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WE THE LIVING. Directed by Goffredo Alessandrini. Written by Anton Giulio Majano, from the novel by Ayn Rand. Produced by Scalera Films (Rome). Restored by Duncan Scott Productions. Released by Angelika Films. At the Agee Room, Bleecker Street Cinema; and the Carnegie Screening Room, Carnegie Hall Cinema, opening November 25.

MAMMA ROMA. Written and directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini. Produced by Alfredo Bini. At the Museum of Modern Art, November 27.

Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1962 *Mamma Roma*—a vehicle for the onetime Signora Alessandrini, Anna Magnani—is an altogether livelier celluloid artifact. Never released in the U.S., it's screening at the Museum of Modern Art for the third and last time this Sunday afternoon. Less warmly received at Venice than *We the Living* had been 20 years before, Pasolini's second feature is the hit of MOMA's current Magnani retro despite, or maybe because of, the mismatch between the director's studied neorealism and the star's raw flamboyance.

Magnani is treated, more or less, as a

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Heavy living: Anna Magnani as *Mamma Roma*

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found object. Neither the director, nor his Vesuvian diva, waste any time developing her persona—it's instant over-the-top. Thirty seconds into the movie, Mount Magnani is sputtering, singing, screaming, and otherwise spewing lava in your face. She's a veteran whore, attending her pimp's wedding. Throughout, she's a continual spectacle—everything, from her openmouthed laugh and apoplectic *malocchio* to her free and easy gait to her unruly crown of hair, signifies an excess of life force. Nor does she check her personality when she attempts to go straight, leaving prostitution to hawk beans in the marketplace. "Sora Roma, what a voice you have!" the neighboring vendor says in amazement.

As a movie actress, Magnani stands alone—and indifferent (although she would surely have made television history as Alice Kramden). Still, the opening scene aside, she has a number of extraordinary moments, most notably two lengthy sequences in which she strolls toward a retreating camera, riffing with the successive clusters of whores and johns who drift across her path. This bravura use of the road anticipates *The Hawks and the Sparrows*, although it's hard to imagine that Pasolini wrote Magnani's dialogue, let alone directed her, as she breaks into an impromptu cha-cha while reminiscing about her husband or the drooling old man who deflowered

her. Magnani's eruptions aside, *Mamma Roma* is a lopsided mix of urban grit and overintellectualized lyricism, Vivaldi-drenched shots of new workers' housing rising out of the bleak Roman periphery. Once the heroine fetches her teenage son from the countryside and brings him back to live with her, the film's quasi-Marxist critique of her petit bourgeois aspirations is totally subsumed in a baroque permutation on the madonna/whore complex. "Come and dance a tango with your mother," *Mamma Roma* bellows seductively at the 18-year-old Ettore (Ettore Garofalo, a stony kid with an engagingly pushed-in face, whom Pasolini discovered waiting tables).

When Ettore falls in with a half-crazy neighborhood slut *Mamma Roma* goes nuts, running to the priest for help, fixing the boy up with one of her erstwhile associates, presenting him with his own motorbike. His docm is, of course, sealed, once he discovers her ill-concealed past. As always, Pasolini can toss off an image of startling poetry: We understand that Ettore is dead when, dragging her wagon up the road, *Mamma Roma* makes unexpected eye contact with another kid on a motorbike. But son's passion is totally eclipsed by Mamma's response. Like Ayn Rand's, although to different effect, the Magnani world is as elemental as a billboard—each kitchen knife is an invitation to murder, every window the pretext for a swan dive. ■