



A man with a white beard and a dark hat is holding a large black umbrella. He is wearing a light-colored trench coat over a dark, striped shirt. The scene is set at night, with a street lamp visible in the background. The umbrella is open, and the man is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background shows a building with a sign that has some red and white elements.

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CAST

Roberto Benigni Ivo Salvini
Paolo Villaggio Gonnella
Nadia Ottaviani Aldina
Marisa Tomasi Marisa
Angelo Orlando Nestore
Sim The Oboist
Susy Blady Susy
Dario Ghirardi The Journalist
Chevalier Terzio
Nigel Harris Giuanin
Vito Micheluzzi no. 3

CREW

Story and Screenplay by **Federico Fellini**
Liberally Inspired by the Novel *Il poem dei lunatici* by **Ermanno Cavazzoni**

with the collaboration of **Tullio Pinella** and **Ermanno Cavazzoni**

Music by **Nicola Piovani**
Director of Photography **Tonino Delli Colli**
Production Designer **Dante Ferretti**
Costumes **Maurizio Millenotti**
Editor **Nino Baragli**

Produced by **Mario and Vittorio Cecchi Gori**
Directed by **Federico Fellini**





FELLINI'S SWANSONG

by Pasquale Iannone

The days that followed were so eventful, so inscrutable and such a jumble that the best I can do here is to try and disentangle them. [...] Obviously one's sense of time in the countryside is rather approximate, and the same was true of my mastery of my faculties and my feelings. My mind was in a state of continual flux.

Ermanno Cavazzoni, *The Voice of the Moon*

While not constituting Federico Fellini's final work – he made a couple of (typically inventive) TV commercials before his death in 1993 – *The Voice of the Moon* (*La voce della luna*, 1990) brought the curtain down on a feature film career of remarkable formal and thematic consistency. From his 1951 debut *Variety Lights* (*Luci del varietà*, co-directed by Alberto Lattuada) to the major international successes of *La strada* (1954), *La dolce vita* (1960) and *8½* (1963) to his mature, unabashedly baroque flights of fancy such as *Casanova* (*Il Casanova di Federico Fellini*, 1976) and *City of Women* (*La città delle donne*, 1980), a handful of themes obsess him. Most notably perhaps, the pleasures and inevitable disappointments of the life of the imagination, of spectacle and performance. In varying degrees, with specific emphases, and always mindful of the socio-cultural backdrop, these are questions he returns to again and again.

The Voice of the Moon is freely adapted from *Il poema dei lunatici* (*The Lunatics' Poem*), the 1987 debut novel by Italian writer Ermanno Cavazzoni. In an interview for *Rai Letteratura*, Cavazzoni explains that he began work on his book by researching in the archives of mental institutions where he hoped to find a singular account written by a patient. But he soon realised that those that found themselves in institutions were there precisely because they had trouble communicating. "It was a bit of a disappointment, but through my research I found documents and letters from patients as well as accounts written by doctors in medicalese, a language which plasters over everything and which becomes comic in its asceticism." Cavazzoni goes on to say that what interested him was the idea of digression, highlighting the influence of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605-15), a detail which is crucial in understanding Fellini's interest in his source novel.

From the very beginning of his career, the Rimini-born director privileged loose narrative structures over tight, Hollywood-style storytelling and this became more pronounced as



his career went on. Fellinian characters are some of cinema's great wanderers, moving around in spaces that range from the clearly identifiable (Rome in *La dolce vita*) to the oneirically indeterminate (*City of Women*). When Fellini is in the latter mode, his pictures seem to closely fit in with what French philosopher Gilles Deleuze calls "trip/ballad films [films de bal(l)ade] with the sensory-motor connections slackened". Deleuze argues that these types of films go against the clearly defined spatio-temporal structures of Hollywood and often take place in "any-space-whatever – marshalling yard, disused warehouse, the undifferentiated fabric of the city".

One of the most distinctive examples of the bal(l)ade form, *The Voice of the Moon* follows the wanderings of Ivo Salvini (Roberto Benigni), a young man recently released from a mental institution. At various points in his journey, he crosses paths with Adolfo Gonnella (Paolo Villaggio), a man in late middle-age whose political ambitions have been cruelly derailed by mental illness. As Cristina Degli-Esposti has rightly pointed out, "Ivo [and Adolfo's] wanderings represent the need of people who cannot find themselves and cannot keep up with the times."

