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VISCONTI DISCUSSES MOVIES

8/11-63

By John Molleson

It was nice to be speaking of movies when Luchino Visconti—the father of Italian neo-realistic films—was making his first crossing of the Queensboro Bridge. That lordly structure, flanking the fogbound towers of Manhattan, seemed to offer a perfect background for a great new realistic scene.

Mr. Visconti, speeding from Idlewild Airport in an air-conditioned 20th-Century-Fox limousine, surveyed the city with mounting enthusiasm, as well as a famed director, for he even showed interest in looking at Queens. He was looking at Queens. He was told that he was still in the outskirts of town, and when the skyline came into view he recognized a few of the towers from his only previous visit here, in 1937.

The Fledgling Days

At that time, he was still a fledgling in the movie business. He had helped Jean Renoir make "The Rules of the Game" in France. But he felt he had to go to Hollywood, he said, to see how films were made. Back in Italy in 1941, he directed his first picture, "Obsession."

"That's when Italian pictures began to get good," someone said.

"Sure," said Mr. Visconti. "Before that they were all Fascist films—terrible."

"How are they now?" was the question.

"Who? The Fascists?"

"No, the films."

"Realism is still going strong," Mr. Visconti said. "In Italy, we are at our best in realism. Even the new directors, Fellini and others, when they are fanciful or fantastic, their roots are in realism."

"How about American films?"



Burt Lancaster, "The Leopard," is shown here with his mistress, played by Olimpia Cavallo. The film will come to the Plaza Theater tomorrow.

"The good American directors have a personality all their own. The best American films are very American. Just as the best French films are very French."

"Is there any American picture you especially liked?"

"Well, you see, I don't go very much to the pictures."

But Mr. Visconti must have studied our actors fairly carefully, for in casting "The Leopard" he felt that Burt Lancaster (who was born in New York City and attended P. S. 83 and De Witt Clinton High School before he ran off to join the circus) was the perfect type to play the Sicilian Prince Don Fabrizio Salina, whose centuries-old way of life is threatened by

—have also turned out to be rather special, because "The Leopard" won the top prize—the Golden Palm—at this year's Cannes Festival, and has been honored by countless other palms at festivals from Moscow to Montreal.

The film, based on Count Giuseppe di Lampedusa's novel, "Il Gattopardo," will have its American premiere tomorrow at the Plaza Theater, and Mr. Visconti was persuaded to come to New York for the occasion.

Break in the Weather

He was able to make the break from Italy at this time because he is waiting for cooler weather to come to Egypt, where he will work this winter filming the "Joseph and His Brothers" sequence of a multi-directed picture, "The Bible."

While in New York, Mr. Visconti will also look over some theaters for possible use next year by his celebrated legitimate stage company, from which many young Italian actors, Marcello Mastroianni among them, have gone on to fame.

In addition to directing many stage plays, and such movies as "La Terra Trema" (to be seen here this fall for the first time as part of the New York Film Festival), "Bellissima," "Senso," "White Nights" and "Rocco and His Brothers," Mr. Visconti directed Maria Callas in five operatic productions at Milan, London and Spoleto. He would welcome the chance to do an opera at the Met, he said, but so far he has not been approached by Rudolf Bing.

Mr. Visconti made "The Leopard" at the height of the

Sicilian summer, when the temperature can go to 104 without any effort at all.

"It was hot, hot, hot," Mr. Visconti said, "like . . . well, perhaps, New York."

In all that heat, Miss Cardinale had to put away her bikinis and wear long sleeves and high collars, to protect her alabaster arms and shoulders. It didn't seem fitting for a pampered Sicilian girl of the 1860s to have a 20th-century tan. And Mr. Lancaster came down with water on the knee and was in agony during the elaborate ballroom scene, filmed over a period of 35 nights in the 218-room Palazzo Gargi, in Palermo.

"They showed courage," Mr. Visconti said.