

By the director of *IL SORPASSO*
Never Before Released in the U.S.

DINO RISI'S

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

STARRING ALBERTO SORDI AND LEA MASSARI

RIALTO PICTURES PRESSBOOK

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

Director

Dino Risi

Screenplay

Rodolfo Sonogo

Producer

Dino De Laurentiis

Director of Photography

Leonida Barboni

Production Designer

Mario Chiari

Art Director

Mario Scisci

Editor

Tatiana Casini

Costumes

Lucia Mirisola

Music

Carlo Savina

A Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica Production

A RIALTO PICTURES RELEASE

Italy Black-and-White Mono 1.85:1 Running time: 120 min.

First release (Italy): December 22, 1961

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

CAST

Silvio Magnozzi

Alberto Sordi

Elena

Lea Massari

Simonini

Franco Fabrizi

Elena's mother

Lina Valonghi

Commendatore Bracci

Claudio Gora

The Marquis (Marchese Cafferoni)

Daniele Vargas

Elena's friend

Antonio Centa

cameo appearances

Silvana Mangano

Vittorio Gassman

Alessandro Blasetti

Edith Peters

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

THE RESTORATION

Una Vita Difficile was scanned in 4K from the original negative by Istituto Luce, Rome. The restoration was carried out at VDM by Studiocanal.

Subtitles (2023)

Bruce Goldstein

Subtitle Editorial Consultants

Fiamma Arditì

Adrienne Halpern

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

SYNOPSIS

In 1944, near Lake Como, Roman student and ex-army lieutenant Silvio Magnozzi (Sordi) is now part of a local partisan group, following the surrender of the Italians to the Allies. On the run from the Germans, he's sent to a hotel for safe haven. He's soon discovered by a German soldier, who's about to shoot him on the spot. Elena (Massari), the landlady's daughter, saves his life by killing the German with an iron. She takes him to an old mill once owned by her late grandparents. For three months, he and Elena live there as lovers. He eventually sneaks away without saying goodbye and rejoins the partisans.

After the liberation, Silvio returns to Rome, where he works as a journalist at *Il Lavoratore* ("The Worker"), a poorly funded communist newspaper [though its political affiliation is never stated outright in the film]. Seven months after war's end, Silvio and his friend and colleague Simonini (Fabrizi) travel to Lombardy on assignment for the paper. Silvio winds up in the same town where he met Elena and arranges to meet her again. She agrees to live with him in Rome, despite his meager income and poor prospects.

On the day of the referendum deciding whether Italy will become a republic or remain a monarchy, Elena and Silvio, who haven't eaten for days, are turned away from two different restaurants after trying eat on credit. They run into a friend of Elena's – a marquis -- who invites them to dinner at the home of an elderly Italian princess. The table is filled with snobby aristocrats anxiously awaiting the results of the referendum. Finally, the establishment of the republic is announced; everyone but Elena and Silvio leave the table, devastated at the referendum results.

Silvio and Elena eventually marry and have a son named Paolo. But Silvio, unwilling to compromise his political ideals, refuses to obtain a better paying job. His journalistic career comes to an end when he's arrested for libel against a media mogul. He's later jailed for participating in a riot, following the shooting of communist leader Palmiro Togliatti. While in prison, Silvio finally has time to write the novel he's been mulling over in his mind for years. He titles it *A Difficult Life*.

After his release, Elena and her mother urge him to get his degree. Silvio agrees to take an architecture exam, which he fails miserably. He gets

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

drunk and tells Elena that she's too ignorant to understand him. Hurt and disappointed, she disappears from Silvio's life.

Two years later, Silvio is still intent on publishing his novel. A publisher tells him that the book is mediocre and uninteresting, but that he should try his luck in the movies. At Cinecittà studios, he stalks actors Vittorio Gassman and Silvana Mangano and director Alessandro Blasetti, trying to get them interested in his book. At Cinecittà, he also has a chance encounter with the Marquis, now impoverished and earning his living as a bit player in sword and sandal epics. The Marquis tells him Elena is now living in Viareggio, working in a boutique.

In Viareggio, Silvio drunkenly begs Elena to come back, but she explains that love doesn't matter to her anymore, only economic security. Elena storms away and Silvio vents his bitterness by spitting on luxury cars and shouting at German tourists.

Years later, at Elena's mother's funeral, Silvio shows up driving a luxury car. He begs Elena to take him back, stating that he has found a permanent job and set aside his political ideals to seek economic stability. Elena is moved at seeing the mill where they had spent three blissful months together and decides to return to Rome with him.

