

**Short synopsis (one paragraph):****Status:** approved

Assisi, 1211.

Chiara is eighteen years old and one night she runs away from home to join her friend Francesco: from that moment on her life changes forever. With charisma and conviction, she breaks free from her family's constraints and stands up to the Pope himself. She fights for herself, for the women who join her and for her dream of freedom. The story of a Saint. The story of a girl and her revolution.

**The Icon:****Status:** approved

Clare of Assisi was the first woman to write an original Rule for a female order, refusing to adapt a pre-existing male order Rule: she wrote an amazing Rule, full of kindness, seeking understanding instead of judgement and punishment. It is mainly men who wrote about her: her biographer, the Pope and members of the clergy, they all wrote so that the real Clare could be forgotten. She spent her whole life behind the walls of the San Damiano monastery. That was not what she would have wanted: she was forced into a cloistered life, but her solitude was inhabited by many loved ones and an incredibly strong spiritual force.

Chiara Frugoni

**Comments of the director:****Status:** approved

"Francesco's and Chiara's stories are really exciting. To rediscover the political, other than spiritual, dimension of their "radical" lives – the choice of poverty; of a life at the margins of an unfair society; the dream and foundation of a community life without any hierarchy or power division – makes us realize, while we question the mysteries of faith and religion, the impact that Franciscan beliefs and practices have had on secular thought. The story of Chiara's life, unknown to many, offers us the energy of a rebirth, the contagious enthusiasm of youth, but also carries the gravity of a revolution, of any revolution worthy of the name."

Susanna Nicchiarelli

**RADICALISM AND MODERNITY:** I believe the strength of Clare's story lies in its radicalism: a radicalism that is always relevant and questions us in any age. Though set in a context distant from our own, it is the story of an 18-year-old girl who leaves her father's home, wealth and security, to fight for a dream of freedom. I hope the film will be able to communicate to everyone the energy and youthful enthusiasm of this battle: the dream of a rebirth, of a revolution so strongly wanted and desired.

**THE IDEA:** I ran into Clare's story by chance, but it struck an important chord in me as a woman and filmmaker at a very peculiar time in our history.

On March the 7th, 2020, on the eve of the first Covid lockdown, I was visiting Assisi with my children to show them Giotto's frescoes (I have Umbrian origins and my paternal grandmother's house is not far from Perugia). Like everyone, I had always been fascinated by the figure of St. Francis but I knew little about Clare. On that occasion, I bought two books about Clare of Assisi in the bookshop of the basilica. I read those books in the following days of March 2020, in Rome, in the absurd and frightening atmosphere of those days during which the Middle Ages and its fears didn't seem so distant.

The first book was a very traditional biography, depicting Clare as a nun devoted to seclusion and prayer since she was a child. The second book fascinated me much more: it was a text by Chiara Frugoni, the great Italian medievalist who dedicated her whole life to the study of *Clare and Francis*, and who would later become my irreplaceable consultant for the screenplay of the film. I read Frugoni's book *Chiara and Francis* and bought immediately her beautiful *Una solitudine abitata (An inhabited solitude)*: Frugoni deconstructed the official, domesticated and obedient image of Chiara that I had found in the more "traditional" biography. I thus discovered that we don't know much about the real Clare, because official and religious historians have never told her true story.

Clare was a rebel, a brave young woman full of energy, who wanted to preach, travel and establish a poor community of Franciscan women spreading the example of evangelical life around the world. Her dream, however, dangerously challenged the established power, because in the Middle Ages religious women were not permitted any kind of active preaching nor were they allowed to choose a life in poverty. If they wanted to devote themselves to religion, women were forced to choose a cloistered life: they had to disappear behind the walls of a convent, living under the protection of the Church and of the possessions they brought as a dowry, if they were rich, or living as servants of the wealthier nuns if they were poor. Chiara didn't want any ladies or servants, and she defied cardinals and popes to keep together her community of poor sisters, all equal and free. Throughout her life she had to give in, compromise and come into conflict even with Francis himself in order to carry out her project.

After I met Clare, in those months of 2020 and then in the following two years of periodically forced isolation, this revolutionary dream of a life in a community of equals accompanied me and gave me strength. The more time passed, the more was I convinced that the moment was right to tell Chiara's story.

