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Director Still Reaching 'Beyond the Clouds'

■ **Movies:** Despite a stroke in 1985, Michelangelo Antonioni persevered to complete the film that opens the AFI festival.

By CHARLOTTE CHANDLER
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

The American Film Institute opens the Los Angeles Film Festival on Thursday night with "Beyond the Clouds," a picture almost no one believed could be made.

Its director, Italian film legend Michelangelo Antonioni, has spent the past 10 years in near-silence following a massive stroke in 1985. One who did believe was Enrica Antonioni, wife of the 83-year-old director and the film's executive consultant.

"It was raining and raining and raining," she recalled of the first days of shooting. "Everyone was worried and depressed. Only Michelangelo was happy. The weather was just the light he

wanted."

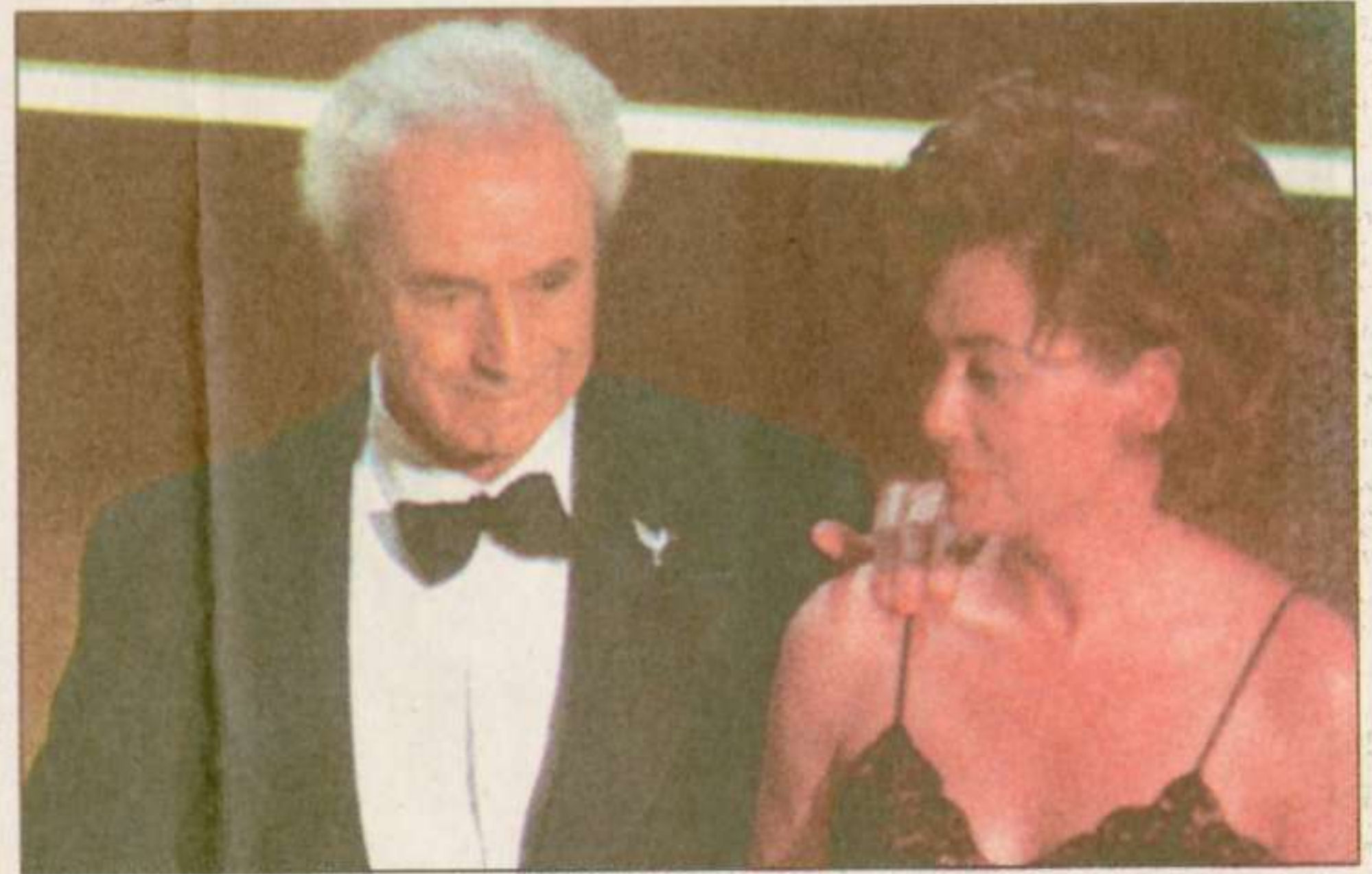
Even Antonioni's speech problem was turned to his advantage.

