



la storia ti guarda
il nostro passato custodito da
sempre con amore. Anche per te

AS

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WEB: [YOUTUBE.COM/USER/THEBOOKOFLIFEMOVIE](https://www.youtube.com/user/thebookoflifemovie)

You are, of course, quite famous in Italy for the character Mr. Him. Can you talk a little bit about how you came to play that character and how your role developed?

Since I was a little child I've had a fond appreciation for things that were funny and made me laugh. I always volunteered in plays at school, church, etc., where I often had funny parts. And if they were not funny, I would make them so. When I was older, I found a summer job as an entertainer in tourist villages. People from all over the world would come to Italy to stay at these villages and therefore I needed to develop a way to make people laugh that went beyond the use of words. That is the reason I start using my body language to communicate. Eventually I started to be comfortable

with that form of comedy and gradually developed the persona of Mr. Him and made a number of short video clips and sold them to two large TV stations in Italy and Switzerland.

You are obviously very interested in children's media. Was this true before Mr. Him or is your interest a result of that role?

In the summer villages where I was an entertainer I had to create programs for families and kids, so I developed a great interest in that demographic and began to focus on creating a persona that would professionally target that age group. Of course, you don't just acquire these skills. You need to have a predisposition to be that kind of person, that for me eventually became defined as Mr. Him.

You studied at the University of Verona. Articles have hinted that this wasn't an easy path for you to take. How did you develop your passion for comedy, and what has given you the drive to see it through?

I graduated from the University of Verona with a degree in kinesiology/P.E. Studying the body and how it works/moves is something I have always been interested in.

My instructors were very influential in my career—particularly one of the professors who taught me about kinesiological development in children.

The university was Plan B after serving a full-time mission since I was not landing any interesting jobs in show business. Eventually, though, things that I was learning at the school





were helpful in bringing me back to my original passion, which was entertainment. My degree required a thesis/final project in order to graduate. I chose to make a video where children were the main actors and they were expressing themselves using pseudoscientific terms about common mistakes parents make in educating them. It was very fun to watch and very entertaining.

What exactly is kinesiology?

It is a scientific approach to sport science in general. It is the study of mastering certain techniques that need to become automatic before we can move on to the next level—just like children need to first learn coordination of the hand, and then they can take a pen in their hands and learn how to write. Writing is a more complex movement/technique that can also become creative, but without learning how to move your fingers and wrist, you can't master the more difficult art of writing. We often underestimate the need to understand and become masters of our own basic movements, so that we can then progressively learn more difficult tasks that are based on the simpler automated tasks we have already learned. For example, walking is an automatic process in adults, but it is not in children. They need to spend years learning how to do it before they can run or jump. Another example is when someone is learning to drive a

car and cannot carry a conversation at the same time.

Much of your comedy is physical humor reminiscent of old silent film stars like Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. Are these some of your influences? Who else?

I love Charlie Chaplin. I don't know much about Buster Keaton, but I know who he is. I also admire the work of Stan Laurel, Oliver Hardy, Jerry Lewis, and even the more modern Jim Carrey (although not all that he does). I also love Antonio De Curtis, who went by the stage name Totò. He was one of the greatest actors and comedians of all times, but was not known much internationally as he could only act in the Italian language. Another actor I really enjoy is Roberto Benigni from *Life Is Beautiful*. I love the way he can tell stories through his movies. He made several movies that are not as famous and profound as *Life Is Beautiful* but that are nevertheless very fun to watch. Benigni's film structure is similar in all his movies. He builds a story in the first part of the movie and then he "harvests" the fruits of his work in the second half.

How do you get ideas for your comedy routines?

Ideas come based on the natural predisposition and character of the

individual and based on his or her personal study of the situation. Even watching a comedy is part of the study process. Some people just watch it to be entertained, but another comedian will watch it with a critical eye, trying to analyze the mechanisms of the production. These ideas are the result of meditation after much effort and work. In the LDS faith we know that a prophet receives revelation after much pondering on a particular subject. Likewise, a scientist will get intuitions after much pondering and experimentation. So it was for Charlie Chaplin who, on the set of a movie, would stay still and ponder for hours until the inspiration came on how to proceed with the scene.

I believe that a true comedian also has a strong sense of perceiving the logistics involved in comedy. Comedians are both natural and smart. They are able to understand the different steps involved in making comedy, so that they can take it apart and rebuild it as they please. Comedy is not just memorizing funny lines, but is a study of the body and language so that spontaneity can be combined with an actual story line.

