

Document Citation

Title	Le amiche
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Source	<i>Toronto International Film Festival</i>
Date	1987
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Le amiche (The girl friends), Antonioni, Michelangelo, 1955



Le Amiche **The Girl Friends**

Michelangelo Antonioni

Italy, 1955, 105 minutes

Production Company: Trionfalcine Production

Screenplay: Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Alba De Cespedes, Michelangelo Antonioni

Cinematography: Gianni de Venanzio

Music: Giovanni Fusco

Principal Cast: Eleonora Rossi Drago, Valentina Cortese, Gabriele Ferzetti, Franco Fabrizi, Yvonne Fourneaux, Madeleine Fischer, Anna Maria Pancani

Michelangelo Antonioni has perhaps paid the price so often demanded of artists whose work was once too much in fashion. For a while, during the 1960s, it became hard to escape the Antonioni look: from *L'Avventura* to *Blow Up*, he produced images which crept into the general consciousness. No historian of the 1960s could afford to ignore Antonioni. Then, a majority of critics jibed at *Zabriskie Point*, finding it merely ridiculous, the pendulum swung, and latter day Antonioni has been, if not out of sight, critically somewhat out of mind — though for sheer knockdown skill in filmmaking, the last sequence of *The Passenger* surely takes all the beating. Soon, no doubt, major reappraisals will be under way. Meanwhile, it seems time to take another look, and *Le Amiche* is certainly quintessential Antonioni, from the other side of the divide represented by *L'Avventura*. The director was still looking for his most authoritative manner, but in the 50s films he had already found his themes — in this case, a group of people, rich, aimless, indolent and querulous, as seen through the eyes of a more active outsider. Betrayal and compromise are the common currency. And in the long and justly celebrated beach sequence, Antonioni's style, in which the camera becomes almost a moral instrument, is at its finest.

Penelope Houston