He's now employed as secretary to *Commendatore* Bracci, the same media mogul who had sued him for libel. Silvio can now afford luxuries like new cars and a fur coat for Elena, but is forced to perform degrading tasks for his boss. Bracci ridicules Silvio in front of the guests and Elena by spraying seltzer in his face. Unable to bear this last affront, Silvio punches Bracci in the face with enough force to make him fall in the swimming pool.

He and Elena walk home because "We need the fresh air."

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

DINO RISI ON *UNA VITA DIFFICILE* AND CINEMA

A POLITICAL FILM

Rodolfo Sonego¹ and I were looking for a story for Alberto Sordi. There had already been in America, if I'm not mistaken, a film called *Cavalcade*², which covered a period of ten or twenty years. We had the idea of making an "Italian cavalcade" ranging from the end of the Second World War to the first years of the economic boom³. The film was centered on a problem that is not exclusively Italian: that of compromise. This is why, even today, it's still topical. In my opinion, *Una Vita Difficile* [1961], *Il Sorpasso* [1962], *Mordi e Fuggi* [1973], and *In Nome del Popolo Italiano* [1971] are political films. Political cinema doesn't necessarily mean the protagonists are workers and politicians. We've done so many boring films like that. Any film that represents and explores a moment in society is political. It seems to me that a whole period of Italian history is represented through these four films.

THE SACRED MONSTERS

These Italian actors embody the traditional masks of the *commedia dell'arte*⁴, transposed to the screen. We use them to tell about Italy,

¹ **Rodolfo Sonego** (1921-2000) was a screenwriter closely associated with Alberto Sordi. Beginning in 1954, he wrote over 50 films for the actor, sometimes uncredited.

² Based on a play by Noël Coward, *Cavalcade* (1931) was an epic pageant of English life from 1899 to 1933. The movie won three Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director (Frank Lloyd).

³ Italy's "miracle" economic boom ("il miracolo economico italiano") took off in the years 1958 to 1963. Among the other films that satirized the sudden post-war consumerist society was DeSica's *Il Boom* (1963), starring Sordi. Rialto Pictures released *Il Boom* for the first time in the U.S. in 2017.

⁴ *Commedia dell'arte* was a form of popular Italian theater that flourished in Europe between the 16th and 18th centuries. Its stock comic characters (including its most famous creation, Arlecchino, or Harlequin) often wore masks.

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

because precisely, they *are* Italy... I think that their only misfortune was to be born in this country. But Tognazzi⁵ and Sordi each represent a part of Italy: Tognazzi, Northern, prosperous Italy; Sordi, the Southern part. They are “dialect” actors, a term that shouldn’t be taken in the restrictive sense of the word, since in Italy we all speak in dialect.

SIMPLICITY OF MISE EN SCÈNE

I’ve never been a fanatic of photography, or décor, or framing, or complicated camera movements. In my opinion, technique doesn’t exist. A director once said, "I write with a dolly."⁶ He said it just to impress the critics, I believe, who made bad comments about this filmmaker. No, technique is not one of my concerns. I'm not a technician at all. If something interests me, I look at it, I follow it. As soon as it stops captivating me, I abandon it. That's why my films can be debatable, even bad, but never boring.

My scenes are generally very brief, never exceeding one or two pages of script. I think one can express in a few frames what others develop in long speeches. I cut abundantly in the editing, without pity. I don't get attached to anything. Some of my colleagues wrote endless newspaper articles to complain about producers who had removed such and such a scene and threatened to take their name off the film. I can't take myself that seriously. I have no such desire. Defense of authors rights seems absurd to me, especially since cinema is the collective product of a team. I always ask the members of the crew their opinion of the scene we are shooting. If it doesn't get their approval, I eliminate it without hesitation. The ideal would be to be like the great comedians of silent

⁵ Born in Cremona, **Ugo Tognazzi** (1922-2000) was one of the biggest stars of *commedia all'italiana*, including seven films directed by Dino Risi. He’s probably best known in this country for his starring role in the original *La Cage aux Folles*.

⁶ **Dolly**: a wheeled cart holding a cameraman and camera, used to create smooth camera movements

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

movies, like Keaton, who had the healthy habit of showing the barely edited film to a preview audience to make them "sample" it and who mercilessly cut the scenes that got no reaction.

My main concern on the set is getting the right distance between the camera and the characters or objects. I always look for simplicity. And, in fact, directors such as Buñuel, De Sica, Chaplin who shoot simply, appeal to me. I'm not saying that the camera should always remain still, as with Chaplin, but I think we shouldn't feel its presence. In this respect, Buñuel may be the best of all. He shoots like he breathes. You never feel the presence of the "camera". But his films are so well crafted that the presence of the mechanical means is never bothersome: his writing is so meticulous. I move the camera when it's necessary, at the right time. I never move the camera around the actors. These are cinematic tricks of no interest for me.

