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2019

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- **FILM CLOSE-UPS**
Thursday 21st March 7pm:
**Songs, Soundtrack Albums
and Psychedelia: Film Scoring in
the 1960s**
- **FESTIVAL FILM**
Friday 29th 2.30pm
THE SEAGULL
- **FILM**
Thursday 11th April 7.30pm
THE WIFE

further details klcc.uk

The Great Beauty

Paolo Sorrentino, Italy 2013

Italian title *La Grande Bellezza*

Producers ...

Nicola Giuliano, Francesca

Cima, Fabio Conversi

Screenplay ...

Paolo Sorrentino, Umberto

Contarello

Story Paolo Sorrentino

Toni Servillo Jep Gambardella

Carlo Verdone Romano

Sabrina Ferilli Ramona

Carlo Buccirosso Lello Cava

Giovanna Vignola Dadina

Music Lele Marchitelli

Cinematography Luca Bigazzi

Editor Cristiano Travaglioli

"To this question, as kids, my friends always gave the same answer: "Pussy". Whereas I answered: "The smell of old people's houses". The question was: "What do you really like the most in life?" I was destined for sensibility. I was destined to become a writer. I was destined to become Jep Gambardella."

The Great Beauty explores the human response to 'beauty' through a series of panoramic glimpses: the aesthetic beauty of art, architecture, the gratification of the corporeal, and



the mysteries of the transcendent; the incidental beauty of mortality through a filmic prism.

We sense all this through the film's protagonist, Jep Gambardino—a just-turned 65-year-old who perpetuates the notion of beauty through leisure and opulence. We're introduced to him at his birthday bash—an extravagant knees-up on his swish rooftop patio in Rome; a stone's throw from the Colosseum. Jep is a ruminating, botoxed writer who hasn't penned

anything of note since his one-hit wonder novella, ironically titled *The Human Apparatus*, in his mid-twenties. Since then he's been a bon vivant idler and flâneur—partying the decades away and pontificating about the capital's fashionistas and high-lifers in social columns. However, a shock revelation about his past jolts him to reflect upon his life, the hollowness of the *mondanità*, and the meaning of beauty, triggering, as Peter Bradshaw puts it, "his final Proustian

passeggiatta".

But the film is equally about Rome, and the quantum stream that ebbs and flows through the city, from the decline of the ancient empire to the ennui of the fading bourgeoisie, with its untranslatable allure. Just what is it about the Italians and *la dolce vita*? The Japanese have Zen, the French romanticism and tristesse, the Spanish surreal, whilst the Italians are unparalleled at popping spumante. Jep's birthday bash is illuminated by a giant nearby Martini sign. Even the soundtrack could be nuanced as a middle finger at the cultural void that is Hollywood, as partygoers writhe to the pulsing strains of electro-swing outfit Yolando B Cool & DCUP's *We Speak No Americano*. Such irony. The film was nominated for a slew of prizes, netting a hat-trick of Best Foreign Language Film awards at the Golden Globes, the BAFTAs, and an Oscar at the 86th Academy Awards.

Jep's associations include his long-time editor Dadina, a dwarf who sends him into a swirl of childhood nostalgia. In another scene, we see Jep carrying a breakfast tray to his lover, Ramona, in an illusory death scene. On other occasions, he is in conversazione with literati or visiting Cardinal Bellucci—a contender for the papacy and learned in the secret codes and practices of the *Romanità* but who is more excited talking about food than offering any insights into the sacred or profane.

An array of peripheral characters reinforce director Paolo Sorrentino's fascination with the absurd as a

sideshow: a performance artist runs head-on into an aqueduct; a bronzed youth practices football tricks in the front room of a small apartment; a haggard old nun crawls up the Scala Sancta on her hands and knees in a display of complete devotion.

And here again the filmmaker teams up with the brilliant stage

condition theme through masterful character interplays, deserve equal merit. Comparisons between Sorrentino and Federico Fellini have been plentiful. And this is justified to some degree: *The Great Beauty* does work as a Berlusconi-era update to *La Dolce Vita* [1960]—with echoes of Antonioni's *La Notte* [1961]—



and screen actor Toni Servillo (*Consequences of Love*, 2004, *Il Divo*, 2008) whose Jep imbues Sorrentino and co-writer Umberto Contarello's script to perfection. Framing it all is cinematographer Luca Bigazzi (another of Sorrentino's stable), whose floating camerawork is arresting.

The film is widely considered Sorrentino's chef d'oeuvre, perhaps in the context of the Italian socio-political narrative, although one could argue that *Consequences of Love* [2004]—his earlier outing starring Servillo as an ill-fated Mafia pawn—and the English-language *Youth* [2015], which fissions the human

but Sorrentino has his own voice. Contextualised alongside another epochal study of place, Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* [1945], Sorrentino continues the tradition of exploring the Eternal City in a way that only cinema can attempt.

A final note on the film's soundtrack—Sorrentino is known for writing music into his scripts. Along with principal themes composed by Lele Marchitelli, Sorrentino (like Tarantino) curates an eclectic mix, which evokes a sense of the sublime within the film. From David Lang's stirring harmonic choral opener *I Lie* performed by Torino vocalensemble to the hedonistic abandon of *Far l'Amore*—a collision of Franco-Italian house by Bob Sinclar featuring sampled vocals of Italian singer Raffaella Carrà—Sorrentino creates a playlist that emanates from the screen and envelops the space between.

FEATURE FILMS

- 1998 *The Dust of Naples*
- 2001 *One Man Up*
- 2004 *The Consequences of Love*
- 2006 *The Family Friend*
- 2008 *Il Divo*
- 2011 *This Must Be The Place*
- 2013 *The Great Beauty*
- 2014 *Rio, I Love You*
[Segment: *La Fortuna*]
- 2015 *Youth*
- 2018 *Loro*

**PAOLO
SORRENTINO**
Born 31 May 1970
Naples, Italy



NEXT MONTH'S FILM IS
THE CONVERSATION
(Francis Ford Coppola, US
1974)

Monday 15 April

www.elyfilmsociety.com

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