

Sydney Sweeney as Cecilia in Nepi Cathedral.



Director Michael Mohan tells his best num joke.

DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

# Then There Was Nun

Director Michael Mohan on his new Sydney Sweeney-headlining horror **Immaculate** WORDS: STEVE O'BRIEN

➔ **BLACK NARCISSUS, ROSEMARY'S Baby, Barbarian, What Have You Done To Solange?, The Red Queen Kills Seven Times...** These are just some of the films Michael Mohan namechecks when asked about the influences on his latest big-screen offering. While some directors are happy to paddle in horror waters, but have no deep love for the genre, Mohan is absolutely a horror man through and through.

"As a filmmaker, it's the most challenging genre you can work in," he enthuses to Red Alert, "because you need the performances to be grounded, but the filmmaking language is so much more sophisticated in terms of setting up jump scares in a way that the audience doesn't see coming."

In 2021 *The Voyeurs*, Mohan's twisty, erotically-charged thriller for Prime Video, featured Sydney Sweeney as its leading lady.

Now he's re-teamed with her for *Immaculate*, a psychological horror about a young woman of devout faith who finds herself offered a place at a convent in the Italian countryside.

"Sydney sent me the script in 2022, and I was really worried I wasn't going to like it," Mohan says of Andrew Lobel's screenplay (Sweeney's production company Fifty-Fifty Films is producing), "but as I was turning the pages I was like, 'Andrew is an undiscovered talent here in the horror space.' This contains



Alvaro Morle, playing a not at all sinister character.

scars that I've never seen before. And the reveals that happened in the script... like, I got to a certain page and my mind was blown. I'm someone who writes films with these big twists in them, so I can always see them a mile away, but this one I couldn't. So when I got to the end of the script, I immediately called Sydney and basically begged her to be a part of this project."

Few female actors are as hot at the moment as Sydney Sweeney, so to have the star of *Euphoria* (HBO's drama about high schoolers) headlining a horror is a Big Deal. Mohan first worked with her on comedy-drama *Everything Sucks!*, a Netflix series he co-created with Ben York Jones, and believes *Immaculate* will show off Sweeney's acting skills like no other movie before has.

"She's an actress who can do unhinged like no other actor - I mean, you've seen *Euphoria*

**"I'm shocked that they're allowing us to keep the last two minutes of this movie"**

season two, right?" he says. "But she can also do quiet and subtle really well too. When I read this script I saw the potential to slightly modify the character to someone that gives us this huge arc, where she starts as this altruistic, innocent young woman, and by the end of the movie, turns into an absolutely feral creature.

"I'm lucky to work with an actor who really wants to go there," he continues. "When Sydney approached me with this, she was like, 'I want to cover myself in blood from head to toe, I want this to be as brutal as humanly

possible.' I give so much credit to her for wanting to go there because we did. Quite frankly, I'm shocked that they're allowing us to keep the last two minutes of this movie!"

In the finished film, Sweeney's character Cecilia, is, like the actor herself, a woman in her mid-twenties. In the original script, however, the character was a fresh-out-of-school teenager.

"The thing I had to delicately tell Sydney is that she can do anything as an actor, but I just didn't think that audiences would buy her as a high school virgin, especially considering the movies that she and I have made together!" Mohan laughs.

"So my idea was to make her a nun. It suited the circumstances the most and it also allowed us to take this character from point A to point B, and a more extreme arc."

At the time of our interview, Mohan is one month away from *Immaculate*'s first public airing, at Texas' South By Southwest film festival. When we ask if he's apprehensive, he simply smiles and tells us he feels like "a little kid waiting for Christmas morning.

"Our first screening is in front of 1,300 people," he says excitedly, "and the end of this movie is truly shocking. I just can't wait to feel the energy in that room when the film finally cuts to black, that's all I'll say..."

Beyond *Immaculate*, Mahon says he's keen to direct more horror, and is at the moment working on a movie with the makers of *M3GAN*. "What I really want to do is I just want to make sure that I can top this film," he says. "In the same way that this really, really tops what we did with *The Voyeurs*, I want the next one to go even darker, and go to even more extreme places. That's my goal!"

*Immaculate* is in cinemas from 22 March.



"Um, actually, I think I might have changed my mind."

**➔ SCI-FACT!** Some location filming took place at Rome's Palazzo Doria Pamphili, home to a private art collection.



**NEWS WARP**  
HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

- ➔ Marvel's **Fantastic Four** cast is finally official: Pedro Pascal is Mr. Fantastic, Vanessa Kirby the Invisible Woman, Joseph Quinn the Human Torch and Ebon Moss-Bachrach the Thing.
- ➔ Tim Burton directing **Attack of The Fifty Foot Woman** remake from a script by *Gone Girl*'s Gillian Flynn.
- ➔ Milly Alcock is **Supergirl** in *James Gunn's* DC cinematic universe.
- ➔ Destin Daniel Cretton directing live-action anime adap **Naruto**.
- ➔ Christoph Waltz and Caleb Landry-Jones in the frame for Luc Besson's **Dracula**.
- ➔ Sophie Turner and Kit Harington reuniting on 15th century horror **The Dreadful**.
- ➔ *Infested*'s Sebastian Vaníček helming new instalment of the **Evil Dead** franchise.
- ➔ Ewan McGregor and Anne Hathaway joining untitled dinosaur adventure by David Robert Mitchell.
- ➔ Stephen King's 1979 book **The Dead Zone** is set for a big-screen remake.
- ➔ *Godzilla's* Gareth Edwards in line to direct the new **Jurassic World** movie.



BY: KIMBERLY DAVE BARNETT/GETTY