



*Italy 2012 / feature documentary / 54' / arts&culture / travels / music&dance /  
biography / cross-cultural / Simona Coccozza & Samantha Cito*

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

**The Barefoot Princess** feature documentary narrates the universal paradigm of the personal *journey* in search of oneself.

The symbol of this path is the real and metaphorical journey of a woman who, going through Asia, Africa and Europe over 40 years of difficult life experiences, was finally able to face some inner conflicts lying deep within the human heart. She found herself through the art of dancing, which gave her real freedom.

The protagonist is the Japanese artist *Kamellia*, the *first* Far East belly dancer in the second half of the last century, who became a living legend in the Arab world, where the media named her the "Princess of Oriental Dance".

## EXTENDED SYNOPSIS

*Kamellia* has been a great belly dancing star. In the '80s and '90s, she danced for the King Hassan II of Morocco, the Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali in Tunisia, and the Saudi Arabian Royal Family, becoming extremely popular in the Arab Countries despite – or maybe thanks to – her exotic, Asian appearance, so far from Middle-Eastern beauty standard. Today, she still charms with her dancing.

She is a mature artist now, the woman concealing something which is quietly unresolved, still needing to investigate her own deep self, facing fears that lie buried in a forgotten past in order to find her own inner balance.

*Kamellia* has been living in Paris for some time now. One day, after 40 years of extraordinary career, she decides to leave for a journey in search of her origins.

This day is her sixtieth birthday, which has a strong symbolic meaning in Japanese culture. Sixty years are, in fact, the overall life cycle of human beings, based on the combination of 12 signs and 5 elements. The time has come to come full circle somehow, to complete the path on this earth. It is a tricky moment of reflection and self-assessment, asking to face the distance between present results and past ambitions, projects and dreams. It is the moment to come to terms with oneself and try healing the wounds of life. A moment to prepare for peace, to be reconciled with the universe.

In such a meaningful moment, *Kamellia* decides to go back to her mother country Japan, in order to find the family she had left in her teenage years, trying to understand what she could not or did not want to understand at the time.

She is ready to go even further beyond, to her parents' native country South Korea, in an attempt to learn more about its traditions and find a name and a reason for the inappropriateness, rejection and loneliness feelings which had been accompanying her since her childhood. Which had been maybe her reason for leaving.

This journey in the past is bitter, though necessary. It is an immersion in her ancestors' culture, seeped through her experience and feelings as a daughter of the world, aware of what means to be a woman in the Arab countries, as well as in the western "Old"

Europe. *Kamellia* had left the reassuring Japanese culture, with its pre-organized schemes leaving little room for individuality, to find a dangerous and heady freedom, as fascinating as hard to handle.

Racial discrimination, female marginalization: she knows how to name things now, she gathers the pieces of her life. She is finally ready to go back to Paris, where she can focus on her new mission: transmitting her professional and personal experiences to children. Human beings are in fact still pure in their early years of life, they do not care about skin color or body appearance and preserve a solid connection between inner and outer self.

Through dancing, *Kamellia* teaches children not to lose this balance, that she has been looking for years and she has maybe finally taken back.

## DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

When we heard *Kamellia's* story, we felt we came across an extraordinary life, transcending the private sphere and rising to a higher value of universal metaphor.

This woman, while unique in many ways, has something in common with all those who, in different times and parts of the world, do not accept rules or orders. Those who want to discover their own personal mission and find their place in the world, refusing to accept cultural and religious impositions that simply depend on the place of birth. Those who escape from rules, searching for the essence of life. Those who approach this search, which is not free from contradictions, as a crucial step in the endless fight for freedom.

From a stylistic point of view, we gave our story a purely film, documentary style, without fictional embellishment. The documentary scenes are only supported by the interviews to the protagonist, reflecting on her life with a new-found serenity.

We assign a particular value to archive footage, in which a young *Kamellia* dances for common audiences as well as for Kings and Presidents of Arab Countries. The intrinsic value of any historical document is even higher here, due to the importance of image and

representation in Arab culture, which is pervaded by a widespread iconoclasm.

Most of *Kamellia's* performances in official contests are enshrined in the memory of royal palaces and boundless deserts, as she made private shows, where even taking pictures was strictly forbidden. For this reason, the rare archive footage, in this case not only has the patina of age, but also the charm of the forbidden.

**The Barefoot Princess** is a made-in-Italy movie that immediately looks to have an international nature. First of all for the choice of English language, which sets it apart from most Italian productions. In the same way, the cosmopolitan protagonist and the exotic locations (at least for much of the audience) are coherent with the movie international appeal.

## DIRECTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

**SIMONA COCOZZA** was born in Naples in 1976, she has been working in audiovisual production for 13 years. In 2000, she graduated in History and Criticism of the Cinema at DAMS, at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy of the University of Bologna. After the years spent on film sets in the direction division as script girl, she finally debuted as an author with the short film "Fresca di bucato". It has been in competition in foreign and Italian festivals, winning numerous prizes and awards.

In 2007, she founded *Giallomare Film* in Rome, an independent film production company which realized about a hundred of audiovisual works, over 70 official video reportages for Greenpeace Italy, and many other collaborations (RAI, Repubblica.it, Istituto Italiano per il Credito Sportivo, FIDAS, Lega Ambiente etc.).

She also realized authorial projects, writing 3 feature documentary films and 7 short fiction films entered in competition in over 200 world festivals, winning 13 national and international awards. In 2010, ten of her works were presented at the Italian Film & Art Festival of Seoul, the first contemporary Italian film festival in South Korea.

**SAMANTHA CITO** was born in Apulia, Southern Italy, in 1979. She attended the University of Bologna, where she graduated in History and Criticism of the Cinema at DAMS, at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, and the University of Ramon Lull, in Barcelona, where she attended an Official Master in Production and Direction for Cinema and Television at the Blanquerna Faculty of Communication.

She started working in film industry in 1999, as production assistant and second director assistant. Since 2003, she worked as first director assistant in full-length films, sitcoms, tv drama productions and, in 2008, she joined Giallomare Film as executive producer, actively participating to all its projects.

Director and scriptwriter, she mostly wrote and directed commercials and short films, which were showed in national and international festivals. One of her main success as an author is the 35 mm short film “Il dio della pioggia” (written in collaboration with the director A. d'Aragona), which was in the official selection at the 61<sup>st</sup> Venice Film Festival in 2004, and won the New York Short Film Festival.

## TARGET

PRIMARY: Adults, mostly women, with medium-high education, interested in documentaries or most generally in artistic and social issues, who are sensitive or empathetic towards positive and constructive real life experiences.

SECONDARY: Young/adult people with low, medium or high education, practicing belly dance (or any other kind of dancing) at beginner or professional level.

TERTIARY: Young/adult people with medium education, keen on Oriental culture and traditions, fascinated by far away Countries.

## LOCATIONS

FRANCE: Paris

JAPAN: Tokyo, Osaka, Kobe, Kyoto, Kamakura, Chikura

SOUTH KOREA: Seoul, Jeju Island



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