Le Cinéma italien parle - Aldo Tassone - Editions Edilig

(translated from the French by Adrienne Halpern; edited and annotated by Bruce Goldstein)

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

DINO RISI: MUSINGS ON *UNA VITA DIFFICILE*

[Producer Dino] De Laurentiis and I we were looking for stories rooted in the Italian reality. He was very generous, understanding that such a film might have little commercial success. Ultimately, it went very, very well, but it was quite a different film from the ones they were making at the time. With this picture, like the others I've made, I was telling the story of the Italians in some way, as Italy transitioned from the Resistance to the economic boom. It was a pleasant film to work on, like almost all the films I made. We did everything on location: we were on Lake Como, and then in Viareggio.⁷

The famous episode where Sordi spits on the cars was also great fun⁸. It was supposed to be very brief, but it was so funny that I shouted to Sordi, "Keep going, keeping going!" and the big cars that had finished going round had to come back over and over again. The sequence worked really well because it went on for so long.

I saw Lea Massari again several years later in Cannes. She said to me, "You didn't like me much during that movie," because I hadn't pampered her. But it wasn't true.

Una Vita Difficile had very good reviews, which was strange because they generally panned me. A book about me seems to come out every month now, but the critics treated me very badly at the time. The Italians started giving me good reviews only after the French began to appreciate me. At the time, the critics favored leftist films where no one was allowed to laugh. The reason Occhetto⁹ lost the election is that the Left has never been able to laugh, and now they're paying for it; they took themselves too seriously.

-- courtesy Marco Risi

⁷ Viareggio is a seaside city in Tuscany, along the Tyrrhenian Sea. In *Una Vita Difficile*, it's where Silvio finds Elena years after their separation.

⁸ Among Italians, this is one of the most memorable scenes in the film, along with the banquet scene

⁹ Achille Occhetto was, from 1988-1991, the last secretary-general of the Italian communist party, and the first leader of the Democratic Party of the Left. He was defeated by Silvio Berlusconi in the 1994 election.

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

The action of *Una Vita Difficile* begins near Lake Como in Northern Italy during WWII, soon after the fall of Benito Mussolini's fascist regime.

The film references the following historical events.

SEPTEMBER 8, 1943

General Pietro Badoglio, Mussolini's successor, officially surrenders to the Allies. On October 13, Badoglio and the Kingdom of Italy declared war on Germany.

JUNE 4, 1944

Allied troops liberate Rome.

APRIL 27, 1945

Mussolini is captured by partisans near Dongo, a town on Lake Como, only 30 miles from the Swiss border.

Mussolini and his loyalists were carrying what became known as "the Dongo Treasure": important state documents, along with jewels, coins and bags of gold.

To this day, the mystery of the treasure's disappearance is unsolved.

MAY 9, 1946

Crown Prince **Umberto II** becomes king of Italy, following the abdication of his father, Vittorio Emanuele III.

JUNE 2, 1946

Italy becomes a republic after a national referendum, with a 54% majority. Umberto II's reign would last little over a month. He became known as "il re di Maggio" ("The May King").

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

APRIL 18, 1948

Italy holds its first democratic general election since 1922, and the first with universal suffrage.

Front runners were the Christian Democrats, led by **Alcide De Gasperi**, and the Popular Democratic Front, a coalition of **Pietro Nenni's** Italian Socialists and **Palmiro Togliatti's** Italian Communists.

De Gasperi, founder of the Christian Democrats, would become the last prime minister of the Kingdom of Italy and the first prime minister of the Italian republic. His eight-year term in office was one of the longest in Italian history.

JULY 14, 1948

Palmiro Togliatti, head of the PCI (Partito Comunista Italiano), is shot three times by a fascist student. Badly wounded, his condition caused a political crisis in Italy, including a general strike. Togliatti survived the assassination attempt and remained the PCI head. He served as deputy prime minister in 1944 and 1945 and was appointed Minister of Justice in 1946.

March 5, 1953

Death of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin.

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

DINO RISI

“Dino Risi’s comedies are a devilish piece of work, lampooning the politicians, playboys, and priests of postwar Italy. Together with Mario Monicelli, Luigi Comencini, and Ettore Scola, Risi enjoyed tremendous commercial and critical success during “Il Boom,” the Italian economic miracle of the 1950s and 1960s. At his best, Risi was a caricaturist in the vein of Honoré Daumier, using exaggerated grotesqueries to sweeten the bitterness of his social satire. His films are populated by a rogue’s gallery of shamelessly lovable *commedia all’Italiana* types in the inimitable guises of some of the era’s greatest actors: Alberto Sordi, Vittorio Gassman, Nino Manfredi, Ugo Tognazzi, and Sophia Loren.”

