

NEWS & FEATURES

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ELISABETTA SANTI

Se uno vuole, c'è la fa: you can do anything you set your mind to. This sums up the essence of Claudio Bondi, the softly spoken, captivating filmmaker who is an award-winning writer and director. Bondi, born in Rome, 1944, was Roberto Rossellini's assistant-director and has since written and directed documentaries, television series and films as well as published several books. He now teaches at Ca' Foscari University in Venice and continues in filmmaking.

Bondi's passion for storytelling is contagious and his dogged determination to fashion dreams into realities is what makes him inspirational to listen to. However, there is yet work to be done, and there remains a story of Rossellini's that Bondi hopes to be told.

Can you tell us about yourself and your connection to Roberto Rossellini?

I am *italiano-romano* and I graduated in *lettere* in 1969 from *La Sapienza*. Following that, I studied at the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia* for two years. The president of the school was Roberto Rossellini and in the spring of 1971 he asked me to help him on a film he was making for Swiss television. Not long after, he called me and asked if I would direct a film with him, under his supervision. Can you imagine, Roberto Rossellini asking a 25-year-old boy with no experience to do a film under his supervision? It was really extraordinary! I accepted immediately. He told me what the film was about and it was a beautiful story. I have since written a book and made a documentary about it, and entitled both, *La balena di Rossellini* (Rossellini's whale).

The story was set in Chile - Rossellini was acquainted with Chile because he had spent time there interviewing the president,



Director Claudio Bondi

Rossellini's Whale: Claudio Bondi on the Maestro's Untold Story

Salvador Allende. However, a few days later the film was cancelled because the situation in Chile was too difficult. I worked as the assistant director on another film instead, a biography of Agostino d'Ippona.

I worked with Rossellini as his assistant director for a further four years. Then I realised that I needed to walk on my own, because when you are a great maestro's right hand man, there is a big risk that you become their photocopy - there is the chance that you can lose yourself, because they are so

captivating.

Can you tell us the story of *la balena di Rossellini*?

It's about a fishing village on the Pacific Coast in Chile. The fishermen are so poor that they don't even have nets, so they're not even *real* fisherman - they are *raccoglitori* (gatherers). They collect crabs when the tide is out and then sell them at the market.

One day they wake up to find a whale washed up on the beach. A whale could be *una ricchezza straordinaria* for a fishing village like theirs. They

start thinking about what to do with the whale and its different parts: one person suggests cutting it up and eating it immediately, another suggest going to the next village to ask the *real* fishermen with nets what to do. They start arguing and nothing is decided. Days go by and the whale starts to smell. A wise man of the village suggests that they send two boys to seek the counsel of an old priest. The boys leave to consult the priest, and he responds by saying: "*Non tutto il grano diventa farina, ma tutta la farina*

diventa pane." (Not all the grain will become flour, but all the flour will become bread). The boys relay this message to the villagers but they all go to bed *sconsolati* because they still have no clarity on what to do.

The next morning everyone wakes up to find that the tide has taken away the cadaver of the whale, and has left a very deep hole in the sand. In this hole, there are thousands of crabs: *la farina è diventata pane* - the flour has become bread.

Rossellini wanted to make a film that told the story of Chile, because Chile was one of the richest countries in South America, yet still extremely poor. There wasn't the *conoscenza* to match the wealth. In the end its wealth didn't stand for anything, just like the whale.

What do you want to do with this story?

I want to make a film about it and share the story with everyone. It's a parable - if you don't know how to manage your wealth, it is worth nothing. We have to help people to move forward; the poor fishermen need to be helped to become *real* fisherman.

What are your current film projects?

I have a film, which I have proposed to the National Film Board of Canada. It's the story of an *amérindien* from Canada that lived in Torino in 1680. He came back with a regiment of soldiers from *Piemonte* who had been fighting in Canada for the King of France.

It's a story about diversity and will explore the notion of what it really feels like to be alone.

If I can't make the film, I will write the book. I won't lose it, nor will I abandon the story because it is too beautiful to lose.

What are your thoughts on diversity?

I believe that diversity is always valuable - it always adds value, and never takes it away.



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