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CAST

Conductor **Balduin Baas**
Harp player **Clara Colosimo**
Piano player **Elizabeth Labi**
Bassoon player **Ronaldo Bonacchi**
Cello player **Ferdinando Vilella**
Bass tuba player **Franco Javarone (as Giovanni Javarone)**
First violin **David Mauhsell**
Second violin **Francesco Aluigi**
Oboe player **Andy Miller**
Flute player **Sibyl Mostert**
Trumpet player **Franco Mazzieri**
Trombone player **Daniele Pagani**
Violin player **Luigi Uzzo**
Clarinet player **Cesare Martignoni**
Copyist **Umberto Zuanelli**
Head of orchestra **Filippo Trincia**
Union man **Claudio Ciocca**
Violin player **Angelica Hansen**
Violin player **Heinz Kreuger**

CREW

Directed by **Federico Fellini**
Written by **Federico Fellini** and **Brunello Rondi**
Producer **Fabio Storelli**
Production Supervisor **Lamberto Pippia**
Music **Nino Rota**
Conducted by **Carlo Savina**
Production Design **Dante Ferretti**
Director of Photography **Giuseppe Rotunno a.i.c.**
Editor **Ruggero Mastroianni**
Production Design **Dante Ferretti**
Set Decoration by **Bruno Cesari**
Costume Design by **Gabriella Pescucci**



IN A NUTSHELL

by Adrian Martin

Orchestra Rehearsal is politics – particularly Italian politics – according to Federico Fellini. It is an allegory, but an abstract, compacted one, boiled down to a single situation. Fellini gets everything into this nutshell.

A renowned but never named conductor (Balduin Baas) tries to work through the score of an equally unidentified classical work (in reality, the final composition by Nino Rota for Fellini's cinema), but is beset by all manner of interruptions, squabbles, challenges.

The film wheels through several variants on the most basic situations or relations of political power. For a while, the musicians form one united 'body' of obedient citizens. But then they increasingly revolt, spurred on by the testy, outspoken representatives of their trade union.

Having passed over from passivity to action, the workers start arguing with one another, breaking off into sects. This creates radical militancy in some, and jaded indifference in others. Differences in class, culture, age, gender and education inevitably assert themselves and become bones of contention.

We get the entire gamut of positions, reactions, impulsive behaviours. And, as the situation inexorably breaks down, chaos becomes a kind of carnival, harbouring every kind of illicit, escapist activity.

Fellini's political references are not specific. He's taking in and condensing an entire *gestalt* or mood of a turbulent decade. Earlier in the same year of 1978 in which he made *Orchestra Rehearsal*, Italy had just breathlessly witnessed, plastered across all media, the saga of the kidnapping, and eventual murder, of former Prime Minister Aldo Moro by the terrorist Red Brigades – an event later dramatised, and reimagined in dreamlike terms, by Marco Bellocchio in *Good Morning, Night* (*Buongiorno, notte*, 2003).

On the one hand, Fellini's figure of the conductor has an almost nostalgic, even tragic aura: he stands for a sense of order and decency that has been lost, trampled by the rising barbarians of leftist ideology. On the other hand, however – and just as significantly – this conductor is also a figure of tyranny incarnate, breaking out in the film's final moments (just as Peter Sellers did in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*, [1964]) into harsh German



invective, an implacable reminder of Nazi Occupation as well as home grown Fascism in Italian history, with its attendant miseries.

A recurring, unifying motif of *Orchestra Rehearsal* perfectly captures this complex ambivalence. We hear with increasing frequency, as do the characters, the muffled sound of what seem to be nearby, approaching explosions. Is it the sound of the type of surprise, terrorist attack that bedevils our world still today? Some viewers and commentators are happy to assume that this is Fellini's intent – and thus either praise him as a wise sage of the political scene, or damn him as an ageing, reactionary conservative.

But when we at last see the source of this sound, it is not a bomb but a wrecking ball – hardly the typical tool of furtive terrorists. It is the sign, rather, of relentless urban development, of governmental power, of what Walter Benjamin called the “destructive character” of a compulsively reformist, managerial middle class. Not the opposition to society, therefore, but society itself, nakedly displayed in a single, ugly object. Fellini was always a dab hand at finding such shocking, audiovisual condensations of big, unruly, ambivalent ideas.

In his brilliant book *Crowds and Power* (1960), the novelist Elias Canetti declares: “There is no more obvious expression of power than the performance of a conductor.” The music produced as a result is almost incidental, a mere pretext for the theatrical ritual or “spiritual economy” of this main man who stands (while all others are seated) and commands the attention of both players and listeners. “He has the power of life and death over the voices of the instruments ... The code of laws, in the form of the score, is in his hands.” The ecstatic feeling of celebrity experienced by the conductor is addictive: “The applause he receives is the ancient salute to the victor, and the magnitude of his victory is measured by its volume.”

