

Cultural Daily

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Fellini's Roma, Restored

Elisa Leonelli · Wednesday, February 19th, 2020

It was a great pleasure to share with my family the movie *Roma* directed by Federico Fellini (1972) projected on the big screen of the American Cinemathèque at the historical Egyptian theater in Hollywood, in a new restoration funded by the Hollywood Foreign Press and executed by the Bologna Cinemathèque.

I learned many more details about the Italian master's way of working from the engaging presentation of clips from Gian Luca Farinelli, director of Cineteca di Bologna. [Read article](#) by Luca Celada about the second [HFPA Restoration Summit](#) on the Golden Globes website.



HFPA Restoration Summit at Egyptian © HFPA

I have a long association with *Fellini's Roma*, since I lived in Rome in 1971 and I met Federico Fellini. In the mid 1990s, while studying for a Master Degree in Critical Studies at USC's School of Cinematic Arts, I chose to write a short essay about this film for a class in Italian Cinema, taught by Professor Aine O'Healy.

In 2016 I represented the HFPA at Il Cinema Ritrovato, the annual Festival of Preservation in Bologna. [Read article](#) by Armando Gallo in the Golden Globes website, and [my article in Cultural Weekly](#).

In 2019 the HFPA premiered the restoration of *Fellini's Roma* in Bologna, a year before the 2020 celebrations for the 100th anniversary of the director's birth would take place. [Read article](#) by Luca Celada on the Golden Globes website



Il Cinema Ritrovato, Bologna © Elisa Leonelli 2019

As Fellini did in 1939, when he moved to Rome from Rimini, where he was born on January 20, 1920, I also left my hometown of Modena for Rome in 1970, after graduating from the University of Bologna, in pursuit of the dream of getting involved in the magical world of movies. You may find more details of my journey in [the story of my career](#), *From Modena to Hollywood*, that in 2015 I was asked to write by Salvatore Giannella as an inspiration for other young Italian dreamers.

Here a few excerpts from my critical essay *Fellini's Roma*, 1993

“Fellini structures *Roma* in eight distinct segments, openly recognizing the fragmented and meandering nature of his films, that find unity not in plot and narrative but in analogies and feelings. In the first segment the author, in the didascalical mode that informs the film, explains his early impressions of Rome gathered as a child in his native Rimini. The schoolmaster Zeus (named after the king of the Gods in the Greek pantheon, a humorous reference to the classicism that pervades Italian culture) takes his students to the river, the Rubicone, that Julius Caesar crossed with his army in 49 B.C. pronouncing the famously defiant phrase “*Alea iacta est*” (the die has been cast). Latin (as Greek) was widely studied in Italian schools, not only to underline the ties to a Roman past, but also because it was the universal language of the Catholic Church, that everybody was expected to understand during Mass. Constant references to the glorious era of imperialist Rome were made by the Fascist regime to justify its nationalist ideology. Fellini attributes his distaste for politics to his upbringing in a dictatorship.



Fellini’s Roma-Ecclesiastical fashion show

“A politically charged statement, in the powerfully hallucinatory and satirical seventh section about the ecclesiastical fashion show, is made against the secret power of the Catholic hierarchy and their ancient ties to the Roman aristocracy. After a humorous beginning, the parade of increasingly bizarre and magniloquent vestments concludes with the ominous representation of a mummified Pope Pius XII (1939-58) on a shining throne. He represented the conservative elements of the Catholic Church, and was later criticized for never speaking out against the Nazis during World War II nor denouncing the horror of the Holocaust; in contrast with the warm and open leadership of John XXIII (1958-63), who became a icon for the 60s, the third figure of a beloved trinity that included John Kennedy and Martin Luther King.

“Rome was not only the Holy city of the Catholic Church, but the movie capital of Italy; anybody who wanted to make films had to come here, where the studios of Cinecittà had opened their doors in 1937.”

Featured image photo credit, Colosseum, Roma (c) Elisa Leonelli 1984

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