



HUNGRY FOR LOVE: A Conversation about Food, Cinema & Amore!

Chiara Montalto (November 25, 2014)

Christmas is around the corner, the Holidays are here! What better time to sit down and talk food, cinema and amore with two of my dearest friends, award winning filmmakers and big time foodies, Justin Ambrosino, and Soojin Chung.

Justin Ambrosino and I became fast friends at a playwriting group at the Calandra Institute years ago. A graduate of the prestigious American Film Institute, his short film "[The 8th Samurai](#) [1]", won more than 20 jury awards worldwide and qualified for an Academy Award.

Soojin Chung, originally from South Korea, and also a graduate of AFI, produced "[Escape from Tomorrow](#) [2]" which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2013 and has been both critically and commercially acclaimed. As a matter of fact, we were all briefly, housemates when I was in LA doing a run of my own play!

"[Hungry for Love](#) [3]" will be their first feature collaboration. The film, which is backed by Sundance, IFP, Film Independent & Filmmaker Magazine is the story of two strangers who meet for the first time and embark on a five-borough culinary adventure through NYC! Their [Kickstarter campaign](#) [4], which recently launched, is already gaining traction and is a Kickstarter Staff Pick because it is considered one of the best campaign videos seen! So to support them on their journey from script to screen, we ate a dinner, prepared by Justin, of linguine with shrimps and arugula, grilled bronzino and a cold bottle of Falaghina, and we had a chat, a chiaccherata if you will, about three of my favorite topics: food, cinema and amore.

CM: Justin, tell me about growing up in the restaurant business and your family. Where was the restaurant? What are your earliest memories of it?

JA: My father comes from Torre del Greco, a city situated on the bottom of Mt. Vesuvius. He opened an Italian restaurant in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn in 1977 and sold it over five years ago. So, it was a 35 year run for him. I am 33. It was all I knew. My earliest memories involve the scent of my father when he'd come home at night. He worked 7 days a week in the beginning and stayed past closing because he had to shut down every night. I remember... when he'd tiptoe into my room to give me a good night kiss, he had this potent smell that was a mixture of baked clams, fried calamari and lingering cigarette smoke!



Then, came the parties we'd throw every Christmas. The restaurant would close and our family would take over. We'd share presents, eat Lobster Fra Diavola and all us kids would whack a pinata full of candy until it popped. Good memories. But as soon as I turned 15, I went to work as a busboy, and from that point on my eyes were opened up to the reality of it all, a mixture of good and bad. The next ten years working there would be my coming of age through all things food related.

CM: What about you, Soojin, what are your earliest food memories? Were you always a foodie?

SC: Growing up, I was never interested in food. I was an unusual kid because I didn't ask for candy, chocolate, ice cream or hamburgers like the other children. But since I met Justin, eight years ago, I found another side of myself that I never knew existed. When we worked on our first film at AFI together, Justin invited all the crew to his tiny apartment for our first production meeting (that's where we are supposed to discuss all the details of making the film). But when I arrived, Justin was sweating, frying fresh shrimp, making dough from scratch, he was cooking up a feast! Then, as we ate, all everyone discussed was food and wine. It was definitely a delicious dinner, made with love and care, but after 3 hours of talking and eating, I wondered when the production meeting would begin! In that moment, I became a bit of a foodie myself.

CM: How are food and love connected? Loaded question, I know.

JA: There is nothing better than spending the rest of your life eating delicious food with someone who makes you feel special. I mean there is no way to sum up happiness any other way. Think about when you travel somewhere, when you return home, family and friends always ask, "how was the food?", and, "did you meet any cute girls? Guys?" Why? Because that is what defines a good time! Sure, you can be with someone you love and eat a bad meal but still be happy, or you can be with someone you don't love but eat a good meal and still be happy. But if you put them together? There's nothing better!

