

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Luca Guadagnino—We Are Who We Are

Elisa Leonelli · Wednesday, October 7th, 2020

Luca Guadagnino, the Italian director of *Call me By Your Name*, created a television series titled *We Are Who We Are*, 8 episodes airing weekly on HBO from September 14 to November 2. It's the story of two American teenagers, Fraser and Caitlin, who live with their families inside a US military base in Chioggia, Italy. Several themes are explored: sexual identity, gender expression, lesbian relationships, living abroad, fitting in with new friends, identifying as African vs African-American, being sent to fight a war, etc.

Watch and listen to Guadagnino explain: "Mostly it's a tale of changes. We all go through processes where we really don't know who we are and we need to experiment who we could be. And this for me fits every generation."



Luca Guadagnino ©. Armando Gallo HFPa 2017

I ask the director why he set this story in 2016 against the backdrop of the last presidential election, when Hillary Clinton earned 3 million more votes than Donald Trump, but he became President, despite proof of illegal Russian meddling.

"2016 is an important year because of the consequences that came out after the election of Donald Trump. I had been there already as an Italian witnessing the rise to power of a plutocrat who was very intertwined with the entertainment TV system, Silvio Berlusconi. The idea of a plutocracy that gains political power started with him in 1993 then spread like a virus all over Europe and in America. I wanted to show that the direction toward love and desire of these young people is definitely more poetic than the brutality of what happens around them."

Guadagnino elaborates on his fascination with troubled teenagers: "I believe that adolescence is a state of transition, you are mourning the end of your infancy, when you feel powerful and you think that every desire, every wish you have can be fulfilled by the love of your parents. Then this moment ends, your body starts to transform and this becomes almost a painful transformation, because puberty comes with aspects that you don't expect. You see yourself becoming something else and you don't know what you will eventually become, so you are in this transitional moment, which is very confusing."



Jack Dylan Grazer as Fraser © HBO

I ask [Jack Dylan Grazer](#) who plays Fraser how he was directed to play an unruly boy who hits his mother Sarah (Chloe Sevigny), captain of the military base, married to Maggie (Alice Braga), a doctor in the Army. “My mom would never let me get away with slapping her in the face, or coming home drunk with blood gushing down my face. I talked to Luca about the relationship I have with Sarah, my maternal mom, and he told me it was a similar dynamic, but not as incestuous, like in the movie *La Luna* by Bernardo Bertolucci. It’s almost like she’s my spouse, we’re having arguments and it’s disturbing, but it’s also beautiful. Then another thing that goes on with Fraser is his relationship with his other mother Maggie, who doesn’t get all the recognition she deserves for doing her best to parent me.”



Jordan Kristine Seamon as Caitlyn © HBO

I ask Jordan Kristine Seamón who plays Caitlin if she has done some research among trans teenagers to portray the struggles of a girl who is exploring how she could be a boy. “Yes, I did a lot of online research beforehand, and I actually have some friends who are transgender and are transitioning currently, so I was able to ask them a few questions about what their experience was like. There are so many kids out there, especially now, that are exploring their gender identity and gender fluidity, and it’s great to have a show for young girls and boys, non-binary kids, to see, so they can understand that they’re not alone and that their problems are valid.”



Elisa Leonelli, Luca Guadagnino (c) Armando Gallo HFPA 2018

You may read my one-on-one interview with Luca Guadagnino [in Italian](#) on the Golden Globes website and my translation [in English](#).

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