

Citizen Rosi, a Film Retrospective of Political Modernism

Gabrielle Pati (August 05, 2011)



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From August 3-21 the [Brooklyn Academy of Music](#) [2] Rose Cinemas is hosting a retrospective of Francesco Rosi's work for New York film appassionate, highlighting both the gems and lesser known works of Italy's master of political cinema.

The films of Neapolitan Francesco Rosi span over the course of half a century, yet are not overwhelmingly known, even by Italians. Rosi is one of the last living legends of Italian cinema, and BAM, in collaboration with the [Italian Cultural Institute of New York](#) [3] and [Cinecittà Luce](#) [4], is bringing to the public a comprehensive 16 film retrospective that exudes politically charged messages and touches the common human spirit with compassion, humor, drama and stunning cinematography, all'italiana. All of the films are 35mm prints and vary in theme, style and content. All films are in Italian with English subtitles.



On August 3, quite a muggy summer evening, fans of director Francesco Rosi (and fans of John Turturro) packed into one of BAM's theaters to view the screening of *La tregua* (The Truce, 1997), which stars John Turturro, who was present during the film and participated in an evoking Q&A afterward. The film is based on Primo Levi's book *Survival in Auschwitz: the Nazi Assault on Humanity*, and recounted the story of Levi's return to Turin from the Auschwitz concentration camp in 1945. Released in 1997, *La tregua* has had little exposure to the American public before this screening, and although is set in 1945, it is the most recently made film of the Citizen Rosi series.

Turturro described *La tregua* as indeed a "journey of survival", and that making the film gave him "great experience in life as a human being", not just from playing the role of Primo as a survivor of atrocities, but from a cinema-graphic viewpoint. Director Visconti also worked closely with Rosi on *La tregua* and both capi (established directors) exposed Turturro to ways of visually composing cinema which influenced his sensibilities behind the camera as a director.

Turturro mentioned that Rosi assisted him in editing the new film *Passione* (2011), being that Rosi is Neapolitan, hence the element of music is so vital in his films.

"Rosi does not aim to please, but takes you to another world and enriches you," Turturro said during the Q&A, in referring to the kind of experience Rosi's viewers undergo while watching his films. *La tregua* has elements of humor, action, drama and compassion: love and fear mixed with the longing for stability of normality to emerge out of a realm of chaos that Nazi Germany created for millions of Jews and Italians, Jews or not, pining to survive those gruesome years. Most of the film takes place in the Soviet Union, and offers myriad landscapes, some bucolic and some serene, but many depict the hardship and of the journey that the Italians presume will take them 'home'. The element of music comes alive in scenes of Soviet women singing, a burlesque dancing, and Italian prisoners' makeshift songs after being liberated and trying to find a route out of Russia.

Other familiar titles in BAM's Citizen Rosi showcase are: *Salvatore Giuliano* (1961, screening Aug. 6), *Hands Over the City* (1963, Aug. 7), *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1979, Aug. 21), and *Lucky Luciano* (1973, Aug. 14). The film *Christ Stopped at Eboli* tells the story of Carlo Levi's exile from Piedmont to the Mezzogiorno, the deep Italian south, where he encounters a people that seem to him more human and pagan than was he considers 'Italians', and realizes that although they share the same peninsula, northern and the southern Italians live in very different worlds and realities. With *Lucky Luciano*, Rosi adapted a real-life scenario of an elusive man involved in both the CIA and mafia.

In *Hands Over the City*, Rosi portrays a ruthless politician (played by Rod Steiger) in Naples, and investigates the connections between the physical and political power structures of this metropolis and the shoddy foundation both structures are laid upon. It is an expose` of corrupt construction plans and politicians' roles in pursuing their interests instead of those of the citizens of a war torn city. The film won the Golden Lion, the Venice Film Festival's top prize.

Rosi has been continuously inspired by Neorealism, and has collaborated with tons of talented writers and actors during his career, which began more or less in the early 1960s. His experiences as a witness to the forces of corruption and poverty in southern Italy during and after WWII absolutely affected his cinematic vision: his work is politically charged, but it is also visually experimental, complex and beautiful from an artistic point of view. At age 88, Francesco Rosi is one of the last living legends of 20th century Italian cinema, and the messages that his films deal with still reverberate in the political spectrum of the 21st century—even more reason to check out BAM's retrospection and experience Rosi's films.

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- [2] <http://www.bam.org/>
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