



The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946-1973 (Wisconsin Film Studies)

Tino Balio

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Largely shut out of American theaters since the 1920s, foreign films such as *Open City*, *Bicycle Thief*, *Rashomon*, *The Seventh Seal*, *Breathless*, *La Dolce Vita* and *L'Avventura* played after World War II in a growing number of art houses around the country and created a small but influential art film market devoted to the acquisition, distribution, and exhibition of foreign-language and English-language films produced abroad. Nurtured by successive waves of imports from Italy, Great Britain, France, Sweden, Japan, and the Soviet Bloc, the renaissance was kick-started by independent distributors working out of New York; by the 1960s, however, the market had been subsumed by Hollywood.

From Roberto Rossellini's *Open City* in 1946 to Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* in 1973, Tino Balio tracks the critical reception in the press of such filmmakers as François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Tony Richardson, Ingmar Bergman, Akira Kurosawa, Luis Buñuel, Satyajit Ray, and Milos Forman. Their releases paled in comparison to Hollywood fare at the box office, but their impact on American film culture was enormous. The reception accorded to art house cinema attacked motion picture censorship, promoted the director as auteur, and celebrated film as an international art. Championing the cause was the new "cinophile" generation, which was mostly made up of college students under thirty.

The fashion for foreign films depended in part on their frankness about sex. When Hollywood abolished the Production Code in the late 1960s, American-made films began to treat adult themes with maturity and candor. In this new environment, foreign films lost their cachet and the art film market went into decline.

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