



Never Again Like Before

Mai + Come Prima
(Italy)

A Medusa release of a Prana Film production, in association with [Medusa Film](#), Sky. Produced by Giacomo **Campiotti**. Executive producer, Gian Luca Bianco. Directed by Giacomo **Campiotti**. Screenplay, **Campiotti**, Alexandre Adabachian.

With: Marco Casu, Marco Velluti, Natalia Piatti, Nicola Cipolla, Laura Chiatti, Federico Battilocchio, Pino Quartullo, Lidia Broccolino, Francesco Salvi, Mariella Valentini, Fabio Sartor.

By [DEBORAH YOUNG](#)

Giacomo **Campiotti**, who recently helmed the English-lingo miniseries "Doctor Zhivago" with [Keira Knightley](#), shows he knows how to climb emotional heights in "Never Again Like Before." A gripping coming-of-age about four boys and two girls who've just graduated from high school, this Italian-language mountain drama, with a cast of unknowns, sports a wholesomeness and uplifting message geared more to family audiences than the jaded young. Though overlooked on local release in mid-November, it has an unusual depth that could work better offshore, certainly for festivals and TV.

Co-scripted with Russian writer-director Alexandre Adabachian, story opens conventionally with final exams, where a lot of ingenious cheating between the students is used to reveal character and relationships.

Enrico (Marco Casu) and Lorenzo (Marco Velluti) exchange notes when wheeling their unwilling friend Max (Nicola Cipolla), a spastic with cerebral palsy, to the bathroom. Pretty Giulia (Laura Chiatti) flirts shamelessly with the prof for help, while nobody spares a glance at plain-Jane Martina (Natalia Piatti). Shaved punk Fava (Federico Battilocchio), none too bright, takes the exam with headphones on.

Family background of each is rapidly sketched, with noteworthy actors in supporting roles as parents. Story then plunges deeper into their characters as they all end up taking a train to the Dolomites, where they pitch camp in a remote cabin.

Enrico, a wise young man, with a spiritual bent and an intense love of nature, sets them off on a climbing expedition up a mystic peak, where story takes a tragic turn. Far from ending there, however, the film continues to show how each of them deals with this life-changing experience back home.

As evidenced in his warm feature debut "Like Two Crocodiles," **Campiotti** has absorbed a canny blend of American and Euro filmmaking styles. Here the human drama is set amid picture-perfect Italian scenery and carefully built to white-knuckle tension. After an emotional pay-off, the story eases back to a thoughtful conclusion.

Similarly, the kids deliberately hover between stereotypes and more complex characters in the ensemble work. Dark-eyed Casu brings out the mythic edge in dreamy Enrico, who turns out to have an almost supernatural bond with nature. Cipolla is refreshingly ironic, but also touching, as the handicapped Max, who demands to be treated normally. Also notable is Piatti's good girl, Martina, whose inner strength grows throughout the film.

Tech work is unobtrusive and always in service of the story. Duccio Cimatti's camera lets the scenery take center stage in crisp bright colors, which turn dark and menacing as the drama develops. Editing concisely packs in a great deal.

Camera (color), Duccio Cimatti; editors, Joe Walker, Fabio Nunziata; music, Corrado Carosio, Pierangelo Fornaro; production designers, Alessandro Vannucci, Peter Kaser; costume designer, Alexandra Toesca; sound (Dolby Digital), Massimo Simonetti. Reviewed at Metropolitan, Rome, Dec. 1, 2005. Running time: 106 MIN.