-- Josh Siegel, Museum of Modern Art notes (2016 Risi retrospective)

DINO RISI (DIRECTOR)

Born in Milan in 1916, **Dino Risi**, the son of a doctor, chose psychiatry as his first career. His interest in the cinema was stimulated by his close friendship with Alberto Lattuada¹⁰, thanks to whom he worked as second or third assistant on Mario Soldati's *Piccolo mondo antico* (1940), for which Lattuada was assistant director. Two years later, still without abandoning his medical career, Risi worked as assistant director on Lattuada's first feature, *Giacoma l'idealista*. He also began to establish a reputation as a film critic. During the latter part of World War II, Risi was detained in Switzerland, where he attended Jacques Feyder's lectures on film direction in Geneva.

Back in Italy after the war, Risi gave up his psychiatric career and became a documentarian in Milan. His first short was *I bersaglieri della signora* (1946),

¹⁰ **Alberto Lattuada** (1914-2005) would eventually direct nearly 40 films, including *Il bandito*, *Senza pietà*, *Anna*, *Il Cappotto*, and *Mafioso*, starring Alberto Sordi (re-released by Rialto Pictures in 2007.) Lattuada also co-directed Federico Fellini’s first film, *Luci del Varietà* (*Variety Lights*, 1950), starring Lattuada’s wife Carla del Poggio.

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

about a hospice for old people. Another twenty documentaries followed between 1946 and 1950 -- shorts on various aspects of the postwar scene.

Even then, though he was working in the neorealist style of the period, Risi said that he was "studying how to make the documentary acceptable to audiences who can't wait to see the main film." In 1949, he made two non-commercial features using nonprofessional actors: *I siero della verità*, co-directed by Mario Milano, about a serum whose users remember things they'd rather forget; and *Seduta spiritica*, about a spiritualist.

Eager to direct mainstream features, Risi went to Rome, where he at first worked as a scriptwriter. He collaborated on Lattuada's *Anna* (1951); *Totò e i re di Roma* (*Totò and the Kings of Rome*, 1951), directed by Steno and Mario Monicelli; Mario Camerini's *Gli eroi della Domenica* (1952); and Samuel Taylor's *Montecarlo* (1956). Meanwhile, he had directed his own first feature, *Vacanze col gangster* (*Vacation with a Gangster*, 1952). He followed this with *Viale della speranza* (*Hope Avenue*, 1953), a modest comedy set in the Italian movie world, starring Marcello Mastroianni.

That same year, Risi was invited to contribute to Cesare Zavattini's neorealist experiment *Amore in città* (*Love in the City*, 1953), planned as the first in a series of semi-documentary anthology films. The different stories were directed by Fellini, Antonioni, and Lattuada, among others. Risi's piece was "Paradiso per tre ore" ("Paradise for Three Hours"), a sad little story about a dance hall frequented by young working-class Romans.

Risi's first commercial success (and the first of seven movies made for the production company Titanus) was the ironic comedy *Il segno di venere* (*The Sign of Venus*, 1955), scripted by Zavattini and Risi, among others. The cast included Sophia Loren, Vittorio De Sica, Franca Valeri, and Alberto Sordi, in his first of seven films for Risi.

At about this time Risi announced that the neorealist mode "was no longer valid as a means of explaining reality." Realism indeed impinges very little on *Pane, amore e...* (*Bread, Love and...*, also known as *Scandal in Sorrento*, 1955), the second sequel to Luigi Comencini's *Pane, amore e fantasia* (*Bread, Love and Dreams*, 1953). It starred De Sica and Loren.

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

Considerably more original was *Poveri ma belli* (*Poor But Beautiful Girl in a Bikini*, 1956), an Italian-French coproduction that is said to have saved Titanus from bankruptcy. Risi's portrait of his young heroes' working-class milieu and style was found wonderfully fresh and authentic, and this low-budget film with its cast of unknowns was enormously successful, launching a whole subgenre of urban teenage comedies.

The same screenwriters, Pasquale Festa Campanile and Massimo Franciosa, wrote Risi's remaining films for Titanus: *La nonna Sabella* (*Oh Sabella!*, 1957), *Belle ma povere* (*Beautiful But Poor/Irresistible*, 1957), and *Poveri milionari* (*Poor Millionaires*, 1958).