For his main roles, Fellini turned to two established comic actors whose contrasting physiognomy and performance styles seemed ideally suited to the project. Tuscan actor/director/comedian Roberto Benigni is best known internationally for his Oscar-winning tragi-comic Holocaust film, *Life Is Beautiful* (*La vita è bella*, 1997), but began his film career some twenty years earlier with the riotously subversive comedy *Berlinguer, I Love You* (*Berlinguer ti voglio bene*, 1977). Roles in similarly idiosyncratic comedies *Seeking Asylum* (*Chiedo asilo*, 1979), *Il minestrone* (1981) and *Nothing Left to Do but Cry* (*Non ci resta che piangere*, 1984) followed, before he gained international exposure with a memorable turn in Jim Jarmusch's prison-set, monochrome three-hander *Down by Law* (1986). Genoan Paolo Villaggio is most famous to Italian audiences for creating the character of Ugo Fantozzi, the blundering, beret-wearing accountant who first appeared on TV and in story form before featuring in ten films between 1975 and 1999. Villaggio was also a regular collaborator of Luciano Salce (director of the first two *Fantozzi* films) and Sergio Corbucci, for whom he gave eye-catching performances in *What Am I Doing in the Middle of the Revolution?* (*Che c'entriamo noi con la rivoluzione?*, 1972), *What's Your Sign?* (*Di che segno sei?*, 1975) and *Mr. Robinson* (*Il signor Robinson, mostruosa storia d'amore e d'avventure*, 1976), amongst others.

The Voice of the Moon opens on a barren, fog-swept landscape lit by a full moon. We see Ivo tentatively approach a well before addressing the camera claiming to have heard voices. Just a few yards away, a group of men are talking among themselves as they make their way to a nearby house. Ivo drifts along after them and it's soon revealed that

one of these men is charging the others to watch his buxom middle-aged aunt perform a striptease. The indeterminate landscape of these opening minutes, coupled with the wandering protagonist and glimpses of adolescent voyeurism place us firmly in Fellini Land. An imposingly tall, but benign Orson Welles-type figure steps in to save Ivo from an altercation with the enterprising nephew, and the man turns out to be an undertaker named Pigafetta (Giovanni Javaronne). He ushers Ivo away and the pair travels to a cemetery where Fellini introduces another mercurial figure, a distinguished, middle-aged musician (Sim), who lives in self-imposed isolation in one of the vacant cavities of a Columbarium wall. A flashback reveals more about the musician's background, offering clues as to why he has withdrawn from society. While he's at the cemetery, Ivo takes a stepladder up to another side of the Columbarium and we see the resting place of his grandfather. "Where are you all?" he asks. "Sometimes I think there must be a place in the world where there's a hole, a passage to the other side."

From the cemetery, Fellini shifts seamlessly into another flashback, a childhood memory, with strong echoes of the flashbacks in *8½*. Ivo is in the warm, affectionate care of his grandmother. The director – even more than usual – makes no attempt at verisimilitude by having a child play the young Ivo or having an elderly woman play the grandmother. Benigni plays himself as a child while 25-year-old German actress Uta Schmidt plays his *nonna*. Ivo slips under the bed and peeks out at the crackling fire. "How many ideas come to me here, granny. But they fly away, like sparks from the fire. How do we stop them?" We then find Ivo on the bed, looking out at the moon. "I love remembering," he says, "more than living. In any case, what's the difference?" If the *mise-en-scène* was not enough, these lines of dialogue – their content, but also the wistful way they're delivered – give a further sense of Fellini's authorial voice.

The Voice of the Moon's exploration of the links between the moon and womanhood is evident from the outset, but is explicitly stated when Ivo first sets eyes on his beloved Aldina (Nadia Ottaviani) one night as she sleeps peacefully. "Aldina's identity, beauty, and impenetrability are equal to the distant apartness of the moon" notes Degli-Esposti. In this sequence, the film's score – by Rome-born composer Nicola Piovani – is particularly striking, briefly emerging as Ivo watches Aldina sleep. Its melancholy, fairy-tale tinkle can't help but recall the bittersweet themes of Nino Rota.

