The First Edition of the Festival of New Italian American Cinema is over... BIS!!!

Damiano Beltrami (October 02, 2008)

After four days of movies, conferences, and debates, the first festival dedicated to the "New Italian America Cinema" ended on Saturday. Its success encourages hopes for a second edition next year.

The festival of New Italian American Cinema organized by the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute [2] ended last Saturday, closing a well-attended event that presented over 30 movies by young directors.
“It’s the adjective ‘new’ that really sparked the choice of the films,” said Professor Anthony J. Tamburri, Dean of the Calandra Institute. “We wanted to show what the younger and up-and-coming generation of Italian filmmakers out there is doing.”
Family issues dominated many of the films. For example, in the documentary “It’s One Family Knock On Wood” by Tony De Nonno [3], we meet puppeteers Mike and Aida Manteo as well as their

children and grandchildren, a family bound together by a Sicilian folk tradition that dates back to the 16th century.
Stories of gender and sexuality were also well represented. The short documentary “Mother Tongue: Italian American Sons and Mothers” by Marylou Tibaldi-Bongiorno [4] features seven Italian American men – including Martin Scorsese and Rudy Giuliani -- who describe their special, complex and at times hilarious relationships with their mammas, who are excellent at instilling fear, insecurity, low self-esteem and guilt in their sons. Or consider “Household Saints” by Nancy Savoca, in which three generations of Italian American women struggle to live in a rather macho post-World War II Little Italy in New York.
The new generation of Italian film makers seems to put much more emphasis on the working class than the previous one. This can be seen, for instance, in “Romance and Cigarettes [5]” by John Turturro, a musical love story depicting the troubled marriage and family life of Nick, an ironworker, his wife Kitty, a dressmaker, and their three wayward daughters.
In the final roundtable of the Festival, directors Gianfranco Norelli, Nancy Savoca and Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno discussed the Italianness of their stories, agreeing that they were interested in telling universal stories, not just Italian American ones.
“The greatest response that I got [to her film “True Love”] was how universal the story was,” said Nancy Savoca with a smile. “After the screening in China a young man came up to me and said that in his country weddings work exactly the same as the one shown in the story set in New York, in the Bronx. This was my intent. I wanted to say, look, we’re all the same.”
Finally, the crucial issue of immigration, both in America and in today’s Italy, was touched upon, particularly in the discussion of Gianfranco Norelli’s documentary “Pane Amaro [6],” about the persecution and racism that Italian Americans and Italians suffered from 1880 to World War II.
“After ‘Pane Amaro’ was broadcasted on Italian television, the Italian media were shocked by how little is known in Italy about Italian immigration in America,” said Norelli. “This is partly the reason why the documentary was done. Discrimination against foreigners in Italy increased in the last decade. For instance, [Giancarlo Gentilini] the mayor of Vicenza, a town in the North of Italy where a great number of North African workers are employed in factories, was once reported commenting on them with a group of friends in the following way: ‘Could we use them, dressed as rabbits, to have hunters’ exercises?’”

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