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L'Appassionata (ITALIAN)

Rome An Istituto Luce-Italnoleggio release of an ABCinema production, in association with RAI-TV Channel 2 and Pegaso productions. Produced by Enzo Porcelli. Directed by Gianfranco Mingozzi. Screenplay, Lucia Drudi Demby, Mingozzi; camera (Luciano Vittori color), Luigi Verga; editor, Fernanda Indoni; music, Nicola Piovani; art direction, Leonardo Scarpa, Giancarlo Basili. Reviewed at Politecnico Cinema, Rome, Feb. 3, 1989. Running time: 97 MIN.

GilbertaPiera Degli Esposti
ToniNicola Farron
EnzoFederico Proveddi

Also with: Ornella Marcucci (Ileana), Daniela Morelli (Toni's mother), Paolo Bacchi, Gaetano Naccarato, Guido Luigi Cavalleri, Massimo Madrigali, Zeno Pezzoli, Alberto Bartolani.

■ A homey psychodrama of three characters set in Bologna of the 1950's, "L'Appassionata" ("The Impassioned Woman," literally) isn't likely to set local theaters on fire. Intentions are serious, cast is mostly good, but this tragic May-December love affair remains more on paper than on the screen.

It is Gianfranco Mingozzi's second feature this season (the other is "The Sparrow's Flutter," doing okay business with Ornella Muti and Philippe Noiret). Main off-shore market should be tv ready to pick up sensitive, rather offbeat product.

Stage thesp Piera Degli Esposti headlines as "L'Appassionata," a widow in her 40s with a 16-year-old son who, unknown to her, supports them by selling family knickknacks and cleaning the public swimming pool.

The arrival of a handsome young lodger, Toni (Nicola Farron), momentarily brings life and joy to the house. Mama Gilberta, a warm woman of precarious mental balance, embarks on an intense, guiltless love affair with the boy, while Son Enzo (Federico Proveddi) treats him as a big brother, though with misgivings. These prove to be justified. Toni leaves Gilberta for one of her piano pupils, a pretty girl closer to his own age.

Gilberta, guileless and vulnerable, takes Toni's betrayal so hard she loses her reason. In and out of mental hospitals, she has one last painful meeting with Toni, then begs her son to put an end to her suffering, which he does with an overdose of medicine.

Very much an actors' story, "L'Appassionata" benefits from Degli Esposti's daft but always appealing mother-lover, a totally natural woman. Also impressive is Proveddi's screen debut as her loving, anxious offspring. Farron lacks range in the key role of Toni, settling for being just likable and ordinary. —Yung.