Risi, though he continued to enjoy his share of international hits, chose to gear a considerable proportion of his output to the tastes of smalltown Italy, earning the gratitude of a large ticket-buying public, if not the approval of the more serious Italian critics.¹¹

Il Vedovo (*The Widower*, 1959), for example, a black comedy again starring Alberto Sordi, did well domestically but had very little exposure abroad. *I Mattatore* (*Love and Larceny*, 1959) was the first of a number of Risi movies built around a virtuoso performance in multiple roles, and the first of a dozen Risi comedies starring Vittorio Gassman¹², previously known mainly as a dramatic actor.

Un amore a Roma (*Love in Rome*, 1960) was a departure, scripted by frequent Fellini collaborator Ennio Flaiano. Risi set out to make Rome itself a character in the film -- a "secret" Rome little seen by tourists. The film failed at the box office, and Risi reverted to comedy.

Risi's next major success was made for Dino De Laurentiis. This was *Una vita difficile* (1961), perhaps Risi's most ambitious film, described by Lorenzo Codelli as "one of his masterpieces.... a memorable picture that

¹¹ Risi often stated that *Una Vita Difficile* was the first of his films to be embraced by the Italian critics. Even his most successful and famous film, *Il Sorpasso*, initially got a lukewarm reception from the Italian critics, who came around only after the film won accolades from the French.

¹² Gassman would give a virtuosic comic performance in Risi's most famous film, *Il Sorpasso*

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

was also appreciated by the Italian critics, who usually violently attacked Risi's humorous style."

Gassman starred in *La marcia su Roma* (*The March to Rome*, 1962), a sub-Brechtian fable about the rise of fascism. The film's six credited scenarists included two famous teams of comedy writers: Age (Agenore Incocci) and Furio Scarpelli, and Ettore Scola and Ruggero Maccari. Each of these teams worked on a number of Risi's films of the 1960s, and during the next decade Maccari emerged as his favorite writer, often collaborating with Risi alone or with Risi and Bernardino Zapponi.

One of the most admired of Risi's films followed, *Il Sorpasso* (1962). A road movie of sorts, it follows the journey along the Riviera of a testosterone-fueled playboy (Gassman) and his sudden traveling companion, an earnest young student (Jean-Louis Trintignant). John Francis Lane said that it showed the other side of Italy's postwar "economic miracle."

I Mostri (*The Monsters*, 1963) employed virtually all of Risi's regular scriptwriters to cram twenty viciously satirical sketches of contemporary Italian life into two hours. Risi cast Gassman in eleven different roles and Ugo Tognazzi in twelve.

A more personal comedy, *Il giovedì* (*Thursday*, 1963), about the delicate relationship between a divorced father and his precocious child, was followed by *Il gaucho* (*The Gaucho*, 1964), an amiable satire on Italian filmmakers abroad, shot in Argentina. After that came contributions to two portmanteau films, and then *L'ombrellone* (*Weekend Italian Style*, 1965), and *Operazione San Gennaro* (*Operation San Gennaro*, 1966), a satirical comedy about an American-style heist in Naples, starring Nino Manfredi and Senta Berger.

Risi's next five movies explored various comedy genres popular in Italy, but *La moglie del prete* (*The Priest's Wife*, 1970) was something of an international *succès de scandale*. Sophia Loren plays a luckless pop singer who falls in love with a Paduan priest (Marcello Mastroianni) and successfully seduces him before the Church seduces him back with a promotion.

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

There was said to be a tougher critical spirit in two political comedies of the early 1970s that have been little seen abroad -- *In nome del popolo Italiano* (*In the Name of the Italian People*), starring Gassman and Ugo Tognazzi, and *Mordi e fuggi* (*Bite and Run*, aka *Dirty Weekend*), with Mastroianni.

Risi's international reputation as a "serious" humorist was revived with *Profumo di donna* (*Scent of a Woman*, 1974), adapted by Ruggero Maccari and Risi from a novel by Giovanni Arpino. Gassman plays an embittered ex-officer blinded and crippled on maneuvers, who continues, as best he can, in his pursuit of women, "man's only true religion". A Hollywood remake in 1992 starred Al Pacino.

There was also a respectful international reception for *Telefoni bianchi* (*White Telephones/The Career of a Chambermaid*, 1975). Set during the fascist years, it traces the rise and fall of an attractive young hotel worker (Agostina Belli), from prostitute and Mussolini's mistress, to stardom in the glossy, so-called "white telephone" movies of the era. Gassman contributed another bravura performance as a marvelously hammy star.

Anima persa (*Lost Soul*, 1976) starred Gasman and Catherine Deneuve in a kind of psychological thriller that reminded critics of Hitchcock. *Le stanza del vescovo* (*The Bishop's Room*, 1977) teamed the veteran Ugo Tognazzi with newcomer Ornella Muti, and so successfully that Risi brought them together again in *Primo amore* (*First Love*, 1978.) Muti also starred in "Senza parole" ("Without Words"), one of Risi's contributions to the fourteen-episode *I nuovi mostri* (*The New Monsters*, 1978).

