

“The Hungry Ghosts”

Opening Night Film | “Tiger Award” Nominee | 2009 Rotterdam Int’l Film Festival

Warsaw Int’l film Festival – 2009
Santa Barbara Int’l film Festival – 2010
Berkshire Int’l film Festival – 2010 (upcoming)

“THE HUNGRY GHOSTS” written & directed by Michael Imperioli



"The Hungry Ghosts"

Press Quotes

"Gripping...an impressive debut film that offers an uncompromising look at the complexities of life and the redemptive qualities we need to get through it...Steve Schirripa gives a remarkable performance."

Jason Guerrasio, Filmmaker Magazine

...[A] quintessential actor's behind-the-camera debut...shows that Imperioli has learned plenty from Scorsese and Ferrara...Among the leads, the bulky Schirripa in particular is immensely watchable.

Jonathan Romney, Screen Daily

"...There's no doubt [Imperioli] has a gift for language, and the performances are strong all around, especially Nick Sandow's splenetic alcoholic Gus."

IFC.com, R. Emmet Sweeney

"...Comparable to Robert Altman's SHORT CUTS...Steve Schirripa plays a brilliant role that will surely go on to deserve recognition in the film world."

Marta Sikorska, Stopklatka (Polish National Review)

"...in the tradition of John Cassavetes and many directing actors who came after him."

Mark Moorman, Het Parool (Dutch National Newspaper)

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Director’s Statement

The first draft of The Hungry Ghosts was completed in December of 2007. My wife Victoria (also the film’s Production Designer, co-Producer and Guardian Angel) was the first to read it, and without her encouragement it would have gone no further. Instead, we set forth together on the path of turning words on a page into image and sound.

Our model for producing was Studio Dante, the 66-seat Off Broadway theater founded and run by Victoria and myself (with the help of a varying team of talented theater professionals) during the five year span of 2003-2008. It was at Studio Dante where we learned that combining choice talent, scrupulous discipline and creative freedom often yields vital and effective art. There would be no Hungry Ghosts without Studio Dante. There are 19 actors in the film that appeared on our jewel box stage. Equally as important is the fact that our two most generous patrons joined the film team as our executive producers.

The final piece of the puzzle was Stefan Schaefer and Diane Crespo of Cicala Filmworks. Victoria had worked with Cicala on a television pilot and sang me their praises. After seeing the film Arranged (written, directed and produced by Stefan and Diane) I humbly asked if they would join us and produce The Hungry Ghosts. Luckily, they accepted and put together a crew of filmmakers with the same dedication, passion and skill they themselves possess.

This film is the fruit of these collaborations. It is exactly the film I had hoped to make when pen first hit paper, only more so and beyond. In this sense it is truly an independent film. It was a great privilege to work with such a unique and gifted group of individuals. As for the themes and ideas presented on screen, I hope the film will speak for itself. Enjoy.

Michael Imperioli | New York City

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Motion Picture Synopsis

Short Synopsis

Five New Yorkers - of different ages, races, backgrounds – hunger for sensual, emotional and spiritual fulfillment. Their intersecting and colliding paths reflect the zeitgeist of our times, in which the desperation of the West smacks up against the religious teachings of the East.

Long Synopsis

The Tibetans describe a type of hell in which souls with tiny mouths are afflicted with enormous, insatiable bellies. Enter Michael Imperioli’s New York, an urban landscape where inhabitants search futilely to satisfy their illusory physical wants and spiritual needs. These are “the hungry ghosts” we will travel with for 36 hours...

FRANK, a late-night radio host, gambles and uses drugs at the expense of his impressionable teenage son, MATTHEW. After a rough night out, Frank and Matthew meet for their family therapy session. Frank, feeling attacked by his son and the therapist, is forced to admit he doesn’t even know Mathew’s cell-phone number. Matthew storms off...

Meanwhile GUS, a philosophical seeker fresh out of a 90-day detox program, begins searching for his ex-lover, NADIA. Thwarted at every turn, he soon meets and goes on a bender with a charismatic wino. Periodically, Gus voices his yearnings and love in messages to...

