

Open Roads - A Look Behind the Scenes

Natasha Lardera (June 11, 2014)



Open Roads New Italian Cinema has returned for its 14th year. One of the most popular annual programs held at Lincoln Center, it has served as the leading North American showcase of contemporary Italian cinema. This year's exceptionally strong and diverse edition, featuring many US premieres, highlighted the latest work from established veterans alongside promising new talents.

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Every year [Istituto Luce-Cinecittà- Filmitalia](#) [4] brings to New York City a delegation of film directors, actors, writers and producers who come to promote their film to an international public, to attend

screenings and participate in the following q&as, to meet the international press and to look for international distribution.

This year i-Italy was lucky enough to have a chance to follow the delegation on their day-to-day activities. So instead of booking the usual interviews, we have something different. So how does the day go for these guys? Wake up call is pretty early in the morning, between jet lag and interviews to be a part of, there is not really much time to sleep in... and then off to the first screening.

Director Bruno Oliviero, presenting *The Human Factor*, a noir set in Milan, had a screening at 4.00 pm on opening day. As he landed at 1.30 there was not much time to be at the Walter Reade Theater to introduce his work (usually directors introduce the film and then, at the end, participate at a Q&A).

Oliviero, who traveled his son, had to go straight there, suitcases included. Then there are the cocktail parties held for the press and dignitaries, the lunches, more interviews and special events.

The majority of the directors, for example, were part of a special round table held at [Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimo](#) [5] where they were asked, by Casa's director [Stefano Albertini](#) [6], to pitch their films. Edoardo Winspeare was in town but he was not present, because, at the same time, he had to be at the Walter Reade to introduce his vibrant drama *Quiet Bliss*.

And we can definitely talk about bliss, every member of the delegation seemed pretty content. If they had a problem, they never showed it. Many directors already know each other, some have never met but adore the other's work, some are even star struck.

Actress Lara Licchetta, who stars in Winspeare's film, was so taken by [Valeria Solarino](#) [7]'s beauty and acting skills. "She is so stunning. I cannot believe I am here with her, as part of the same group. And I cannot believe I am going to be interviewed. I've never been interviewed before. I hope they're not going to ask me any weird questions. I haven't even seen the movie." Despite her nervousness, Lara always did more than fine. As did Umberto Montella.

Umberto Montella is the Neapolitan lawyer and building administrator who stars in Vincenzo Marra's *The Administrator*. The older gentleman never stopped repeating "I don't belong here. What am I doing here?" But we can all agree that he did belong. The audience was so taken by this humble man who "Was not acting, but I was simply myself caught on camera."

Selected by the director himself, Montella manages a few buildings in Naples, not an easy feat, and he does it with charm, loads of patience and the help of psychology. "Marra came to talk to me one day and after he heard me speak to a tenant on the phone he decided I was to become the main character of his film. I know psychology because my brother in law is a therapist and he has taught me some tricks." Montella came to NYC with his partner and one of his daughters (Ilaria, who also has a cameo in the film): this was the perfect opportunity to see a city he thought he would never see.

So what was on his schedule between an interview, a lunch with all the others and a screening? "Shopping at the Woodbury Commons outlets, with a list of requests from friends and family back in Italy, a visit at the Statue of Liberty and endless sightseeing... I can't feel my legs anymore."

And he's not the only one. Pif, [Pierfrancesco Diliberto](#) [8], who came to present his *The Mafia Only Kills in Summer*, went running in Central Park on his first morning here. But he forgot to stretch and we all know how bad that is for our muscles.

Although in pain, the TV personality turned film director has been more than available to anybody who had a question, a comment or just wanted to pose for a picture. "My feet hurt so much," he often said when he had to dress up and wear his Armani suit and shoes which were not "black but navy and black, definitely more elegant." Despite his confession of not ever wearing suits for work and not speaking English ("At 42 I know it's too late to learn. I don't know how I get by but I do somehow.

People think I understand when they speak to me and I put words together and come up with something to say... which apparently they understand...or maybe we both don't understand each other?" Pif has incessantly been answering questions from the audience and the press who have been charmed by his re-telling of some of Italy's most tragic events in Italy's recent history.

"I am a little nervous," he confessed at lunch before the first screening of his film but once on stage Pif turned into the irreverent character Italian audiences are used to seeing on TV. The only cause of concern? "My name, when I tell Americans my name they get confused, they think my name's "Beef".

"What really attracts audiences to the screenings is the fact that we have Q&As afterwards," Irene Richard, Manager of Ticket Strategy at the Film Society of Lincoln Center has confessed and indeed the films where the directors were present were more popular at the box office. Director Gianfranco Rosi, who presented *Sacro Gra*, the first documentary to win the Golden Lion for Best Film at the Venice Film Festival, is proud of his sold out screenings. People were in line for hours trying to get tickets to see his portrait of life around Rome's Grande Raccordo Anulare, the 43.5 mile highway that encircles the city.

"Let me read the program, I don't remember what my film is about." Rosi often joked before facing the audience or a journalist. And later, at the Q&A, he would say something not entirely different. "My film has no beginning and no end. Not a specific structure. These are fragments of life of people who live around the Gran Raccordo. Some people say it's political, some say it's not at all. I love to think it is universal as it captures people and their lives. I don't film just to film, I turn the camera on when there is a moment of truth to be captured. This is the story of my film." Rosi, with his pink scarves, dark glasses and spontaneous smile, always had people around him, fans but mostly friends.

The director has indeed lived in the city for about 20 years (he attended NYU) and has kept in touch with local writers, directors and artists of all sorts. He is not the only one who is familiar with the City. Fabio Mollo, presenting *South is Nothing*, has also studied here and the lights of the Met have no particular effect on him. We can say the same of Jacopo Cullin, the actor of *The Referee*.

And the rest of the delegation? There are those who are more independent and prefer to leave the hotel that has been booked for them and experience the City in a local apartment, preferably in one of the cool hoods, like the LES, there are those who don't miss an opportunity to go shopping, Uniqlo is the greatest hit, those who love to eat hamburgers (Yes, American food is something they want to try, why go to an Italian restaurant where they can have the best Italian food back home?) and those in search of inspiration (Alessandro Rossetto looked for it at the Brooklyn Museum).

"I've come to New York many times during my career," director Gianni Amelio confessed during a cab drive to Casa Italiana where he was going to be interviewed by Stefano Albertini for i-Italy TV, "Always for a festival or something like that. I don't know how experiencing it as a tourist would be like... this is close enough. And now, let's go to Uniqlo."

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