

Document Citation

Title	Controversial 'Dolce Vita' opens on two S.F. screens
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Source	<i>Oakland Tribune</i>
Date	1961
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	La dolce vita (The sweet life), Fellini, Federico, 1960

Trib
1961

Controversial 'Dolce Vita' Opens on Two S.F. Screens

By **THERESA LOEB CONE**
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"La Dolce Vita" or "The Sweet Life," the subject of many heated discussions ever since it was made in Italy early last year, opened in San Francisco yesterday in a two-theater screening at the Clay and Larkin designed to accommodate the hordes of moviegoers expected to attend its showing.

Directed by Federico Fellini, whose "La Strada" made movie history both as a work of art and a successful commercial venture, "La Dolce Vita" is, of course, an ironic title to point up the degradation, bitterness, disillusionment and heartbreak experienced by the denizens of Rome's cafe society seemingly at their wits' end inventing new ways to enjoy all the pleasures of the flesh money can buy.

Fellini, himself a former newspaperman, has chosen to point an accurate, discerning, unflinching camera at the strata which provide gossip columnists with their most malicious tidbits and occasionally contribute choice morsels for scandalous headlines.

ACTUAL STORIES

In fact, the 12 principal segments of this 3-hour film are all supposedly taken from actual newspaper stories which appeared in Rome's press during the past few years. And it is through the eyes of a free-wheeling, free-lance reporter that the "story" is seen.

Although we never see him typing or filing his stories, we follow his frantic observance of decadence not peculiar to Rome only, but found in every major metropolis of our day. Starting on a lofty (no pun intended) assignment to photograph the delivery via helicopter of a statue of Christ for the Vatican, Marcello Rubino and his photographer Pararazzo try to get phone numbers of bikini-clad sunbathers on apartment rooftops.

Marcello's experiences then take him to a night club and to a chance meeting with a wealthy, beautiful nymphoma-



ANITA EKBERG
In "La Dolce Vita"

niac (Anouk Aimee giving the picture's best female performance) with whom he spends the night in a dingy apartment provided by a philosophical prostitute.

AVERTS SUICIDE

His mistress, an intense young woman who expects the affair to end in marriage has tried to commit suicide. Marcello arrives to save her via quick trip to a hospital, where quiet nuns provide a sharp contrast to the disorder of his existence.

Out of this miserable adventure and endless lovers' protestations, Marcello dashes to the airport to meet a Hollywood star, Anita Ekberg, who never looked more glamorous. He winds up escorting the regal Nordic personality on a tour of night clubs, through back alleys and side streets, into a fountain fully clothed. She disregards his invitation to amour. But her thanks for this virtuous response is to be slapped publically by her fiancée (Lex Barker) when she returns to her hotel.

And so it goes. Marcello watches response to a phoney "miracle" supposedly observed by two bratty children. He meets his publishing friend, the intellectual Steiner who apparently is managing a good family life in the midst of the world's confusion and the pressures of his erratic

and artistic friends who surround him.

Marcello's father visits him, tries to be as gay as the young blades. But he finds it an impossible achievement in a scene that is probably one of the film's most poignant and touching moments.

The reporter attends a party of aristocrats—zany and amoral—who troup through an almost empty palazzo, the remnant of a culture no one now can afford. He hears to his horror that his hero Steiner has murdered his two children and committed suicide. That does it for Marcello. He cannot disassociate himself from those on whom he reports and becomes one of them, participating in the movie's "big" sequence which revolves around a so-called "orgy" of drunks of all sexes.

This scene, by the way, is more implied in off-scene bits of conversation (not always translated in subtitles) than actually recorded by the camera, which, does, however, feature a strip tease.

FALLS INTO LINE

An enigmatic ending shifts Marcello irrevocably into the camp of weary evil, although he seems to be struggling—but not hard enough—against his fate.

Allowing for the fact that Steiner's suicide motives, for instance are hazy and so also are the motivations of others, one might consider that Fellini is not probing. He is merely recording. Each can draw his own conclusions from what he sees. This reporter happens to be rather fed up with both foreign and domestic emphasis on sexual behavior as the only form of immorality in a world that abounds in far more serious sins.

But, for its frankness, its superb use of the camera, a magnificent performance by the very goodlooking Marcello Mastroianni as the reporter, an unforgettable contribution by Alain Cuny as Steiner as well as lesser roles well-played, "La Dolce Vita" is far above the usual romanticized, unreal "exposes" that have crowded the screen recently without purpose.