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## Sundance Film Festival winner 'Luzzu' at Orinda Theatre for one week

By Sophie Braccini



Image provided

A crack appears in the hull of a small fishing-boat. Is it a simple case of maintenance or a call from destiny signaling that something more existential has to change?

In the movie "Luzzu," opening Oct. 15 in Orinda, everything in Jesmark's life is starting to take on water; his generations-old boat is showing signs of dangerous decay; his infant son is diagnosed with developmental delay; to navigate his circumstance he grows more likely each day to compromise his morals to make ends meet. Life is getting tougher in Malta, the European Union island mid-way between Tunisia and Italy, and for the small fishermen who wants to play by the rules. In this idyllic Mediterranean Sea, the luzzu is the traditional wood vessel that has been used by fishermen for generations. It is Jesmark's only possession, his way of life, and his identity.

The luzzu Ta' Palma has been in Jesmark Scicluna's family for generations. The 12-foot-long wooden boat is a traditional Maltese coastal fishing boat that is emblematic of the island and has been around since the 18th century. Boats are painted with vibrant colors, each different from the next, and they harbor the traditional Phoenician eyes on the boats' bows called occulus that protect the luzzijiet (plural of luzzu) against the dangers of the sea. Jesmark loves his job and the small town's fishermen community, but the economic reality is harsh, fish are rare or forbidden at certain times per EU regulations, and the fish auctioneers ignore the small fishermen. In order to prove to his wife that he can support her and their young child, Jesmark will make hard choices and will discover darker sides about himself and about his world.

"Luzzu" was written and directed by Alex Camilleri and it is his first full feature film. The movie describes beautifully and in detail the life of the fishermen, including aspects of fishing, slicing, or boat repair. This documentary aspect of the movie is reinforced by the inclusion of non-professional actors in the making of the film. In the words of Camilleri in an interview for Sundance, "The reality pokes through the edges of the frame." This is on the surface a simple story about the waning of a traditional way of life, but along the way it evokes complex realities such as the changes of the ecosystem; EU regulations and opportunities; the diverse trafficking and mafias; the different social strata in Malta; and also, environmental issues. With climate change, and depletion of fish stock, what will become of the lonely fisherman?

This movie remains the touching intimate drama of a man and a father fighting to prove himself, save his marriage and support his child. As Camilleri describes it, it is a movie about family and sacrifice. It is easy to empathize with the young couple at the center of the story and the director has managed to include elements of surprise as well as moments of calm and peace in his narrative.

"Luzzu" got a 100% rating on Rotten Tomatoes and it premiered at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival where it won the festival's World Cinema Dramatic Special Jury Award. It is brought to Orinda by the International Film Showcase starting on Oct. 15 for at least one full week with three screenings each day. There is limited seating and proof of vaccination is required at the door. Tickets: [www.OrindaMovies.com](http://www.OrindaMovies.com)

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[back](#)

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