

## Interview with Andreas Pietschmann (Jesus) about the film

### *“Maria di Nazaret”*

(The interview was conducted by Jutta Bök)



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***Was it something very special for you to play the role of Jesus, or did you look at the role from the professional point of view?***

In many respects it was a very special role, even under professional aspects. I myself stand in great awe before the character of Jesus Christ. Hardly any other person has affected mankind in such a sustained manner; his life and his teachings have influenced people and changed the world. Some respond to Jesus with love, whilst others fear him and even react with aversion. In order to find access to him as an actor I have tried to blank out whatever one normally associates with Jesus, otherwise this task would have intimidated me too much.

***How were you chosen for the role?***

Initially, I had come for an audition for the role of Joseph. During the casting Giacomo Campiotti, the director, who observed me closely, kept talking to Cornelia von Braun, the casting agent, and also to the producer, whereupon he asked me whether I would also play a scene as Jesus. From the internet he printed the Sermon on the Mount which I was more or less supposed to learn by heart within twenty minutes. So I

played the scene and in the end got the positive answer for the male leading part.

***What sort of feeling did that cause you?***

I had mixed feelings. On the one hand it was a great piece of luck and I was happy to have been assigned such an extraordinary task; on the other hand I was impressed by what would be in store for me. Director Giacomo Campiotti's great merit lies also in the fact that everything worked out so smoothly. He is a brilliant and intuitive director for actors. We got along very well and had similar ideas as to the enactment of Jesus. He supported and guided me well. □□



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***How did you prepare yourself for the role?***

As I have been brought up in a large catholic family, I occupied myself with the Christian religion at an early age. Thus the filming was for me a great chance and also a challenge to dare a new approach. I read the four gospels again and had a glimpse of the Apokrypha – something I had not done any more in the past years, even though in hotel rooms

there is always a Bible on display. I wanted to know what exactly is reported and what the impact on me was, so I could make my own picture of Jesus. Freed from the usual interpretations, I have thus found a very personal view. This was an exciting learning process for me.

***How does your interpretation of Jesus look like?***

I think that he was an extraordinary man with an incredible charisma, an immense effect on people and a great love for them. He had something quite special about him, and I can understand that the power he had could also have frightened some people so that they persecuted him. For our film it was very important to me to understand the network of relationships between him and his disciples, his mother Mary and to Mary Magdalene. Of course we could not show all of Jesus' facets, such as his revolutionary side, when for example he expelled the money changers from the temple. Our focus lay in Jesus, the embracing one, the forgiving one. □□



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***Have other films or pictures from the history of art inspired you?***

As a lead-in into the theme, and above all from the esthetic point of views, I watched excerpts from Franco Zeferelli's film "Jesus from Nazareth". I also saw Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ", which shows in great detail the last 24 hours of Jesus' life until his resurrection. Besides, images of Jesus in the world of art were of great importance to me. I wanted to know: what do I perceive when I am watching this, which feelings does it arouse in me? I had also discussions with Giacomo Campiotti, who had shown various pictures to me, such as about Michelangelo's world-famous Pietà which has always moved me deeply. In our film there is a similar scene in which Mary holds dead Jesus in her arms – a very expressive picture indeed. Moreover, the bible and the screenplay have been a source of inspiration to me.

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### ***In which way?***

Francesco Arlanch's script is a fantastic, well researched, very precise, but also extremely careful and cautious regarding the realization of the subject. The lyrics conform very much to the bible, and I have found in them many passages I had read in the bible before. A great piece of work it is indeed, for in order to describe the network of relationships between the main characters, the missing passages in the bible - about Mary one doesn't really find many clues – had to be complemented. The fictive dialogues blend in very well and so do the scenes from everyday life. This film focuses on Mary and Mary Magdalene, and I find this approach very important, because it tells the story from the point of view of these women for a change.

### ***When you read the bible again after so many years, what impact did this have on you beyond the film?***

It's surprising that many passages of the New Testament have not lost their significance; in fact, they could principally still be valid in this day and age. I for my part am above all impressed by the principle of forgiveness. If more people would conform with it, this world would certainly be a better place.



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***Were the shooting sessions strenuous for you, especially during the crucifixion scene?***

Actually, it was rather strenuous, but I prefer it when physical exertions are real and not merely acted. The effect is greater. For example, for the scene in which Jesus has to drag the cross up to Golgatha, I picked the heaviest and most massive of all available wooden crosses – the designer spoke of a weight of approximately 100 kilos – in order to demonstrate Jesus' way of suffering as realistically as possible. Our shooting sessions on top of the hill took several days, under a scorching sun from which one could hardly protect oneself. Despite the suntan cream I got sunburn pretty badly.

***Which part of the shooting sessions has left in your memory the most lasting mark?***

There are many things. The elaborate international production, the story dating back as far as 2000 years, the many different languages on the set – it was something of a biblical Pentecostal experience. The numerous background actors in historic costumes, the buildings – all these pictures have left in me a lasting and deep impression. And I especially remember with pleasure the great warmth and cordiality of the Italian team, which made me feel good and well-nestled. Friendships even developed which we are still cultivating.