



SUSPIRIA

The witching hour draws near as **Luca Guadagnino** prepares to release *Suspiria*, his intoxicating homage to Dario Argento's 1977 masterpiece. He speaks to **Delfina Delettrez Fendi** about believing in magic, the spell of cinema, and the enduring power of horror

Photography **Nico Vascellari**

DELFINA DELETTREZ FENDI: Today is Friday the 13th, this unlucky number, so I have prepared 13 questions for you, dear Luca. The first question is: Do you believe in the existence of witches?

LUCA GUADAGNINO: I do. I actually believe in witches historically. I think it's something that has been historically determined, that witches existed. But why did they exist? They probably existed because the incredible power of womanhood posed such a threat to the patriarchy for centuries, that it had to be, in a way, turned into a phantom of evil. The essence of this power of womanhood was basically swapped out for evil. So I think that witches exist, but they exist as a representation of the power of womanhood.

I really like this answer. When did you first see the 1977 *Suspiria*, and what sort of emotions did it provoke?

I saw *Suspiria* in 1984, I think, alone in my house in Palermo. It was the kind of experience that forged me. The impact of the movie was, for me, so radical in its novelty because I had never seen something like that at the time. I was 13 or 14. I was also novel to the possibility that you could juxtapose such extreme violence with extreme formalities—I'd been assaulted by the music, so it created in me an incredible impact, and its long-standing effects on me are still here.

I remember the first movie I saw about witches, which was a movie called *Häxan*. I don't know if you know it, it's a silent movie.

I know *Häxan*. Witchcraft of two centuries. It's a fantastic movie.

Yeah, and when this movie was released it was also banned and condemned, so I always liked the aesthetic of the movie especially because there is this subtle yet evident feminist appeal, which I also found in your movie. It's very of our age and seems very relevant. What is your opinion on this?

Well, *Häxan* is a very important film for me too and it's an example of what I said in the first place, which is the idea of womanhood that we have to analyze when we discuss witchcraft. That's why the topic of witches is addictive in cinema, as is something about the horror genre. The reality is that horror, in the sense of Freud, is the mirror image of our aim and our aspirations.

You've said this film is not a remake but an homage. What separates the idea for you?

We don't want to replicate a Dario Argento film, because his film is not replicable. It is something that stands by itself and doesn't need to be mimicked by anybody. What we want is to admire Dario's movie and translate the effect and the feeling that happened when we saw

the movie, and see if you can create an impact with a new language, so it's something of a companion piece. In this sense, it's an homage because without Dario's movie, we couldn't have made our version. It's not because we needed to copy Dario's, but it inspired us to be very personal ourselves.

Yes. Was it personal for you to set the film in Berlin during that specific historical moment?

Well, Dario Argento's film was in Freiburg, which is in Germany, and it came out in 1977. That led me and my writer David Kajganich to reflect on how the '70s had these very, very strong movements that were well on their way to radicalizing the public discourse and political discourse around the conflict of generations, the conflict between genders, feminism, and in Germany in particular, the great divide between the society that came out of the Nazis trying to forget about it and never processing its guilt, and a generation that wanted to shake the house of Germany and really flip its values upside-down in a very radical way, to the degree that it led to terrorism. So, I thought that to intertwine the idea of a coven of witches and dancers that happen to live under the same roof with a historical period in which the tensions outside in society reflect the tension inside the company, that was something that interested me a lot.

Speaking of different decades, it's a movie set in the '70s but it is being released nowadays. Horror movies are always political and there are social statements if you read between the lines. Was there a specific message you wanted to send?

Well, I'm a little bit shy to name the themes of the movies I make and the discourse that I try to go for, but let's try to be less shy and let me think of what I could say. Maybe I can say that it is an interesting thing that this movie is about the power of femininity and that the public discourse on womanhood has become so strong this past year. Sometimes you happen to feel what happens around you so strongly that it is reflected in your work without a programmatic approach.

Let's talk about the music. Dario's *Suspiria* had mesmerizing sounds by the band Goblin, which made it particularly relevant. How did you choose the music for this film, and how important was the music to your vision?

I thought we had to have the sound of our generation, my generation. I can't think of anyone more poignant as an artist in music than Thom Yorke, as far as the sound of my generation goes. When I wanted to work with him and I approached him and he finally said yes, clearly it was such an amazing achievement for me.

What about sex? This is your first movie in which sex doesn't have a prominent role, if I'm right. But I noticed there were subtle but explicit sexual references in the trends of some of the clothes. Is this a way of referring to the secret mysteries of sexuality?

Well, that is a very wise and inspired approach that comes from the wonderful Giulia Piersanti, who made the costumes, and the conversations we had. She informed me of the possibility of using imagery that was, in a way, hidden in the body of the texture. You will see all these details are really, really precise in the movie. This is Giulia's work, she's so good.

Within the movie, there are a lot of homages to art and bodies in art, particularly artists like Marina Abramović and Gina Pane. What is relevant about their work in this historical moment?

I think the lesson of great artists like Gina Pane and Ana Mendieta is that radicalism goes hand in hand with a very wise idea of the senses. I am up for radicalism, and that is why I wanted to look at horror as art, and the great art that radicalized the public discourse of the '70s—particularly the female artists of the time—to review how horror and the uncanny go hand in hand with desire and beauty.

I'm fascinated with your ongoing partnership with Tilda Swinton. It almost seems like you've found each other in order to push each other's boundaries and fantasies. She's such a poetic actress, and you have the ability to offer her such exciting roles. Can you tell me about your relationship?

Well, it's very simple and very mysterious. It's all about being part of a family and wanting to spend as much time together as possible, like little kids. We're trying to spend time and we have the luck to play games that turn into movies, like we do.

How many questions am I at? Ten? Here's a question: What are your top three horror movies of all time?

Well, I would say *Cat People* by Jacques Tourneur and Paul Schrader, *The Thing* by Howard Hawks and John Carpenter, because those have been remade, and maybe *Suspiria* by Dario Argento and because it's my child, *Suspiria* by Luca Guadagnino, in a very immodest way. All remakes! I like the originals and the remakes.

This is your fourth film that draws inspiration from an existing story, either a text or film property. But you maintain an auteur level of control over your vision that brings a new life to the story and takes it in a direction that feels completely novel. What draws you to a story and what sort of story would you be interested in making next?

It's a very complicated question because it's always intuitive and never direct. I don't know what draws me to a story. You should probably look at what I have done so far and try to find the qualities that connect them together. But definitely, making a movie for me is all about craftsmanship and control.

For my 13th and final question, is there anything you would like to reveal about the film for your audience, our readers?

What should we say? I will say that this movie is very dear to me because it has been a very long process to make. It took many years since I first saw the original movie, but most importantly, it is the enterprise of a group of people among which there is my producer and partner Marco Morabito and my dear friend and producer who I love, Silvia Fendi, and it took us 10 years. I will never forget when we finally acquired the rights to make the movie and then we said, "Let's celebrate by watching the movie!" So we reunited at Silvia's house and we were so tired because we had all been working very hard. We decided to see the movie very late at night and as soon as we played the video, we all fell asleep on the couches.

I didn't know if you wanted to admit this!

[Laughs] Like a big family. I think it went into our subconscious even more! But it wasn't about the movie, it was about our tiredness and exhaustion, but we were just so happy to celebrate that, and I can't wait to celebrate the opening of the movie soon with the same people. Let's hope nobody falls asleep watching *our* film!

Suspiria is in theaters November 2.

