

Document Citation

Title	The stunt men
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Source	<i>Village Voice</i>
Date	1999 Apr 13
Type	review
Language	English English
Pagination	145
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	8 1/2 ([eight and a half]8 1/2), Fellini, Federico, 1963

Reopening this week as well, Federico Fellini's 1962 8 1/2 marked the high point of the director's personal legend. This self-reflexive essay on the vicissitudes of a successful, middle-aged movie director (given an undeserved grace by Marcello Mastroianni's performance) was once so revered it's worth noting that it always had detractors. Pauline Kael and Andrew Sarris both panned *8 1/2* and continued to flog it for years as the sort of bogus masterpiece beloved by over-earnest English professors (Kael) or callow film students (Sarris).

However the ensuing decades have brought forth a deluge of bogus masterpieces, and Fellini's, by comparison, holds up rather well. *8 1/2* may be lightweight, but its facility is inspired. The filmmaker was never smoother than he was here, guiding the audience through a series of superb set pieces: the opening traffic-jam nightmare, the harem fantasy, the cocktail party—press conference on the movie lot, the haunting and inimitable circus-ring ending. Fellini's intercutting of reverie, dream, and reality is seamless and standard-setting. And as *8 1/2* was made before his style inflated to DeMille dimensions, his pet tricks—killing all the sound except the howl of the wind, or dollying the camera through a throng of *ciao*-hissing gargoyles—had yet to harden into mannerist tics.

More than any other foreign "classic" of the early 1960s, *8 1/2* was slick and entertaining enough to make a splash in the mainstream. The movie's major flaw remains its romantic, self-serving portrait of the artist as a big-time moviemaker. This, of course, has been its fatal appeal for certain self-conscious Hollywood auteurs. Now that movies like Woody Allen's *Stardust Memories* and Bob Fosse's *All That Jazz* have slid down the memory hole, it should be easier to enjoy the maestro's more adroit hokum. **V**