

ALBERTO SORDI (Nino)

Alberto Sordi was born in Rome's working class quarter of Trastevere in 1920 (1919, according to some sources). He studied recitation at Milan's *Accademia dei Filodrammatici* but was apparently dismissed because of his thick Roman accent and use of dialect. In 1937, he won a contest organized by MGM to find the dubbing voice of Oliver Hardy, which opened the door to regular professional dubbing work of American movies (actors he would later lend his voice to included Anthony Quinn, Robert Mitchum and Mexican star Pedro Armendariz). He landed his first film parts at Cinecittà in 1938, but his screen career, limited mostly to minor supporting roles, took a back seat to the music hall and his increasingly popular radio performances.

Sordi got his first important role in the Mario Matelli's 1942 film *I tre aquilotti*, but movie popularity eluded him for an entire decade. His career took off with two early now-classic films by Federico Fellini, *The White Sheik* (1952) and especially *I Vitelloni* (1953) in which he portrayed the spineless loafer Alberto. There followed a series of films in which Sordi chiseled his jaundiced comic portraits of the petty-minded average Italian in all his mediocrity. Italian critic Goffredo Fofi described his image in this way: "From adventure to adventure, we now find Sordi in a particular role: the low-born petit-bourgeois Roman, ignoble, whining, mama's boy, lady's man, not too keen on doing any work, but who knows how to make himself look good in the eyes of his priest and office chief because he's the kind who knows how to make do and he has an extraordinary capacity for and a wide range of hypocritical attitudes for each occasion... Italians recognized in him the worst aspects of their character."

Films of this period, in which Sordi averaged six a year, included Roberto Savarese's *Mamma mia che impressione!* (1952), which Sordi co-scripted with Cesare Zavattini and Vittorio de Sica, Steno's *Un Americano a Roma* (1954), Mario Monicelli's *Un Eroe dei nostri tempi* (1955), Dino Risi's *Il Segno di venere* (1955), Luigi Comencini's *La Bella di Roma* (1955), and Luigi Zampa's *Il Vigile* (1960).

The late 50s and 60s were Sordi's artistic heyday and coincided with the flowering of Italian film comedy of which Sordi was one of the biggest stars alongside the likes of Vittorio Gassman, Ugo Tognazzi and Nino Manfredi. Beginning with Monicelli's *La Grande guerra* (*The Great War*, 1959) and Risi's *Una Vita difficile* (*A Difficult Life*, 1961), Sordi's roles became increasingly dense and darker in tone, climaxing with Monicelli's bleak 1977 tragicomedy *Un Borghese piccolo piccolo*.

Though consistently one of the most beloved personalities in Italian cinema, Sordi remained less well known than his peers on the international scene. His rare foreign film credits included Charles Vidor's *A Farewell to Arms* (1957),

John Berry's *Oh! Que Mambo!* (1958), Guy Hamilton's *The Best of Enemies* (1961), and Ken Annakin's *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines* (1965).

As writer-director, Sordi made (and acted in) 19 feature films between *Fumo di Londra* in 1966 and *Incontri proibiti* in 1998, which also marked his last screen appearance. In all, Sordi appeared in some 50 films in a career spanning 60 years.

Among numerous other film honors, Sordi was the recipient of seven David di Donatello awards, a Golden Bear for Best Actor at the 1971 Berlin Film Festival for Nanni Loy's *Detenuto in attesa di giudizio* and a Golden Lion career prize at the 1995 Venice Film Festival.

Sordi died of a heart attack at his home in Rome in 2003. He was 82.