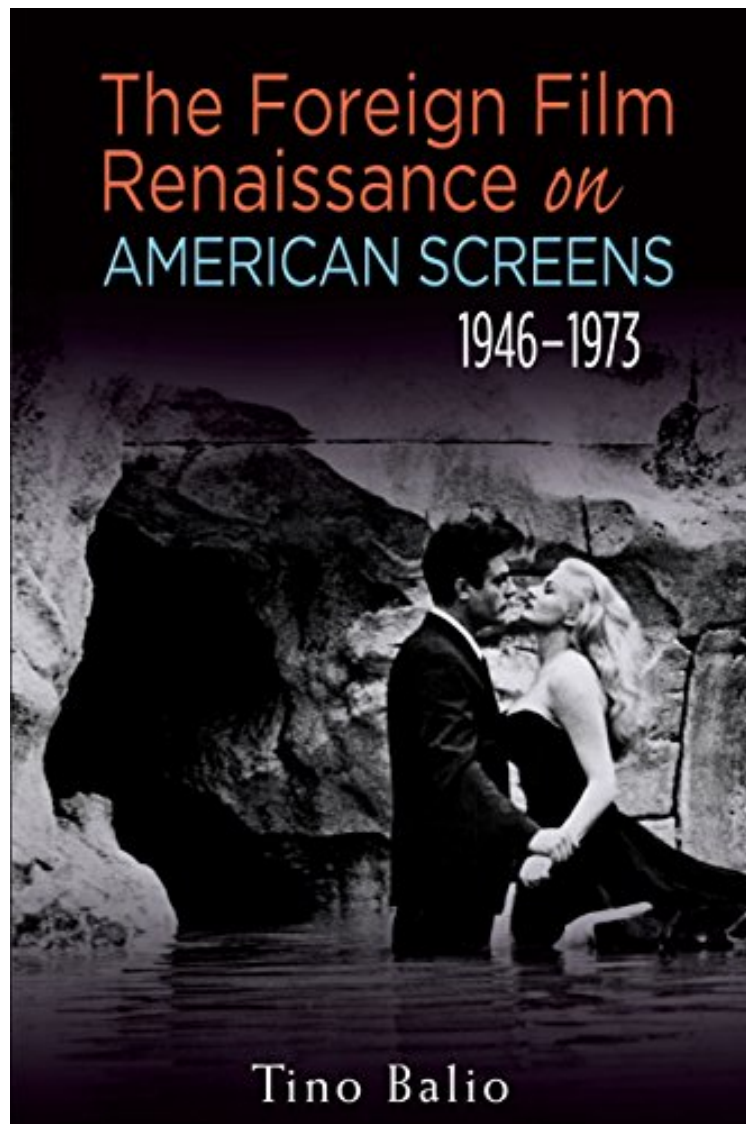


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## The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946-1973 (Wisconsin Film Studies)

*Tino Balio*

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**Tino Balio : The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946-1973 (Wisconsin Film Studies)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946-1973 (Wisconsin Film Studies):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Clear, Well-Researched Delight By David A. Andrews This book is a treasure-trove of information that is both well-researched and incredibly clear. It is not biased toward any particular