How did the idea for your film *The Book of Life* develop? What was your purpose in making the film?

The doctrine of the plan of salvation offers great ideas for an intelligent story. I was inspired by the way that Roberto Benigni builds the story in his movies with a frequent use of metonymy. In my movie, things happen to people in the pre-mortal life that lay the foundation for understanding and even laughter during the rest of the movie. For example, there are the funny physical exercises that the wannabe teacher was doing in heaven.

My first goal was simply to make a movie that could create strong emotions and perhaps make a lasting impression. So, I started with something really dear to me, something I know to be true: our pre-mortal, mortal and post-mortal existence. I wanted to make more than just a movie, though.



Photo courtesy Marco Lui







I wanted to make something that other people could also admire and enjoy—like a builder who builds such a nice home that everyone who walks by comments on how beautiful the work is. I believed so much that *The Book of Life* could create these kinds of emotions in people that I was willing to pay for it myself to make it happen.

It was not an easy project to pursue, especially in the Italian culture. In Italy, movies that sell a lot are those that use crude language, nudity, and poor morals. I knew that mine was going to stand against this preconceived idea of what a popular movie should be. But I wanted to do it anyway.

Tell us about some of the challenges you faced in making *The Book of Life*.

It would take a lot more than this interview to talk about them all. The biggest challenge was that since I was producing the whole thing, I was in charge of everything. So, in addition to my role as an actor in the film, I was also directing the acting of all the other actors (professional and amateur), coordinating the production, the permissions, and the choreography, as well as the post-production work. If there was a problem, I had to stop what I was doing and focus on resolving it. For example, after filming in the school, I would stay behind cleaning after everyone left so that the next day when the real students came in everything would be in order.

Can you describe the experience of actually filming *The Book of Life*?

It took me several years to be ready to make this film. I had it written and ready to go a long time ago, but I couldn't find anyone willing to produce it. So I kept doing what I was doing in the show business, keeping the goal of making this movie as a future plan. Then the time came when I had to make a choice between making the movie using my own resources (a lifetime of savings) or pursuing other projects. Nothing else felt good inside. It was as if I was directed by some greater inspiration to move in

this direction. It could have been that this was what God wanted, so I followed my feelings and moved forward to make it happen. It was not an easy path. Every single day during the filming (it was just a couple of weeks of time to get all the raw footage done) there were new problems, sometimes small, sometimes big—equipment that would break down, actors who got sick, a delivery truck that broke down on the first day of the shoot.

Who is your audience for *The Book of Life*?

This movie is for everyone. Really. It is narrated on multiple levels. It has the simplicity and quick humor that children love. It has a deeper underlying story that invites adults to ponder. I made this movie for the individual and for the family, for the young and for the old. I made it without thinking about how much money I could make from it, but as a labor of love that others could enjoy and as a gift from me to my audience. My desire is for people to watch it, enjoy it, feel at peace with themselves, laugh both with their lips and their hearts, and at the same time ponder the message of love and life.

Though the word “Mormon” is never used in your film, it’s one of the most authentically Mormon films that has been produced recently. It tells the plan of salvation, the main character reads from the Book of Mormon in several scenes, and he even teaches principles of the gospel (such as the body and the spirit being separated and then reunified when they are resurrected). Why did you choose to teach Mormon principles so explicitly in this story? How do you think these principles will be received by audiences not of our faith?

My original intention was not to make a “Mormon movie.” I wanted to make a movie based on what I knew to be true for me and share it with others. As the story was developing, it became natural to follow the beautiful narrative of the plan of salvation. I am indebted to God for all I am and all I have. Anyone

who loves him should not be ashamed to teach others to recognize his hand in all things. I tried to do that without making a preachy or religious movie. Movies like *E.T.*, for example, helped me understand principles such as friendship and selflessness. These are values that most religions embrace, but *E.T.* is not a Mormon movie. Positive principles that promote good feelings and love are usually welcomed by anyone seeking them, regardless of their religious background. There were members of the Church who did not particularly enjoy or welcome the movie, and many viewers not of our faith who loved it and watched it multiple times.

Your film has been compared to *Life Is Beautiful* and *Saturday’s Warrior*. Were you influenced by these films?

