



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

8½ (Otto e mezzo)

8½ (Otto e mezzo)

Director: Federico Fellini
Production Companies:
Cineriz di Angelo Rizzoli, Francinex
Created by: Federico Fellini
Produced by/Presented by: Angelo Rizzoli
Production Supervisor: Clemente Fracassi
Production Manager: Nello Meniconi
Unit Manager: Mario Basili
Production Secretaries: Albino Morandin,
Angelo Iacono
2nd Unit Director: Alessandro von Normann
Artistic Collaborator: Brunello Rondi
Assistant Director: Guidarino Guidi
2nd Assistant Directors: Giulio Paradisi,
Francesco Aluigi
Continuity: Mirella Gamacchio
Screenplay: Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli,
Ennio Flaiano, Brunello Rondi
Story: Federico Fellini, Ennio Flaiano
Director of Photography: Gianni Di Venanzo
Camera Operator: Pasqualino De Santis
Editor: Leo Catozzo
Assistant Editor: Adriana Olasio
Art Director: Piero Gherardi
Assistant Art Director: Luciano Ricceri
Set Dresser: Vito Anzalone
Costumes: Piero Gherardi
Assistant Costumes: Orietta Nasalli Rocca
Wardrobe Mistress: Clara Poggi
Key Make-up: Otello Fava
Hairstyles: Renata Magnanti
Hairdressers: Eugenia, Filippo
Colour Grader: Enzo Verzini
Music: Nino Rota
Sound: Mario Faraoni, Alberto Bartolomei
Music Publisher: CAM
Prints/Processing: Istituto Nazionale LUCE
Negatives: Dupont
Studio: Titanus-Appia
uncredited
Still Photographer: Tazio Secchiaroli
Cast:
Marcello Mastroianni (*Guido Anselmi, the director*)
Claudia Cardinale (*Claudia, the star-actress*)
Anouk Aimée (*Luisa Anselmi, Guido's wife*)
Sandra Milo (*Carla, Guido's mistress*)
Rossella Falk (*Rossella, Luisa's friend*)
Barbara Steele (*Gloria Morin, Mario's fiancée*)
Madeleine LeBeau (*Madeleine, French actress*)
Caterina Boratto (*unnamed woman in harem*)
Edra Gale (*La Saraghina*)
Guido Alberti (*Commendatore Pace, the producer*)
Mario Conocchia (*Conocchia, production manager*)
Bruno Agostini (*Agostini, 2nd production secretary*)
Cesare Miceli Picardi
(*Cesarino, 1st production secretary*)
Jean Rougeul (*Fabrizio Carini, film critic*)
Mario Pisu (*Mario Mezzabotta, Gloria's friend*)
Yvonne Casadei
(*Jacqueline Bon Bon, ageing soubrette*)
Ian Dallas (*Maurice, the mind-reader*)
Mino Doro (*Claudia's agent, 'Super Tarzan'*)
Nadine Sanders (*Nadine, air hostess*)
Georgia Simmons (*Guido's grandmother*)
Hedy Vessel
(*Hedy, harem woman with costume changes*)
Tito Masini (*the cardinal*)
Annie Gorassini (*Pace's girlfriend*)
Rossella Como (*Tilde, Luisa & Rossella's friend*)
Mark Herron (*Luisa's timid admirer*)
Marisa Colomber (*Guido's aunt*)
Neil Robinson (*French actress's agent*)

Taking its title from the number of films Fellini had completed up to this point, *8½* features filmmaker Guido (Marcello Mastroianni) being besieged by sycophants and collaborators as he struggles to get started on an unwieldy science-fiction epic. Frequently digressing into surreal and erotic dream sequences, Fellini's self-reflexive movie about movie-making climaxes with an exuberant parade.

Acclaimed as one of the greatest films about artistic expression, *8½* won two Academy Awards and many festival prizes upon its release, and ranked joint 31st in the 2022 *Sight and Sound* Great Films of All Time poll.

player.bfi.org.uk

Back in the 1960s heyday of the pre-video art-house sector, two filmmakers stood as defining poles of the foreign-language art movie – Ingmar Bergman and Federico Fellini. Their qualities complemented and contrasted with each other's perfectly: Bergman Nordic, serious, austere, locked in a grim struggle with the grey spectre of the Lutheran deity; Fellini exuberant, Mediterranean, expansive, forever poking fun at the wilder excesses of Catholicism. (Although, by strange coincidence, each ended one of his best-known films – *The Seventh Seal* and *8½* respectively – with the same image, albeit to startlingly different effect: a chain of people dancing along with hands interlinked.) Neither director now enjoys the critical status he did 40 years ago. But while Bergman remains a respected figure, even if his films are relatively rarely shown these days, Fellini has suffered a crueler fate, widely dismissed as sentimental, overblown and self-indulgent, a filmmaker snared by his own intellectual and aesthetic pretensions.

This isn't the kind of critical downgrading that regularly follows a creative artist's death. The process started well within Fellini's lifetime, indeed almost coincided with the commercial peak of his career. Even at the time of his Oscar-nominated box-office triumphs *La dolce vita* (1960) and *8½* (1963) there were disenchanted mutterings that he was losing his way, cutting himself off from the neorealist roots that had so richly nourished him. But if these accusations were justified, the process was entirely deliberate on Fellini's part: the whole first half of his career can be seen as a determined campaign to break free from the fetters of neo-realism and assert his own vision. With *8½*, the most personal film he had made up to that point, the break was complete.