It's at this point in the film that Fellini introduces Villaggio's Adolfo. He's shuffling his way home late across a deserted, rain-swept piazza while hounded by a journalist (Dario Ghirardi). Once safely in his apartment block, he's welcomed by his elderly, comically tottering Sicilian neighbours but, increasingly paranoid, he locks himself in his apartment. During the night, he's visited by visions of his neighbours and becomes anxious that they



will “infect” him with old age. The action then shifts back to the town piazza at daytime. The area is now a throng of activity – Japanese tourists snapping indiscriminately, market traders peddling garishly coloured dresses, youngsters snapping to their cassette players. The piazza will be the site for most of the film’s remaining action and is the last in a long line of bustling Fellinian street scenes. As critics such as Aine O’Healy have observed, these sequences allow Fellini to “fleetingly acknowledge the demographic shifts resulting from globalisation and postcolonial migration”. Ivo interacts briefly with a variety of characters including a tearful woman dressed in red who turns out to be Marisa (Marisa Tomasi), the estranged wife of his friend Nestore (Angelo Orlando). As with the cemetery-dwelling musician earlier, *The Voice of the Moon* dedicates a substantial, contextualising flashback sequence to Nestore. We spool back to his first encounter with manicurist Marisa then move forward to their wedding before building to one of cinema’s most gloriously madcap love scenes. After witnessing the insatiable Marisa set upon a meek Nestore, it’s hard to argue with O’Healy when she describes the character’s transformation from “benign seductress to an all-consuming grotesque”.

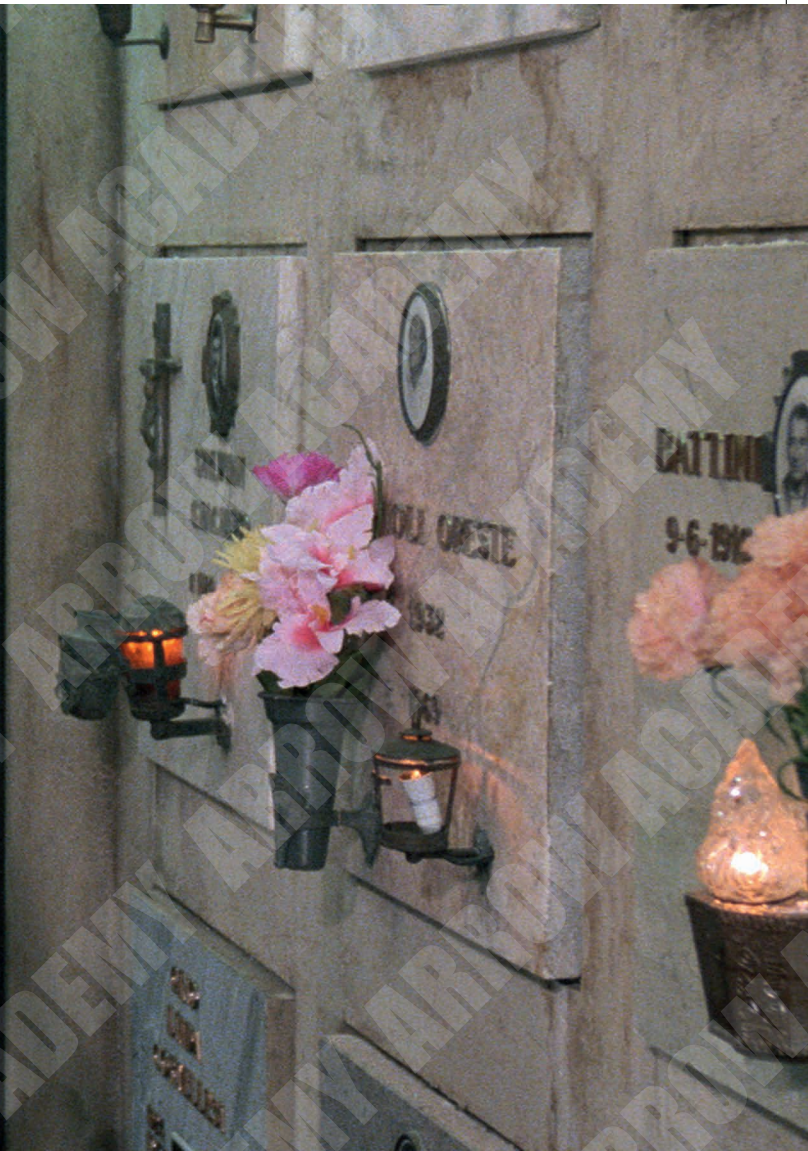
Further memorable set-pieces include the *Festa della Gnoccata* – a celebration of gnocchi which unfolds in the town square and includes a beauty contest called Miss Farina (Miss Flour) – and a remarkable sequence which takes place in what looks like an abandoned car factory that’s been turned into a giant nightclub. Monolithic speakers hover above the packed dancefloor as they boom out Michael Jackson’s 1987 hit ‘The Way You Make Me Feel’. While Ivo makes his way into the wriggling mass of leather and denim, joyously feeding off the energy of the crowd, Adolfo tries to get the DJs to stop the music. His anger turns to a sense of pitying disappointment as he observes the youngsters continuing to dance around him. Once again, as in several earlier scenes, the character becomes a mouthpiece for Fellini, allowing him to reflect on the apparent state of modern popular culture in a brief monologue. “What do you know?” Adolfo begins. “Have you ever heard the sound of a violin? No, because if you’d heard the voice of violins like we did, you’d be silent now. You wouldn’t have the impudence to think you’re dancing.” He goes on to compare dancing to embroidery, to taking flight, to glimpsing the harmony of stars. Dance, he says, is a declaration of love, a hymn to life. Fellini then has the clubbers disperse and the soundtrack fall completely silent. The figure of the duchess (Lorose Keller) – first glimpsed in a portrait in Adolfo’s apartment earlier in the film – suddenly appears. A wider, high-angle shot shows that the clubbers have made a wide circle in the middle of the dance floor clearing the way for Adolfo and the Duchess to dance to Strauss’s ‘The Blue Danube’. The couple are cheered on by the crowd before the circle is closed and Michael Jackson resumes.

