

A BLINK BLINK PROD. PRODUCTION WITH RAI CINEMA

# SHASHAMANE

ON THE TRAIL OF THE PROMISED LAND

**BLINK BLINK PROD.**

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Artwork by Marco Lovisatti [marcolovisatti.it](http://marcolovisatti.it) based on a photo by Derek Bisthon.

**Rai Cinema**

A FILM BY  
**GIULIA AMATI**

**blink blink prod**

“We’ve been... Niggers right? From Niggers we went to Negroes, from Negroes we went to Blacks, from Blacks we went to African Americans, so they keep calling us with different names. And why? When our central foundation is: we are Africans.”

*Sister Patrice/Shashamane*

## Synopsis

The journey towards Shashamane in Ethiopia where a community of Afro-Americans has returned to live on their forefathers' land, as sung by Bob Marley. An exodus of coming-of-home, that for some has become a haven, but for others a cage of no escape. "Shashamane" chronicles a chapter of the lengthy history of the African diaspora, through the voices of men and women who have left the West after 400 years since the dawn of slavery, to seek their promised land. "Shashamane" is the second film of a promise land-themed trilogy, after the Palestine of "This Is My Land... Hebron". Through the eyes of the director we embark on an extraordinary journey of those who have stood the test of time to reclaim their African identity.





## Director's note

To be able to tell this story it has taken 3 years of investigation, 3 months of fact-finding trips and 6 months of sharing the homes and the lives of the men and women of 3 different continents. I filmed in Shashamane of Ethiopia, Kingston of Jamaica, and Birmingham and London of Great Britain. The realisation itself of "Shashamane" became my personal test both on a physical and spiritual level. Apart from the difficulty of filming by myself in a remote location in Africa, the biggest challenge was to be accepted by the inhabitants of the community, which has long avoided contact with the media as well as gazes from the outside. I lived with them, shared their meals and their daily lives, listened to their stories and told my own with honesty.

*Giulia Amati*

## The triangle

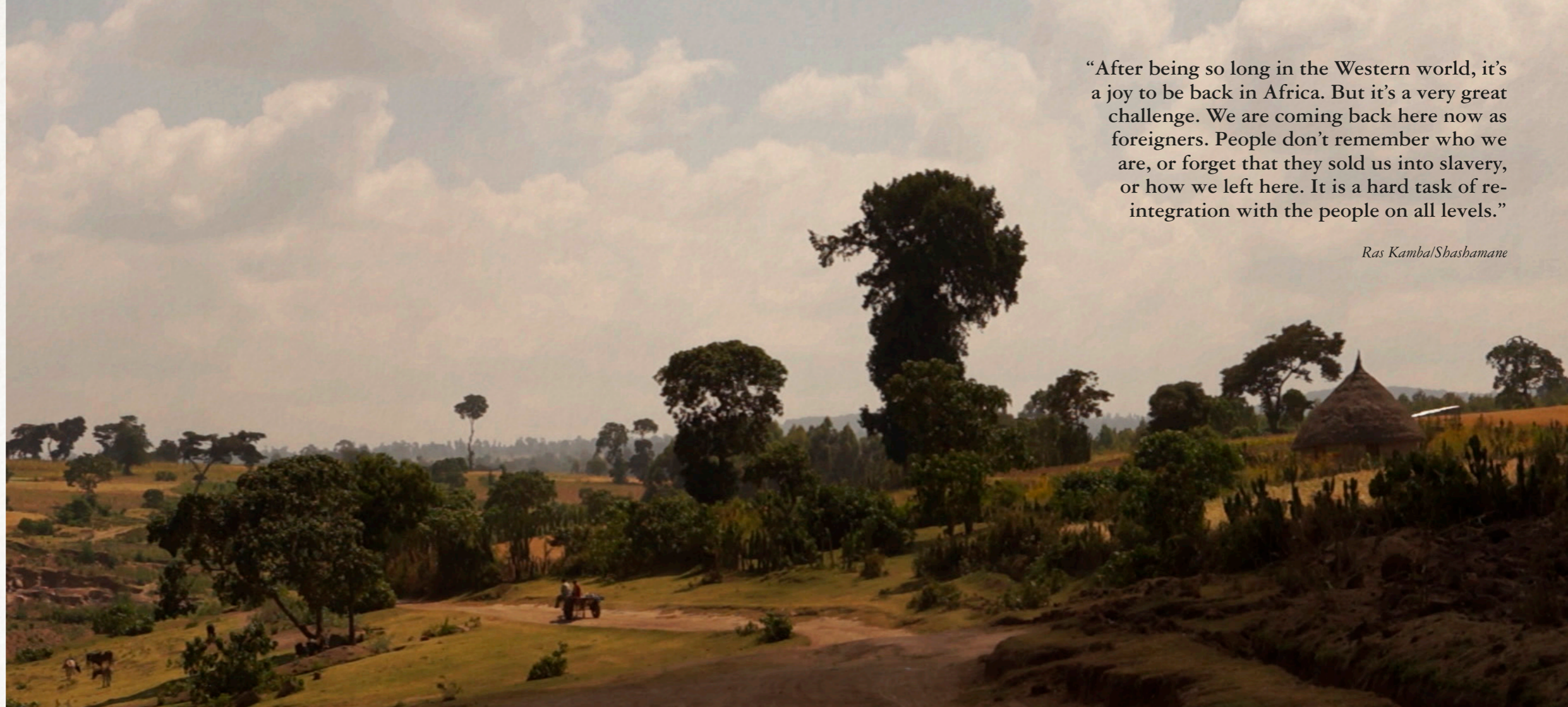
The triangle that binds Great Britain, the Americas and Africa geographically is named the "slave trade". In the documentary, these 3 continents become the background in which the characters recount their stories from their very own point of view: the community of Shashamane, those who came to Shashamane but gave up and returned to the West, and finally those who travelled from England to Ethiopia to relay a special gift for the inhabitants of the promised land. Shashamane is situated 250 km south of Addis Abeba, and was donated in 1948 by the Emperor of Ethiopia Hailé Selassié to all the blacks in the world, descendants of slaves, who desired to return home.



