

Italian Spiderman! Mistry, Parody, and Stereotypes

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An interview with Dario Russo, the Italian-Australian film student who invented the fortunate web series.

A few months ago i-Italy was one of the first webzines to discover 'Italian Spiderman'. A viral phenomenon that premiered on YouTube in May 2008 rapidly reaching millions of viewers, the project now consists of twelve YouTube installments chronicling the adventures of a plump moustached superhero as he battles with his enemies, as fearsome as they're ridiculous, and routinely saves the world while propagating (with a healthy dose of irony added) many of the worst stereotypes trailing Italians. The principal character is in fact affected by incurable machismo:



besides being recklessly rude to both friends and foes, he is also an unrepentant womanizer—and in one episode he readily punishes the woman he just saved, guilty of not being prompt enough to prepare a macchiato for him.

As [Laura Ruberto wrote in a comment to our previous article](#) [2], besides the Italian angle, what is impressive in the Italian Spiderman is how the clips recreate the style of those earlier films—not just the costumes and music but even the camera movement and non-synchronized sound. But among the secrets of its success was the mystery that surrounded it; nobody knew what it was, but the buzz invaded the web. A parody of non-American b-movies of the 60s and 70s that misappropriated popular American superheroes, it was presented as a fake trailer for a non-existent film. A [Wikipedia entry](#) [3] pretended it was a 1968 Italian action-adventure film which had been deemed "un-viewable" by Italian distributors and never released. The story has the only 35mm print of the film being lost at sea, but recovered in the present day, thereby allowing Alrugo Entertainment to release the film through YouTube...

Intrigued by the phenomenon and by the way it played with stereotypes about Italians, we set to reveal the mystery, and after long research we managed to reach its creator Dario Russo, an Italian-Australian film student. He considers Italian filmmaker Mario Bava (an eclectic director whose works span from thrillers to fantasy flicks) and 'Danger: Diabolik', the film version of a famous Italian comic, as two of his main sources of inspiration.

The Italian Spiderman Trailer Episode 1 Episode 2

Italian Spiderman. Why Italian and why Spiderman?

I would be lying if I said that there weren't any reasons at all to invent Italian Spiderman. I always wanted to make a film in Italian, even if completely ill-formed. Initially I wanted to shoot a short satirical movie on some European TV shows such as Inspector Rex. But then somehow the idea of the Italian Spiderman came to my mind. It certainly did not come from any real affection to the real 1960s hero: I never read one single Spiderman comic or even watched any of the new movies based on his adventures up to the end. Maybe, and I am not sure about it, I did watch an episode of the original animated cartoon series.

How has your Italian background contributed to shape the personality of the character? Has it also been a satirical tool? Do you think that "Italian Spiderman" justly represents the traditional Italian (or Italian Australian) popular culture? If yes, in what way?

The Italian-Australian concept and Pop culture don't get along too easily. In fact it seems that a large amount of Italian-Australians don't get Italian Spiderman at all. I would say that some of the elements of the Italian Spiderman character are a closer to the American Italian stereotype than to the Australian one. But I did show a few episodes to some Australian-Italian politicians (on request). Except for some, they all seemed to enjoy it, although I never thought politicians would be interested in this kind of works. So let's consider it a plus! As for the legacy, Don Alrugo Thick Skin Orange grows here on hearsays and conjectures.

How did you come up with such a funny and effective way of performing "viral diffusion of content"?

Viral success was never part of the plan, we just ran into it (I know that this is frustrating for aspiring webisode makers, so I am sorry to say so). Essentially all I did was make another short film along the same lines of other stuff I had been making in the past years. People watched it, so we shoot another 10. They watched them too, thank God!



What films, music style, or other forms of popular culture inspired the production of these shorts? They feature what seems to be a semi-conscious combination of '60s and '70s Italian & US pop, to which a healthy dose of irony is added. What is your target?

Well, I think that most of the times comedy and post modernism are unfortunately combined. There are periods in which I exclusively watch TV shows and movies of one particular genre. That's when I understand which are the stereotypes that particularly influence it. As regarding to Italian Spiderman, I am inspired by Mario Bava movies, The Sean Connery Bond films and the 1960s Batman. German funk swing and rock music from the 1960s and 1970s was a big influence also.

Are all the Aussie chicks as beautiful as the ones featured in Italian Spiderman, or have they been selected, like the Don Alrugo Skin Tick Oranges?

Australia has strict genetic control laws. We don't give birth to ugly people here.

How much of Italian Spiderman may be ascribed to your flair and pure ideas or to your study, training and/or acquired skills?

Well I hope ideas had a major role than training.

How do you organize your work?

Everyone on the crew has a job; if they are negligent they are put in a POW camp! We don't let them out until they have learnt their lesson.... I am kidding of course...

What is the average age of the Alrugo staff?

Most of the people involved in Italian Spiderman are around 21 years old.

Any plans for the future?

Other projects? Let's wait and see what happens....

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[1] <http://test.iitaly.org/files/italian-spiderman1227374713jpg>

[2] <http://www.i-italy.org/node/3004>

[3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Spiderman