

Italian Movies In My Own Backyard

Renata Conte (October 28, 2008)



The new Italy and the movies that generate out of it address new concerns...



I spent this past weekend submerged in Italianess right in my own backyard. The center for Italian Cultural Studies at StonyBrook University presented its fifth annual Italian Film Festival. This event is put together by Professore G.Balducci and Dr. M.Mignone of the University, along with the aid of the Suffolk County Council of Arts. It is truly a wonderful little piece of culture and real Italian exposure in this otherwise barren bit of suburbia. Prof.

Balducci does a wonderful job of selecting the films, which are all top quality, with well known actors and intense story lines. Truly entertaining, not to mention they really help with my Italian language skills. Most will not be distributed in the US so it really is a treat to get to see them here.

My husband and I have been to the festival all five years, and we have always enjoyed our experience. I've come to notice that aside from the college students who are viewing the movie(s) as part of a class requirement or hopefully out of interest and curiosity, we were the youngest viewers there (and we have a son in college). The other attendees were all delightful and really have such a keen interest in discovering and connecting with their heritage. They are to be commended for this. I've come to realize, since the loss of my father, how truly difficult this connection is to establish and maintain without the constant presence of an Italian.

The new Italy and the movies that generate out of it address new concerns that my fellow viewers seem shocked even exist in the country. Issues such as racism, immigration, unemployment, promiscuity and drug abuse. This part of Italy is never included on the church tour and is expectedly a surprising shock to them. I have the luxury of corresponding with my family, my 21 year old cousin included. I have spent time in the real life towns without a tourist itinerary. Most of my fellow viewers have seen, and do love all that tourist Italy has to offer, who wouldn't. I have seen much more and still I love it. I will fight hard to stay as Italian as I can, to keep Mezza Via. My Dad used to complain about the present day politics of Italy, the imbroglios, the red tape, tell me it is not a fantasy land. I'd reply that I knew, and would tell him to read the Washington Post or the NY Times, they might as well cut and paste from the Italian paper, just change the geographical location of the problems.

In any event the professors are to be commended on the wonderful program they put together every year. I would love to see some local High School Italian classes come. My daughter whom I dragged along for an afternoon movie was reluctant at first but in the end totally enjoyed it. ("the kid in the movie was really cute; and half way through I was hardly reading the subtitles"). She's really impressing me lately. As the child of "Mezza Via" she's already achieved "Quarto Via" status. A few more summers in Bologna with her cousin and an Italian major in college and she'll be totally in-between just like her mamma.

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