



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Rome, Open City

(Roma città aperta)

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Made towards the end of WWII, Rossellini's film about life in Rome under the Nazi Occupation – originally inspired by a priest serving in the Resistance – was one of the landmarks of Italian neo-realism, and remains something of a model for movies about an underground movement fighting against occupying forces. It's most effective is its interlacing of loyalty and betrayal, suspicion and courage.

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Between 1945 and 1947, Roberto Rossellini made three films chronicling the final throes of World War II and its devastating immediate aftermath: *Rome, Open City* (1945), *Paisà* (1946) and *Germany Year Zero* (*Germania, anno zero* 1948). It was Rossellini's second war trilogy, coming after three pictures he made while Italy was still under fascist rule: *The White Ship* (1941), *A Pilot Returns* (1942) and *The Man with the Cross* (1943).

Rome, Open City was initially planned as a documentary on Don Giuseppe Morosini, a priest accused of resistance activity and executed by the Nazis, but as the project evolved, Rossellini and his collaborators (including Sergio Amidei and a young Federico Fellini) decided to broaden the film's scope so that the story of the priest became one of several narrative strands. They drew on other harrowing stories of life and death under the German occupation, including that of Teresa Gullace, who was shot while going to the aid of her husband.

Although Rome had been liberated, shooting conditions in early 1945 were difficult. Electricity supplies were erratic and curfews were still in place. Rossellini had been given funds by a local countess, but these quickly ran out. To finish the film he sold whatever personal items he could and made do with discarded pieces of film stock, including material the Allies used to produce newsreels. Synchronised sound was also out of the question, so the film was shot silent with dialogue and sound effects added in post-production, together with Renzo Rossellini's score.

Helping to keep the project afloat amid myriad difficulties were two established personalities of stage and screen. Aldo Fabrizi and Anna Magnani had already appeared together in two lighter, more comic portraits of Roman life: Mario Bonnard's *Campo de' fiori* (1943) and Mario Mattoli's *The Last Wagon* (1943). Rossellini himself was quick to acknowledge the importance of these films in the development of neorealism, especially in their small-scale, regional storytelling and their use of dialect. Fabrizi and Magnani's performances in *Rome, Open City* have been seared into film history – for Magnani in particular, it was the role of a lifetime.

Pasquale Iannone, *Sight & Sound*, May 2013

Rome, Open City has such a daunting (and amply merited) reputation as the foundation stone of modern Italian cinema that it's easy to forget how well it works as entertainment: if it weren't for the fact that it was shot on the streets of war devastated Rome and cast with locals who'd recently lived through events reconstructed on screen, it could be marketed simply as a pacey resistance-vs-Gestapo thriller. And one shouldn't downplay this aspect: it undoubtedly helped its considerable commercial success at a time when international interest in Italian cinema was effectively non-existent. Anna Magnani, too, was unknown abroad and considered a light comedienne at home, but she's so forceful here that her mid-point death (one of 1940s cinema's great shock moments) might have unbalanced a lesser film. Instead, the final act turns into a heartfelt, viscerally powerful paean to the courage of individual resistance activists (led by Aldo Fabrizi's mulishly stubborn priest), unmatched in impact until Jean-Pierre Melville's *Army of Shadows* a quarter of a century later.

As with Satyajit Ray's early work, there's a pervasive assumption that the challenging circumstances of their production will always leave Rossellini's mid-1940s films looking a bit ropey. Thanks to a gorgeous digital restoration by L'Immagine Ritrovata lab in Bologna, however, *Rome Open City* rivals almost any other film of its decade, with only very occasional allowances needed for hastily grabbed out-of-focus shots or visibly differing film stocks.

Michael Brooke, *Sight and Sound*, May 2015

Roberto Rossellini's three war pictures are just as much history as it is cinema, and remain required viewing, for the sake of cultural literacy, not just cinephilia. Which was unquestionably Rossellini's objective: no other major auteur has made fiction films so intent on communicating to and broadening the perspective of an unspecialised audience, minus the entertainment-complex bullshit (in this sense, the Senegalese Ousmane Sembene is his truest heir). The one director whose major work was truly born out of the fire of WWII, Rossellini was committed to 'what happened', and never trucked with manipulations, stereotypes or prettiness in the process.

Rossellini fell on hard times just as the Bergman-Fellini-Kurosawa art-film era peaked, with critics such as Pauline Kael shrugging and others hardly noticing at all. But film writers of all stripes in recent decades have come to pantheonise him, often without being capable of clarifying why – after all, his directing can be distracted (a reflection of his methods; co-writer/assistant director Fellini has remarked on how the set of *Paisan* felt like a party), his visuals could be serviceable and his narratives sometimes seemed preachy. Truly, the circumstances under which *Rome, Open City* was filmed – shot on piecemeal stock in locations where just two months before the participants in the production had suffered Nazi atrocities and worked in 'la Resistenza', and as the northern areas of the country were still fighting the Fascists – lent the film an authentic electricity it might not otherwise have had in such full supply.