Nadia, a young African-American woman who we see leaving a rooming house with all her worldly belongings in a duffel bag. Avoiding Gus, she seeks out an old friend in the City, and tells her of the sexual fulfillment, danger and spiritual insights she experienced with her ex-lover...

As night descends, Frank is forced to concede to his ex-wife, SHARON, that their son Matthew is missing. While she curses and threatens to take him back to court, Frank heads for the radio station, where he pleads on-air for Matthew to call him. Frank’s heart-breaking pleas are punctuated by the routines of a Catskill-era guest comedian...

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But it's too late. After sharing drugs with a predatory older couple, Matthew joins them in their bed. He spends a lonely night in their high-end apartment before finally calling his mother. She picks him up, tells him everything will be okay, but his psychologically fragile state leaves him suicidal. She and her brother load him into the car and head upstate, in the hopes that fresh air, mountains, and quality family time will help him navigate “the teenage blues”...

As Gus's bender moves from comic to anguished, his voice messages to Nadia become more desperate. At a bar, he meets a young woman who is also seeking spiritual enlightenment at an upstate meditation center. Gus questions her, challenges her quest, his charisma drawing her closer...

Still directionless, and having fought with her old friend, Nadia sneaks onto a commuter train where she runs into Frank, who is en route to meet Sharon and Matthew upstate. Suffering a panic attack, Frank is taken to a local hospital by Nadia. Afterwards, as he awaits a call from his family, she convinces him to join her at a center for spiritual development...

It is in this small upstate community where the intersecting lives of all five characters converge. But the peace of those who have gathered is threatened when Gus, having been ignored by Nadia too long, shows up for the meditation session. It is here where they all must face their demons and, perhaps, overcome...

Through the poignant story lines of ordinary citizens, THE HUNGRY GHOSTS captures the zeitgeist of our post-millennium New York City, in which the desperation of the West smacks up against the religious teachings of the East.

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The Creative Team

Writer/Director – Michael Imperioli

Michael Imperioli is best known for his portrayal of Christopher Moltisanti on the acclaimed HBO series “The Sopranos,” for which he won a Best Supporting Actor EMMY Award and was nominated for a GOLDEN GLOBE. In addition to his role as a cast member, he also wrote five episodes of the hit show.

Michael first came to the public's attention in the role of "Spider" in Martin Scorsese's GOODFELLAS. In his more than 30 film roles since, Michael has worked with acclaimed directors such as Spike Lee (JUNGLE FEVER, MALCOM X, CLOCKERS, GIRL 6, SUMMER OF SAM), the Hughes Brother's (DEAD PRESIDENTS), Nancy Savoka (HOUSEHOLD SAINTS), Gary Winnick (SWEET NOTHING, starring opposite Mira Sorvino), and Peter Jackson (the forthcoming LOVELY BONES). He was recently cast as a lead in “Life on Mars,” which premiered on ABC in October.

As a writer, Michael has worked for Dimension and penned the screen adaptation of Mario Puzo's OMERTA for Miramax. He also wrote and executive produced SUMMER OF SAM.

Working on the New York stage for over a decade, Michael has produced, directed and acted. Some of his work includes critically acclaimed performances in AVEN' U BOYS directed by Frederick Zollo, DISPLACED PERSONS (opposite Martha Plimpton), HALF DESERTED STREET, Seth Zvi Rosenfield's THE WRITING ON THE WALL, and LITTLE BLOOD BROTHER.

Demonstrating a longstanding commitment to the New York City stage, Michael and his wife Victoria Imperioli launched Studio Dante, a 66-seat theatre focused on presenting and mounting new works. The theater was built to inspire the next generation of our City's performers and audiences.

THE HUNGRY GHOSTS marks Michael's debut as a writer/director, and was written with many of his favorite actors and colleagues in mind.

Producer – STEFAN SCHAEFER

A co-founder of the New York-based production company Cicala Filmworks, Stefan has worked in independent film for over 13 years. His films have premiered and won awards at top-tier festivals such as Berlin, Hamptons, and SxSW, among many others, and have been successfully released theatrically, via cable outfits such as HBO and the Sundance Channel, and on DVD.

Recent feature film credits as a writer, director and/or producer include THE HIGHER FORCE (2008), THE AMAZING TRUTH ABOUT QUEEN RAQUELA (2008), ARRANGED (2007), CONFESS (2005), and the documentary CONTESTED STREETS (2006).

