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TONIGHT AT 7:00 PM

Pacific Film Archive

Presents In

WHEELER AUDITORIUM

ROBERTO ROSSELLINI in Person

and

First West Coast Showing of

Rossellini's

THE AGE OF COSIMO DE MEDICI (252 min. Color, 35mm)

Box Office at Wheeler Opens at 6:00 PM

Admission: Students and Full PFA Members = \$2.00

General Admission = \$2.50

The following is the text of a review of Rossellini's MEDICI trilogy which appeared in the Washington Post on April 13, 1973, following the film's premiere at the American Film Institute Theatre.

Friday, April 13, 1973

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Rossellini's Medici

By Alan M. Kriegsmann

In making "The Age of the Medici," showing tonight at the new American Film Institute Theater in the Kennedy Center, filmmaker Roberto Rossellini tried hard to emulate his own subject matter. He strove to do for the movies what the luminaries of the Renaissance did for Western civilization, exalting reason over passion, blending art with science, restoring a sense of wholeness to human enterprise. To say the least, it's a large order. What's astonishing is the degree to which he succeeded.

"The Age of the Medici" is actually a trilogy, three 84-minute sections dealing with the rise of urban commerce and the emergence of humanistic culture. Made for television as part of a vast super-series on the history of man, all three components are being shown as part of the film festival inaugurating the new theater. The showing begins at 6 and ends at 11, with a 40-minute refreshment break.

This isn't the easiest kind of movie-going, and there are obstacles other than length. The English voice track is dubbed, and though it's done fairly smoothly the dialog is often slow and stilted. The exquisite color photography, the painterly composition of the imagery and the sumptuous, painstakingly authentic settings offer ample compensation on the visual side. But Rossellini's vision of Renaissance life isn't exactly what you'd call action packed. And there's his curiously deadpan, understated direction, an approach you may recall from his "The Rise of Louis XIV," which was conceived in the same spirit.

This last trait, though, turns out to be the work's great strength in the long run. At a screening the other day, I found the first hour's worth flat, tedious and pedantic, and didn't see how I was going to get through the rest. The more I watched, however, the more deeply enthralled I became. When it was over, I felt ready for more, and left convinced that what Rossellini

is now up to in moviemaking may prove ultimately more satisfying and important than all the chic novelities of the past decade.

I suppose what I was looking forward to unconsciously was a kind of updated "The Prince of Foxes" with a Tyrone Power type slashing his way down the dungeon stairs to rescue the panting heroine. The old swashbucklers certainly deserve a plate in the scheme of things, but Rossellini has other, more nutritious fish to fry. Once he was "seized by the mania" for education, he realized he would have to forego the false glamor, the fake excitement and the emotional strong-arming of commercial tradition.

At the same time, he knew he'd risk boring audiences to death unless he provided entertainment along with his instruction. The outcome is a genuinely new film esthetic, a broad extrapolation from the "neo-realism" Rossellini once championed in pictures like

"Paisan" and "Open City," combining the objectivity of documentary with the spectacle, color and vivid impersonations of the fiction film. The actors in "The Age of the Medici" don't emote; they simply converse. Their drama is not that of idealized incidents of derring-do, but of the mundane business, craft, knavery and ambition that have made the world what it is.

The first two parts center around Cosimo de Medici, the merchant prince and arts patron, and his illustrious Florentine circle. In the last part, the focus shifts to Leon Battista Alberti, architect, humanist and a typically polydexterous Renaissance figure. In the same scene in which he demonstrates a primitive moving picture machine of his invention, he also exclaims, "art has the divine ability to make dead times live again." That, of course, is Rossellini's dream, and in this case at least, his accomplishment.