"Michelangelo never reveals everything he's going to do," she said. "Now he doesn't have to tell what he wouldn't have told anyway. He protects his intuition from being talked away."

(Antonioni said recently there was one advantage to having a stroke: "It got rid of a facial twitch I had since I was a boy.")

To best understand how Antonioni did it, the greatest insight is offered by Enrica Antonioni's own film of the film being made, titled "For Me, to Make a Film Is to Live"—a quote from her husband. The 52-minute documentary, edited from 85 hours of film, will be shown Saturday as part of the AFI festival.

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LAWRENCE K. HO / Los Angeles Times

Michelangelo Antonioni, who received an Oscar for lifetime achievement, with Enrica.

ANTONIONI

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Part is in black and white, not because she ran short of color film, but because, she explains, "it represents Michelangelo's current state, and I felt it was more powerful in combination with the color."

"I shot so much film that when I began editing, I didn't know where to start. The real value of my film was the possibility I had for my camera to be in the closest proximity possible to Michelangelo, who wouldn't have allowed anyone else's camera to be so intimate while he was working."

The couple met in 1971 when Enrica, having completed art school in Milan, asked an artist friend if he knew anyone in Rome who might help her find work.

He knew only one person—Michelangelo Antonioni.

Antonioni met her at a cafe, and observed she had the most beautiful legs he had ever seen. He offered her a job assisting the wardrobe person on his new film. It was the beginning of an enduring bond. He chose the right person, if not for the right reasons.

After the stroke, Enrica became the inspiration for his rehabilitation. He made peace with himself by accepting what he could do rather than yearning for what he could not do.

In March, Antonioni received the honorary Academy Award for lifetime achievement. He hadn't made a feature since 1982, but following Jack Nicholson's introduction, the audience rose as one in a standing ovation for Antonioni, who had moved slowly onto the stage, holding the arm of his wife. He liked holding her arm; but, also, he needed to, another result of the stroke.

Nicholson starred in Antonioni's 1975 "The Passenger." Antonioni's most famous picture, "Blow Up" (1966), was also shot in English, as was his only Hollywood film, "Zabriskie Point" (1970). The director first came to world prominence with "L'Avventura," which Federico Fellini's "La Dolce Vita" edged out for the 1960 Cannes Golden Palm.

Enrica delivered the speech her husband had written, Antonioni adding a closing "Grazie." The audience assumed he doesn't speak English, though he does. Rather, the public speaking situation is impossible for him, the private speaking situation being difficult enough. (The Antonionis will attend Thursday night's "Beyond the Clouds" premiere.)

"Beyond the Clouds" is based on his 1983 book "Bowling Alley on the Tiber," a short story collection for films he thought he couldn't make—until now. Four stories were adapted by Antonioni and Tonino Guerra, longtime collaborator of Antonioni and also of

Fellini. German director Wim Wenders, who became involved because Antonioni was uninsurable, worked on the epilogue, prologue and linking sections, which he directed.

The film, with segments in French, Italian and English, stars John Malkovich, Irene Jacob, Marcello Mastroianni, Jeanne Moreau and Peter Weller.

Antonioni was able to direct "Beyond the Clouds" with only a few words, *basta* (enough) being one of them. He gestured and made faces. He drew pictures and plans for the cameraman, and to show actors how they should move, not so different from his method before the stroke. He always encouraged spontaneity. Then, from behind the camera, he was the final judge.

In Paris, for location scouting, Antonioni had insisted on going to the top of an unfinished skyscraper that he envisioned as the perfect site. Wearing hard hats, the group ascended in the swaying elevator, including Enrica, who is so afraid of elevators she walks up hotel stairs.

Antonioni's genial relationship with Fellini, the other great Italian director of his generation, is perhaps best summed up by a playful moment at a party in Rome some years ago.

Antonioni, who had been away from Italy making "Zabriskie Point," stopped in London because he was interested in the Carnaby Street life of that moment. As he was going through customs, the inspectors found marijuana in one of his shoes. Newspapers everywhere played up the story, and everyone in Italy read about it.

On Antonioni's return, director Francesco Rosi gave a party to welcome him. Among the guests was Fellini. There was a lot of tension. People talked about everything except marijuana. Fellini walked over to Antonioni, took off one of his own shoes and held it out to him, saying: "Have a smoke?"

Everyone laughed, and the tension was broken.

So what does Antonioni want to do next? "It's all said by the director character in my film," he responded. "Listen to him: 'When I have finished a film, I start thinking about the next one, and for me, being silent is not just the only thing, it is the best thing—to be silent in the darkness and then the lights come up.'"

■ Charlotte Chandler is a New York-based author whose latest book, "I, Fellini," was published this week. She is working on a book about Antonioni.