Risi's son Marco collaborated with Risi and Bernardino Zapponi on the script of *Caro papa* (*Dear Father*, 1979), about an industrialist who discovers that his son is involved with a terrorist group. With *Fantasma d'amore* (*Ghost of Love*, 1981), Risi ventured into the gothic genre, a story about a bourgeois lawyer (Marcello Mastroianni) and his dead mistress (Romy Schneider). His later films include *Scemo di guerra* (*Madman at War*, 1985), *Teresa* (1987), *Il Commissario lo Gatto* (1987), *Toglio il disturbo* (*I'll Be Going Now*, 1990), with Gassman and Elliott Gould, and *Giovanni e belli* (1996), loosely based on Risi's 1957 *Poveri ma belli*.

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

Risi received a Golden Lion lifetime achievement award at the Venice Film Festival in 2002. He died in 2006.

Historian/archivist Lorenzo Codelli has described Risi as "reinventor of genres" and as "a genuine story-teller with an unwitting sociologist inside him." John Francis Lane calls him the "undisputed maestro of Italian comedy." Risi has been immensely popular in Italy since the mid-1950s. He began to attract international attention in the early 1960s and his reputation has grown steadily since then -- especially during the 1970s and especially in France -- as he has moved step by step away from the formulaic *commedia all'italiana* into serious social satire. He himself said in 1977, "These aren't comic times in Italy. It's catastrophe time."

-- adapted from *World Film Directors, Volume Two (1945-1985)*, edited by John Wakeman

ALBERTO SORDI (Silvio Magnozzi)

Born in Rome's working class quarter of Trastevere in 1920 (1919, according to some sources), Alberto Sordi studied recitation at Milan's Academia dei Filodrammatici, but was apparently dismissed because of his thick Roman accent and use of dialect. In 1937, he won a contest organized by MGM to find the dubbing voice of Oliver Hardy, which opened the door to regular professional dubbing work of American movies (actors he would later lend his voice to included Cary Grant, Anthony Quinn, Robert Mitchum, and Mexican star Pedro Armendáriz). He landed his first film roles 1938, but his screen career, limited mostly to minor parts, took a back seat to the music hall, his dubbing work, and increasingly popular radio performances.

Sordi got his first important role in Mario Matolli's 1942 film *I tre aquilotti*, but movie popularity eluded him for an entire decade. His career took off with two early now-classic films by Federico Fellini, *The White Sheik* (1952)¹³ and especially *I Vitelloni* (1953).

¹³ A new restoration of *The White Sheik* was released by Rialto in 2019.

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

There followed a series of films in which Sordi chiseled his jaundiced comic portraits of the petty-minded average Italian in all his mediocrity. Italian critic Goffredo Fofi described his image as "a low-born *petit bourgeois* Roman, ignoble, whining, mama's boy, lady's man, not too keen on doing any work, but who knows how to make himself look good in the eyes of his priest and office chief...Italians recognized in him the worst aspects of their character."

Films of this period, in which Sordi averaged six a year, included Roberto Savarese's *Mamma mia che impressione!* (1952), which he co-scripted with Zavattini and De Sica, Steno's *Un Americano a Roma* (1954), Monicelli's *Un Eroe dei nostri tempi* (1955), Dino Risi's *Il Segno di venere* (1955), Luigi Comencini's *La Bella di Roma* (1955), and Luigi Zampa's *Il Vigile* (1960).

The late 1950s and 1960s were Sordi's artistic heyday and coincided with the flowering of Italian film comedy, of which Sordi was one of the biggest stars, alongside Vittorio Gassman, Ugo Tognazzi, and Nino Manfredi. Beginning with Monicelli's *La Grande Guerra* (*The Great War*, 1959), Risi's *Una Vita Difficile* (*A Difficult Life*, 1961), and De Sica's *Il Boom* (1963), Sordi's roles became increasingly dense and darker in tone, climaxing with Monicelli's bleak 1977 tragicomedy *Un Borghese Piccolo Piccolo*.

Though consistently one of the most beloved personalities in Italian cinema, Sordi remained less well-known than his peers on the international scene.

His rare foreign film credits included Charles Vidor's *A Farewell to Arms* (1957), John Berry's *Oh! Que Mambo!* (1958), Guy Hamilton's *The Best of Enemies* (1961), and Ken Annakin's *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines* (1965).

As writer-director, Sordi made (and acted in) 19 feature films between *Fumo di Londra* in 1966 and *Incontri Proibiti* in 1998, which also marked his last screen appearance. In all, Sordi appeared in some 150 films in a career spanning 60 years.

