

Antonio Monda: Italian Cinema. An "Open" Road to Success

Benedetta Grasso (May 31, 2010)



Interview with Antonio Monda who along with Richard Peña founded the New Italian Cinema Festival, Open Roads which will run at the Lincoln Center from June 3 to June 10 2010

Some of the most significant Italian movies of this past year, the ones that the majority of Italians have seen in their movie theaters and have talked about with friends, can now be seen here in New York at the [Open Roads](#) [2] Film Festival.

This is a very different kind of festival. Often, when we look for Italian cinema around the city there are surprisingly lots of venues, film archives, film schools and cultural events that screen, for example, Fellini, Bertolucci or Antonioni movies. At least in New York you are bound to find these programs and screenings almost more than in Italy itself, since here a film counterculture, which sprouted during the 60s, started to praise Italian and French cinema as a response to Hollywood or as an inspiration for new directorial styles.

Often, though, the focus is on the past, the golden age of neo-Realism and some of the fascinating



gems that have come out more recently and depict a 21st century Italy or reflect on the past from a modern perspective, remain anchored to the national market and never make it abroad.

Some of the new directors take the audience to less familiar locations among the Italian landscapes, some face more modern issues within family or society, some pay homage to neo-Realism or to the comedies of the 1960s but they do it within a new narrative framework, a modern way of storytelling.

The objective of Open Roads is to bring a variety of titles that immerse in the diversity of perspectives and offer something that might be unusual to an American audience.

New directors such as [Salvatores](#) [3] or [Muccino](#) [4], for example, are quite young but very well established, working with professional actors and big budgets. They are independent filmmakers also supported by various important film studios and institutions.

Antonio Monda, one of the two co-founders, along with Richard Peña, explained how the festival got started and what to expect from it .

So, this is the 10th edition. How do you feel about it?

We are extremely proud to have come so far. Eleven years ago Richard Peña, Giorgio Rosetti and I were sitting on a gorgeous balcony of the Hotel Splendid in Cannes and we decided to found a festival of Italian Cinema in New York. Giorgio, who at the time managed a company, Italia Cinema - which now has become Film Italia and was then absorbed inside Cinecittà - backed us economically. Richard and I focused on the artistic aspect. The goal was to organize at least three editions and now that we got to the tenth we are obviously incredibly satisfied. We established two criteria for the festival: the variety of genres and the quality of the movies, but at the same time we maintained a general freedom in choosing the films. So far our intuitions have been successful.

Why the name Open Roads?

The title Richard and I picked ten years ago was Dolce Cinema, as an homage to La Dolce Vita. The funny thing was that in those years Scorsese was making a documentary on Italian cinema which was entitled Dolce Cinema and we thought it inappropriate to call it the same way, especially since Scorsese would have helped us open the first edition. So we changed it to Open Roads, inspired by Rome Open City, a famous Rossellini movie. Eventually, though, even Scorsese changed the title of his documentary to Viaggio nel Cinema Italiano.

Like every year you picked contemporary directors. What's exciting about this edition?

Well, we focus on relatively young people. 95% of them are usually under 50. In this year's program you can see the variety of genres I was telling you about. From the comedian Verdone who's starring in a very funny movie to the emotional and "larger than life" Baaria. This year's movies are perhaps linked by the new found tendency in Italian Cinema towards "regionalism". Different cities are at the center of each story, from Milan (Salvatores) to Livorno (Virzi'), Rome (Verdone), Sicily (Baaria) and so on. This is because the various film commissions give incentives to shoot in their location which allows the directors to experiment with different settings.

We are proud to open with "The Man who will come" by Giorgio Diritti, a movie that has won 8 David di Donatello, set in the area around Bologna, which is a very powerful movie and a reflection on war and not little known episodes of WW2.

Many of the movies in the program this year are definitely influenced by the Commedia all'italiana, especially the funnier, lighter ones. The way a country creates a comedy reflects its national sense of humor. Do you think that there are movies that have things in common with the popular comedies in the United States?



Well, surprisingly there are similar themes. For example I noticed a lot of US comedies lately have focused on 40-50-year-olds with a bittersweet look on life. Adam Sandler's "Funny People" for example focused on that age group and deals with cancer similarly to Virzi's *The First Beautiful Thing* (*La Prima Cosa Bella*).

How is the image of Italy changing in contemporary movies?

For many years, Italian cinema has been famous abroad for certain trademark features that, from the American point of view became symbolic of an entire nation's spirit. Usually it combined a retro and nostalgic feeling, often had imaginative children as protagonists, a loose narrative structure with a somewhat surreal, not quite realistic tone. Even the most successful modern movies like *La vita è bella* or *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* benefitted from this tradition.

Now the interest is shifting towards something different and a bit more realistic and modern, and, on certain levels, if the themes remain similar the film language has changed completely.

What are the best aspects of this year's festival?

I'm happy and satisfied with all the movies we picked but I'm particularly looking forward to the opening and the closing screening. *The Man Who Will Come* was made by Giorgio Diritti, a director whom we had the pleasure to have also in 2006 with an absolutely original and striking movie called *The Wind Blows Round*. He has confirmed his talent and this new feature is absolutely striking.

Also we are closing with an homage to a master that few people know abroad, Bruno Bozzetto, which gives us the opportunity to explore the field of Italian animation. His animated feature is visually stunning and thought-provoking.

Overall, as I said, I'm very proud. We have brought over 120 movies to the United States and some of them were picked up by US distributors, giving us the opportunity to be a bridge between the two countries.

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