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Recent awards/nominations include: nomination for Nordic Film Prize (2009), Grand Prize for Best Feature Film at the Skip City Int'l Film Festival in Japan (2008), the TEDDY Award for Best Feature Film at the Berlin Int'l Film Festival (2008), Best Film at the Berkshire Int'l Film Festival and Brooklyn Int'l Film Festival (2007), and Best Screenwriter at the Hamptons Film Festival (2005).

Producer – DIANE CRESPO

After several years producing and directing theater off Broadway, Diane co-founded Cicala Filmworks in 1997. Over the years she has directed and produced films for clients including the Guggenheim Museum, the March of Dimes, and Roundabout Theatre, as well as documentaries and feature films.

Diane produced the TV documentary CONTESTED STREETS, which aired on the Sundance Channel in early 2008, and co-directed and produced her first narrative feature ARRANGED in 2007, which premiered at the South by Southwest Film Festival and has played at over forty festivals and sold to over thirty international territories. Recent producing credits include THE HUNGRY GHOSTS, and the TV pilots "Circledrawers" and "Late on Laight."

PRODUCTION DESIGNER | PRODUCER - Victoria imperioli

Victoria currently serves as Co-Artistic Director of Studio Dante, the New York theatre she founded with her husband Michael Imperioli. In this capacity, she is at the center of selecting what new shows go up, overseeing the set and costume design, and ensuring plays receive the critical and audience support they deserve.

Victoria studied architecture and design at The School of Visual Arts in New York City, while also attending classes at NYU. She has been involved in various projects in both Europe and the US since the early 90s. Victoria has developed a distinct and admired style in her set work and interior design work. Her work has been featured in publications such as Architectural Digest Magazine.

Additional Producers:

- Tina Thor, Producer, TMT Entertainment Group
- Howard Axel, Producer, TMT Entertainment Group
- Joe Scarpinito, Executive Producer
- Joe Laurita, Executive Producer
- David Greenberg, Co-Executive Producer
- Andrew Lund, Co-Executive Producer

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Producing Companies

Cicala Filmworks

Cicala Filmworks is a full-service film, video, and new media production company headquartered in New York City. Since its inception in 1997, the company has grown to produce content as varied as documentary programming, industrial videos, TV commercials, music videos, new media installations, and short and feature films.

The company’s recent film *ARRANGED* (2007) has played at over twenty international film festivals, winning top awards at five, and was picked up for North American distribution by Film Movement. It is being sold internationally by Visit Films, which has already negotiated theatrical and/or cable TV deals for Israel, Brazil, Japan, Latin America, and Central Europe. The company’s recent documentary, *CONTESTED STREETS* (2006), was picked up as part of the Sundance Channel’s “green programming block” and will air in May.

Founded by Diane Crespo and Stefan Schaefer, the company has long-term partnerships with Icelandic filmmaker Olaf de Fleur Johannesson, German screenwriter Christoph Silber, and actor/filmmaker Michael Imperioli and Victoria Imperioli.

CINEMA DANTE

Cinema Dante’s story begins in the theatre. When Michael and Victoria Imperioli decided to fulfill their shared passion for the rare thrill of experiencing truly progressive works of art, their instinct led them back to their roots, and the result was the Off-Broadway theater **Studio Dante**. Working side by side they built this small but ambitious non-profit company with the mission of fostering this singular kind of progressive art. The stories Studio Dante tells, though diverse, all have one thing in common: the courage to illuminate fresh, though often difficult points of view. Over four seasons and twelve productions, Studio Dante’s work has garnered industry awards and critical praise, developed a dedicated audience, and attracted substantial financial sponsorship.

The strength and success of Studio Dante lies in the extraordinary family of veteran theater artists that it gathers together to breathe life into its chosen projects. Now, Cinema Dante continues along Studio Dante’s path. Engaging this same tried and true family of artists, Cinema Dante brings theatrical expertise to the screen.

TMT Entertainment Group

TMT partners, Howard Axel and Tina Thor, are longtime Imperioli managers and frequent producers and collaborators. Having produced several Studio Dante plays, *THE HUNGRY GHOST* is the first film they worked on with Imperioli and Cicala Filmworks.

