



## CHASING THE REAL: ITALIAN NEOREALISM

# Shoeshine

### Shoeshine (Sciuscià)

Director: Vittorio De Sica

Production Company: Cinematografica Alfa

Producer: Paolo William Tamburella

Production Manager: Nino Ottavi

Production Assistant: Franco Serino

Assistant Director: Umberto Scarpelli

2nd Assistant Directors: Armando Tamburella,

Argi Rovelli, Elmo De Sica

Screenplay and Original Story: Sergio Amidei,

Adolfo Franci, Cesare Giulio Viola, Cesare Zavattini

Director of Photography: Anchise Brizzi

Camera Operator: Elio Paccara

Editor: Nicolò Lazzari

Music: Alessandro Cicognini

Sound: Tullio Parmeggiani

Cast:

Franco Interlenghi (*Pasquale*)

Rinaldo Smordoni (*Giuseppe*)

Aniello Mele (*Raffaele*)

Bruno Ortensi (*Arcangeli*)

Emilio Cigoli (*Staffer*)

Gino Saltamerenda (*Panza*)

Nana Pedoni (*Nannarella*)

Leo Garavaglia (*the commissioner*)

Enrico De Silva (*Giorgio*)

Antonio Lo Nigro (*Righetto*)

Antonio D'amico (*the Sicilian*)

Antonio Carlino (*the man from Abruzzo*)

Francesco De Nicola (*Ciriola*)

Pacifico Astrologo (*Vittorio*)

Maria Campi (*the fortune-teller*)

Giuseppe Spadaro (*Bonavino*)

Irene Smordoni (*Giuseppe's mother*)

Antonio Nicotra (*Bartoli, the social worker*)

Claudio Ermelli (*the nurse*)

Guido Gentili (*Attilio*)

Armando Furlai

Leonardo Bragaglia

Tony Amendola

Edmondo Costa

Gino Marturano

Edmondo Zappacarta

Achille Ponzi

Piero Carini

Mario Del Monte Jr

Mario Jafrati

Italy 1946

93 mins

Digital 4K (restoration)

Restored in 4K in 2022 by The Film Foundation and Cineteca di Bologna in collaboration with Orium S.A. with funding provided by Hobson/Lucas Family Foundation at L'Immagine Ritrovata laboratory.

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**SIGHT AND SOUND**

The screening of *Shoeshine* on Tuesday 14 May will be introduced by season curator Giulia Saccogna.

In the devastation of post-war Rome, two street kids shine shoes to escape starvation. Dreaming to buy a white horse of their own, they naively fall into petty criminality, ending up in a reformatory – a microcosm where their innocence and friendship crumbles. De Sica and Zavattini created a masterpiece of moving visual poetry – a work of painful beauty that owes much to Charles Chaplin and Jean Vigo.

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Vittorio De Sica's *Shoeshine* is one of the masterpieces of Italian neorealism. De Sica had learnt his trade as an actor, but his box-office hits of the interwar years were films that he was proud and dissatisfied with in equal measure. He began to direct in the early 1940s, and his previous acting experience helped him become an unrivalled coach of non-professional actors. The smooth performance of the two 'shoeshine' boys ('sciuscià' being the transliteration of the distorted Italian pronunciation of 'shoeshine') bears testament to this. Indeed, De Sica seemed to have a particular knack for training young actors. Children carried leading roles in his first serious film, *The Children Are Watching Us* (*I bambini ci guardano*, 1944), and in the second masterpiece following *Sciuscià*, the legendary *Bicycle Thieves* (*Ladri di biciclette*, 1948).

Shot in the squalid desolation of an occupied Italy slowly recovering from the destructions, physical and moral, of a long dictatorship and a humiliating war, *Shoeshine* is not a political or a socially engaged film like Rossellini's more conventional and ideologically slanted *Rome Open City* (1945). The story could not be simpler. Two homeless young boys scrape a living as shoe polishers for the American troops still stationed in Rome. Their involvement in a petty criminal scam lands them in an overcrowded jail, where their friendship is torn apart with tragic consequences. Around this thin plot, loosely based on the stories of real children whom De Sica had actually met, are weaved the dreams and fears of the two protagonists.

The film's opening scenes of the two children on horseback are powerfully iconic. They perfectly portray the mixture of depressing squalor, open-eyed aspirations and passion for redemption of a whole nation on its knees. Thanks to the help of Cesare Zavattini, Italy's best scriptwriter of those years, De Sica follows the lives of Giuseppe and Pasquale without ever falling into the trap of producing tear-jerking melodrama. If neorealism is often defined by its use of location shooting and non-professional actors and its exploration of contemporary working-class life, it is also the no-frills, no-preaching realism of films such as *Shoeshine* that brought a new dimension to world cinema.

Hollywood recognised the greatness of the film and gave it a Special Award Oscar (the predecessor of the foreign-language-film Oscar) for its being 'proof

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**Shoeshine** Sciuscià

Tue 14 May 18:10 (+ intro by season curator Giulia Saccogna); Tue 21 May 20:45

**A Tragic Hunt (aka The Tragic Pursuit)** Caccia tragica

Wed 15 May 21:00; Sat 25 May 15:40

**The Children Are Watching Us** I bambini ci guardano

Thu 16 May 18:20

**The Mill on the Po** Il mulino del Po

Thu 16 May 20:40; Sat 25 May 18:20

**The Bandit** Il bandito

Fri 17 May 20:50; Sun 26 May 18:30

**Paisà**

Sun 19 May 15:30; Mon 20 May 12:00; Wed 29 May 12:00

**Germany, Year Zero** Germania anno zero (aka Deutschland im Jahre Null)

Sun 19 May 18:20; Wed 22 May 12:30; Mon 27 May 15:00; Wed 29 May 20:40

**Bicycle Thieves** Ladri di biciclette

Sun 19 May 20:20; Mon 27 May 18:00

**Bitter Rice** Riso amaro

Wed 22 May 20:40; Thu 30 May 18:15

**La terra trema**

Sun 26 May 15:00; Fri 31 May 20:00

**Course: City Lit at the BFI Italian Neorealism – The Cinema of Everyday Life**

Wed 8 May – Wed 12 Jun 18:30-20:30

**With thanks to**

Camilla Cormanni, Paola Ruggiero, Germana Ruscio, Marco Cicala at Cinecittà

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to the world that the creative spirit can triumph over adversity'. Paradoxically, *Shoeshine* was more successful abroad since Italy's cinemas at the time were flooded with the huge backlog of US films boycotted by the Fascists since the late 1930s. Among conservative circles there were also cries of denunciation for the film's depiction of such an embarrassing image of Italy's ragged state. Indeed, the most remarkable feature of *Shoeshine* is its hard-hitting honesty in describing a general state of crisis: even to the 21st-century spectator, the social frescos (the slightly surreal scenes in the jail interiors included) remain striking for the way in which they are warm-hearted and truthfully brutal at one and the same time.

Guido Bonsaver, *Sight and Sound*, November 2006