I never saw the movie *Saturday’s Warrior* because it wasn’t available in Italian, so I have no idea what it is all about. I know *Life Is Beautiful* very well and it is a completely different story, but I agree that the way the narrative is structured is similar, as I mentioned before. Roberto Benigni is an extremely talented actor/producer/director with many years of experience. *Life Is Beautiful* is the culmination of many years of success, so he had many resources to make it happen. If anyone compares me and my work to him and his movie, it is a wonderful compliment to me because *The Book of Life* is the beginning of my work in the movie business and it was made on a much, much smaller budget than *Life Is Beautiful*—although it was a lot of money to me! There were many movies that inspired me and I got few ideas here and there that I tried to adapt to my story. One example is the scene of a child that never speaks in the movie *The Patriot* with Mel Gibson. It is such an emotional scene and I was very touched by it, so I wanted to do something similar in my movie.

What has been the reaction to your film so far, both in Italy and in the United States?

The film has been shown in private movie theatres and at special events in the last few months, though it has not had an “official” release yet. It was very well received by those who have watched it so far and there has been an informal DVD sale/distribution that, although limited, has demonstrated great interest in the product. We are still testing it in the U.S. It was screened for the first time at the 2011 LDS Film Festival as the first international movie ever presented there. The first screening was so well received that the organizers asked for a second screening during the event. More than 300 people attended both screenings and we collected feedback from a large number of viewers. There was not a single negative comment. It was given four to five stars (out of five) from nearly everyone. We also received many requests to make the movie available in theatres or on DVD in the U.S., but so far we have not received any formal offers for distribution. The film is currently being edited to fix a couple minor issues with length and subtitles and we hope to have additional opportunities to show it to people and to allow them to purchase it. So far, everything we’ve done with it has produced overwhelmingly positive results that are encouraging us to move forward with it.

Is the film going to be distributed in English? How can someone who is interested in your film see it?

We added English subtitles for the screening at the LDS Film Festival last January and right now we are evaluating what the best options are to make it available to the public. Eventually, we want to have it available as a DVD or for download, but it would be nice to run it in a few theaters for a few weeks first. There is something more special and magic when you are able to watch a film on the big screen. We currently have a YouTube channel and a Facebook page set up for people to follow the developments so that we can inform them when and where it becomes available. We are also

interested in talking with anyone who could help in distributing it.

Mormon independent film has had its ups and downs. Some people have said that Mormon cinema is dead. Do you agree with this? What is your vision for Mormon cinema?

I’m not familiar with the concept of Mormon cinema. It is new to me. I have seen a few movies made by Mormons with a Mormon theme (*The R.M.*, *The Singles Ward*, etc.), and it was evident to me that they were funny movies for Mormons only because they used themes that are familiar to LDS people specifically. They were funny to watch if you knew about Mormons in detail, but for those not of our faith, they were for the most part incomprehensible.

I don’t know how to answer to this question, because it was not what inspired me to make my movie. I didn’t want to make a Mormon movie for Mormons. I made this movie thinking about all people. There are movies made by the Church that are very powerful and worth watching, but for a different reason (*The Mountain of the Lord*, etc.). These are not commercial movies, but the emotions they can create are real and lasting. These Mormon movies will never “die.”

How do you see your work helping build the kingdom?

Conversion is a personal matter, something that people explore on

their own, perhaps with the assistance of a friend or another person. My job is to entertain people. I like to do it using clean language and positive messages. I know that some people who learned of the sacrifices I made to make this movie found courage in their hearts to make their own difficult decisions. I think that people who see my work will be positively influenced and if they learn that it is the work of a Mormon, perhaps it will give them a chance to overcome misconceptions or wrong judgments.

Care to share what you are working on currently? Any plans for any more movies or other theatre roles?

A couple of weeks ago I won a national competition for a new project I would like to work on as either a TV series or a movie. The contest was for original scripts and mine received first prize. It is a project that will have nothing to do with LDS doctrines or other Mormon themes but is actually a comedy that has a bit of a dark side—something similar to the works of Tim Burton. It is a project that I hope will touch people, using themes that are familiar to adolescents. The story is of a teenage witch who needs to find her own self.

I also recently received a proposal from Bollywood to produce something for them and I am currently running a TV show and doing live comedy, so life is good with current and future projects. 🎬



Photo courtesy Marco Lui