**MIRACLES AND SPIRITUALITY:** When she begins her adventure, Clare not only discovers that she has an unexpected charisma that will make her the leader of an increasingly large group of women: she also finds herself handling a series of miracles that arrive unexpectedly, and that she doesn't always understand or control. Miracles that create a distance between her and her sisters, between her and the people: they are mostly everyday miracles, many of them dealing with food, that simply happen. To represent them, without seeking rational or transcendent explanations, I chose the path of simplicity.

I was raised a Catholic but I haven't been a believer for quite a long time. However, I believe that the mystery of life, death, and the leap into transcendence that faith represents questions and concerns us all. The spirituality of Clare's story is perhaps the strongest element of the film: it gives solidity to the characters of Clare and Francis and explains the obstinacy of their choices, along with those of the men women around them. Their will to remain in the Church in spite of everything, and to build a project for future generations, would be inexplicable without the religious context. That's why, though rereading it in the light of the historical facts, I believed the story of Clare needed to be told also according to the "legend," with its miracles and inexplicable phenomena. It would have made no sense to omit the supernatural events supposed to have marked her journey, events that have such a strong narrative in popular belief and representations, and are so vivid in the testimonies of Clare's sisters at the canonization process. Therefore, I tried to imagine these incidents as the protagonists themselves told them, with simplicity, like everyday events; and I have also tried to imagine the effect that these miraculous occurrences must have had on Clare and Francis, who were young but coming to terms with their own "sanctity."

Addressing this aspect of Clare's life, I wanted to question how sainthood, and the popular cult that came with it, could frighten or clash with Clare's and Francis's need for simplicity and humility. Both saints perhaps would have preferred to be like everyone else. As Francis says to Clare in the film, "Don't you know that when I die, they'll chop me up and sell the pieces to the churches?"... Death, illness, people's worship can be a blessing but also a curse. Even if blessed, the suffering of a saint is real and equally frightening: faith doesn't soften the horror, it might make it even more dreadful.

**VISUAL CHOICES:** To tell Clare's story, I chose the 2:35 aspect ratio. As opposed to *Nico, 1988*, where I used the 1:33 aspect ratio, a square format that isolated Nico and visually reminded of the 4/3 vhs image of the late 1980s, here I used the most metaphysical format, the one that best shows the enormity of nature and the smallness of man. It is a format that, instead of isolating the characters like the other one, never allows close-ups: that's why Clare is never alone in the frame, she is always with her community, and when she is surrounded by emptiness, that emptiness becomes a character in the film. With Crystal Fournier, the director of photography I collaborated with also on *Nico, 1988* and *Miss Marx*, we chose a poor and simple light, to enlighten Ludovica Ferrario's sets with simplicity, while also showing the magnificence and emptiness of Medieval convents and churches. I wanted Chiara's visions, on the other hand, to act as a counterpoint of the simplicity of the film. Thanks to the inventions of Massimo Cantini Parrini, the visions have become journeys into the imagination of a girl who, from time to time, imagines herself as Saint Scholastica or the Madonna and Child, or imagines Francis with the sultan. Fantasy being unbridled and visionary by its nature, these are moments where the film takes philosophical liberties, using haloes that seem to have come out of International Gothic, Spanish altarpiece dresses, jewelry and drapery from an imagined, unreal, Orient. These are perhaps the only moments when Clare really allows herself to fantasize.

**STORIES OF BOYS AND GIRLS:** After so many films that showed them more mature than they were in reality, it seemed important for me to tell Chiara and Francesco for what they really were: two young people (she was 18 and he was 30 at the beginning of their story; Francesco later dies very young, at 45) with their "intemperance" and fragilities, so similar to those of the actors who play them: starting with Margherita Mazzucco, who grew up quickly on the set of *My Brilliant Friend* and still looks like a child, fragile and charismatic at the same time. I saw Clare in her: her insolence and outbursts, her tender and childlike jealousy, as when she hears about Jacopa de Settesoli. Similarly, I thought that Andrea Carpenzano's very instinctive acting, that had moved me in the film about Italian soccer star *Campione*, could give Francesco's character a modernity and naturalness that could not be taken for granted.

**THE LANGUAGE:** The language of the film is the Umbrian vernacular of the time. It is the vernacular of Saint Francis's poems, that mixes with Latin when the conversation becomes cultured or when people read the Scriptures aloud.

