

ALBERTO LATTUADA (director/co-writer)

“a grossly underappreciated directorial talent”
– Andrew Sarris

One of the most sadly underrated and versatile of the great Italian filmmakers to emerge in the post-World War II years, Alberto Lattuada was born in Milan in 1914. His father, Felice (1882-1962), was a well-known composer and conductor who would later score his son's early films. Alberto trained as an architect, at the same time developing a love of opera, photography and literature. An ardent anti-fascist, he published articles, poems and stories in several anti-conformist reviews, organized an international retrospective film festival in 1940 (which included a tumultuous screening of Renoir's *Grand Illusion*) and, with Luigi Comencini and Mario Ferrari, laid the foundations of Italy's oldest film archive, the Cineteca Italiana, in Milan.

Thanks to his range of skills and interests, Lattuada entered the film industry during the war and worked his way up the ladder as screenwriter, set designer and assistant. He made his directing debut with *Giacomo l'idealista* (*Giacomo, the Idealist*, 1942), the first of Lattuada's many literary adaptations. His second film, *La Freccia nel fianco*, whose release was held up until 1944, was another literary adaptation in the same style.

After *La nostra guerra* (*Our War*, 1945), a short documentary about the liberation of northern Italy, Lattuada came into his own after the war with two powerful neorealist works, *Il bandito* (*The Bandit*, 1946), about a homecoming Italian POW who must turn to crime in order to survive, and *Senza Pietà* (*Without Pity*, 1948), a tale of interracial love between a black American soldier and an Italian prostitute. Praised for their humanity and raw authenticity, both films also reflected the influence of American crime movies in their melodramatic representation of violence, complete with gun battles and car chases. In between these two films, Lattuada slipped temporarily back into the formalist mode with *Il delitto di Giovanni Episcopo*, an adaptation of a novel by the poet Gabriele d'Annunzio. The film's screenwriting team included the young Federico Fellini.

Lattuada's first masterpiece is considered by many to be *Il Mulino del Po* (*The Mill on the Po*, 1949), which, though considered neo-realist, was atypically based on a novel and set in the past. Co-scripted with Fellini and others, it dramatized the agrarian struggles in northern Italy in the late 19th century and the rise of socialism there. Its release in 1949 coincided with a national strike of

agricultural workers. Lattuada would later recall with satisfaction that this epic film, which used Soviet style montage effects, was attacked both by the communists and the right, a fact that has confirmed Lattuada as an "authentic neorealist" in the eyes of such historians of Italian cinema as Roy Armes.

Lattuada's next film was the famous *Luci del varietà* (*Variety Lights*, 1950), which he co-wrote and co-directed with the debuting Fellini. It quickly became the object of a famous film auteurship feud. An anecdotal comedy-drama about a touring music hall company, it has often been qualified as a Fellini movie rather than a Lattuada film, if only because the subject and theme seem closer to Fellini's artistic universe. Lattuada never stopped contesting that his co-writer/director's contribution to the film was more important than Fellini's and the latter seemed to concur when he entitled his most famous autobiographical film *8 1/2* — the "1/2" being *Variety Lights*.

After a commercial melodrama starring Silvana Mangano and Raf Vallone, *Anna* (1951) — reportedly the first Italian film to gross over one billion lire — Lattuada directed one of his finest films, *Il Cappotto* (*The Overcoat*, 1952), a brilliant adaptation with Kafkaesque overtones (by Lattuada, Cesare Zavattini and others) of Gogol's famous short story about a humble clerk whose yearning for a warm overcoat that will also bring him social prominence only leads to humiliation and death. Transposed to modern Italy, the film boasted a memorable seriocomic performance by Renato Rascel.

Lattuada's next made *La lupa* (*The She-Wolf*, 1953), widely considered an unsuccessful adaptation of a story by Italian naturalist writer Giovanni Verga, then contributed a sketch to the omnibus film *Amore in città* (*Love in the City*, 1954), which included episodes by Antonioni, Fellini, Risi and Zavattini. *La Spiaggia* (*The Beach*, 1954), was Lattuada's first color film, a comedy-drama starring French sex kitten Martine Carol as a good-natured prostitute vacationing on the Riviera with her convent-educated young daughter. *Scuola Elementare* (*Elementary School*, 1954) was a touching drama about a younger teacher from the south who gets work in a northern city.

Lattuada's interest in the social and sexual problems of juvenile heroines inspired many of his subsequent films and periodically got him in trouble with the Italian censors: *Guendalina* (1957) dealt with the spoiled daughter of rich parents who gets involved with a young worker; *I dolci inganni* (1960) dealt with the sexual awakening of a young student. Other films in this vein were *L'Imprevisto* (*The Unexpected*, 1961), *Don Giovanni in Sicilia* (1967), *Le farò da padre* (1974), *Così come sei* (*Stay As You Are*, 1978), which starred Marcello Mastroianni and the debuting Nastassja Kinski; and *La Cicala* (*The Cricket*, 1980).

After *The Overcoat*, Lattuada returned regularly to literary adaptations, often of Russian works: *La Tempesta* (*The Tempest*, 1958), an international co-

production based on two stories by Pushkin; *La Steppa* (*The Steppe*, 1962), a Chekhov adaptation; *La Mandragola* (*The Mandrake*, 1965), an adaptation of Machiavelli's libertine comedy which enjoyed the honor of being condemned (but not banned) in the U.S. by the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures; and *Cuore de cane* (*Heart of a Dog*, 1975), based on Mikhail Bulgakov's Soviet satire.

Like *Mafioso*, several of the Lattuada's later films are hard to categorize and, according to admirers, call for reappraisals. They include *Fraulein Doktor* (1969), an espionage comedy about a female spy during World War I, *Venga a prendere il caffè da noi* (*Come Have Coffee with Us*, 1970), a bitter farce starring Ugo Tognazzi, and *Sono stato io!* (*I Did It*, 1973), a black comedy about a window wiper who craves fame and fortune so badly he frames himself for a murder he did not commit.

Lattuada turned to television in the 80s, notably directing a mini-series, *Christopher Columbus*, broadcast in the U.S. in 1985. His last work was a portrait of Genoa for the 12-director omnibus film, *12 registi per 12 città* (*12 Directors for 12 Cities*, 1989).

Lattuada died in Rome in 2005, aged 90. His wife of 60 years was Carla del Poggio (the mambo-dancing star of *Variety Lights*), whose father, Ugo Attanasio, played Don Vincenzo, the Mafia Don in *Mafioso*.

Looking back on Lattuada's career, filmmaker and critic Edgardo Cozarinski wrote that Lattuada's "eclecticism had obstructed an evaluation of his unusual achievement... For over 30 years he has turned out films of considerable interest... without surrendering to opportunism... Most of Lattuada's minor films look considerably better years after they were made... The capacity to work with given materials and achieve something else, in quality and tone, has been one of Lattuada's elusive talents: very much isolated in the Italian cinema of the 1970s, his solid, unadventurous films often prove more biting, more complex even than the flashy concoctions of most 'new' Italian directors."

According to Lattuada's wife, Carla del Poggio, who was the star of *Variety Lights* and in virtually every scene, Fellini took a screenwriting job soon after production began and was rarely on the set.

An career officer in the Italian cavalry, Attanasio, late in life, appeared in several other Italian films, including Fellini's *The White Shiek*, playing Leopoldo Trieste's uncle. A native of Naples, Attanasio's voice was dubbed by an actor with a Sicilian accent.

MAFIOSO
- RIALTO PICTURES -

PAGE

PAGE 2