

## VITTORIO DE SICA

(1901-1974)

Born in 1901, De Sica grew up in poverty in Napoli. As a young man, he worked as an office clerk to help support his family, but he soon discovered that acting was a more satisfying escape from the drudgery of youth. Dashing and handsome, he began his career as a leading man on the stage and then in black-and-white romantic comedies.

However, as World War II came to an end and Italy underwent a social revolution, De Sica's interests turned to the other side of the camera. The transformation began when he met screenwriter Cesare Zavattini, a leader in the Italian Neorealist movement. Free of political pressures for the first time, artists were able to explore Italy's social order, delving into the stark dichotomy of poverty and wealth typical to the time.

De Sica and Zavattini began an important artistic collaboration that yielded a number of classic neorealist films, including the Academy Award-winning *Ladri di Biciclette* (Bicycle Thieves), *Sciuscià* (Shoeshine), and many more. Today, De Sica's films are known for their heart-rending insight into the beauty, tragedy, and comedy of the human condition.

Vittorio De Sica directed 34 feature films for which he won numerous international prizes. He was honored with four Academy Awards: two Special Awards, preceding the creation of the Best Foreign Film category, for "Shoeshine" in 1947, and "The Bicycle Thief" in 1949, and Best Foreign Film Awards for "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" in 1964, and *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* in 1971.

### ***Ieri, oggi, domani* (Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow) (1963)**

Winner of the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar at the 1964 Academy Awards, *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* is a sparkingly original comedy that casts Marcello Mastroianni and Sophia Loren in three different stories set throughout Italy.

In Naples, they are poor but resourceful, selling black market cigarettes on the streets. In Milan, Loren is costumed in Christian Dior and debates her preference for a Rolls Royce or her husband. And in Rome, Mastroianni is an industry scion who helps Loren's prostitute set a wavering priest back onto the spiritual plane.

This very enjoyable film may be a let down for someone expecting the heights of De Sica's Neorealist masterpieces like *The Bicycle Thieves* or *Two Women*. However it is very funny in parts and is pointedly critical of Italian society in the boom years of the 1960s. Also Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni are absolutely stunning to watch.

For people interested in Italy it is a fascinating commentary on the country that can border on stereotype. Naples (De Sica's hometown) is warm and happy and filled with clever types ready to outwit the system and find their own way to happiness. Milan is cold, rich, and callous.

Rome is dominated by the Catholic church and the State with plenty of hypocrisy and corruption. But De Sica finds some humor in all of this.

An amusing, verging on wonderful film movie that is unfortunately compromised by the dub; Loren speaks perfect English and Mastroianni - whose beautiful voice is a star turn in itself, knew enough to acquit himself.

**Adelina of Naples.** This segment of the film is a fictionalized take on true events 10 years earlier. Lauren is the principal breadwinner for her family, selling black market cigarettes and committing other illegal acts to make ends meet. To avoid jail, she merely need remain pregnant which her semi-employed husband Carmine (Mastroianni), is expected to chip in with. The rub however, is that the shoe factory next door has, for several years, kept the poor man awake so that after 8 or so other siblings, he simply is not the race horse he used to be. Chastised by his wife for his weakness, Mastroianni despairs while Adelina (almost) produces number nine with Carmine's best friend. Lauren's luck and the appeal processes are eventually exhausted, Adelina does go to a jail that better frankly, than the average Motel 6. Carmine, in the mean time, contacts the press and the Pope, really everyone, and finally, Sophia is sprung. During her internment, Mastroianni apparently recovers his strength and the movie ends with the certainties that he 'got his thang back,' and that, at least to 1963 eyes, things in Naples would never change. At the time the movie was lauded for its unsubtle criticism of the Catholic Church's birth control policies, policies, which it was reasoned, contributed to high birth rates, poverty, apathy and - laziness of Naples.

**Anna of Milan.** This segment basically has no plot whatsoever. Sophia Lauren is Anna, a rich, bored woman who has married an industrialist and has time and amore to spare, especially as her rich husband travels. A lot. Mastroianni plays Renzo, a writer with a curious haircut and a raincoat, a man appalled by Lauren's focus on money, yet still a man. One fine Sunday, the pair travel to the country in her new Rolls. Renzo passing the time chiding Anna for her materialism in between bouts of desire. Lauren insists that she wants to go somewhere, anywhere to get away from all 'this.' Really she insists, she could give up money at any time and as a token of her good faith on this point - allows Mastroianni to drive. Eventually, overwhelmed by so much woman and horsepower, Renzo crashes, almost killing a child selling flowers on the roadside. The Rolls' in flames, Anna flips out, her only concern the car, she even insists that use HIS clothes to douse the flames. Returned to her senses by the crash, Anna shows through her anger that her true love is the Lira, especially when she rides off into the Milanese sunset with another swinger - a short guy in a Lancia. The Rolls abandoned for repairs on the roadside, Renzo buys some flowers from the almost run-over little flower peddler who asks if it's 'really a Rolls?' The day's stock results are announced on the Roll's radio as Mastroianni walks bemusedly out of camera, (very effective shot) discarding the flowers on the roadside. While too obvious - 'money is the poison of today,' the curious scenery and some fine acting, make this episode enjoyable, if lightweight.

**Mara of Rome.** This famous episode stars Lauren as Mara, an upscale hooker and is frankly, hilarious and a treat for the eyes. There are two themes in this episode: Mastroianni's 'Rusconi,' son of a wealthy industrialist from Bologna is wild about Mara - and the camera by the way is wild about Mastroianni, who is murderously handsome. Unfortunately, something always arises to interrupt his love - especially the second theme, namely: The crush on Mara of her shy young neighbor, a gorgeous young man being sent to a seminary by his tiny little

grandparents who seem to want him there for his own good and just maybe, their own finances. One comic turn after another arises to prevent Rusconi's union with Mara; on one occasion, hounded on the phone by his Father in Bologna, Rusconi insists, that he is 'not an idiot,' and then reminds his Dad that you have to 'bribe the minister, first. That's why it is called a bribe.' Showing great capacity as a comic actor on a level with his dramatic turns, Mastroianni really puts the 'S' in star power and is hilariously funny. Tired of the 'what next?' Mastroianni swears off Mara and says he is leaving forever. In the meantime, the self-righteous Grandma next door accuses Mara of being a common whore and home-wrecker who is ruining her young man and promises to evict her. (In reality, it was the shy young man who made a Roman roof top approach, asking Lauren if she would go to the beach with him; she is non-committal.) Enraged by the Grandma, Lauren fires back: How can anyone judge HER - after all, she is very choosy about the men she sleeps with. Mastroianni returns stating that he kept thinking about Mara. Finally the young man's affairs are sorted and neighborly relations, restored. As a reward, Lauren performs a very famous (and rather tame, in fact) strip tease for Rusconi, whose by-now ruined nervous system leads to a series of hilarious faces. About to dish out the real reward, however, Lauren recalls she has made a vow of chastity for 'just two weeks'..