



RE-RELEASES

Rome, Open City (Roma città aperta)

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 1945

103 mins

Digital 4K (restoration)

* Uncredited

A BFI release

'The overwhelming experience of 1945 was *Rome, Open City*,' wrote influential film critic David Shipman in his book *Cinema: The First Hundred Years*, 'it made every movie made until then seem old-fashioned and artificial, or so it seemed at the time.'

In this brief sentence, Shipman perfectly encapsulates the impact that Roberto Rossellini's film had on the world: it startled audiences with its apparent naturalism, made international stars of Rossellini and lead actor Anna Magnani, and played the key role in launching Italian neorealism as an idea.

The film centres on the Resistance activities of Manfredi (Marcello Pagliero), the communist leader of the National Liberation Committee, during the 1944 German occupation of Rome. Attempting to avoid capture by the Gestapo, he seeks the help of Don Pietro (Aldo Fabrizi), a Catholic priest, and Pina (Magnani), the pregnant fiancée of a fellow resistance fighter. In telling their story, Rossellini shows us the reality of daily life during the occupation, and paints a sympathetic portrait of the Italian civilians who fought against their cruel German occupiers.

The agonies of this daily life was something that Rossellini and his team knew all too well, having lived through it themselves. Indeed, according to Rossellini, he and co-writers Federico Fellini, Sergio Amidei and Alberto Consiglio began work when Rome was still under occupation, drawing inspiration from their own experiences and the lives of those around them. Rossellini's self-proclaimed aim was to show things as they were, and to give an honest account of life during wartime.

Production began just months after Rome's liberation. With the rest of Italy still at war, resources were scarce, and *Rome, Open City* was made on the streets of the war-ravaged capital with stolen electricity and scraps of 35mm stock supposedly sourced on the black market. Such conditions lent the film a perceived verisimilitude and a rawness familiar from newsreels, and it quickly became the torchbearer for the Italian neorealist style.

Neorealism, as a movement, generally focused on the social and economic struggles of ordinary working people, and made use of non-professional actors, real locations and vernacular dialogue. Often, it is seen as being a post-war reaction to the 'white telephone' films of the fascist era – slick escapist fare featuring upper-class characters and luxurious lifestyles – but its roots can be traced at least as far back as the 19th-century realist verismo novels. Meanwhile, several 'precursors' can be found within fascist era cinema – see, for instance, Alessandro Blasetti's *1860* (1933), featuring location shooting, non-professional actors and a focus on a Sicilian shepherd. Indeed, even Rossellini was making docufiction under fascism, with films like *La nave bianca* (1941), a piece of wartime propaganda shot on location with a cast of non-professionals.

Seen in this light, then, *Rome, Open City* should be understood in the context of a slowly evolving lineage. Notions of the film's wholesale 'realism' are also largely overstated: Magnani and Fabrizi were already established talents, key locations were built as sets, the carefully structured script was pure melodrama, and it drew heavily from religious art and Catholic symbolism. As

Restored in 2013 by Cineteca di Bologna,
CSC – Cineteca Nazionale, Coproduction Office
and Cinecittà at L'Immagine Ritrovata laboratory

The screening on Tue 21 May will be introduced by
season curator Giulia Saccogna

CHASING THE REAL: ITALIAN NEOREALISM

Ossessione

Sat 4 May 20:15; Sun 12 May 17:50

Paisà

Mon 6 May 15:20; Fri 10 May 20:30; Sun 19 May
15:30; Mon 20 May 12:00; Wed 29 May 12:00

Journey through Italian Neorealism

Tue 7 May 18:10

Four Steps in the Clouds

Quattro passi fra le nuvole

Tue 7 May 20:30 (+ intro by season curator Giulia
Saccogna); Mon 13 May 18:20

The Children Are Watching Us I bambini ci

guardano

Wed 8 May 20:45; Thu 16 May 18:20

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 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

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

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Rossellini himself put it later in life, it was 'full of old ingredients'. Still, it was precisely the inclusion of these old ingredients, skilfully blended with a dollop of docu-realism, that made the film so accessible; rather than being a complete break with convention, it offered audiences something which looked unflinchingly honest, but wrapped this honesty in a coating that made it easily digestible.

Reports of the initial domestic response vary. When the film opened in Rome in September 1945, the horrors of the war were still fresh in the minds of Italian audiences. According to some sources, this made them turn tepidly away from *Rome, Open City* in search of escapism, while others claim that it led to heavy identification and cathartic tears. Either way, it seems to have struck a nerve, and box office reports from the time do paint a picture of success – and this was certainly the case across the Atlantic.

Under the auspices of an American GI named Rod E. Geiger, *Rome, Open City* had its New York premiere in February 1946. There, audiences unaccustomed to the brutal realities of the war in Europe sat agape at what they saw as unpolished authenticity. With the apparent rawness of a newsreel, Rossellini's film taught them what life had been like under the occupation, and the film played solidly for almost two years. Reviewers cheered, and The New York Film Critics Circle awarded it best foreign language film.

Shortly after its New York premiere, *Rome, Open City* screened at the inaugural Cannes Film Festival. Despite Rossellini later claiming that it played to a small audience and 'went quite unnoticed', it was awarded the 'Grand Prix du Festival International du Film' (later renamed as the Palme d'Or). Its place in film history had been secured.

Today, the film's international success is seen not only as a breakthrough for Italian cinema but also for the Italian people: Rossellini's decision to omit Italian fascists and populate his Gestapo headquarters with Nazi officials made it clear who the real bad guys were. Despite a speech from Don Pietro proclaiming that Italians shouldn't think of themselves as helpless victims, the heart-wrenching fate that awaits the Italian characters, and the sadism with which the Germans unleash it, presents a different proposition – one that sympathetically portrays a hapless and oppressed people, and which directly helped to rehabilitate the Italian people internationally in the post-war years.

If the ramifications of this view are still felt in today's political consciousness, it isn't *Rome, Open City's* only lasting impact. The huge success of Rossellini's film spearheaded the neorealist movement, paving the way for the likes of Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) on the international stage.

Taken as a whole, the legacy of the neorealist movement is profound and far-reaching: films as diverse as Ingmar Bergman's *Port of Call* (Sweden, 1948), Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* (India, 1955), Andrzej Wajda's *A Generation* (Poland, 1955), the Taviani brothers' *Padre Padrone* (Italy, 1977), Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* (United States, 1978) and Walter Salles's *Central Station* (Brazil, 1998) all bear its influence – to name just a smattering of random examples.

That these films were made in disparate times, places and ways shows just how thoroughly the tenets of neorealism have permeated cinematic language the world over – and all thanks to Rossellini's trailblazing triumph.

Alex Barrett, bfi.org.uk, 15 May 2024