

THE FILMS OF ELIO PETRI



Often disguised as suspense thrillers, futuristic fantasies, or art-house horrors, and featuring some of the finest Italian actors of the day, Elio Petri (1929–1982) created some of the most important political films of the '60s and '70s. One of the most highly charged filmmakers to emerge from European cinema of the 1960s, Petri has often been overshadowed by such contemporaries as Bertolucci, Bellocchio, and Pasolini. Beginning his career as a film critic for the Communist newspaper L'UNITA and a screenwriter and documentary maker before turning to feature films, he became both a master of dry, caustic humor and political outrage. Managing to craft films that were wildly entertaining as well as harshly critical of modern capitalist society, he sliced deep into the heart of the Italian zeitgeist and universal human psychology. Little seen in the United States, Petri's sleek body of work bears witness to a rare melding of Marxist ideology and cinematic sophistication. Thanks to the efforts of Cinecitta Holding, Rome we are pleased to offer a rare opportunity to enjoy a retrospective of this modern master of ideological satire.

This series is presented in new 35mm prints courtesy of Cinecitta Holding and with the assistance of the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, San Francisco. Special thanks to Camilla Cormanni and Rossella Rinaldi, Cinecitta Holding, Anna Marie Lelli, IIC & the Pacific Cinematheque, Vancouver, BC.

SEPT 11 12 SAT 7 PM, SUN 8:45 PM

WHITSELL AUDITORIUM

THE LADY KILLER OF ROME

ITALY 1961

DIRECTOR: ELIO PETRI Petri's acclaimed first feature is a Kafkaesque crime film that showcases the great Marcello Mastroianni as a stylish Roman antiques dealer accused of murdering his mistress (Micheline Presle).

Punctuated with frequent flashbacks, the film details the game of investigatory cat-and-mouse that plays out between the suspect and a deviously crafty police inspector (Salvo Randone). Petri renders this antirealist thriller with a highly convincing atmosphere of claustrophobia, corruption, moral doubt, and dread. Whether the hero is innocent of murder or not, he is, in Petri's words, "guilty of inhumanity." "Nonchalant, subliminal, drenched in a nightmarish brew of farce

and intangible menace." —SIGHT AND SOUND."Compelling viewing"—David Thomson. (105 mins.)

SEPT 11 12 SAT 9:15 PM, SUN 6:30 PM

WHITSELL AUDITORIUM

NUMBERED DAYS

ITALY 1962

DIRECTOR: ELIO PETRI Never released in America, Petri's second feature displays the same evocative mix of realism and symbolism found in *THE LADY KILLER OF ROME*. Cowritten by the prominent scenarist Tonino Guerra (a favorite collaborator of Petri, Antonioni, Rosi, and other Italian luminaries), the film stars Salvo Randone as Cesare, a lonely Roman plumber in his early fifties. Traveling by tram one day, he witnesses the sudden death, by heart attack, of a man his own age. The event shocks him into the realization that his own days might be numbered, and he becomes determined to make the most of the time he has left. Quitting his job, he sets out with enthusiasm to enjoy the finer things in life, but the effort only leaves him dispirited and disillusioned. (102 mins.)

SEPT 16 19 THU 7 PM, SUN 7:30 PM

WHITSELL AUDITORIUM

THE WORKING CLASS GOES TO HEAVEN

ITALY 1971

DIRECTOR: ELIO PETRI Petri's absurdist political fable shared top honors at the Cannes Film Festival with compatriot Francesco Rosi's *THE MATTEI AFFAIR*. A giddy, gut-level, sex-and-politics critique of industrial capitalism, the film features Petri regular Gian Maria Volonte as Lulu, a gung-ho Turin factory worker caught up in the dehumanizing wheels of mechanical production and meaningless mass consumption. Sexual fantasies drive his productivity for the company, but his perspective on work and life undergo a radical transformation when he is injured in a factory accident and temporarily laid off. Petri opts for an aggressive, expressionistic visual and aural approach that effectively captures the brutality of modern industrial working conditions. (125 mins.)

SEPT 17 FRI 7 PM

WHITSELL AUDITORIUM

A QUIET PLACE IN THE COUNTRY

ITALY 1968

DIRECTOR: ELIO PETRI Petri's erotic, intellectual horror film, winner of a Special Jury Prize at Berlin in 1969, offers a harrowing, hallucinatory account of an artist's descent into madness. Franco Nero stars as a successful abstract painter who heads out for a peaceful, rural idyll with his mistress-turned-manager (Vanessa Redgrave) only to become unhinged by his growing obsession for the ghost of a murdered woman (Gabrielle Grimaldi) that haunts their holiday villa. The film's striking canvases are by the American artist Jim Dine, and the original score is from noted film composer Ennio Morricone. (106 mins.) Original English-language version.

