

Oscar Winner Plans TV Series With an American Pope in a Scandal-Rife Vatican

Fresh from his Oscar win for best foreign film, Italian director Paolo Sorrentino's next project is a TV series about a fictional American pope.

Sorrentino, who won for his sumptuous, stream-of-consciousness feature, *La Grande Bellezza* (or *The Great Beauty*), will now direct an imaginary pope named Lenny Belardo. The actor chosen to play the Roman Catholic pontiff has not been announced.

Sorrentino also previously directed *This Must Be the Place*, an English-language story about a goth musician played by Sean Penn who, after the death of his father, a Holocaust survivor, comes out of self-imposed exile to become a Nazi hunter.

The new series will be no less controversial; given Sorrentino's wildly inventive style, the series will likely skirt between the sacred and profane.

The working title for the series is *The Young Pope*, and the 43-year-old director hopes to create fictional mysteries and scandals within the walls of the Vatican.

The Italian production company Wildside, Rupert Murdoch's Sky TV and U.S. producer John Lyons are co-producing the project.

"The series is about dreams, fears, conflicts, battles, the search for meaning and the need for love of a pope, seen through Sorrentino's unique vision capable of creating worlds that are at the same incredible and more real than reality itself," said Wildside's Lorenzo Mieli and Mario Gianani in a statement.

The series will include eight 50-minute episodes with an

international cast and will be shot at the Vatican, Italy, Africa and the U.S.

The producers were unavailable for comment on Tuesday. But in an interview with the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera*, Mieli predicted that the imaginary pope would rival other complex characters, including Tony Soprano in *The Sopranos*, Walter White in *Breaking Bad* and Frank Underwood in *House of Cards*.

“The pope invented by Sorrentino is someone you have to meet at least once in your life,” said Mieli.

Mieli said the lead character would be played by “an international actor” but gave no further details.

Hollywood director Ridley Scott recently filmed a TV series, *The Vatican*, in Rome, starring Bruno Ganz as the fictional present-day Pope Sixtus VI, while *The Borgias*, a historical fiction series created by Irish filmmaker Neil Jordan, sought to re-create the life of Pope Alexander VI at the turn of the 16th century.

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