The climax of *The Voice of the Moon* sees the titular astronomical body actually ‘captured’ and tied down like a giant balloon in a barn. The capture causes a media sensation and images are beamed to the packed town piazza where debates take place between members of the clergy and other prominent figures. Eventually, the moon is returned to its rightful place up in the heavens and the film ends with Ivo once again looking up in awe-struck wonder as the moon – Méliès-like – takes on the face of Aldina and even starts addressing him.

Biographer John Baxter notes that *The Voice of the Moon* “was Fellini’s most assured film in years, and certainly the most personal, but the very recognisability of his concerns and the familiarity of the ingredients made it seem negligible”. This is an important point – it’s easy to see how audiences that had grown up with Fellini could have grown tired of the director’s hallmarks. But 25 years after its original release, even the most cursory viewing of Fellini’s swansong will reveal a work that is anything but self-indulgently hermetic.

Pasquale Iannone lectures in Film Studies at the University of Edinburgh. He is also a critic and broadcaster, regularly contributing to Sight & Sound and BBC Radio.





ABOUT THE RESTORATION

The Voice of the Moon (La voce della luna) has been exclusively restored by Arrow Films and is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.66:1 with Italian mono audio.

All restoration work was carried out at L'Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna. The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 2K resolution on a pin-registered Arriscan and was graded on Digital Vision's Nucoda Film Master.

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. Image stability was also improved.

The mono Italian language track was remastered from the optical sound track negatives. There are times in which audio synchronisation will appear slightly loose against the picture, due to the fact that the audio was recorded in post-production.

Restoration Supervised by James White, Arrow Films
Restoration Services L'Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna

The original film and audio elements for *The Voice of the Moon* were made available for this restoration by Intramovies.

Intramovies
Paola Montavani, Paola Corvino

L'Immagine Ritrovata
Gilles Barberis, Valeria Bigongiali, Diego Mercuriali, Julia Mettenleiter, Alessia Navantieri, Caterina Palpaceli, Davide Pozzi, Elena Tammaccaro, Giandomenico Zappa



PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs and Booklet Produced by Anthony Nield
Executive Producers Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni
Technical Producer James White
QC Manager Nora Mehenni
Authoring and Subtitling The Engine House
Design Obviously Creative
Artwork Peter Strain

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Michael Brooke, Federico Caddeo, Eugenio Cappuccio,
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