This choice is strictly linked to the Franciscan message: preaching in vernacular was an essential component of Francis's and Clare's preaching, which was also considered scandalous for this reason. In fact, it addressed simple people and brought the Church's message out of cathedrals, in the streets, in the language people used every day. Therefore, shooting the whole film in modern Italian, not narrating the extraordinary linguistic innovation of vernacular mixing it with official Latin, would have missed a decisive component of the story.

For the work on the vernacular, I counted on the collaboration of Nadia Cannata, professor of History of Italian Language at La Sapienza University in Rome. With her help, I tried to give back to Francis and Clare their own words, adapting the dialogue I had written in modern Italian into an ancient yet recognizable language, modeled on that of Francis.

to give back to Francis and Clare their own words, adapting the dialogues I had written in modern Italian into an ancient yet recognizable language, modeled on that of Francis' Canticale of the Creatures that we also hear in the film. A sort of Italian of the origins, still "fragile" and therefore tender, almost childlike, capable of saying very profound things in a dialect that sometimes sounds also funny.

**THE MUSIC:** *Musicals* were crucial in my formation as a child and filmmaker, and *Hair* was a key reference for the film's scriptwriting, because it has many points in common with Clare's story. These men's and women's choice of a free life, their refusal of money, wealth and social constraints was accompanied in Franciscan preaching by a central role given to song and dance: their love of creation was celebrated through voice and movement, another sign – if ever needed – of a joyful religiosity that didn't mortify the body. Therefore, I immediately felt that the musical genre, or rock opera, was very close to what I had in mind: films like *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* were fundamental and useful references to understand the path to take, and I shared them with the actors and all the departments during the film preparation. As I did for the language, I chose a mimetic path also in music. It is no coincidence that the earliest song manuscripts are Franciscan, and it is no coincidence that – beyond sacred music – Francis was passionate of the *chanson de geste*: he had loved as a layman "secular" poetry and music, courtly love, and for his whole life he went on quoting the *Round Table Cycle* and speaking French (hence his nickname which became his name, "Francesco"). Therefore, I decided to look for joyful music, using period instruments and sounds, and I found some invaluable allies in the Anonima Frottolisti. Their musical project rediscovers ancient repertoire through an attentive study of original manuscripts: they are extremely aware of the value of the writing, compositional art and musical theory of the time. Together with them, we chose two manuscripts in particular, and all the pieces that were sung and danced by the film characters come from these two manuscripts. One of these manuscripts was of secular, romantic music, with texts in medieval French inspired by courtly love. And so, thanks to the Anonima Frottolisti, I found a musical key that brought me closer to the people I was telling the story about, and helped me understand their deep modernity while respecting their distance. In parallel, I worked with choreographer Letizia Dradi on the characters' movement, staging medieval dances as were portrayed in the miniatures of the manuscripts and described by Dante and Boccaccio. As for the music, medieval dance was both something we felt distant from us but that worked as a device to understand the characters and their joy. Moreover, working with the actors on dances and chants before shooting was fun and useful: it enhanced bonding between the actors and helped us create our own community, parallel to the ancient community we were narrating, which was a constant source of ideas and energy even during the shooting.

**AN INVOLUNTARY TRILOGY:** Despite the previous *Nico, 1988* and *Miss Marx*, I never thought of a "women's trilogy": I simply discovered – or rediscovered – these three women and was pushed to tell their stories. In retrospect, I realize that Clare seems to conclude the path I started with Nico: she is the youngest of the three women, the most resolved, and the only one who succeeds, though with some setback, in realizing her dream. Thanks to her, this has become my most positive film and at the same time the most political and hopeful: if Nico answered the ultimate question of existence through music, and Eleanor Marx through politics, Clare does so through faith, and her answer is perhaps the most radical: if the other two are women destined to be alone, Clare seeks – and finds – her identity in life with others, in the community she has founded.

#### Director's biography:

Status: approved

Susanna Nicchiarelli was born in Rome in 1975. Philosophy graduate with a PhD at the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa, in 2004 she graduates in Film Direction at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia. After a few shorts and documentaries, in 2009 she directs her first film, *Cosmonauta*, winner of Controcampo at the Venice Film Festival, followed by the *Discovery of Dawn* (2012), *Nico, 1988* (2017), Best Film in Orizzonti, and *Miss Marx*, main competition at the Venice Film Festival in 2020. *Chiara* is her fifth film.