# Africa

## RETURN TO ROOTS

The first pioneers that moved to Shashamane had to make great sacrifices and choices to return to their motherland. They traveled across the ocean to an unknown land with nothing: potable water, electricity, houses, schools, hospitals, and scarce economic resources. Ras Mweya Masimba is an artist who illustrates these challenges in his work. Of Jamaican origins but born in England, Ras Mweya moved to Shashamane in 1990 and recounts the endeavours of his people through his animations. Today, African-Americans from all over the world – France, Jamaica, U.S., Great Britain and various Caribbean Islands – live with him on this promised land. Everyone is motivated by the desire of self-emancipation and of raising their own children in a context devoid of racism. In the documentary each character contributes to portray this story that started in 1951, when the first pioneer moved to the promised land.



“After being so long in the Western world, it’s a joy to be back in Africa. But it’s a very great challenge. We are coming back here now as foreigners. People don’t remember who we are, or forget that they sold us into slavery, or how we left here. It is a hard task of re-integration with the people on all levels.”

*Ras Kamba/Shashamane*



“As an African that was born in the West, it was very important to know who I was. I knew I was an African taken from Africa, born in the West. All of us who made it up here, who have reached the land of Shashamane in Ethiopia, we are the true revolutionaries.”

*Ras Mweya Masimba/Shashamane*

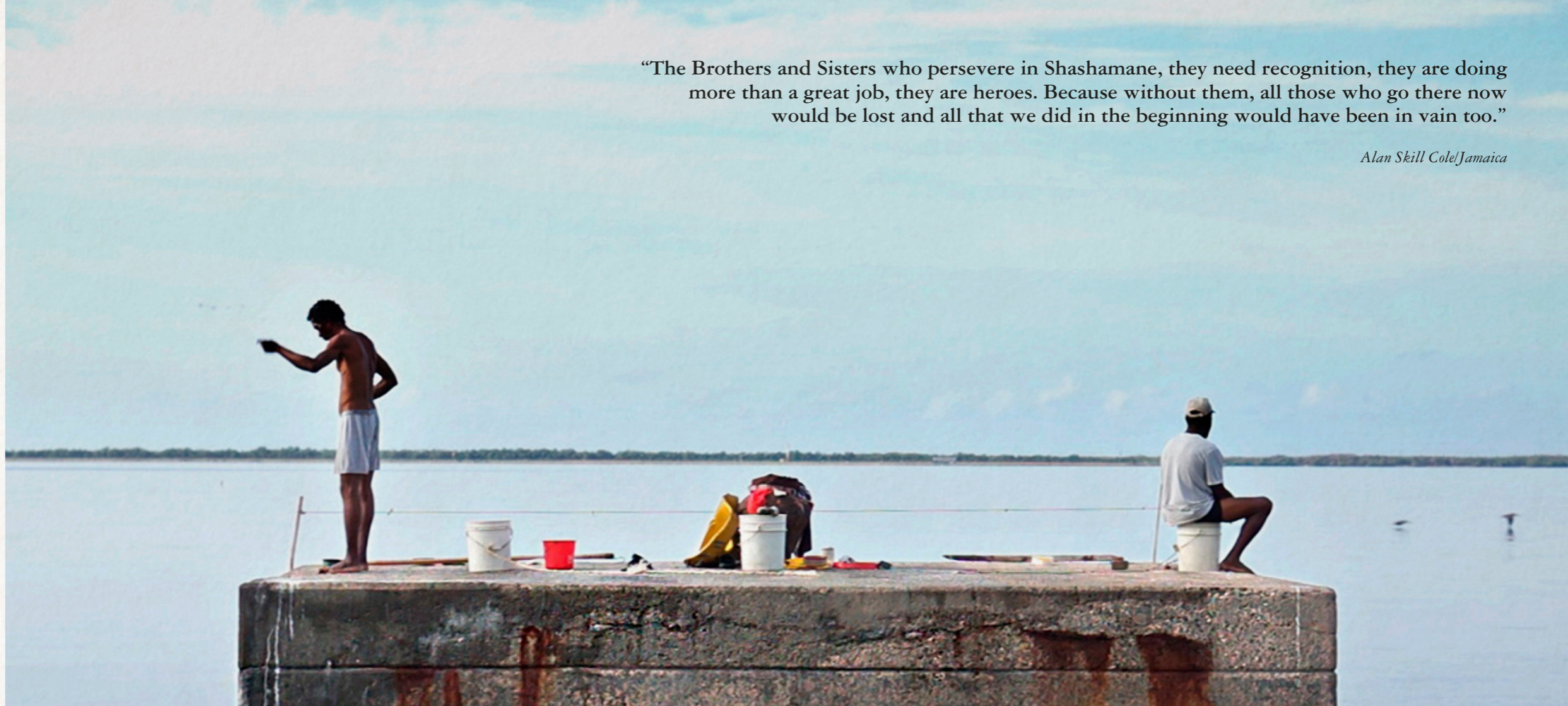
# Jamaica

BACK TO THE WEST

Some of the people who made their move to Shashamane have had to face the hardships of that choice. Ivan Coore, son of Jamaica's ex-prime minister and ex-minister of economy, has lived in Shashamane for 10 years. When Ivan lived in Ethiopia, the country was destabilised by a state military coup, which in 1973 disposed of the emperor Hailé Selassié and nationalised all the lands, including that of Shashamane. Ethiopia was overturned by a red cultural revolution, which generated a climate of terror. Ivan resisted for a few years, but then decided to return to Jamaica, fearing for his family's and his own physical safety. His choice was not an easy one. His point of view and the reasons he gave up on his repatriation inform the complexity of this story and illuminate the considerable undertaking required of those who remain in Shashamane, keeping the dream of a homeland alive.

“The Brothers and Sisters who persevere in Shashamane, they need recognition, they are doing more than a great job, they are heroes. Because without them, all those who go there now would be lost and all that we did in the beginning would have been in vain too.”

*Alan Skill Cole/Jamaica*





“When I was in the UK I’d see things that I knew were folly. You see our people working for 60, 50 years, 40 years and they are on the same level, and they can’t get anything because the society says: this is what you should have.”

*Ras Mweya Masimba/Shashamane*