For Canetti, the entire ‘show’ of the conductor, spellbinding the orchestra and the audience alike, is an ominous sign of the larger political world that contains it, whether nominally capitalistic or totalitarian in nature. “The conductor is a leader”, he suggests, one who carries the audience, at his back, into the fields of battle – and who can bring about the execution of terrible orders with the slightest flick of his all-powerful wrist. In this sense, the conductor figure is a reassuringly nostalgic symbol of the workings of power – a holdover of charismatic presence in a modern world that increasingly runs on media transmissions, invisible cues and phantom commands.

For Fellini, as for Canetti, the music that would logically seem to be the reason for, and focus of, a rehearsal, is secondary. Rota, obligingly, gave him a piece of music that is suitably attractive but generic – and must weather many repetitions, in tiny portions, that grind

down whatever magic or charm it possesses on first listen. In many ways, Fellini reproduces elements of the social, orchestral ritual that Canetti evokes – but he also deliberately, brutally amputates it, bringing to it a very modern and un-nostalgic regard.

This is a rehearsal, not a performance, so there is no audience present, no applause or veneration. The space in which everybody labours resembles a claustrophobic, isolated bunker. Glimpses of the conductor's ‘private room’ bestow no particular glamour or celebrity status upon him. Fellini strips the situation down so as to better dissect and examine it – for him, it's an almost minimalist film, the polar opposite (in this respect, at least) of *8½* (1963) or *Amarcord* (1973).

Fellini was himself the grand conductor of a particularly dynamic, volatile ambivalence – the drive that powers all his best films. Especially from *La Dolce Vita* (1960) onward, in *Juliet of the Spirits* (*Giulietta degli spiriti*, 1965) or *Fellini's Casanova* (*Il Casanova di Federico Fellini*, 1976), he became fond of arranging vulgar scenes of contemporary decadence (in the aristocratic upper classes, in the art world, in mass media and show business), underwritten by a tone of moral disapproval.

And yet, at the same time, these scenes are so vividly and energetically brought to life that the films unmistakably call out to us (as Sam Roddie has argued) to join the dance and enjoy the apocalyptic conflagration. It is this very Felliniesque ambivalence that is carried on today by Paolo Sorrentino in movies such as *The Great Beauty* (*La grande bellezza*, 2013).

The nutshell situation of *Orchestra Rehearsal* resembles a TV comedy-sketch set-up – complete with game-changing variations at key points of the anecdote. Like many of Fellini's projects beginning with *A Director's Notebook* in 1969 (made as part of *NBC Experiment in Television* [1967–71]) – and, indeed, like much of the most celebrated Italian art cinema by Bernardo Bertolucci, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Carmelo Bene and others – *Orchestra Rehearsal* was partly financed by Italian television, with which Fellini had an ongoing, complex, ambivalent relationship. As with so many things that came into his life and drew his fascinated attention, he both loved and hated it – mixed feelings that played themselves out, especially, in *Ginger and Fred* (*Ginger e Fred*, 1986).

But the giddy, split-second confusions of actuality and fiction, “live” and pre-recorded material, on-camera and off-camera activities, responses of studio audiences and home audiences – all those mutations of audiovisual presentation and media technology that Umberto Eco dubbed in 1983 as Italy's garishly revolutionary era of “Neo TV” – added up to a type of enchanted surrealism that Fellini himself foresaw and conjured in *Toby Dammit*,



his elaborate contribution to the Edgar Allan Poe omnibus film *Spirits of the Dead (Histoires extraordinaires, 1968)*.

The single, reduced set of *Orchestra Rehearsal* in which its action takes place; the mosaic construction of one small detail placed after another; its network of mundane intrigues between multiple, starkly stereotyped or caricatured characters; the gradual alterations of mood leading to a generalised catastrophe: all of this tips a hat, as it were, to the enabling medium of TV and its popular genres like soap opera.

Yet no one 'does' TV quite like Fellini. From a point in the early 1960s, Fellini had become fond of reflexive counterpoints built into the action of his films: reporters writing stories and gathering interviews, movies being shot within the movies. The technique of using documentary reportage – from a film or TV camera zipping around everywhere asking questions of creators and participants – became his favourite device of this sort, evident in works of the early 1970s such as *The Clowns (I Clowns, 1970)* and *Roma (1972)*. By the time of *Orchestra Rehearsal* and the later *Intervista (1987)*, Fellini had honed this idea to its finest point.

