA brandished the *Comedy* as though it was a weapon, shining and beautiful, shouting out their right to happiness to the whole planet”.

Marco Martinelli author, dramaturge and director – along with Ermanna Montanari is the founder and artistic director of the Teatro delle Albe (1983). Along with Montanari, who has received many prizes as an actress and director, for years he has been proposing projects based on Dante internationally, from Romania to the United States, and is involved in a complete edition of the *Divine Comedy* for the Ravenna Festival, 2017-2021.

He has received many prizes nationally and internationally, including: seven Ubu Prizes, the “Oscars” of Italian theatre, as director, dramaturge and pedagogue; the “Golden Laurel” at Sarajevo’s international Mess Festival di; the Hystrio Prize; the Career prize at the Journées théâtrales

de Carthage; and the “Premio Enriquez” for directing. He has directed over fifty performances and his texts have been published and staged in Italy, France, Belgium, Germany, Romania, Slovakia, Chile, Brazil, Senegal, Russia and the United States. His activity as a dramaturge is documented in Maria Dolores Pesce’s monograph *Marco Martinelli Un Drammaturgo Corsaro*, published by Editoria e Spettacolo. Martinelli founded the *non-school*, a theatrical-pedagogical practice with adolescents that has become a reference point in Italy and various other parts of the world, and is the topic of the volume *Aristofane a Scampia*, Ponte alle Grazie Editore, forthcoming in France (Actes Sud). Martinelli made his film debut in 2017 with the feature film *Vita Agli Arresti di Aung San Suu Kyi*, whose subject was co-conceived by Montanari, also the film’s leading actress. It was recognised as culturally significant by the MiBACT Cinema Department and promoted by the Emilia-Romagna-Film Commission. After debuting at the Biografilm Festival and other Italian festivals, it has been shown in theatres in Italy and abroad, with independent distribution. The editor Ponte alle Grazie recently released *Nel Nome di Dante*, in which Martinelli brings autobiographic memories and contemporary events together with a sparkling rereading of Dante’s life and work, following an original path whose roots lie in his transformation of the *Comedy* into theatrical language.



Contacts

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