

Rome Cinema Fest, Dream Factory

Monica Straniero (October 28, 2019)



As curtains draw over the 14th edition of Rome's Festa del Cinema, with the people's choice award going out to Alessandro Piva's "Santa Subito," here are some considerations about what this event means for the city, whose image is unfortunately too often that of a metropolis in disarray, unable to bounce back.

Founded in 2006, the festival's intention was not to be a competition, like that of Venice, but rather a celebration, to shine the spotlight on this city, which more than any other in Italy and even the world, represents cinema.

Just to give an idea, [Cinecittà](#) [2] studios, founded in 1937 by Benito Mussolini, have produced over 3000 films, 90 of which have been nominated for Academy Awards, and 45 have won them. The



greatest actors and directors have worked here, from Fellini to Visconti, from Anna Magnani to Sophia Loren, but also Scorsese and Coppola. It was then unthinkable for Rome not to have a Festival.

A Festival, which under the direction of the current artistic director Antonio Monda, became a "Festa," a celebration. Monda, "the American" - as he is fondly referred to - has been in charge since 2015 and will be until 2020.

Among his initiatives, was the idea to remove the jury from the festival, thus giving the public the chance to choose the winner by voting on notecards upon exiting the screenings.

"It is truly a celebration of cinema and for cinema, but especially for the audience. Here you don't only see stars who come to present their films, but also directors and actors who book 10-hour flights just to meet the public and talk to them for the pleasure of talking about film. That's our strength."

And the figures look good indeed.

Once again, the Festa del Cinema has increased all its numbers. Box office income grew by 18%, attendance by 13%, visits on the official website increased by 86%. Ticket sales grew by 20%, social media also blew up - Facebook by 12%, Instagram +36% - and media coverage increased by 23% locally and 10% nationally.

The image of Rome cashing in, after 10 days of festival, is undoubtedly positive. Sold out theaters, functioning transportation, collateral events, excellent accomodation, full restaurants, talent professing their eternal love for the city, despite a few small hitches here and there, but who doesn't face them?

Rome is, in the collective imaginary, a dream set, full of beauty, formidable stars, and brilliant directors. Its past is heavy and hard to live up to, but the Festa del Cinema won the Italian capital the title of "Creative City for Cinema." And, after all, even Cannes has its issues to deal with.

Of course, it isn't a "true" festival, so it might not be for some journalists who complained that the press screenings were too tight, and by not having a jury for the main competition it loses some of the glamour of Cannes and Venice, but to Monda, as he explained, this doesn't matter.

Some of this edition's hiccups were caused by Bill Murray. First the actor didn't show up to the press conference, still in pijamas at 1:30, then he refused the translation during his encounter with the public, annoyed at having to wait for the translator to address the public.



Much different were the behaviors of other celebrities such as [Fanny Ardant](#) [3] and [John Travolta](#) [4], who were incredibly open, not only to translations, but also amiable enough to try and say a few words in Italian. Of course, quite a few stars were missing from the red carpet, for example, none of the actors from *The Irishman* were present, and Jennifer Lopez and Renee Zellweger also remained at home. Then, Benicio Del Toro slept through his press conference as well.

Of this year's edition, people will certainly remember *The Irishman* soiree. Director [Martin Scorsese](#) [5], accompanied by his wife Helen Morris, and daughters Catherine and Francesca, met with the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, who came to the screening with his daughter and her husband.

"Two-time Oscar winner [Frances McDormand](#) [6] comes here to joyously celebrate cinema, the atmosphere is different here, everyone agrees on that. That's why they're happy to come and are all very relaxed. This is a 'Festa,' a celebration, and it will remain such. I don't want it to become like the other festivals," Antonio Monda stressed once more.

For 10 days, we forgot about the trash, the holes in the streets, the homeless people outside of Termini Station, and the brutal murders. But unfortunately, a marvelous Cinema Fest isn't enough for Rome to bounce back. It's a welcome break, but these extraordinary interventions only reach a limited area.

Meanwhile, the city still faces its daily problems.

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