taste or auteur, though it is clearly the product of cinephilia--a combination that I find incredibly rare. Too often cinephile books reflect the author's likes and dislikes in a way that is irritating on top of irrational. Not in this case: Balio's cinephilia seems to drive his curiosity, such that he gives us information about all kinds of things that we have never known before. I found his information on art-cinema distributors particularly helpful, and I found his honesty about the role of sex in the success of classic art cinema refreshing. Thank you, Professor Balio.4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. How Foreigners Captured AmericaBy Rob Hardy\_The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946-1973\_Today's movie audiences, made up as they are of young people, will not remember the heady days of foreign cinema, when if you wanted to view films that stimulated (and not just intellectually), you went to see the newest import from Italy or France. For me this was the sixties and seventies, but that's just because I was young myself then and knew movies were a form of entertainment and art I was going to be devoted to. My generation was not the first to watch foreign movies, of course, and there had been foreign films coming into the country for the entire twentieth century. There was, however, a boom in such films after World War II and into the seventies, and this is the worthwhile subject of \_The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens, 1946-1973\_ (The University of Wisconsin Press) by Tino Balio. Balio is a professor emeritus of film, and obviously loves the movies, but he has not set out to write an explanation of why Truffaut or Bergman are important filmmakers. He has instead described how foreign movies became important in the cinematic life of American viewers, and anyone who wants to understand the influences of money, publicity, film criticism, and sexuality of the times will find much of interest, and if you are like me, a good deal of nostalgia, too. World War Two interrupted the flow of films from Europe, but in 1946 Roberto Rossellini's \_Open City\_ began its run in New York. It continued at the World Theater there for over a year and a half; one of the great surprises in Balio's book is that the distribution of films was so different then that movies might stay booked in a theater for such a length of time. \_Open City\_ is the reason Balio's study begins in 1946. Italian neorealism brought in the audiences, but it took some adjustment for distributors to accommodate the movies. One of them quoted here said, "There is no demand for foreign pictures like there is for Hollywood films... Distributors like me must go out and create a market for each picture, and that is a challenge that is both heartbreaking and fascinating." Foreign movies dealt with sex, and Balio's book covers many censorship problems. Ingmar Bergman's films also dealt with sexual issues, and Balio has a whole chapter describing the tactics of how the Bergman oeuvre was moved into theaters. Bergman's films were far from pornographic, but since his films came from Sweden, and Swedish films were synonymous with soft porn, they had an extra reason to be popular. To see the latest film from the prolific director was, starting in 1959, the mark of a thinking moviegoer. Bergman's films were inherently interesting, personal, and well crafted, but they were also well sold. A year after his first movie was shown here, Janus Films got U.S. distribution rights. They made sure not only that each film got proper advance notice, but that Bergman's life, themes, working methods, enthusiasms, position in Swedish cinema, and so on were fit subjects for newspaper and magazine articles. His screenplays were published in book form. "What emerged from all this press," says Balio, "was a composite portrait of Ingmar Bergman, the auteur - or, stated another way, Ingmar Bergman as a brand name." Janus was careful to control the issue and reissue of the director's work, and increased not only his reputation but that of the art film business. The foreign film renaissance did not last; there is no foreign director today that comes close to having the enthusiasm of film intelligentsia the way Bergman did. Part of the change was that there were "arty" American films, some even made by the studios, like \_Five Easy Pieces\_ or \_The Last Picture Show\_. Youth films made independently had an avid following. Critic Andrew Sarris put his finger on another big reason foreign films faded: "No one on either side of the Atlantic - or Pacific - wants to admit it today, but the fashion for foreign films depended a great deal on their frankness about sex." When the American ratings system was jimmied to allow R pictures to show sex, there was one more reason that the art house screens would pick from American offerings. Balio's tracing of the foreign film movement is full of quotations from critics at the time as they tried to make sense (and help audiences make sense) of these films that were so different from the usual fare. We are still getting foreign films, of course, but in nothing like the quantities described here (not to argue about quality). The renaissance is over, though, and I will give a warning. One of the depressing parts of going through this enlightening book is finding films that were popular in their time and certainly would be worth seeing again, only to find that many of them can't be put on your Netflix list because they have never been put on DVD.5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. I could've figured all this out on googleBy MaximusThe contents of this book are 80% plot summaries and other people's opinion. If I wanted a list of every film made during the French New Wave, I could just Google that. Balio constantly relies on the opinions of others in this book, even going so far as to quote people's plot summaries. Come on! If you're going to write about all these movies and claim to be an expert in foreign film, I should hope that you've either seen or heard enough about these movies to come up with your own summaries. There is barely any information on the actual characteristics of these different movements. A chapter that claims to be about Italian Neorealism will just be a list of 20 neorealist films. After 30 pages, I still had no idea how the movement came about and what made it relevant. Ugh, this book is useless.

