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TORINO BOYS

(ITALIAN)

A Filmalbatros production for RAI. (International sales: Sacis, Rome.) Produced by Pier Giorgio Bellocchio. Artistic supervisor, Marco Bellocchio.

Directed, written by Marco and Antonio Manetti. Camera (color), Federico Schlat-ter; editor, Francesca Calvelli; music, Neffa; art direction, Pierluigi Manetti; costume design, Cinzia Lucchetti; sound, Gaetano Carito; assistant director, Cristiano Grillo; casting, Fabiola Banzi. Reviewed at Turin Young Cinema Festival (competing), Nov. 18, 1997. (Also in Locarno Film Festival.) Running time: 94 MIN.

Nike Juliet Omoniji
Eby Paul Anthony Anderson
Fabio Luca Laurenti
Faith Jennifer Bola Akinemi

By DAVID ROONEY

Most attempts to portray the immigrant experience in Italy up to now have been earnest accounts of the absence of dignified employment and difficulties of integration. One of a series of films, "Another Country in My Eyes," (see review of "The Apartment," page 116) made under the artistic supervision of Marco Bellocchio, "Torino Boys" detours from that route, taking a much lighter view of a community of Nigerians in Rome. While sibling directing team Marco and Antonio Manetti's inexperience sometimes shows, as does the stiffness of the non-pro cast, the comedy musters enough warmth and freshness to qualify for festivals and foreign-language TV.

Story centers on a group of Nigerian women living in the Italo capital; the title comes from their perception that their male compatriots in northern Turin are mostly vain gigolos living off the prostitution proceeds of their lovers. Less jaded than her streetwise girlfriends, recent arrival Nike (Juliet Omoniji) believes her fling with Torino boy Eby (Paul Anthony Anderson) has laid the foundations for true love. She anticipates picking up where they left off when he travels to Rome with a bunch of friends to see a soccer match.

Much of the running time is devoted to a briskly choreographed series of crossed wires that threatens to keep the pair apart. When they finally do get together, their romantic idyll hits a bump with the unexpected arrival of Eby's territorial Torino girl (Jennifer Bola Akinemi). While this is going on, a second story tracks another young woman's journey of hope from her poor Nigerian village to Italy, where the threat of exploitation awaits her, disguised as a hospitable welcome.

The comedy generally is well handled, with the characters' flexible notion of time amusingly played off against the frustrations of the group's one Italian (Luca Laurenti). What lifts the material above its weaknesses is the feeling that while the writer-directors are not exactly part of the community they are portraying, nor are they complete outsiders; they bring sincerity to their observations about being aliens in a country still relatively unprepared to deal with immigration.

The sometimes amateurish acting is highlighted by the apparent unnaturalness of speaking pidgin Italian. While the logical choice would have been to shoot with more authentic Anglo-African dialogue, this was impossible given the Italian TV financing. Attempts to introduce some music-video-style visuals via editing and camerawork are inconsistent, but the soundtrack of tunes by Italian hip-hop acts keeps things moving.