#### Selected director's filmography:

Status: approved

Year:	2022	International title:	Chiara	Original Title:	Chiara
Year:	2020	International title:	Miss Marx	Original Title:	Miss Marx
Year:	2017	International title:	Nico, 1988	Original Title:	Nico, 1988
Year:	2012	International title:	Discovery of Dawn	Original Title:	La scoperta dell'alba
Year:	2009	International title:	Cosmonaut	Original Title:	Cosmonauta

#### Main Cast Biography:

Name and Surname	MARGHERITA MAZZUCCO	Status:	approved
Biography	She makes her debut at a very young age as one of the protagonists of the Italian-American series <i>My Brilliant Friend</i> , created by Saverio Costanzo. The huge international success of the series, sold all over the world on HBO channel, gives Margherita worldwide visibility. Meeting the character of Elena Greco makes her feel the thrill of acting. Thanks to the intensity and elegance of her interpretation, she stands out over thousands of auditions and continue playing the famous role of Lenù in all the three seasons aired. In the continuation of the saga written by Elena Ferrante, Margherita manages to draw an adult character facing new problems and situations, also finding inspiration in the indications of Daniele Luchetti, the new artistic director of the series. The need to confront new challenges brings Margherita to meet director Susanna Nicchiarelli and play for the first time in a feature film, as the absolute protagonist of <i>Chiara</i> . An artistic and personal challenge she embraces with the enthusiasm and dedication.		

Name and Surname	ANDREA CARPENZANO	Status:	approved
Biography	While still in high school, he was discovered by director Francesco Bruni and cast as the leading actor in <i>Tutto quello che vuoi</i> , winning a Biraghi Award – Special mention at the Silver Ribbons 2017. He later played in <i>Il Permesso</i> by Claudio Amendola and in the D'Innocenzo brothers' debut feature <i>Boys Cry</i> , which premiered in Panorama at the Berlinale 2018. Between 2019 and 2022, he was nominated to three times to the Silver Ribbons for Best Actor for his performances in <i>Il Campione</i> by Leonardo D'Agostino, <i>Lovely Boy</i> by Francesco Lettieri and <i>Calcincolo</i> by Chiara Bellosi. He also played in <i>Romantic Guide to Lost Places</i> , together with Clive Owen and Jasmine Trinca, presented at Venice Film Festival 2020.		

Main Cast:	Name and Surname		Character's name in the film	Status:
	1 Margherita Mazzucco	-	Chiara	approved
	2 Andrea Carpenzano	-	Francesco	
	3 Carlotta Natoli	-	Cristiana	
	4 Paola Tiziana Cruciani	-	Balvina	
	5 Luigi Lo Cascio	-	Cardinale Ugolino / Papa Gregorio IX	

Main Crew:	Position	Name(s) and Surname(s) - separated by commas	Status:
	1 Director and Scriptwriter	Susanna Nicchiarelli	approved
	2 Scriptwriter collaborator	Chiara Frugoni	
	3 Director of Photography	Crystal Fournier	
	4 Editing	Stefano Cravero	
	5 Production Design	Ludovica Ferrario	
	6 Costume	Massimo Cantini Parrini	
	7 Hair	Desirée Corridoni	
	8 Make-up	Valentina Tomljanovic	
	9 Sound	Adriano Di Lorenzo	

10	Music	Anonima Frottolisti
11	Dialogue editor	Daniela Bassani, Marzia Cordò
12	Sound editor	Marc Bastien
13	Mixing	Franco Piscopo
14	VFX Supervisor	Massimiliano Battista
15	Producers	Marta Donzelli, Gregorio Paonessa
16	Co-Producers	Joseph Rouschop, Valérie Bournonville
17	Associated Producer	Alessio Lazzareschi

**Billingblock + Logos:** [please send separately](#)

**Status:** approved

**Technical details:** [please fill out this information in the General Information Template here ==>](#)

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets>

**Status:** approved

Original title: *CHIARA*  
 International title: *CHIARA*  
 Duration (min.): 106  
 Aspect Ratio: 2.39:1  
 Format: 2K  
 Sound: 5.1  
 Year: 2022  
 Original language: *Italian*  
 Country(ies) of production: *Italy, Belgium*  
 Production Companies: *Vivo film, Rai Cinema*  
 Co-production Companies: *Tarantula*  
 With the support of: *Eurimages, MIC – Direzione generale cinema e audiovisivo, Regione Lazio, Wallimage (La Wallonie), Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral Belge – Casa Kafka Pictures Belfius*

**International Press:**

Rendez Vous  
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**Status:** approved

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