



Amarcord (15)
25th April 2005

Director: **Federico Fellini**
Italy/France 1973

Running time : 127 minutes

LEADING PLAYERS: **Pupella Maggio** (Titta's mother), **Armando Brancia** (Titta's father), **Magali Noël** (Gradisca, the hairdresser), **Ciccio Ingrassia** (Teo, Titta's uncle), **Nando Orfei** (Pataca, Titta's uncle).

SCRIPT: **Federico Fellini, Tonino Guerra**. PHOTOGRAPHY: **Giuseppe Rotunno**. EDITING: **Ruggero Mastroianni**. MUSIC: **Nino Rota**.

Fellini was a cartoonist first; indeed he designed many of his films' posters. Remember this when looking for a clear dramatic structure in his works: you won't find one. Even the early neo-realist influenced features (*La Strada, I Vitelloni*) are sluggish and episodic.

The subject matter of *Amarcord* is life in his hometown of Rimini during the Thirties. The title means "I remember" in the local dialect. But if you've not seen a Fellini film before, you could find it bewildering, even exasperating. So I thought it might be helpful to provide a checklist of things to look for in the maestro's work, things that make it uniquely his own, and make up its charm.

- Fat ladies: Fellini had a predilection for well-proportioned women and something of a mammary obsession.
- Voice of la Mama: this often comes from 'off' and (cf. the same in Woody Allen) is the voice of solicitude and security.
- The father figure: he is invariably suited, in a provincial Sunday best way, dignified and rather sad. He has worked for his family, but not necessarily found fulfilment.
- Corrupt officialdom: self-important town councillors, mayors, usually figures of fun rather than menace.
- Pretentious intellectuals: invariably filmed in ugly close-up, they psychoanalyse and look for influences instead of feeling with their hearts.
- Innocence: this is often associated with childhood, though the adult Fellini hero retains many childlike qualities, not least a helplessness and lack of direction.
- The sea: also linked to innocence - the remembered childhood trip to the beach - the sea offers escape from the moral and social constraints of city life. Many key Fellini scenes take place there: the sighting of the girl at the end of *La Dolce Vita*, the curvaceous dancer in *8½*, much of *The White Sheik*.

- Circuses: clowns, strongmen, magicians, charlatans... Fellini in *8½* reduced life to the happy-sad round dance of a circus (more optimistic than Bergman's *Dance of Death*). The metaphor and the atmosphere pervade many of his films, and the characters are larger than life. There is a sense also in which the megaphone-wielding director is the circus master and Rota his band.
- Tarts: women in Fellini come as mamas, downtrodden wives, childlike waifs and mysterious goddesses. There are also just straightforward tarts. Watch for the eye makeup!
- Dancing: already mentioned, and also related to innocence and freedom.
- The grand visual gesture: Fellini is a master at using sets imaginatively, and almost never realistically. Nearly all his films contain one scene at least where he impresses through his flamboyant *mise en scène*: the Christ arriving by helicopter in *La Dolce Vita*, Casanova and the doll, the spa in *8½*, the catacombs in *Satyricon*, the stage in *City of Women*.

Life for Fellini is a pageant, a gallery of grotesques, where it is not always easy to pick out one's true path. Memory, sexual desire and the occasional glimpse of God's grace provide points of orientation for his lost heroes.

David Clare