## UK

### SEARCH OF IDENTITY

The epic move to Shashamane has remained untold, as they often were no means to do it. Derek Bishton, an British man, was the first professional photographer to document the community in 1981. During the '70s he was very active in documenting the wave of racism which permeated the UK, which was shaken by a global financial crisis. In particular, Derek reported the violence of the police against the black population, which was most harshly hit by racial discrimination. It was during that time that Derek encountered Merrise, his future wife, an English woman of Jamaican descent, and heard for the first time about Shashamane. The young Rastas would talk about it as if it were the promised land where they could find refuge from a society that once again was repelling them. When Giulia Amati met Derek in London, the photographer was preparing to return to Shashamane after 32 years of his absence. He was printing the photographs he had taken in 1981 to donate them to the pioneers and new generations, and remind them of the great endeavours of their fathers.

## Future generations

Three generations have passed since the birth of Shashamane's community. The dream to return to Africa after 400 years since the dawn of slavery has become a tangible reality. Sometimes though, the price to pay for one's dreams can be high. Many of the descendants of the slaves who transferred to Ethiopia, are in fact not free to leave the country, because they lack citizenship and official documentation. Consequently, their children are afflicted by the same fate. The mental and geographical limbo that the Shashamane inhabitants live in further causes their struggle to fit in a society in which they feel they don't fit in, whether it's in the West or Africa. In America today there are still cases of brutal violence toward the black population. Europe is a step in the odyssey of many Africans who risk their lives to reach the West in search of freedom and a better life. The back-to-Africa movement of the Shashamane inhabitants, reminds us that building a harmonious multicultural society appears yet to be a long and complex undertaking.



*“Our parents were not African conscious but we became African conscious. Your children are the perpetuation of your lineage here on African soil, they are the fruit of your conquest, they will inherit what you have strived and gained for. But our dreams are not necessarily their dreams.”*

*Ras Mweya/Shashamame*



“Sometimes in life you have to make a decision that is a sacrifice for what you believe in. My brothers, sisters and I struggle to make this place our home. It wasn’t easy and it is still not easy. This is what we have to think about: Is it really home? Can we make it our home?”

*Bro Trika/Shashamane*

A FILM BY  
**GIULIA AMATI**

CINEMATOGRAPHY **GIULIA AMATI** EXECUTIVE PRODUCER **FLAVIA LAURICELLA** EDITOR **GIULIA AMATI**  
SOUND DESIGN **MATTEO DI SIMONE** MUSIC BY **PIERNICOLA DI MURO** COLORIST **VINCENZO MARINESE**  
A **BLINK BLINK PROD.** PRODUCTION WITH **RAI CINEMA** DIRECTED BY **GIULIA AMATI**

Production: **Italy, 2016** - Length: **80'** - color - Language: **English, French** - Subtitles: **Italian/English**  
Format: **HD** - Audio: **Dolby Digital 5.1**