Largely shut out of American theaters since the 1920s, foreign films such as *Open City*, *Bicycle Thief*, *Rashomon*, *The*

Seventh Seal, Breathless, La Dolce Vita and L'Avventura played after World War II in a growing number of art houses around the country and created a small but influential art film market devoted to the acquisition, distribution, and exhibition of foreign-language and English-language films produced abroad. Nurtured by successive waves of imports from Italy, Great Britain, France, Sweden, Japan, and the Soviet Bloc, the renaissance was kick-started by independent distributors working out of New York; by the 1960s, however, the market had been subsumed by Hollywood. From Roberto Rossellini's *Open City* in 1946 to Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* in 1973, Tino Balio tracks the critical reception in the press of such filmmakers as François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Tony Richardson, Ingmar Bergman, Akira Kurosawa, Luis Buñuel, Satyajit Ray, and Milos Forman. Their releases paled in comparison to Hollywood fare at the box office, but their impact on American film culture was enormous. The reception accorded to art house cinema attacked motion picture censorship, promoted the director as auteur, and celebrated film as an international art. Championing the cause was the new cinephile generation, which was mostly made up of college students under thirty. The fashion for foreign films depended in part on their frankness about sex. When Hollywood abolished the Production Code in the late 1960s, American-made films began to treat adult themes with maturity and candor. In this new environment, foreign films lost their cachet and the art film market went into decline.

From Publishers Weekly Even those who don't know Italian Neorealism from French New Wave will appreciate Balio's wonderfully thorough survey of foreign films on American screens. Balio takes readers through nearly 30 years of international film history, from the end of WWII to the '70s, arguing that foreign films were then at the peak of their popularity in the United States in large part because of what they offered: sexy, uncensored alternatives to Hollywood fare (restricted under the Hayes Code, which sanitized domestic product). A decade-long Hollywood recession starting in 1947, leading to studio cutbacks, the production of fewer films, and the need for theaters to seek new content contributed to the renaissance, and a new generation of young filmgoers, especially university students, eager for challenging experiences, were ready to take the seats no longer being filled by their parents. Balio also examines the marketing dynamics of certain films (Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet*, for example, was billed as "the greatest ghost story of them all") and allows critics of the era to discuss Fellini, Godard, Bergman, Truffaut, Kurosawa, Antonioni, Ray, and other directors at the heart of the movement. At times the proceedings cry out for a contemporary context, but film buffs and historians will find much here to enjoy. (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved.

From Booklist \*Starred \* During World War II, American interest in foreign movies virtually disappeared. Then, in 1946, a small Italian film, *Open City*, was booked into a New York cinema and played for more than a year and a half. It was the beginning of the postwar renaissance of foreign movies, and the launch of the art-film movement. Balio, a noted film historian, explores the various aspects of American interest in foreign films: the appeal of Italian neorealism and the British Ealing comedies; the influence of Japanese cinema (which produced both Akira Kurosawa and *Godzilla*); the French New Wave, with directors like Truffaut and Godard (and, let's not forget, the birth of the auteur); the British New Cinema; and, in the 1960s, a new crop of Italian directors (Fellini, Antonioni, Visconti). American audiences were so taken with foreign films, the author notes, that the major Hollywood studios began financing their production, hoping to snag a piece of the profit pie. A relaxing of Hollywood's Production Code, too, allowed American filmmakers to push the boundaries of violence and subject matter, resulting in such movies as *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Midnight Cowboy*. The American studios were now, in essence, making their own versions of foreign films. For movie buffs, this is an indispensable and deeply fascinating book; a follow-up, looking at the post-1973 years, would be most welcome. --David Pitt Balio revisits the most exciting period in the history of world cinema, reminding us how movies suddenly, briefly became a vital force in modern intellectual life. Richard B. Jewell, author of *The Golden Age of Cinema: Hollywood, 1929-1945*