

Cannes Film Review: 'Like Crazy'



Characters and dialogue are the key to Paolo Virzì's terrific comedy-drama "[Like Crazy](#)," a study of two very different women in a psychiatric institution that avoids practically every pitfall such a short synopsis may conjure. Boasting a deliriously loquacious script together with a rare understanding of how to balance certain Italian caricatures with a grounding sense of realism – a combination that's truly Virzì's forte – the film takes two psychologically damaged women, one a mythomaniac powerhouse and the other a fragile wreck, and makes them into a mutually supportive duo who surprisingly touch our emotions. Neither Valeria Bruni Tedeschi nor Micaela Ramazzotti have been better, and this tailor-made production looks set to be one of the few recent Italo comedies with serious chances for international success.

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Villa Biondi is the Tuscan nut house for women where we first see Beatrice (Bruni Tedeschi), a non-stop chatterbox who superficially masters every social situation thanks to her aristocratic lineage and a stunning ability to invent one convincing lie after another. She may be mixing her meds, but somehow she usually manages to hold it all together, though her manner of treating everyone first as co-conspirators and then servants

distances her from most of the residents. What also sets them apart is that Beatrice can successfully pretend to be "normal," at least for short periods.

Not so newcomer Donatella (Ramazzotti), a painfully thin, tattooed mess who arrives bruised inside and out. Withdrawn and distrusting of everyone, she retreats even further after falling for the prying Beatrice's breathtakingly bold impersonation of a psychiatrist. The deception, and further snooping, reveals that Donatella is heavily medicated and has a child she once tried to kill.

During day release at a plant nursery, Beatrice grabs Donatella and they board a bus, evading Villa Biondi staff who are one step behind at a shopping mall, an elegant restaurant, and the nightclub where Donatella's brutal former lover works. Meanwhile Beatrice heads to her ex's seaside villa, thrilled to be out of the nut house yet not really able to re-enter her former life again.

Every now and then "Like Crazy" has a few minor tonal problems, such as an out-of-place randy scene with Beatrice's ex (Bob Messini), plus Virzì is overly coy for most of the film with the details of Donatella's past. But then just when you think he may tip everything into over-milked sentiment, he delivers a finale of such genuine emotional beauty that even tear-resistant audiences will find their cheeks damp.

There may be no better dialogue writer in Italy nowadays than Virzì ("Human Capital"), here collaborating with fellow director-writer Francesca Archibugi. Beatrice's cascades of words are practically nonstop (it's amazing Bruni Tedeschi took breaths), flitting across subjects and character, yet despite a quasi-exaggerated element, somehow the believability and humor remain constant; perhaps it's because they issue from such deep pain. Balancing the fabulist Beatrice against the nearly trembling Donatella gives greater humanity to them both, especially when seen in conjunction with more grounded figures like clinic doctor Fiamma (Valentina Carnelutti, always a welcome presence) and the deeply human couple at the end.

Ramazzotti, painfully thin for the role and looking like she can be snapped in two, transforms herself into a woman of such unspeakable interior damage that one fears a misjudged look would drive her further into her shell. Tormented by being removed from her son, she's a dazed half-survivor needing to sleep with a flashlight on to ward off more nightmares. Where she combs her hair to hide her face, Bruni Tedeschi uses her luxuriant blonde tresses to bewitch and declare her place in society. The fragility the actress has

always been able to channel is here, but it's semi-disguised by the confidence of someone used to money and position – her name dropping is priceless, as is the gleam in her eye when she spies something that excites her. In a word, her performance is a joy.

Summer light and heat inform the bright, saturated visuals, handsomely capturing the beauties of the Tuscan landscape without turning them into tourist postcards. Flashbacks are sparingly used and shot in more textured, almost lurid colors.