



A DOCU-MUSICAL

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PRODUCED BY  
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FOR B&B FILM

LENGTH 52'

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# LE COCCINELLE

## NEAPOLITAN TRANSSEXUAL MELODRAMA

**The ancient art of Neapolitan transsexuals becomes a captivating docu-musical.**

**Neomelodic songs, sex, first communions, christenings and weddings: ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the magic world of Le Coccinelle!**

### SYNOPSIS

They're not drag queens, they don't aspire to be perfectly-groomed 'femmes fatales', nor do they act out scenes from pop icon shows. Gennaro, Tonino, Genny and Giacinto, four Neapolitan 'ladies', four transsexuals from the back streets of Naples.

In restaurant dining rooms decked out in fake Baroque style, Le Coccinelle sing and perform their acts. They tell their stories of prostitution, the judgement by Naples's upper class, the hypocrisy of their clients; but they also recount their friendships with the women of the back streets and the Neapolitans' joyous way of life.

Before an audience of guests at a wedding banquet, this exhilarating mix of sacred and profane, of ancient and modern, of conventional and queer, is played out.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

I met Tonino, leading performer of Le Coccinelle, five years ago while I was doing a photographic project on Naples's transsexuals.

He had an overwhelming urge to tell his story and, with the help of innumerable cigarettes and litres of coffee, he began telling me about his life and his group. It was so fascinating that I wanted to meet the other members. The following day Tonino took me to lunch at the home of Gennaro, intimate friend and co-founder of Le Coccinelle. After a series of unbelievably filling courses, Gennaro turned on the stereo at full bass and volume, and both of them launched into their hit song, 'Femmen 'ra notte' (Ladies of the Night).

Now there was no turning back: I began to follow them during their shows in restaurant ceremonies around Naples. I became a regular guest at Gennaro's house, which was a meeting place for all sorts of people. I got to know his fans and his friends.

Nowadays Gennaro lives alone with his little dog, whom he adopted when his lifelong friend died and who, in his memory, was called Coccinella. His friends, or 'like family', as 'she' calls them, are both company and family to him. Whenever I spend a day with him, there is a constant stream of spur-of-the-moment visits: the neighbour who wants to talk about her cheating husband, friends who drop in for coffee, others who come by to organise tombola for the following weekend. The gap that Tonino has left in Gennaro's life saddened him so much that the group halted its shows for about a year.

Now, with renewed energy and ambitions, the group has formed again, with new members and new songs.



## LE COCCINELLE

Naples at the end of the Sixties. We are in the 'Salone Margherita', one of the city's most popular night spots, where comedians, dancers, strippers and contortionists all perform. On the stage there's a performer called Tania. She's just 19 years old but already displays immense self-confidence. Gennaro, a very young errand boy employed to take coffee to the dressing-rooms, is spellbound as he watches the sensual movements of Tania, dressed in veils and sequins. The child spectator imagines one day he will be in her place, on stage before an adoring public. For Gennaro, his discovery of his own femininity is compounded by a startling revelation: "Tania" is just a stage name; offstage she's Tonino De Filippo. The realisation that the dancer is a transsexual leads Gennaro to the emancipating discovery of his own sexuality.

Over the years Tonino becomes Gennaro's guide to his first attempts at make-up, his first tight skirts and his first high-heeled shoes. Tonino is a reference point not only for Gennaro but for all of Naples's transsexuals, who still call him, in tones of affection and gratitude, "the mother of all the trannies". Tonino was the first modern trans in Naples, the first to go beyond the image of the "neighbourhood trans", asserting an entitlement to dignity and other rights. Several times, this has caused him to end up in jail. But while transsexuals have always been solidly anchored in Neapolitan popular culture, regarded as bringers of good fortune and thus firmly linked to games of chance such as tombola, they have also been relegated to an inferior role in society and thus "forced" into prostitution. In this way, even Gennaro and Tonino inevitably end up on the streets. Until one evening, while waiting for a client, Tonino has a brainwave: "Why don't we start a performing group exclusively of transsexuals? We'll call it Le Coccinelle (The Ladybirds)."

The show put together by Gennaro and Tonino is peculiarly suited to a Neapolitan public. The themes are those of popular melodrama allied with those which Gennaro and Tonino bring directly from their own lives. There is love, betrayal, family rows, desertion, to say nothing of prejudice, prostitution, loneliness and the struggle to achieve emotional stability. It all comes together in a production which is in turn dramatic, grotesque and irresistibly funny. Tonino is the uncontested leader and plays the most dramatic parts: the grieving mother, 'a malafemmina', the jilted transsexual lover. Gennaro is the comic soul of the troupe, thanks to a Fellinian face and a hilarious capacity for improvisation. Over the years the two are joined by Clementina, who with her refined features is perfectly suited to playing an upper-class lady; Giacinto, with her statuesque figure, extremely versatile and often playing male parts; and Carmen and Genny, the most beautiful and eye-catching of the performers.

In the working-class areas of Naples, private ceremonies are a thriving business. These are some of the few areas of the world in which the stars are not the internationally-renowned promoted on MTV, but are home-grown, singers. At wedding parties, which may last over twelve hours, the performers enthrall the relatives and friends of the hosts throughout a gargantuan banquet. Weddings, first communions, christenings, birthdays and neighbourhood celebrations form the



background to Le Coccinelle shows, entertaining an audience consumed with curiosity. Children are entranced and the women are moved by the show of Le Coccinelle. The ties that bind the women with the Neapolitan transsexuals are ancient and run deep; except for ceremonies, only women are allowed to watch the performances of Le Coccinelle. Such is the case with their traditional tombola parties and pilgrimages to religious sanctuaries.

In 2009 a tumour cuts Tonino's life short. Gennaro, now almost sixty, does not know whether to carry on with the group. In the last few years life for transsexuals has worsened. In church, during Tonino's memorial service a year after his death, Le Coccinelle meet once again. And with them, as always, are the women of the poor neighbourhoods. The show must go on!



### THE AUTHOR

**Emanuela Pirelli**, is a young photographer and director from Naples. She graduated at the Rome's Institute of Photography and Communication, she did photo reportage work for magazines and agencies in Naples, Rome, Milan, Amsterdam and Berlin. In 2002 she attended the Documentary School by Doc/it and Zelig. Since then she has worked as camera operator and assistant director for documentaries, news and TV format for both Italian and foreign productions. She directed behind the scenes, arts films and filmed for several documentaries among which "Winners and Losers" by Lech Kowalsky.

### THE PRODUCTION COMPANY

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