As far as the loaded topic of food goes, well, I try not to think about it too much. I don't know where I fit in it all. There are tons of books, TV shows, studies and debates about food in the media. But for me, I distill it to the essence, it doesn't matter what you eat, or how you eat it, you die. We only get one turn around the globe and that's it. Food, and love, are two things that can help us get through it all. We need food to live and love to survive.

CM: So then why "Hungry for Love"? Why now?

JA: This is my first feature, and I want to tell a story that will bridge my past and my present, leading the way for my future. Using food, restaurants and New York City as the backdrop, I will be able to fill every frame with the things I love the most and that made me who I am today. For example, I made the male lead, Giovanni, an Italian American from Staten Island, who delivers pastries. I used to deliver pastries myself and know all the details about the job and of course about restaurants, Staten Island and being Italian American. You see, all these characters are based on some sort of reality in my life. They are all dealing with issues like student debt, Hurricane Sandy, weight, and possibly related illnesses – issues my family faces everyday. Sadly, even my father just suffered a minor heart attack – despite being skinny! But he is fine now. So, we know a bit of the reality of it all. Finally, there is my love of food and New York and how one night out in the city, eating amazing food can transform you and your outlook on life. Basically, the story itself is a reflection of how I feel right now and how the ones I love feel, and throughout the story there are many hints about the things I will surely be making movies about in the future!



As for why now? Well, luckily for me, food is a very hot topic currently. Coming from where I do, I would have written about food no matter what, but right now is the perfect time for something like this. But I want to tell a different side of the story than I am used to seeing. There is an overwhelming amount of media out there that makes a fuss about food, what it is, how we eat it, what it does to our bodies and how to prevent this or that. Now, that's all great and important, but for me, sometimes I just want to eat and not think about it, you know... actually enjoy myself, live in the moment. I know it is sometimes an all-too-brief moment, but that is why my movie takes place in one night. It tries to capture that moment of ecstasy before it all fades away.

CM: Sojin, what about you? Why are you interested in telling this story now?

SC: I came to America, from South Korea, in 2006, and gained about 20 pounds while living in LA. Now, that's not the reason for "Hungry for Love", this is... you see, two years ago, I went back to South Korea for the post-production of my previous film "Escape From Tomorrow" and suddenly I was looked at differently. Korean people were shocked and deeply concerned about my weight, age and my single status. All together, I became an un-ideal woman, and that's when I realized how I am categorized in Korean society and what that feels like. When I came back, Justin and I had a discussion about how miserable I was feeling. He related it to his own family and their stories. I thought there was something really touching about that and worth telling. Justin mentioned he did have a love story he wanted to tell set in that world and so we began to develop it. I think it is important to tell this story to combat the overwhelming amount of beauty & fitness advertisements preaching just the opposite.

CM: So the movie has many sides to the story! When will the audiences expect to see "Hungry for Love" in the theaters?

SC: We plan on having our premiere in 2016 at some festival around the world! Then would will be in the theaters shortly afterwards. It seems like a long way away but that's the reality of filmmaking. But all this will not be possible unless we succeed our Kickstarter campaign, so it's really up to your readers and all the people out there to make our dreams come true! Even \$1 will help!

If you enjoyed this conversation and would to know more about Justin and Sojin and their wonderful New York City Food Film, please take a look at their [Kickstarter campaign](#) [4], contribute to their dream to make it possible and then go back to enjoying life; to the all important quest for love and good food.

Related Links: <http://HUNGRYFORLOVEMOVIE.COM> [5]

<https://twitter.com/hungryforloveff> [6]

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Hungry-for-Love/216783278453568> [7]

<http://bit.ly/hungryforlove> [8]

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Links

[1] <http://www.the8thsamuraimovie.com/>

[2] <http://escapefromtomorrow.com/>

[3] <http://hungryforlovemovie.com/Welcome.html>

[4] <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/603554707/hungry-for-love-a-ny-food-film-to-feed-your-heart>



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