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Author(s)	Tom Allen Andrew Sarris Tom Allen Andrew Sarris
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SUNDAY

Federico Fellini's **THE CLOWNS** (1970), from a screenplay by Bernardino Zapponi and Fellini, with Ricardo Billi, Tino Scotti, Pierre Etaix, and Anita Ekberg, is an affectionate essay about the classic European clown from the far past into the '70s. Made for Italian TV, Fellini's sketch film is strikingly colorful, informative, and couched in some surprisingly somber tones. It does not emphasize the laugh-release of pratfalls so much as the fragility, physical grotesqueness, and sad mortality of us all as reflected in the gaudy spotlight of a three-ring spectacle. The subject matter is neatly compartmentalized, with Fellini improvising confessional doubts through an absurdist film-within-a-film. The set pieces of Fellini's boyhood experiences with circuses (directing complementing *Amarcord*, which was made in the same period), a reporter's notebook on famous aging clowns, and the swirling climax under the big top are all very much off the cuff. (Co-feature: Mario Bonnard's 1941 *The King's Jester*, with Michel Simon as Rigoletto) **Soho Theater: 3:40, 7:10, 10:30**