

## **Rome Cinema Fest. A Positive Balance**

From Italy by Maria Rita Latto (October 30, 2007)



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After ten days in which Rome was transformed into a little Hollywood, the Rome Cinema Fest ended its second edition with c: 600,000 visitors, 110,000 tickets sold, 102 films, 32 special events, 170 sponsors. An event strongly supported by Walter Veltroni, the mayor with a passion for cinema who succeeded in his dream of a festival devoted not only to movies but also offering a long list of cultural events. The challenge to create culture without being boring is the main success of the Rome Cinema Fest, and the public responded positively to the many "treats" on the menu proposed by the organizing committee.



Among the prizes, it is worth noting the one given by a jury composed of youngsters from Italian schools in the section Alice in the City, which brought together an international selection of works dedicated to cinema made for and by young people. The winner of this section was the Italian American director Joseph Greco who received the award for his film, *Canvas*. The motivation of the jury was rather clear: "This is a film you cannot watch and forget right away. It goes right to your heart with its portrait of the strength and determination of a family fighting against the mother's illness. The courage of the director, who has based the film on his own childhood, is simply unbelievable". The autobiographic story of the schizophrenia of Greco's mother had already moved the audience the day of the screening, giving a message of hope that families can survive mental illness. The role of the father was played by Italian American actor Joe Pantoliano, who is well known for his role as Ralphie Cifaretto on HBO's hit series, *The Sopranos*. The day of the award ceremony Joseph Greco thanked the jury and expressed his personal satisfaction: "Being an Italian American, winning this prize in Rome, my favorite city, is the best thing that could ever happen to me. This Fest is an experience I will never forget. An incredible emotion."

In this edition the quality of the films presented was decidedly good, with interesting attempts to experiment with new languages and with considerable space devoted to committed cinema. Though, the winner of the golden Marco Aurelio was the American film *Juno* by Jason Reitman, a film that could be defined as "popular" – not reserved to an elitarian public. The jury's motivation, composed by regular people, not showbiz professionals, shows that the film created a wave of emotions in the jurors and in the public too. *Juno* is the story of an adolescent who has to deal with an unwanted pregnancy that she will have to face on her own. *Juno* is played by Ellen Page, a young actress who, together with an excellent cast, presents a convincing story full of humor.

The special jury prize was assigned to the Iranian film *Hafez* by Abolfazl Jalili: a film narrating the love story between Hafez, the greatest love poet of Persian culture and one of his Coran students. This film was appreciated for the innovative narration and the ability to show the force of man against religious fanaticism. The prize for the best actor went to Rade Sherbedgia for *Fugitive Pieces* by Jeremy Podeswa, a film telling the story of the friendship between a Polish child, whose family was exterminated by the Nazis, and a Greek archaeologist. The Best actress prize went to Chinese actress Jiang Wenli, for *Li-Chun (And the spring comes)* – directed by her husband Wei Gu – the story of a singing-mistress who dreams of moving to Beijing and singing at the Opera, despite the difficulties created by people and by the official prohibitions.

Among the many events it is impossible not to remember the meeting of Sophia Loren with the public at the Auditorium, where, in front of people of all ages, "the myth" of Italian cinema remembered the milestones of her unique career, marked by unforgettable figures of the history of world cinema, such as Vittorio De Sica, Charlie Chaplin, Marlon Brando, Cary Grant and Marcello Mastroianni. A meeting in which the great Sophia also spoke of her anxieties as an actress, and her torments as a diva. The climax of her journey through memory was the moment in which she candidly admitted to have "hated" Meryl Streep because she "stole" a role she deeply felt as hers: Francesca, the Italian American protagonist of *The Bridges of Madison County*, having Clint Eastwood as the charming leading man.

Another memorable moment of the Rome Cinema Fest was the celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of *Novecento*, the unforgettable film by Oscar winner Bernardo Bertolucci. The director, together with one of the protagonists of the film, the French actor Gerard Depardieu, introduced this masterpiece giving a real lesson in the history of the cinema, offering lots of anecdotes, stating the



importance of remembering old films that are classics and not letting them fade away. Depardieu got applause and laughs from the public as he reminisced about the atmosphere on the set during the making of Novecento: he was nostalgic remembering his typical Emilian breakfasts such six eggs and lambrusco wine. The French actor noted the different approach to the film of Robert De Niro, who preferred not to eat, like he did, and took notes on every aspect of his role. Bertolucci interrupted to say that although they had different working methods, both actors were great in creating a memorable film that stayed in the hearts of the public all over the world.

And, inevitably, in the memory of all those who followed the daily chronicles of this second edition of the Rome Cinema Fest, will remain the gossip regarding the whims of the celebrities who descended on the Eternal City. For example, many curious fans learned that Tom Cruise usually brings his own pillow during his trips. It Robert Redford's wish to have dinner in a good Italian restaurant seems simple enough, especially if compared to Tim Robbins' request to use a hydrogen car to avoid polluting. Sharon Stone's needs are rather clear: in the suite of her hotel she wants to find a computer, a list of tourist spots to visit and her favorite brand of American coffee. Halle Berry's request of a hotel having a swimming pool was due to her pregnancy: in fact, she had to follow her doctor's recommendation of pool gym for the maternity fitness.

Well, looking back on the past ten days of the Rome Cinema Fest, we have to admit that it really was a success, a sort of cocktail made with many ingredients, some apparently disparate, each of them, though, having the aim to attract as many people as possible, trying to accommodate all. This mix of culture, gossip, cheers, music, glamour, memories, stars, created in the Eternal City ten magic days to honor that fantastic dream that has always been the Cinema.

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