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The Cast

SteveN r. schirRipa (PLAYING lead role of ‘FRANK’)

Steve Schirripa was born in Brooklyn. A series regular on David Chase's acclaimed HBO drama “The Sopranos,” the Brooklyn College graduate's acting odyssey began while working at a hotel on the Las Vegas strip.

As the one time entertainment director of The Riviera Hotel in Las Vegas, Steve worked with such comedians as Drew Carey, Kevin Pollack and Bruce Baum. His cameo roles in their comedy specials led to episodic work on the big and small screen. Over the years he has guest starred on “Joey,” “Enterprise,” “Law & Order,” “My Wife and Kids”, “Ed,” “The George Lopez Show,” and “The King of Queens.” He is also a regular guest on the talk show circuit, including “The Tonight Show with Jay Leno”, “Late Night with Conan O'Brien,” and many more.

Steve's big screen credentials are as formidable as his portrayal of Bobby Bacala on THE SOPRANOS. He's played memorable roles in DUANE HOPWOOD, HIGH ROLLER (with Michael Imperioli), Monday Night Mayhem (with John Turturro), MEET JOE DIRT (with David Spade) and SEE SPOT RUN (with David Arquette). He's also appeared in DETROIT ROCK CITY, FLINTSTONES-VIVA ROCK VEGAS, Martin Scorsese's CASINO, and Terry Gilliam's FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS.

AUNJANUE ELLIS (PLAYING LEAD ROLE OF ‘NADIA’)

Aunjanue Ellis is an accomplished film, TV and theatre actor. Her film credits number over fifteen, including box-office hits such as RAY, UNDERCOVER BROTHER and MEN OF HONOR. On the small screen she has had recurring roles on “E-Ring”, “Justice”, “Johnny Zero” and, currently, HBO's “True Blood.”

She holds a B.A. from Brown University and studied acting in the graduate program at NYU.

NICK SANDOW (PLAYING LEAD ROLE OF ‘Gus’)

New York actor Nick Sandow has over twenty films to his credit, including Swimf@n, CONNIE & CARLA and RETURN TO PARADISE. TV credits include recurring roles on such hit shows as “Third Watch” and “Law & Order.”

He is also well known for his stage work, including work at Studio Dante, where he starred in “Baptism by Fire”, directed by Michael Imperioli.

SHARON ANGELA (Playing Lead role of “SHARON”)

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Sharon Angela is a veteran actor of stage and film. Perhaps best known for her work on “The Sopranos,” in which she played the character of Rosalie Aprile, she has worked consistently for over twenty years in NY theatre, TV and film.

Her first professional gig was playing Tina in “Tony and Tina's Wedding” and since then has appeared in over fourteen films, among them: Ghost Dog, Two Family House, On the Run, The Dutchmaster, Red Passport and Ibs.

She studied acting with Elaine Aiken and for many years sang, played harmonica, produced, created sets and costumes, and did hair and make-up with the Zoo Theater on East 4th Street.

Select theater credits include “The Mayor's Limo,” “The Father” and “Sicilian Limes.” She has worked with Michael Imperioli and the Studio Dante team for many years as an acting coach and Board Member. She grew up in the projects, in a part of Connecticut that is not included in the state's brochures.

EMORY COHEN (PLAYING LEAD ROLE OF “MATTHEW”)

Emory is an 18-year old actor from New York City. He just graduated from Elisabeth Irwin High School and is studying acting on a scholarship at UArts in Philadelphia. THE HUNGRY GHOSTS marks his big screen debut.

Supporting Cast:

PAUL CALDERON, whose credits include PULP FICTION, GIRLFIGHT, 21 GRAMS, among many others.

JOHN VENTIMIGLIA, known for his work on THE SOPRANOS and in films such as PERSONAL VELOCITY, TREES LOUNGE, among over 40 others.

JERRY GRAYSON whose film credits include STRIPTease, FIND ME GUILTY, PUSHING TIN and TV credits include “The Sopranos” and “Law & Order.”

Technical Info:

- Format: HDCam
- Running Time: 1:46
- Sales Info: All territories available