There is some sort of TV documentary being made during *Orchestra Rehearsal*, but we see absolutely none of the paraphernalia associated with a film crew: the personnel, the technology, the cables, reels or tapes, and so on. Not even a single camera or microphone belonging to this 'film within the film' ever becomes visible. And not a single person, either: these internal filmmakers function, for all the world, like phantoms. Not even an off-screen voice-prompt from an imaginary interviewer is needed. It suffices merely that an actor look into and acknowledge the lens, and then a special light unfussily shines on them: that's all Fellini needs to make this conceit work for him.

This is a form of creative artifice that declares itself as such, in the simplest, most efficient and economical way. Once established, it can be used and reused, varied and elaborated, discarded and renewed as the material demands – much like in a cartoon. Fellini was always in search of the aesthetic of this kind of artifice, one that would allow him maximum flexibility, variety and inventiveness.

We see the trace of this, too, in the special 'musical' challenge of *Orchestra Rehearsal's* premise. Are all the actors trained musicians? Of course not. Will Fellini try to make them all successfully 'fake' a few bars of bowing strings or performing piano glissandos or trilling a flute – as almost any other filmmaker would do? No. An ever-repeated, patently unreal gesture that signifies 'playing music' will, for the most part, do the trick from one end of the film to the other.

Rohdie, in his *Fellini Lexicon* of 2002, grasps this tricky point well: "Fellini's documentaries are false in the sense of being staged, but true because the staging is acknowledged." Reflexive devices are not excuses for baroque, convoluted, guessing games in Fellini's cinema, as they are in so many films that were inspired (well or badly) by his example. In *Orchestra Rehearsal*, the ways and means of artifice are patent, palpable, shown – at the very same moment that they vanish, flying off the screen in their minimalist, no-nonsense purity.

So, in a sense, Fellini cannily works within the constraints of TV here. At the same time, he never stops rocking the stylistic boat, marshalling formidable energies that constantly threaten to burst out onto a bigger stage, and a bigger screen. *Orchestra Rehearsal* does not simply take place in a confined area; it offers the truly cinematic spectacle of a dynamic saturation of space: a place that begins bare, then fills up, slowly gaining a lively 'character' all its own, before emptying out again ...

This is exactly the type of arc of mood and event that Fellini had brought to so many of his previous settings in cinema, whether indoors or outdoors – and from his very first, ground breaking features of the 1950s, such as *I Vitelloni (1953)* and *Nights of Cabiria (Le notti di Cabiria, 1957)*. Parties, weddings, dances, funerals, press conferences – taken from their modest point of embryo right through intensive madness all the way to ultimate, usually melancholic exhaustion.

Is it any wonder, then, that *Orchestra Rehearsal*, sometimes referred to as a "small television film", culminates in the devastation of a wall, and the liberation of space? The orchestra comes, in the final moments, under the tyrannical control of the conductor once more, and the score again offers the pretext for a social ritual. And yet the artistic will, the élan of Federico Fellini surpasses all these barriers. Let the music play ...

© Adrian Martin, September 2017

*Adrian Martin is a freelance arts critic and audiovisual essayist living in Spain. His most recent book is *Mise en scène and Film Style: From Classical Hollywood to New Media Art (Palgrave, 2014)*.*





IN THE PICTURE: ORCHESTRAL REHEARSAL

By Tony Mitchell

This news feature and interview with Fellini was originally published in *Sight and Sound* magazine, Volume 48, Number 1, Winter 1978/79. Reprinted with kind permission.

Hailed by *La Repubblica* as Fellini's first political film, *Prova d'Orchestra (Orchestral Rehearsal)* was previewed last October at no less a venue than the Quirinale, seat of the President of the Italian Republic, Sandro Pertini, who warmly applauded what Fellini refers to as a 'Filmetto' or a 'Special' - his first film made exclusively for television. Shot in 16 days in an exposure studio at Cinecittà, lasting one hour, with deliberately vacuous and derisive music by Nino Rota, and made on a budget "no more substantial than a restaurant bill", *Orchestral Rehearsal* appears at first sight to be exactly what its title suggests.

"I've had in mind for some time," Fellini explains, "to portray an orchestral rehearsal. Every time I've had occasion to assist in musical inserts in my films, I'm always fascinated, astonished and even somewhat moved observing how out of a series of rehearsals, complete with chattering, irritations and personal problems, in an atmosphere of confusion and disorganisation, it's possible to bring fifty or sixty people into participating, each at a precise moment, in the abstract, mathematical and totally harmonious discourse which is music."

The musicians arrive in dribs and drabs at a small, smoke-filled bar adjacent to the rehearsal room. They order coffee, beer and sandwiches. "There's a sleepy, noisy, school classroom atmosphere," says Fellini, "halfway between a union protest meeting, a jury gathering and a sightseeing outing. They talk about the cost of living and what they had for dinner the night before. Rather than any story lines there is just their conversation, which just about amounts to the same thing."

