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Saturday, October 30, Wheeler Auditorium
7:00 PM

ROBERTO ROSSELLINI IN PERSON

THE AGE OF COSIMO DE MEDICI (1973, color, 35mm, 252 mins)

Production: Orizzonte 2000. Screenplay by Roberto Rossellini, Luciana Scaffa, and Marcella Mariani. Production Manager: Sergio Iacobis. Director of Photography: Mario Montuori. Costumes by Marcella De Marchis. Set Design by Franco Velchi. Music by Manuel De Sica. Edited by Iolanda Benvenuti.

With Marcello Di Falco (Cosimo De Medici), Virginio Gazzolo (Leon Battista Alberti), Giuseppe Addobati, Michel Bardinet, Tom Felleghy, and Mario Erpichini.

In his latest completed work, Roberto Rossellini uses two eminent Renaissance figures, Cosimo De Medici, merchant and banker, and Leon Battista Alberti, architect and humanist, to portray the ferment and the evolution of one of the most dazzling periods in Italian and world history of art, from 1430 to 1450. The film analyzes the Florentine economy of the day, showing the conflict between the rising commercial bourgeoisie, controllers of the economy, and the aristocracy, whose power was slowly waning. Renaissance Florence revolves about these two great men; in the background are the struggles for power and the rebirth of a purely Italian culture. The script is based on famous texts of Florentine history written in the 15th Century.

A film in three parts, THE AGE OF THE MEDICI will be shown in three stages later in the series, but the experience of the sole prior showing of this film in America, at the American Film Institute in Washington, proves that even at 252 minutes the film can be pleasantly viewed in one sitting. The critic for the Washington Post, Alan M. Kriegsmann, had this reaction:

"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 RISE TO POWER 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 novelties of the last decade.

"The outcome is a genuinely new film aesthetic, a broad extrapolation from the 'neo-realism' Rossellini once championed in pictures like OPEN CITY and PAISAN, combining the objectivity of documentary with the spectacle, color, and vivid impersonations of the fiction film. The actors in THE AGE OF COSIMO DE 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 art patron, and his illustrious Florentine circle. In the last part, the focus shifts to Leon Battista Alberti, architect, humanist, and a typical polydexterous Renaissance figure. In the same scene he demonstrates a primitive moving picture machine of his invention, and also exclaims 'art has the ability to make dead times live again'. That, of course, is Rossellini's dream, and in this case at least, his accomplishment."

Although the dialogue is in English, this cannot be considered a dubbed print. Like almost all Italian films, the dialogue is post-synchronized and the actors on the set do not necessarily speak the lines eventually post-synched (in Fellini's films they generally mutter the alphabet or some nonsense lines). But English was conceived as the main language for the film: the screenplay dialogue was prepared in English by Sonya Friedman, and was "mouthed" by actors wherever possible. Rossellini's decision to make AGE OF COSIMO DE MEDICI in English was no doubt prompted by his desire to seek the widest possible circulation for this work.