

## Document Citation

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Variety 2-7-90  
**La Voce della Luna**  
**(The Voice Of The Moon)**  
**(ITALIAN-FRENCH)**

**Rome** A Penta Distribuzione release of a C.G. Group Tiger Cinematografica/Cinemax coproduction, in association w/RAI-TV. Produced by Mario and Vittorio Cecchi Gori. Executive producers, Bruno Altissimi, Claudio Saraceni. Directed by Federico Fellini. Screenplay, Fellini, with Tullio Pinelli, Ermanno Cavazzoni, freely adapted from Cavazzoni's novel "The Poem Of Lunatics;" camera (Technicolor), Tonino Delli Colli; editor, Nino Baragli; music, Nicola Piovani; art direction, Dante Ferretti; costumes, Maurizio Millenotti. Reviewed at CDS, Rome, Jan. 26, 1990. Running time: **120 MIN.**

Salvini. . . . . Roberto Benigni  
Prefect Gonnella. . . . . Paolo Villaggio  
Aldina. . . . . Nadia Ottaviani  
The Steamer. . . . . Marisa Tomasi  
Oboe player. . . . . Sim  
Aldina's sister. . . . . Syusy Blady  
Nestore. . . . . Angelo Orlando  
Also with: Dario Ghirardi (journalist), Dominique Chevalier, Nigel Harris, Vito, Eraldo Turra, Giordano Falzoni, Ferruccio Brambilla, Franco Javarone, Lorose Keller (Duchess), Uta Schmidt (grandmother).

■ **"The Voice Of The Moon"** will be cherished in a special way by Federico Fellini fans, being almost a summation of the themes, characters and obsessions that have haunted his films since "8 1/2." Other viewers may find the film a little perplexing, so much does it build on the maestro's past work.

Story is gossamer and not all audiences will follow its meanderings raptly. Pic opened Feb. 2 at 200 sites in Italy, where its stars -- popular comics Roberto Benigni and Paolo Villaggio -- are as much a drawing card as the director. Abroad it will attract the usual Fellini audiences.

Film has the twilight mood of a career drawing to a close (the director recently turned 70). For the first time, Fellini bases his film on a novel (coscripiter Ermanno Cavazzoni's "The Poem Of Lunatics"), but actors and crew worked more from a skeleton outline than a shooting script, inventing scenes day by

day at Rome's Pontini Studios. The loosely structured adventures of demented dreamers in a small Emilian town soon turn into a circus parade of favorite Fellini leitmotifs.

Film opens with Salvini (Benigni), poet, dreamer and visionary, communing with nature in the country. He joins a group of locals spying on a house, where a fat, middle-aged woman is performing a comical striptease for their benefit. This causes Salvini to flashback to his grandmother (Uta Schmidt), a big country woman who laughed at his funny face. He ends up in a cemetery where an oboe player (Sim) who's sleeping in a marble tomb tells the story of the ghosts who used to haunt him.

One by one, other village characters come to the fore. There is the prefect Gonnella (Villaggio), a hope-

less paranoiac whose brand of lunacy is alienating and pathetic. A rough sewage worker with a handkerchief on his head fascinates Salvini with his hole drilling; Salvini is always trying to peer down wells to see what's on the other side.

He is also, obviously, hypnotized by the moon. He makes a midnight call on puffy Syusy Blady (a fine new comedienne known for her tv skits) to ogle her beautiful sister Aldina (Nadia Ottaviani) asleep. For Salvini, Aldina is the moon incarnate -- and cinematographer Tonino Delli Colli's superb lighting makes us almost believe her round, glowing silver face is that of a moon-woman.

Rebuffed by Aldina, Salvini steals her sparkling slipper, which he will later try on several females

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and discover to his delight it fits them all. For the moment he is heartbroken, however, and takes comfort sitting on the rooftops listening to the bittersweet tale of gentle little Nestore's (Angelo Orlando) fling with a steamy manicurist (Marisa Tomasi). He marries her but can't keep up with her sexual demands, as overpowering as a runaway train. Though she leaves him for a butcher, he bears her no rancor.

Salvini, another saintly innocent, takes delight in the whole world, untouched by its evil and corruption. Pic's main set is a bitter joke by production designer Dante Ferretti — a typical Italian piazza where medieval, Renaissance and Umbertine buildings coexist with a depressing piece of Fascist architecture, a hideous modern church, choking traffic and a forest of tv antennas.

In a rousing sequence, the square comes alive in a chaotic beauty pageant, where Aldina is elected Miss Flour and Salvini is trapped under the platform. Released at last, he takes revenge on Aldina's sleazy dance partner, sparking a general chase scene. Typically, it ends with a dreamlike abruptness when Salvini is transported back to his old family home by a loving sister. Left to himself, he fearfully opens the door to an empty room and finds Nestore, urging him to come outside

and see the event of the century: the sewage worker and his brothers have captured the moon and tied it down. Before it is assembled an awed crowd, a panel of authorities and tv anchormen. Finally someone shoots the glowing silver ball and as it deflates cardinals and politicians scurry away in their limousines.

Like Salvini, Gonnella is the director's alter ego, ranting against the "infection of old age," knowing "there's not much time left." In a triumphal fantasy scene, he overcomes his fears and dances a waltz with his long-suffering consort, the Duchess d'Alba (Lorose Keller). Salvini is rewarded, too — the moon is back in the sky and at last he hears its voice, the voice of Aldina (which interrupts itself for a "commercial break").

Film is really one long dream, in which thought and poetry continually dissolve into modern chaos. Fellini's horror is evident concerning this brave new world, seen as mindless teens bopping to deafening disco music and an invasion of Japanese tourists. Then the day's noisy chaos becomes the strange, empty sensuality of the night.

The message is silence — listen to the voices and try to understand something.

Headlining a cast of weirdos, Benigni is unrecognizable — a wan elf in Dickensian spectacles. He's a

cross between poet and puppet, Giacom Loepardi and Pinocchio. Tightly reined in by the dialog, so unlike the off-the-cuff ravings of his 1-man shows, Benigni still manages to inject a whimsical rush of energy into pic. Villaggio, too, puts aside most of his mannerisms to play the paranoid prefect with bitter relish.

The haunting little melodies of the background score are the work of Nicola Piovani, the perfect successor to the late Nino Rota in the Fellini oeuvre. —Yung.