

8 ½-1963: Where we view the circus of life on film, sort of....

I note that Fellini directed twenty-four films, of which I have seen only *La Strada* (1954), *La Dolce Vita* (1960), *8 ½* (1963), *Fellini-Satyricon* (1969), *Roma* (1972), and *Amacord* (1973).

I still rate *La Strada* as his most powerful and tragic; *Dolce Vita* explored moral ambiguity of the times; *Satyricon* was an off-beat fantasy; *Roma* an interesting documentary of part of Fellini's life and of that city; *Amacord* looked at the comedy of life from the child's perspective.

This one just kept asking questions, and still does....

When he directed this enigmatic masterpiece, Fellini had been making films since the late nineteen-forties (when he was in his mid-twenties); by the time 1962 rolled in, he was obviously in state of mental flux, if not fugue, all or some of which has gone into the making of this exquisite puzzle.

Was that Fellini's motivation? I can only guess, as much as Guido (Marcello Mastroianni) keeps trying to sort out what his life all means, what and who is really important to him, and the extent to which the heart or the mind should rule the choices we all have to make in life. To do that, poor Guido has to cast his mind back to various episodes in his life – just as we all do, from time to time – and come to some reconciliation about what he'd done to himself and others in his quest for ... what? Salvation? Happiness? Fulfillment? Answers? As somebody once said: In life there's only one answer – there are no answers.

Everybody goes through some sort of mid-life crisis, so why should Fellini be an exception? And, what better vehicle to make an attempt to sort out parts of your life than put it on film where, if necessary, you can review it, as often as you wish, just to see again whether you got things right, after all?

So, in my opinion, the ending for Guido can be interpreted in two ways: either as a wish fulfillment for death, or as a reaffirmation and reconnection with life, depending upon one's own particular point of view. Why? Because, throughout this narrative, there are a few times when the viewer is uncertain whether Guido is only fantasizing or when he's grounded in the reality of the narrative.

Hence, was this narrative truly an autobiographical exposition from Fellini, depicting much of his own thoughts, doubts and knowledge? Well, with others, he was the story developer and scriptwriter, so it's hard to say no, I would think. As every writer knows, there is always part of him/her in every story s/he writes.

And as the clincher, in my view, there is no better quote than that from one of the guests who mocks Guido during the final party on the beach - because no writer ever wants to hear this assessment of a life's work: "He's lost it! He's got nothing to say!"

That says it all....

What is there to say about the cast, except near perfection? With brilliant, black and white camera work, a great score, and settings that range from the surreal to the sublime, even if you've never seen an Italian film before, make this one which you must see.

Highest recommendation. Rating: 9

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