The intention of this 'Special' - "at least the original intention," Fellini adds, tongue in cheek - "was to recount the transformation of the members of the orchestra. We have seen them at work, indifferent and hostile, weighed down by routine, gossiping and arguing, childish overbearing, arrogant and drowsy. And now, through the exertions of their job, the acceptance of limitations, working together punctiliously, meticulously and obstinately under the guidance of the conductor, these same members of the orchestra are transformed, as if by a magic spell, their foreheads glistening with perspiration, eyes glued

to the score or the podium, into something quite beautiful, at one with their instruments, united in the expression of a hard-won harmony.”

Fellini's description of the film's intentions belies somewhat the political resonances of the final result. The long-awaited “magic spell” doesn't come about, the conductor blows his top, the union representatives interrupt to demand a double break because the instrumentalists have been disturbed by the conductor's harsh words. After the break, things begin to fall apart. The room turns into chaos, graffiti has been scrawled on the walls, and the musicians shout slogans which echo round the hall. Portraits of Mozart and Beethoven are splattered with mud and the rehearsal erupts into an oratorio of obscenities, the plebeians rehearsing the uprising. An enormous demolition ball suddenly appears and smashes the walls to smithereens. The instrumentalists then gradually re-emerge from the rubble and resume their positions. The conductor howls, “Da capo, signori!” and the rehearsal continues.

Visually, Fellini regards the film as a study of faces, and he has used no well-known actors for his fictitious documentary. For the role of the conductor, he tracked down the owner of a face sent to him in a tiny photograph from Holland some four years ago. This operation led to what Fellini describes as “one of the most clamorous examples of the mystery of photogenia, perhaps the most exciting in more than thirty years' work.” The photogenic Dutchman was “a catastrophe, the least musical creature in the world, an olive tree would have done better.” But once the cameras started rolling, “my maestro was perfect, stupendous, the most masterly maestro of all maestros. It was the most movingly apt face for a conductor, suffused with the vibrant fanaticism of one invested with the superior and unimpeachable quality of being a conductor.”

In the prestigious context of the Quirinale, watched by Pertini, Andreotti and the director and staff of RAI, *Prova d'Orchestra* took on the air of satirical fable, a cartoon allegory of the malaise in Italian politics, illustrating the impossibility of a discordant, politically heterogeneous government functioning harmoniously, while determined to keep up the formal appearance of doing so. “I didn't want to make a political film,” Fellini demurs, “it's more of an ethical apologue. What I was after was for anyone seeing this film to feel somewhat stricken, as if by an illness.”

Orchestral Rehearsal is scheduled for Italian television transmission shortly. Fellini claims he never watches television, or rather, that he doesn't even know which knob to press to turn it off when his wife leaves it on. How, then, does he approach this unfamiliar medium? “The ‘filmetto’ is halfway between an interview and a confession - these seem to me the chief characteristics of the intimate and colloquial language of television. As far as lighting

was concerned, I had to forget about the cinema. Cinema lighting is rarely reproducible in television, and when it does occur it runs the risk of altering and distorting what's being projected. In television you can't allude or suggest or try to achieve a more emotional, unconscious rapport with the spectator. Everything needs to be seen clearly and closely. Which means we are somewhere halfway between a newsreel and a documentary on the behaviour of insects.”





ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Orchestra Rehearsal was exclusively restored by Arrow Films and is presented in the 1.78:1 aspect ratio with mono sound.

The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 2K resolution by RAI. The film was graded and restored on the Nucoda grading system at R3store Studios, London. Thousands of instances of dirt, debris, scratches and other instances of film wear were repaired or removed through a combination of digital restoration tools and techniques. Some instances of minor damage remain, in keeping with the condition of the original materials.

The original mono soundtrack was remastered and delivered by RAI. All original film and audio elements for *Orchestra Rehearsal* were provided by RAI.

There are times in which the film's audio synch will appear loose against the picture, due to the fact that the soundtrack was recorded entirely in post production. This is correct and as per the film's original release.

Restoration Supervised by James White, Arrow Films
R3store Studios Gerry Gedge, Jo Griffin, Andrew O'Hagan, Rich Watson
RAI Marcello Strippoli Caracci, Alessandra Cordone, Alessandra Sottile

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs and Booklet Produced by James Blackford
Executive Producers Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni
Technical Producer James White
QC Manager Nora Mehenni
Blu-ray Mastering Digital Cinema United
Artwork and Design Obviously Creative

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, John Baxter, Richard Dyer, Chris Edwards, Adrian Martin, Anthony Nield,
Jon Robertson, Rob Winter, Don Young



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