

## The Ciambra [15] 2017|Italy|118 min

UK release date **15<sup>th</sup> June 2018**

Director **Jonas Carpignano**

Screenplay **Jonas Carpignano**

Cinematographer **Tim Curtin**

Cast **Pio Amato (Pio); Iolanda Amato (Iolanda); Koudous Seihon (Ayiva); Damiano Amato (Cosimo)**

In “A Ciambra” Jonas Carpignano follows a Romani family who play versions of themselves, and specifically focuses on a 14-year-old boy named Pio (Pio Amato), whose petty crime apprenticeship with his father and older brothers leads to adult responsibilities before he’s ready, as well as a potentially devastating moral crisis.

Pio lives with his large, extended family in a run-down apartment complex on the abandoned outskirts of Gioia Tauro, a small southern Italian port city known for its part in international drug movement and for the way its city government collapses every time organized crime groups like ‘Ndrangheta step in to take over. The family exists outside of the larger crime mechanics of the town, but close enough to scrounge a subsistence living from it.

Though it’s only the crumbs of criminal enterprise left to families like Pio’s, they make ends meet stealing this and that, at least until Pio’s father and older brother wind up with short stretches in prison. Appointing himself breadwinner, the charismatic boy works overtime to prove his manhood. He steals cars and sells them back to their owners for 300 euros each, he makes off with tech equipment when he can and, in a moment of teenage overreach, he cases the home of an Italian crime family with disastrous, reverberating results.

Pio’s one friend and older brother substitute, Aviya (Koudous Seihon), is an immigrant from Burkina Faso, whose own struggle for survival was the subject of “Mediterranea”, and here Aviya’s steady presence provides the tenderness and wisdom that balances the chaotic rough-love delivered by Pio’s clan.

“A Ciambra” sounds tailor-made for an executive producer like Martin Scorsese, a filmmaker well acquainted with the workings of families whose business is crime. But Carpignano — an Independent Spirit Award nominee for directing — is far less interested in the epic mechanics of how the flat screen TV falls off the truck, and far more on the personal daily details of the people inhabiting this world. The structural conditions keeping Pio and his family poor, marginalized, and too often imprisoned are suggested but not explicitly shown, communicated through familial bickering and weathered, exhausted faces. The film approaches and then backs away from larger issues of marginalized and immigrant communities, showing rather than preaching, and most importantly, prioritizing Pio’s adolescent face and the way his eyes scrutinize his surroundings as they constantly look for opportunity, weak spots to break through.

Occasionally, though, a dreamlike image of a silver horse wanders into the frame — the animal is also seen in an opening flashback sequence featuring Pio’s grandfather as a young man — momentarily interrupting Carpignano’s realist approach and distracting the boy with the promise of escape. It’s a tactic that complicates “A Ciambra” only long enough to create a sense of undefined longing in the young man, and to remind the audience that for all his assertions of adulthood, this is still a child in need of a safer place to grow, one that doesn’t come with a built-in promise of lifetime poverty and turns behind bars.

**After: Dave White, The Wrap, 2 Feb 2018**

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