Among numerous film honors, Sordi was the recipient of seven David di Donatello awards, a Golden Bear for Best Actor at the 1971 Berlin Film

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

Festival for Nanni Loy's *Detenuto in attesa di giudizio*, and a Golden Lion career award at the 1995 Venice Film Festival. Sordi died of a heart attack at his home in Rome in 2003, age 82. Over 80,000 people filed past his open coffin at Rome's Campidoglio (City Hall) and an estimated crowd of a million jammed the piazza around the Basilica of San Giovanni for his funeral.

LEA MASSARI (Elena Magnozzi)

Born Anna Maria Massetani on June 30, 1933 in Rome, Lea Massari changed her name at the age of 22, following the death of her fiancé. Massari's first film role was in Mario Monicelli's *Proibito (Forbidden)*, (1955). She shot to international stardom after appearing in Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura* (1960). Among the 50 films she appeared in, other notable credits include roles in Sergio Leone's *The Colossus of Rhodes* (1961), Dino Risi's *Una Vita Difficile* (1961), Claude Sautet's *Les Choses de la Vie (The Things of Life)*, (1970), Louis Malle's *Le Souffle Au Coeur (Murmur of the Heart)*, (1971), and Francesco Rosi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, for which she won the Nastro d'Argento Best Supporting Actress Award.¹⁴

FRANCO FABRIZI (Simonini)

Born near Milan in 1961, Franco Fabrizi made his debut in Antonioni's first feature film, *Cronaca di un amore (Chronicle of a Love)*, (1950). He's probably best known as the two-timing Lothario of Fellini's *I Vitelloni* (1954), which also featured Aberto Sordi. Fabrizi died in 1995, age 79.

¹⁴ In 2019, Rialto released the complete, uncut version of *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, starring Gian Maria Volontè, for the very first time in the U.S.

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

CAMEO APPEARANCES IN *UNA VITA DIFFICILE*

Three important figures of Italian cinema (in the Cinecittà¹⁵ sequence), and an American expatriate, make cameo appearances in *Una Vita Difficile*.

SILVANA MANGANO

One of the three top female Italian sex symbols of the 1950s, along with Sophia Loren and Gina Lollobrigida, **Silvana Mangano** (1930-1989) first burst onto the scene as the earthy peasant woman in the neorealist classic *Bitter Rice* (1949), which also featured a young Vittorio Gassman. She starred in films directed by Vittorio De Sica, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Luchino Visconti, Alberto Lattuada, Mario Monicelli, Alberto Sordi, and many others. She was married to Dino Di Laurentiis, producer of *Una Vita Difficile* and many other great Italian and Hollywood classics.

VITTORIO GASSMAN

Born in Genoa, **Vittorio Gassman** (1922-2000) began his acting career in the theater, establishing himself as a serious interpreter of Shakespeare, Tennessee Williams, and other great playwrights. His first major film role came in *Bitter Rice* (1949), but movie fame would elude him until his appearance in Monicelli's comedy classic *Big Deal on Madonna Street* (1958), which established him as one of the giants of *commedia all'italiana*. He would star in 13 films for director Dino Risi, more than any other actor. Ironically, apart from *Una Vita Difficile*, Risi and Gassman never made a film together at Cinecittà.

ALESSANDRO BLASSETTI

A native of Rome, **Alessandro Blasetti** (1900-1987) was known as “the father of Italian cinema” for his part in rejuvenating the country's cinema in the 1920s and 30s. One of the leading directors of the Fascist era, his 40-year career began in 1929. Ten years before *Una Vita Difficile*, he also played himself in Visconti's *Bellisima*.

¹⁵ Founded in 1937 by Benito Mussolini and his son Vittorio, Cinecittà is the largest film studio in Europe.

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

EDITH PETERS

Born in Santa Monica, California, African American actress and singer **Edith Peters** (1926-2000) was a younger sister of the three **Peters Sisters**, Virginia, Mattye and Anne, a popular song and dance act discovered in 1937 by comedian Eddie Cantor.

Edith would later join the act and had a separate act with a fifth sister, Joyce. The sisters would eventually find even greater fame in Europe, where they settled. In 1958, Edith married her Italian agent, Silvio Catalano, and would become a familiar face in Italian movies and TV. In *Una Vita*, Sordi introduces her as “Signora Peters Sisters.”

RIALTO PICTURES

“The gold standard of reissue distributors” (Kenneth Turan, *Los Angeles Times*), Rialto was founded in 1997 by Bruce Goldstein, when he realized that so many important classic films had no distribution in the U.S., with prints either impossible to get or unavailable to repertory theaters and arthouses.