The central character of *8½* is film director Guido Anselmi, played by Marcello Mastroianni and presented unmistakably as Fellini's surrogate. Guido repeatedly finds himself assailed by critics and reporters; the former reproach him for intellectual frivolity while the latter assail him with idiotic questions. 'Are you for or against divorce?' yell the press pack. 'Are you afraid of the atomic bomb? Do you believe in God? Why don't you make love stories?'

Meanwhile, the most persistent of his critics, his screenwriter Daumier, tells Guido that 'Your film lacks the qualities of the avant-garde but has all its failings.' At one point Fellini maliciously has Daumier led away and hanged, but it doesn't silence him; he returns unharmed to resume the assault. 'Your tender innocence is completely negative,' he sneers, 'your little memories bathed in nostalgia, inoffensive emotional reactions.' Guido's only defence is to hide behind disingenuous statements. 'I wanted to make an honest film,' he pleads, 'that would help everyone to bury everything that was dead inside us... I've nothing to say – but I want to say it anyway.'

Elisabetta Catalano (*Luisa's sister*)
 Eugene Walter (*American journalist*)
 Hazel Rogers (*dancer in Guido's harem*)
 Gilda Dahlberg (*American journalist's wife*)
 Mario Tarchetti
 (*Poletti, Claudia's press representative*)
 Mary Indovino (*Maya, mind-reader's partner*)
 Frazier Rippy (*the cardinal's lay secretary*)
 Francesco Rigamonti (*Enrico, Luisa's friend*)
 Giulio Paradisi (*friend*)
 Marco Gemini (*Guido as a boy at school*)
 Giuditta Rissone (*Guido's mother*)
 Annibale Ninchi (*Guido's father*)
uncredited
 John Karlsen (*man in car/priest on beach*)
 Roberto Nicolosi (*doctor 1*)
 Alfredo De La Feld (*the cardinal's 1st secretary*)
 Sebastiano Di Leandro
 (*the cardinal's 2nd secretary*)
 Palma Mangini (*ageing relative from the country*)
 John Stacy (*the production accountant*)
 Riccardo Guglielmi (*Guido as a little boy*)
 Roberta Valli (*old man's grandchild*)
 Maria Raimondi (*Guido's 2nd aunt*)
 Eva Gioia (*Eva, girl in Cesarino's bed*)
 Dina De Santis (*Dina, girl in Cesarino's bed*)
 Maria Tedeschi (*school principal*)
 Luciana Sanseverino
 (*patient taking waters at the spa*)
 Luciano Bonanni (*fakir Siva announcer*)
 Olimpia Cavalli (*Miss Olympia in screen test*)
 Maria Antonietta Beluzzi
 (*screen test candidate for La Saraghina*)
 Matilda Calnan (*elderly journalist*)
 Ferdinando Guillaume (*clown in parade*)
 Elisabetta Cini (*the cardinal in sketches*)
 Valentina Lang
 Annarosa Lattuada
 Agnese Bonfanti
 Flaminia Torlonia
 Anna Carimini
 Maria Werthmüller
 Giulio Calì (*man with mushrooms*)
 Antonio Acqua
 Sonia Gessner
 Edward Flemming
 John Francis Lane
 Italy/France 1963
 138 mins
 Digital 4K

SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25*

* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk

SIGHT AND SOUND

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

Fellini's own comments on the film weren't so very different, similarly appealing to the emotions over the intellect. 'I don't like the idea of "understanding" a film,' he said. 'I don't believe that rational understanding is an essential element in the reception of any work of art. Either a film has something to say to you or it hasn't. If you are moved by it, you don't need to have it explained to you. If not, no explanation can make you moved by it.'

Philip Kemp, *Sight and Sound*, August 2004

Jonathan Glazer on *8½*

I was probably 17 or 18 when my dad introduced me to *8½*. This was before I knew precisely what I wanted to do with my life, but the experience of watching it was indelible and extraordinary.

Since I've grown up, I've realised one of the key things that draws me to the film is that it's about creative procrastination. That's probably why so many directors are attracted to it: it's a perfect mirror. The film is about the choices you commit to or don't commit to; whether you point the camera in one direction or another; whether you use this actor or that actor. And it's about all the resonances these choices have.

It's also an intensely poetic film with a wonderful sensuousness that's richly intoxicating. Such scenes as the dance the gypsy woman performs for the kids on the beach, or the beautiful sequence where the young boy is being washed – the grandmother is chasing the kid and a huge shadow looms into view and the camera just follows the shadow. The sheer fluidity of the filmmaking is evident too in the scene in the monastery, where the camera pans past austere paintings of clerics – one, two, three, four, five, six, and the seventh is a real man who comes suddenly to life. I also love the way that the fantasy scenes blend with reality in a way that never feels arch. The famous scene in the harem, for instance, where Guido, the film director played by Mastroianni, has all these women fawning over him never comes at you like a dream sequence; it's presented with its own sense of reality.

When he made *8½* Fellini was at a point in his career where he was free from certain pressures. After the success of *La dolce vita* he probably felt he was in a position – commercially and critically – to do the things he wanted. That security gives the film a feeling of liberation: it has an operatic quality yet it's also quite punk; there's nothing rigid about the way Fellini tells the story yet it isn't without structure; it has classical undertones and it's also effortlessly modern.

These are some of the things I aspire to in my work. *8½* hasn't influenced me directly, but I always carry it in my head – and there are very few films I can say that about.

Jonathan Glazer talking to Edward Lawrenson. *Sight and Sound*, September 2002