

Nine (12) USA 2009

19 September 2016

DIRECTOR: **Rob Marshall**

Running time: 113 minutes

LEADING PLAYERS: **Daniel Day-Lewis** (Guido Contini), **Marion Cotillard** (Luisa Contini), **Penélope Cruz** (Carla), **Judi Dench** (Lilli), **Nicole Kidman** (Claudia), **Sophia Loren** (Mamma), **Kate Hudson** (Stephanie).

SCRIPT: **Michael Tolkin** and **Anthony Minghella**. PHOTOGRAPHY: **Dion Beebe**. EDITING: **Claire Simpson** and **Wyatt Smith**. MUSIC: **Andrea Guerra**.

Rob Marshall is a choreographer with an impressive background on Broadway who saw the cinema as the means to realize the potential of musical theatre and spread his wings as a director. His *Memoirs of a Geisha* divided critics in glamorising the rags to riches life of a celebrated geisha with a visual flamboyance that treated his subjects as the supermodels of their time. Welcome to the world of *Nine*!

Nine began life as Fellini's *Eight and a Half* (*Otto e Mezzo*, 1963), then was first recreated as a musical by Maury Yeston in 1973, and finally produced on Broadway in 1982 after the book was rewritten by Arthur Kopit. Yeston was attracted to the idea of a second male adolescence and the multifaceted nature of women's influence on our lives. After a revival on Broadway in 2003, and a growing international profile, interest in a film version grew, and the Weinstein Company picked up the rights, repeating their association with Marshall on *Chicago*.

Fellini's original dealt with a film director in crisis during the making, or genesis, of his new film. The film is profoundly self-reflexive in a way that only European auteurist movies of the 1960s could be. The title itself referred to the number of films Fellini had made by then, and its leading actor, Marcello Mastroianni, was rapidly becoming a proxy for the director in his work; a Wayne to his Ford, if you like. As his attention is divided between the distractions of the spa, where he is supposedly undergoing a cure for stress, the entreaties of his producer, and the demands of his wife and mistress, Guido's mind drifts into reminiscence and fantasy. Ultimately, he runs away with his new star – and muse – only to be caught up with by his cast and crew for a carnivalesque finale, by the end of which, lo and behold, we have a film. No need for the imposition

of plot and structure; the creative process is art in itself.

Yeston says he changed the title to *Nine* because adding music was like 'half a number more'. It is also the age of Guido the child in the movie. Coincidentally, though I have found no one else to refer to this, it is furthermore the number of roles allotted to women by Yeston in his answer to the question, "What are women to men?" 'They are our mothers, our sisters, our teachers, our temptresses, our judges, our nurses, our wives, our mistresses, our muses.' In any event, Yeston's music and lyrics certainly add an irresistible dimension and dynamism to Fellini's at times sluggish original.

The approach is logical enough: the crises and flights of fancy of the beleaguered Guido are presented as big, brash, stops out production numbers. It is anything but subtle, and you will most likely love it or loathe it, but that is where Day-Lewis's characteristically nuanced performance provides the needed ballast. He may seem like an irredeemably selfish personage, but remember we are inside his head, and that is what the world looks like, especially to an artist.

The female cast is a bucket list of dream performers, and their numbers are presented with an unabashed eroticism verging on objectification only an openly gay director could get away with! Taken all together, *Nine* is an extraordinary amalgam of ideas, talent and fantastic numbers, and a reminder of what the cinema can do.

David Clare