But the grace of auteurism is to deflect questions of mere technique and effectiveness, and Rossellini's achievement has dawned as one of in-the-moment historicisation and sympathetic temperance, an inquiring sensibility that has allowed David Thomson to describe *Paisan* as 'the truest Second World War movie' and made Rossellini one of the key chroniclers of history in general. Spectacle and theatrical drama didn't interest him; rather, the projection of the film-making's reality was the 'truth' he sought to capture, in a way that paved the way for Godard and more acutely presaged the manner of

Kiarostami. Thus, *Rome, Open City*, a fleet and breathless drama about a widow and a priest cornered into helping a Resistance leader, was a film ‘found’ in the ruins, so close to recent catastrophe that it seemed to be non-fiction. Indeed, it was ‘real’, ‘documenting’ its own attempts to show the world what Rossellini and his fellow Romans had seen, which would otherwise vanish into memory.

Michael Atkinson, *Sight & Sound*, March 2010

ROME, OPEN CITY (ROMA CITTÀ APERTA)

Director: Roberto Rossellini
Production Company: Excelsa Film
Production Company: CIS-Nettunia *
Producers: Chiara Politi, Peppino Amato, Aldo Venturini, Rod E. Geiger *
Assistant Producers: Bruno Todini, Antonio Palumbo
Production Manager: F. De Martino
Production Managers: Carlo Civallo, Angelo Besozzi, Ermanno Donati, Luigi Carpentieri *
Production Secretary: A. Manni
Assistant Director: S. Amidei
Assistant Directors: Angela Fellini, Mario Chiari, Alberto Manni, Bruno Todini *
Continuity: J. Tuzzi
Screenplay/Dialogue: Sergio Amidei
Screenplay/Dialogue in collaboration with: Federico Fellini
From a story by: Sergio Amidei
From a story by: Alberto Consiglio *
Director of Photography: Ubaldo Arata
Camera Operator: V. Seratrice
Camera: Gianni Di Venanzo, Carlo Carlini, Carlo Di Palma, Giuseppe Berta*
Editor: Eraldo Da Roma
Assistant Editor: Jolanda Benvenuti *
Sets: R. Megna
Furnishings: Mario Chiari *
Make-up: Alberto De Rossi *
Torture Scenes Make-up: Nino Franchina *
Negatives/Positives: Tecnostampa (Rome)
Tecnostampa Manager: V. Genesi
Music: Renzo Rossellini
Conductor: L. Ricci
Sound: R. Del Monte
Sound Recording: Fono Roma
Sound System: Western Electric

Cast

Aldo Fabrizi (*Don Pietro Pellegrini*)
Anna Magnani (*Sora Pina*)
V. [Vito] Annichiarico (*Marcello, Pina's son*)
N. [Nando] Bruno (*Agostino, aka Purgatorio, sacristan*)
H. [Harry] Feist (*Major Bergmann*)
F. [Francesco] Grandjacquet (*Francesco*)
M. [Maria] Michi (*Marina Mari*)
M. [Marcello] Pagliero (*Giorgio Manfredi, aka Luigi Ferraris*)
E. [Eduardo] Passanelli (*policeman*)
C. [Carlo] Sindici (*police commissioner*)
A. [Akos] Tolnay (*Austrian deserter*)
[Joop] Van Hulzen (*Major Hartmann*)
Giovanna Galletti (*Ingrid*) *
Carla Rovere (*Lauretta, Pina's sister*) *
Amalia Pellegrini (*Manfredi's landlady*) *
Alberto Tavazzi (*priest at execution*) *
Ferruccio De Martino (*soldier at execution*) *
Alberto Manni (*black marketer*) *
Lauro Gazzolo (*dubbed voice of Manfredi*) *
Giulio Panicali (*dubbed voice of Major Bergmann*) *
Gualtiero De Angelis (*dubbed voice of Francesco*) *
Roswitha Schmidt (*dubbed voice of Ingrid*) *

Italy 1946

103 mins

* Uncredited

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

All the President's Men

Fri 1 Jul 20:25; Tue 5 Jul 18:00; Sat 9 Jul 17:45

Battleship Potemkin (Bronenosets Potemkin)

Sat 2 Jul 11:50 (with live piano accompaniment); Fri 22 Jul 18:30 and
Mon 25 Jul 20:50 (with Edmund Meisel score)

Pandora's Box (Die Büchse der Pandora)

Sat 2 Jul 15:10 and Sat 16 Jul 12:20 (with Peer Raben score); Sun 31 Jul
15:20 (with live piano accompaniment)

Theorem (Teorema)

Sat 2 Jul 20:50; Mon 4 Jul 20:50; Tue 26 Jul 18:00

Rome Open City (Roma città aperta)

Sun 3 Jul 13:10; Mon 18 Jul 18:20; Wed 27 Jul 20:40

To Sleep with Anger

Wed 6 Jul 18:15 (+ intro); Fri 8 Jul 18:10

Day of Wrath (Vredens Dag)

Thu 7 Jul 18:15; Mon 11 Jul 20:30

Blue Velvet

Thu 7 Jul 20:40; Sun 17 Jul 18:30; Fri 29 Jul 20:40

Matewan

Fri 8 Jul 20:25; Tue 19 Jul 18:00

Manhunter

Fri 8 Jul 20:40; Thu 21 Jul 18:20; Sat 23 Jul 20:40

His Girl Friday

Sun 10 Jul 16:50; Wed 20 Jul 18:20 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew,
Programmer-at-Large); Thu 28 Jul 20:45

The Scarlet Empress

Wed 13 Jul 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Sun
24 Jul 13:20

The Piano

Thu 14 Jul 14:20; Sat 23 Jul 17:50; Sat 30 Jul 11:45

Mandabi (The Money Order)

Fri 15 Jul 20:40; Wed 27 Jul 18:10

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