

## RECOVERED TREASURES: GREAT FILMS FROM WORLD ARCHIVES

January 15–February 20, 2011

### ***ROME, OPEN CITY (ROMA, CITTÀ APERTA)***

Saturday, January 29, 2:00 p.m.

1945, 100 mins. Presented with electronic English subtitles.

**Restored by Cineteca Nazionale, Rome**

**Presented with assistance from the Italian Cultural Institute, New York**

Directed by Roberto Rossellini. Written by Sergio Amidei with Federico Fellini and Rossellini; from an original story by Amidei in collaboration with Alberto Consiglio and Rossellini. Photographed by Ubaldo Arata. Edited by Eraldo de Roma. Production design by R. Megna. Music by Renzo Rossellini. Principal cast: Anna Magnani (as Pina), Aldo Fabrizi (Don Pietro Pellegrini), Marcello Pagliero (Giorgio Manfredi), Harry Feist (Major Bergman), Francesco Grandjaquet (Francesco), Giovanna Galletti (Ingrid), Vito Annicchiarico (Marcello), Nando Bruno (Agostino).

Essay "Rome Open City: A Star Is Born," by Irene Bignardi for the Criterion Collection:

"All roads lead to *Rome, Open City*," Jean-Luc Godard once said, playing on the old Italian proverb—and meaning, we can assume, that when thinking about modern cinema, one always has to come to terms with Roberto Rossellini's seminal film. Indeed, *Rome, Open City* is not just a milestone in the history of Italian cinema but possibly, with De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, one of the most influential and symbolic films of its age, a movie about "reality" that has left a trace on every film movement since. It is also the story of a fascinating and atypical adventure in filmmaking, a masterpiece *malgré soi*, a unique piece of cinema that was the result, in a way, of serendipity.

It all happened in Rome, soon after the liberation of the city by the Americans in 1944, and following the gentle decree by Admiral Ellery W. Stone, heading a commission created to decide the future of the Italian film industry, that since "the so-called Italian cinema was invented by the fascists," it had to be suppressed. Full stop. Cinecittà, the seat of the best Italian production before the war, was turned into a *centro di sfollamento*, a homeless camp. The Italian cinema became a desert. It had to begin anew somewhere else. And it did.

Numerous stories about the genesis of *Rome Open City* have circulated over the years. The screenwriter Ugo Pirro even wrote a novel about the film's creation. And several documentaries—including one by another master of Italian cinema, Carlo Lizzani—have been made on the subject. In each, the story is different. So let's try to stick to

the few things we know for sure. There is a remarkable director, Roberto Rossellini, who had been making movies for years under the fascist regime but who nevertheless, because of his talent and his attitude, embodied the spirit of the intelligentsia of liberated Italy. There are his friends, the screenwriter Sergio Amidei ("It's a film we made all together, like when you cook easily," Amidei said about *Rome, Open City*) and a young, ambitious artist and screenwriter, Federico Fellini, who both took part in the script. There is the real story of Teresa Gullace, a woman killed by the Germans in front of the barracks on viale Giulio Cesare, who inspired the famous scene of the death of Pina, shot down while running after the truck that is abducting her fiancé. There is, in the beginning, the idea of making a documentary on Don Morosini, a priest who was a hero of the resistance. There is a provisional title, *Città aperta*. . . and no money. Above all, there is a woman, an actress, Anna Magnani—a queen of the cabaret, a star onstage, not a traditional beauty but whose face has an electrifying intensity, and who would become a screen legend, in films all built around her charisma and vernacular charm.

The preparation and development of the project took all summer and autumn of 1944. But according to Amidei, the original script was written in a week in Fellini's kitchen. Once again, there are different stories. Pirro argued that when Fellini became involved in the writing, the major part of the work had already been done by Amidei, and Fellini provided only dialogue and some gags for Aldo Fabrizi. Rossellini, at one point, even said that he had written the script "with some friends during the German occupation." In the beginning, the film was to be simply a documentary on Don Morosini. Then, discussion after discussion, new elements were added, like the story of Gullace. But when? There is no written script left, only personal memories. We have to rely on the final movie.

Shooting started on January 18, 1945. The war in the rest of Italy was still on. There was no film stock, and so Rossellini and his team had to use abandoned scraps found here and there. It wasn't

possible to check the rushes. Rossellini, little by little, sold all he owned so that the film could go on. In Italian, as in English, there is the expression "to make a virtue of necessity," and that's what Rossellini did here. The result was a new kind of movie, never before seen. Does that explain the whistles—which in Italy express disapproval—on the opening night of September 24, 1945, in front of a group of "friends" and critics? Audiences over the next weeks, however, reacted with enthusiasm, and the movie, which in the meantime was given its final title, became the first hit of the year. If some in the establishment were very severe in their criticism—finding a lack of unity between the first and second halves, for instance—others, including Alberto Moravia, Carlo Lizzani, and Umberto Barbaro, found value in a film born in the spirit of the resistance and from its many voices.

Most of all, it was the people of Italy who were won over, finding in the film the flavor of truth. In *Rome, Open City*, which spoke of men and women in difficult times, tormented, injured, scorned, humiliated, they recognized their own experiences during the years of a tragic, suicidal war. In Magnani, with her feverish face of a woman of the people, with her rough voice, with her natural behavior so far from the phony sophistication of the divas of the fascist cinema, with her passion, they found the truth of an Italy too often forgotten. In the actors taken from the street who surrounded her—not Fabrizi, a famous comic performer turned here into a tragic figure, or the professional Maria Michi, a woman very near the resistance and the Communist Party, but in the real, tormented faces of many of the others—they saw themselves.

It was the beginning of "neorealism"—an opening onto reality, onto the human predicament, which Rossellini would continue with *Paisan* and *Germany Year Zero*. And it was the beginning of a new career for Magnani, promoted with this film to the status of icon in the new Italy: a real face, a real woman, a new kind of actress, who would go on to work with Visconti, Renoir, Cukor, Monicelli, Lumet, Pasolini, Fellini. Always in the name of reality. Always with a passion for the truth.



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