

Austin Film Society

Essential Cinema

AFTER 8 1/2: THE CREATIVE IN CRISIS

May 1-29, 2014

Thursdays at 7:30pm

AFS at the Marchesa (6226 Middle Fiskville Rd)

Federico Fellini was flummoxed. After the international acclaim that followed LA DOLCE VITA, he was unsure what to do next. What emerged from his creative restlessness and confusion was 8 1/2, a sprightly mix of Jungian dream, flashback, and nuts-and-bolts, “let’s make a movie” procedural shaped by his own raw autobiography (the title tallies the six features and three shorts – or “halves” – that came prior). What Fellini couldn’t have known then was that 8 1/2 would influence multiple generations of filmmakers, many of whom were similarly confounded by a starburst of early success and the crippling stress of high expectations that followed. 8 1/2 may be an intensely personal work, but its truths are universal: It can be brutalizing, isolating work, making art, but what comfort in knowing others are just as embattled. – Kimberley Jones (Managing Editor, Austin Chronicle), guest curator

\$8 General Admission

\$5 AFS Make and Watch members and Students with School IDs

Free admission for AFS Love and Premiere members

May 1, 8 1/2

Directed by Federico Fellini

Written by Federico Fellini, Ennio Flaiano, Tullio Pinelli, and Brunello Rondi

Cinematography by Gianni Di Venanzo

Editing by Leo Cattozzo

Cast: Marcello Mastroianni, Claudia Cardinale, Anouk Aimée, Sandro Milo, Rossella Falk, Barbara Steele, Eddra Gale, Bruno Agostino

Italy, 1963, Corinth Films, DCP, B&W, 138 min.

Italian with English subtitles

Everybody wants to know what Guido’s next movie is about, from his producer to his doctor to his mistress and, most especially, the creatively sapped Guido himself.

Director Guido Anselmi (played by Fellini's frequent collaborator Marcello Mastroianni) is being treated for exhaustion at a spa resort, but there's little rest for the weary when he brings his entire production team along with him. A harried producer, an actress needing direction, a demanding mistress and scornful wife, even the Church – everybody wants answers from Guido, but he's just as lost. At the start of production, Fellini posted a note next to the camera to remind himself that the film was meant to be a comedy – something that's sometimes forgotten when talking about the film's preoccupations with sex, death, and religion. Dark stuff, maybe, but the film's closing parade – initially intended only for the trailer – is Fellini's tender, ebullient tribute to the circus that is life.

May 8, ALEX IN WONDERLAND

Directed by Paul Mazursky

Written by Paul Mazursky and Larry Tucker

Cinematography by László Kovács

Editing by Stuart H. Pappé

Cast: Donald Sutherland, Ellen Burstyn, Meg Mazursky, Glenna Sargent, Viola Spolin, Andre Philippe, Michael Lerner, Joan Delaney, Federico Fellini, Jeanne Moreau, Paul Mazusky

USA, 1970, Warner Bros, digital, color, 110 min.

Struggling to find a follow-up project to his smash-hit first film, Alex drops acid, goes house-hunting with his exasperated wife, and turns to his hero Fellini for inspiration.

Unsure which direction to go in after the rapturous reception of his debut film, the counterculture classic BOB & CAROL & TED & ALICE, Paul Mazursky channeled that

uncertainty into his autobiographical second film, about a filmmaker, Alex (Sutherland), who is bursting with ideas but paralyzed by indecision. An open homage to 8 1/2 (Fellini cameos) and a very funny picture of Hollywood in transition, ALEX IN WONDERLAND splices together elaborate scenes from the movies in Alex's mind with the touching mundanities of his home life. Mazursky – a sometimes-actor who first appeared in Kubrick's FEAR AND DESIRE – has a terrific bit part as a glib producer promising riches and glory to the more noble-minded Alex.

May 15, STARDUST MEMORIES

Written and directed by Woody Allen

Cinematography by Gordon Willis

Editing by Susan E. Morse

Cast: Woody Allen, Charlotte Rampling, Jessica Harper, Marie-Christine Barrault, Tony Roberts, Daniel Stern, Amy Wright, Helen Hanft, John Rothman

USA, 1980, MGM/UA, digital, B&W, 80 min.

A successful comedic director wants to transition into serious drama, but his fans – and the studio – prefer the “earlier, funny ones.”

Woody Allen followed up his first straight drama, the Bergmanesque INTERIORS, with the poetic and surreal STARDUST MEMORIES. Based on Allen's real-life trip in the Seventies to a weekend retrospective of his work put on by the legendary film critic Judith Crist, STARDUST MEMORIES weaves together flashbacks, fantasy sequences, and clips from the (fictional) films of comedic director Sandy Bates (Allen). Besieged by fans who idolize and attack him in equal measures, hounded by his studio to reshoot the downer ending of his latest film, and haunted by the memory of an old love (Rampling), Sandy is on the knife's edge of a nervous breakdown.

May 22, ALL THAT JAZZ

Directed by Bob Fosse

Written by Bob Fosse and Robert Alan Aurthur

Cinematography by Giuseppe Rotunno

Editing by Alan Heim

Cast: Roy Scheider, Jessica Lange, Leland Palmer, Ann Reinking, Cliff Gorman, Ben Vereen, Erzsebet Foldi

USA, 1979, Criterion Pictures USA, DCP, color, 123 min.

Overworked, sick with stress, and juggling the demands of the many women in his life, film director and choreographer Joe Gideon is in a race against the clock to finish his latest movie and debut a new Broadway show before his heart gives out.

Is art worth dying for? Bob Fosse seemed to think so, and so too does his alter ego, Joe Gideon (Roy Scheider). ALL THAT JAZZ draws from the beats of Fosse's real life – specifically, simultaneous work on a Lenny Bruce biopic and a Broadway ballet, multiple addictions, and complicated relationships with his ex-wife, girlfriend, daughter, and whichever dancer was warming his bed that night, the combined pressures of which added up to his first heart attack at age 46. The film filters that autobiography into a bedazzling song-and-dance monument to one man's death wish (Jessica Lange costars as a comely angel of death). Hallucinatory, acid-dipped, but studded with moments of profound joyfulness, ALL THAT JAZZ speaks truth to that old saw that "There's no business like show business" – and no showman quite like Bob Fosse.

May 29, SYNECDOCHE, NEW YORK

Written and directed by Charlie Kaufman

Cinematography by Frederick Elmes

Editing by Robert Frazen

Cast: Philip Seymour Hoffman, Catherine Keener, Samantha Morton, Hope Davis, Michelle Williams, Tom Noonan, Dianne Wiest, Jennifer Jason Leigh

USA, 2008, Sony Pictures, 35mm, color, 124 min.

When a regional theatre director receives a genius grant, he undertakes an ambitious and ongoing work of performance art. Trouble is, he doesn't know how to drop the curtain on it.

Playwright Caden Cotard (Hoffman) wants to make a theatre piece that is “big and true and tough,” but his own expectations may be the undoing of him. He spends three decades mounting an epic production of his own life in progress. Over time, the actors become characters in their own right, with actors cast to play them as well. That nesting-egg construct grows even more complicated when the eternally inward-looking Caden awakens to the idea that every story of every person on the planet deserves telling. Initially conceived as a horror movie collaboration with Spike Jonze, SYNECDOCHE, NEW YORK – Kaufman's feature directorial debut – is the purest and most profound distillation yet of Kaufman's view on what it means to make art and to be human – and how the two states are inextricably intertwined.