In 1998, a year after the company’s founding, Goldstein was joined by partner Adrienne Halpern, an entertainment attorney and cinephile. In 2002, Eric Di Bernardo, a seasoned repertory film booker and classic film aficionado, became the company’s National Sales Director. Dave Franklin is the company’s marketing and distribution manager.

Since its founding 25 years ago, Rialto has reissued over 100 films in new 35mm prints or digital restorations, with fresh new marketing (trailers, posters, etc.) and, in the case of foreign language films, brand new translations and subtitles.

Rialto’s past releases have included Renoir’s *Grand Illusion*; Fellini’s *Nights of Cabiria* (for the first time in its “director’s cut”); Jules Dassin’s *Rififi*;

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

Godard's *Breathless*, *Contempt*, *Band of Outsiders*, *Pierrot Le Fou*, *Masculine Feminine*, *Le Petit Soldat*, *Alphaville*, and the U.S. premiere of his *Made in U.S.A.*; Carol Reed's *The Third Man*; Kurosawa's *Ran*; Jacques Becker's *Touchez pas au Grisbi*; Bresson's *Au Hasard Balthazar* and *Diary of a Country Priest*; Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* and *Hiroshima Mon Amour*; the Ealing classics *The Ladykillers* and *Kind Hearts and Coronets*; the U.S. premiere of the original, uncut Japanese version of *Godzilla*; the U.S. premiere of the complete, uncut version of Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Cercle Rouge*; the U.S. premiere of Melville's *Army of Shadows*, which became the most critically acclaimed film of 2006 (and winner of the New York Film Critics Circle Best Foreign Language Film award, 37 years after it was made); the U.S. premiere of Claude Sautet's *Max et les Ferrailleurs*; and the U.S. premiere of the uncut version of Francesco Rosi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli*.

Current and recent releases include Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation*, in new 35mm prints personally supervised by the director, and new 4K restorations of Joseph Losey's *The Servant* and *Mr. Klein*; Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria*, Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*; Mike Nichols' *Carnal Knowledge*; Godard's *Breathless*; and Jacques Deray's *La Piscine* (starring Alain Delon and Romy Schneider), which became a post-pandemic repertory sensation. The enormously successful 2021 revival of *La Piscine* in America was covered by the *New York Times* "Style" section, *The Times* of London, *Le Figaro* in France, and French public radio.

Following the theatrical success of Rialto's reissue of *The Conversation*, director Francis Ford Coppola granted Rialto theatrical distribution rights to films in his Zoetrope library, including *Apocalypse Now: Final Cut*, *Tucker: The Man and His Dream*, *B'twixt Now and Sunrise*, and *Dementia 13: Director's Cut*.

Rialto has been given a special Heritage Award from the National Society of Film Critics in both 1999 and 2019, and in 2000 received a special award from the New York Film Critics Circle, presented to Goldstein and Halpern by Jeanne Moreau. The two co-presidents have each received the French Order of Chevalier of Arts and Letters.

UNA VITA DIFFICILE

Rialto Pictures

In 2013, Goldstein became the first person to receive a Lifetime Achievement Award for Film from George Eastman House. He has also received career awards from Anthology Film Archive and the San Francisco Film Festival (Mel Novikoff Award).

Goldstein and Halpern take an active part in the subtitling of Rialto's foreign language films, working alongside such collaborators as Lenny Borger, Jerry Rudes, Fiamma Arditì, Giulia D'Agnolo, and Michael F. Moore. Goldstein has lectured on "The Art of Subtitling" at Film Forum, the TCM Classic Film Festival, and the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts & Sciences in Los Angeles. He created a 20-minute film on the subject for the Criterion/Rialto Blu-ray release of *Panique*, which can now be seen on the Criterion Channel.

For its 10th anniversary in 2007, Rialto was honored with a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Similar tributes were held at George Eastman House in Rochester, the AFI Silver Theater in Washington, and the SIFF Theater in Seattle. The Criterion Collection also issued a special gift box set. Rialto's 15th anniversary was observed in 2012 with a series at the Film Society of Lincoln Center. Rialto's 20th anniversary was celebrated at the Museum of the Moving Image and the American Cinematheque.

Since 2012, Rialto has been the main U.S. theatrical and non-theatrical representative of the Studiocanal library of 6,500 international titles, one of the world's most important film catalogues.

In April 2023, the Museum of Modern Art in New York will host its second tribute to Rialto, in honor of the company's twenty-fifth anniversary.

rialtopictures.com

Annotations and new material written by Bruce Goldstein

Pressbook edited by Dave Franklin, Bruce Goldstein, and Adrienne Halpern

New material © 2023 Rialto Pictures LLC