

Document Citation

Title	The siege
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Source	<i>Toronto International Film Festival</i>
Date	1990
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	69
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	Bertolucci, Bernardo (1940), Parma, Emilia-Romagna, Italy
Film Subjects	Besieged, Bertolucci, Bernardo, 1998



The Siege

Bernardo Bertolucci

ITALY, 1998

90 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
 Production Company: **Fiction-Navert film**
 Producer: **Massimo Cortesi**
 Associate Producer: **Clare Peploe**
 Screenplay: **Bernardo Bertolucci, Clare Peploe**
 Cinematographer: **Fabio Cianchetti**
 Editor: **Jacopo Quadri**
 Production Designer: **Gianni Silvestri**
 Costumes: **Metka Kösak**
 Sound: **Maurizio Argentieri**
 Music: **Alessio Vlad**
 Principal Cast: **Thandie Newton, David Thewlis**

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Bertolucci's new film is indeed a departure, a return to the kind of intimate filmmaking that we have not seen from this director in over a decade. What strikes one instantly is both the immediacy of the filmmaking and the freedom that he has rediscovered. It is indeed a successful rebirth, for this film delights in creating some delectable visual moments that communicate emotion far more than words could. This is unquestionably a film of great subtlety which moves towards a climax of considerable power. Shot primarily in Italy, it captures the light and shade, colours and tones of his native country in a manner that serves both the story and the particular mood he is trying to create.

Centred around a magnificent, palatial Roman house, Thandie Newton plays Shandurai, a woman with an enigmatic past. She has left her African homeland to keep house for a wealthy, somewhat eccentric Englishman, and in her off-hours studies to be a medical doctor. Her situation sharply contrasts with that of her affluent employer, the shy, somewhat eccentric Jason Kinsky – in a finely nuanced performance by David Thewlis – who plays the piano and composes in his spare time. They coexist in the rambling house together, her native music clashing with his own classical tastes, her focussed studying a foil for his somewhat unshaped life. It is not long before Kinsky finds himself hopelessly in love with Shandurai, but she refuses his advances; she has

a husband, a political prisoner whom she has not heard from since his brutal incarceration.

The delicate dance, indeed the web in which Kinsky attempts to ensnare Shandurai, gives Bertolucci full range to display the sheer virtuosity of his filmmaking prowess. Understated, elusive, elliptical, this is a film that reveals its secrets slowly and in the most discerning manner, leading to an ending that is shattering in its emotional complexity and power. Bertolucci has shown that he has the desire and will to reinvent himself, to move forward, to prove that he is indeed a magician of the cinema.

■ Piers Handling



Bernardo Bertolucci was born in Parma, Italy, in 1941. He directed his first feature, the sombre *The Grim Reaper* (62). 1970 was a milestone year for Bertolucci; he directed two classics, *The Spider's Stratagem* and *The Conformist*, and established himself as a major force in contemporary cinema. Selected filmography: *The Grim Reaper* (62), *Before the Revolution* (64), *Partner* (68), *The Spider's Stratagem/The Conformist* (70), *Last Tango in Paris* (72), *1900* (76), *La Luna* (79), *The Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man* (81), *The Last Emperor* (87) which received nine Oscars, *The Sheltering Sky* (90), *Little Buddha* (93), *Stealing Beauty* (96) and *The Siege* (98).

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