

La Lollo in Lucca

Recently two Italian news items have marked the end of important eras in the country's history. The first is the arrest of Mafia godfather Matteo Messina Denaro after thirty years either 'on the run' or 'under protection' (pick your own explanation). Undoubtedly, as PM Meloni emphasised, the Mafia is not yet done, as it is now fed by association with international criminality, but its Corleone branch, made famous by the film starring Marlon Brando, has been irremediably damaged.

The second news item, also connected with the film world, concerns the death, aged 95, of cinematic icon Gina Lollobrigida, described as the world's most beautiful woman. Gina (originally Luigia), born in a working class family in the monastery town of Subiaco, was a consummate actress starring in some classic fifties and sixties neo-realist films and continuing to a distinguished career in journalism and photo-reportage despite her sometimes tormented personal life.

Some world cities are irrevocably connected with famous feature films: Salzburg and *The Sound of Music*, Venice and *Don't Look Now* with Julie Christie and *Roman Holiday* starring Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck. But what about Lucca? Is it associated with any memorable movie? Yes it is, starting with *La Provinciale*, filmed in 1952 by Mario Soldati and featuring a fabulous Gina Lollobrigida with Gabriele Ferzetti.

La Provinciale, presented at the 6th Cannes Film Festival where it won an award, is based on the short novel of the same name by Alberto Moravia, published in 1937. It's a tortuous love story set in the streets of Lucca's historic centre and concerns Gemma, the beautiful daughter of a landlady who falls in love with Paolo, the heir of a Count whom she has known since she was a child. When Gemma discovers that the young man turns out to be her brother through her mother's illicit love affair she agrees to marry Franco, a rather boring professor to whom she isn't particularly attracted. Furthermore, in the provincial town (Lucca, strangely, is never mentioned by name in the movie) where she lives with her husband Gemma becomes friends with Countess Elvira, a shady and rather intrusive character who eventually meets the debacle she deserves.

The shots of Lucca street scenes are not many but they are all immediately recognizable to lovers of this stunning city. They range from those opening images shot in a mansion in Via Filzi, to the classic Villa Torrigiani at Camigliano, to the evening when Gina and her lover lean perilously over the city's famous walls, to the Via dei Fossi with its steeply-stepped houses and the animated evening promenade in Via Fillungo. Gina also sets her eyes on the Carli Jewellery shop window with its characteristic carved shutters, there to this day. There are memorable shots too of the passageway leading into the Piazza dell'Anfiteatro and the sweet little liberty-style shopping precinct belonging to Pierini.

After *La Provinciale*, other films set in Lucca were made, including *Giovani mariti* (1957) by Mauro Bolognini, *Frenesia dell'estate* (1963) by Luigi Zampa, *Per le antiche scale* (1975) by Bolognini, and *L'innocente* (1976) by Luchino Visconti.

Gina Lollobrigida was also one of the ladies of Viareggio's famous carnival, running once again this February. Her bond with the Lucchesia remained strong and

continued to her triumphant return to Viareggio and the Bersagliera Carnival in the winter of 2000, for which she obtained a record number of television viewers.

La Lollo's love for Lucca was truly genuine, and it was one which was fully reciprocated by the inhabitants in the city's tree-lined walls. Incidentally, I'm sure that any new feature film made with Lucca as its location would no longer term the city as 'provincial' nor would it fail to mention it by name!

— by Francis Pettitt
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