SEPT 20 MON 7 PM

GUILD THEATRE

PROPERTY IS NO LONGER A THEFT

ITALY 1973

DIRECTOR: ELIO PETRI Money (and private property) is definitely the root of all evil in this eccentric work, the third film in a loose trilogy on "social schizophrenia" that also includes Petri's *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* and *The Working Class Goes to Heaven*. This barbed satire concerns a lowly bank clerk (Flavio Bucci) allergic to money and revolted by its nefarious influence on humanity who launches a campaign of harassment against a wealthy butcher (Ugo Tognazzi), stealing small, insignificant items (but never money) from the man. (125 mins.)

SEPT 23 THUR 7 PM

WHITSELL AUDITORIUM

THE TENTH VICTIM

ITALY 1965

DIRECTOR: ELIO PETRI A flamboyant, futuristic fantasy in the 1960s Pop-art, sci-fi vein of *Barbarella* and *Modesty Blaise*, Petri's late-night cult classic is set in a 21st century where war and aggression have been replaced by a game of legalized murder called "Man Hunt." Marcello Mastroianni and sex goddess Ursula Andress star as computer-chosen contestants of this deadly televised spectacle in which Andress makes Mastroianni her 10th victim. Legendary in part for Andress's lethal double-barreled brassiere, this lurid satire lampoons media and advertising, faddish 1960s religions, health trends, and the obsession with fame and money. "[A] lipsmacking dissection of the effete Italian bourgeoisie"—David Thompson. (90 Mins.)

SEPT 24 FRI 7 PM

WHITSELL AUDITORIUM

TUDO MODO

ITALY 1976

DIRECTOR: ELIO PETRI A metaphysical mystery based on the novel by Leonardo Sciascia, *Tudo Modo* is the most curious and puzzling of Petri's films and offers a not-so-veiled critique of Christian democratic political power. A group of Italy's most successful politician's goes on a monastic retreat at the convent of Don Gaetano (Marcello Mastroianni) to contemplate their notable careers and secretly devise a new power structure. After a series of mysterious crimes, the consortium becomes divided and, ultimately, depleted. The film's unabashed leftist politics are given vivid articulation through the work of noted production designer Dante Ferretti. (130 mins.)

SEPT 25 28 SAT 7 PM, WHITSELL AUDITORIUM

TUE 7 PM, GUILD THEATRE

INVESTIGATION OF A CITIZEN ABOVE SUSPICION

ITALY 1970

DIRECTOR: ELIO PETRI During a crackdown on political dissidents of the day, a suave, psychopathic Roman police inspector (Gian Maria Volonte) slashes the throat of his masochistic mistress (Florinda Bolkan). Perversely put in charge of the investigation, the inspector plants clues that implicate himself and then craftily diffuses them, ostensibly to prove his invincibility. A biting critique of Italian police methods and a psychological study of a budding cryptofascist, the film outraged the Italian Right, but proved a huge box office success. Petri won the Special Jury Prize and the Cannes Film Festival and the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. (112 mins.)

SEPT 26 SUN 7 PM

WHITSELL AUDITORIUM

WE STILL KILL THE OLD WAY

ITALY 1967

DIRECTOR: ELIO PETRI Based on Leonardo Sciascia's novel *A Man's Blessing*, this tense, surreal thriller was one of the earliest works to take the Italian Mafia as its subject. After two men are killed in a Sicilian town, a lonely professor with no family to protect (played by Petri regular Gian Maria Volonte) takes it upon himself to investigate the crime. Through this obsessive quest, his life begins to resemble a paranoid fantasy—a dark and ominous world that viewers are invited to share. (99 mins.)

SEPT 30 THUR 7 PM

WHITSELL AUDITORIUM

GOOD NEWS

ITALY 1979

DIRECTOR: ELIO PETRI Petri's final film, the ironically titled *GOOD NEWS*, is a bitter, sometimes surreal black comedy that takes a savage swipe at the emptiness of its media-dominated age. Giancarlo Giannini stars as the nameless hero, a disaffected media executive who spends his days watching violent programming on six television screens in his office and spends his evenings neglecting his frustrated wife at home. (110 mins.)