

## Document Citation

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## AGATA AND THE STORM

(AGATA E LA TEMPESTA)

(ITALY)

A Mikado release of an Albachiara production in association with Lumiere & Co. (International sales: Adriana Chiesa Enterprises, Rome.) Produced by Roberto Cicutto, Luigi Musini, Tiziana Soudani.

Directed by Silvio Soldini. Screenplay, Soldini, Dorian Leondeff, Francesco Piccolo. Camera (color), Arnaldo Catinari; editor, Carlotta Cristiani; music, Giovanni Venosta; production designer, Paola Bizzarri; costume designer, Silvia Nebiolo. Reviewed at Mignon Cinema, Rome, Feb. 29, 2004. Running time: 118 MIN.

With: Licia Maglietta, Emilio Solfrizzi, Giuseppe Battiston, Claudio Santamaria, Gisela Volodi, Marina Massironi, Monica Nappo, Pippo Santonastaso, Remo Remotti.

By DEBORAH YOUNG

**T**he bipolar Silvio Soldini follows his angst-ridden, quasi-melodramatic "Burning in the Wind" with a live-wire comedy painted in eye-popping colors. Story about a dazzling bookstore proprietor who blows out light bulbs with her emotional electricity, "Agata and the Storm" is much in the vein of Soldini's "Bread and Tulips" (2000), a sleeper that became one of Italy's top-grossing films that year. After a strong opening weekend Feb. 27, pic looks set to turn into a high-voltage hit in Italy; a marketing strategy capitalizing on its witty modernity could help it strike lightning in neighboring markets, too.

Pic adds good doses of Almodovar eccentricity and Jeunet whimsy to its portrait of a thoroughly emancipated woman, her brother and their friends. Holding together the many centrifugal plots that continually threaten to overbalance the tale is Agata (Licia Maglietta, the runaway housewife in "Bread and Tulips" and a top stage performer).

Agata runs an airy store in downtown Genoa with the assistance of Maria Libera (comédienne Gisela Volodi), dispensing books to customers like they were medicine for the soul. She's such a ray of sunshine, it's no surprise

when Nicola (Claudio Santamaria), 13 years her junior and married, declares he's madly in love with her.

Agata's brother, Gustavo (Emilio Solfrizzi), a much more sober type, is a successful architect stifled in his marriage to a silly but famous TV marriage counselor.

In a third story strand that at first seems unconnected, Romeo (Giuseppe Battiston), a natty traveling clothes salesman, runs around the provinces betraying his beloved wife, Daria (Monica Nappo), with a series of one-nighters. Back home he finds his elderly mother on her deathbed, where she reveals a great secret. Before he was born, she had another child out of wedlock, whom she gave up: Gustavo.

Thus the two half-brothers meet. Gustavo is so shocked he opts out of his job, his family and even Agata to sell suits with Romeo. He remains in this catatonic state until Agata, who is suffering from a broken heart and has such a charge of feeling inside her she blows out street lamps and car batteries, catches up with them.

Despite its surface frivolity and homespun surreality, underneath the film has a Buddha-like calm in pointing to love and freedom

as life's true values. Sadly, the script starts to run out of steam in a string of multiple endings, each with a twist, which ought to have been telescoped into one wild, blowout grand finale.

Heading the cast, Maglietta rewrites the cinematic rules of sex, age and beauty with her magnetism. Next to her everyone else fades into a character actor, including the deadpan Solfrizzi, love-crazed Santamaria (who revenges himself in a final fit of rage, however)

and incurable womanizer Battiston. Volodi and Nappo are off-beat but attention-getting in supporting roles.

Great efforts have been taken to make film a feast for the senses. Every scene, carefully lit by d.p. Arnaldo Catinari, is maliciously underlined by the garish colors and pattern madness of the sets and costumes, while the score titillates with its fresh selection of musical choices. Pic is further spiced with several movie-within-a-movie vignettes that come out of nowhere.

**'Agata and the Storm' has a Buddha-like calm in pointing to love and freedom as life's true values.**



**HIGH VOLTAGE:** Claudio Santamaria and Licia Maglietta star in "Agata and the Storm," helmed by Silvio Soldini.