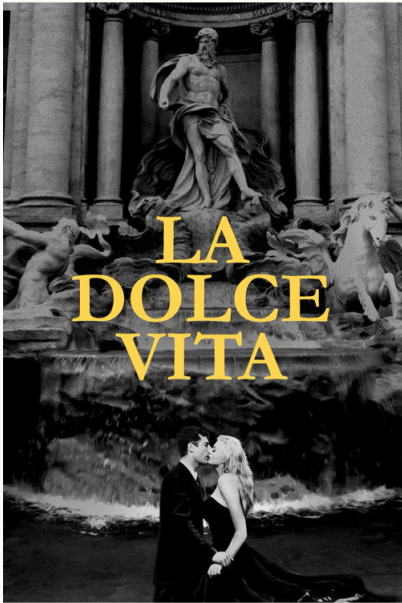




COMEDY · DRAMA

La Dolce Vita

1960 · Directed by Federico Fellini

- Art Cinema
- Auteur Cinema

A journalist drifts through a week of nights in Rome, chasing celebrities, scandals and a half-abandoned ambition to write something serious. Fellini turns the city's glamour into a long, episodic, richly staged portrait of pleasure and its aftertaste.

DIRECTOR	Federico Fellini
YEAR	1960
RUNTIME	2h 54m (174 min)
COUNTRY	Italy
GENRES	Comedy, Drama
CAST	Marcello Mastroianni, Anita Ekberg, Anouk Aimée, Yvonne Furneaux, Magali Noël
MUSIC	Nino Rota
IMDB	8.0 / 10 (84,821 votes)
ROTTEN TOMATOES	95% (critics)
METACRITIC	95 / 100
TMDB SCORE	8.0 / 10 (2,086 votes)

Part one is spoiler-free. Part two, "After watching", reveals the story, scenes and ending.

Before watching

Spoiler-free

WHY WATCH THIS?

1 Fellini's breakthrough and a Palme d'Or winner

This is the film that made Federico Fellini an international name and won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1960. It marks his shift from neorealist roots to a personal, spectacular style.

2 It gave modern media culture a vocabulary

The photographer named Paparazzo is the source of the word paparazzi, and the Trevi Fountain scene became one of cinema's best-known images. Much of what celebrity coverage looks like was sketched here.

3 A new, loose way to build a long film

Instead of a tight plot, it strings together episodes over seven days and nights. Learning to watch this structure prepares you for 8½ and for much of European art cinema.

WHY IT MATTERS IN CINEMA HISTORY

A defining film of 1960s European art cinema, it showed that a three-hour, plotless social panorama could be a popular success and a major critical event.

WATCH WITH INTENTION

YOUR LENS

Watch it as a series of nights, each a different answer to the same question: what is Marcello looking for?

THREE THINGS TO NOTICE

- How often Marcello is placed at the edge of a crowd, watching or being watched, rather than at the centre of the action.
- The contrast between the staged, elaborate set pieces and the quieter two-person scenes, and how the pacing shifts between them.
- How Nino Rota's music moves between dance-band cheer, church-like solemnity and something slightly sour.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY WITH YOU

Is Marcello choosing this life, or is it simply the easiest thing available to him?

CINEMA AT THE TIME

- **Industry:** Italy's postwar boom produced Cinecittà productions, Via Veneto celebrity culture and a booming press. The film arrived as the country was changing quickly, and rebuilt that street on a studio set.
- **Dominant styles:** Italian cinema was still associated with neorealism: location shooting, ordinary people, social hardship. Fellini kept its curiosity about society but moved toward fantasy, ceremony and stylisation.
- **Audience:** Church and conservative critics attacked the film's portrait of decadence, yet audiences came in very large numbers in Italy and abroad, helped by the scandal.
- **Director's moment:** After *La Strada* and *Nights of Cabiria*, Fellini was already admired. This was his biggest canvas: long running time, huge sets, and a far more cynical protagonist.

WHERE IT CAME FROM

MOVEMENT

Italian Neorealism

Fellini worked on neorealist scripts and kept their attention to contemporary society, while moving away from their plain surfaces.



FILM

I Vitelloni (1953)

Fellini's earlier portrait of aimless young men in a provincial town anticipates Marcello's drift in a smaller, warmer form.



FILM

Nights of Cabiria (1957)

A nocturnal Rome of hopeful, battered people, written with Flaiano and Pinelli, which *La Dolce Vita* expands and darkens.



THIS FILM

La Dolce Vita (1960)

NEW AT THE TIME *A near-three-hour film built from loosely linked episodes rather than a conventional story, treating a whole society's appetite for spectacle as its subject.*

SOCIAL CONTEXT

Made at the height of Italy's "economic miracle," when Rome was booming, the Church still held great influence, and a new celebrity and press culture was emerging.

- **Economic miracle:** Between the mid-1950s and early 1960s Italy moved from postwar poverty to rapid industrial growth, with new consumer wealth, cars and television. The film looks at what this prosperity did to values and relationships.

- **Rome and the press:** Via Veneto was a hub for foreign stars, Cinecittà productions and paparazzi, and the gossip press was growing fast. Fellini drew on this world, which gave the film its sense of scandal and spectacle.
- **Church and censorship:** Catholic Italy still had strong religious and political authority through the Christian Democrats. The film's portrait of faith and morality drew condemnation from Church circles and conservatives, and some viewers called for it to be banned, though it became a huge success.
- **The filmmaker's situation:** Fellini began in Rome as a journalist and cartoonist and moved from neorealist-era scriptwriting to directing. By 1960 he was an internationally known director, and this film was a long, expensive project with a big budget and ambitions beyond his earlier work.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- **Pace:** Unhurried and episodic. There is no ticking-clock plot; each sequence is a self-contained night with its own mood.
- **Style:** Elaborate staging, long takes and crowd scenes, mixing satire, melancholy and moments of dreamlike strangeness.
- **Format:** Black and white, widescreen. Runs 174 minutes, so it suits a settled evening.
- **Language:** Mostly Italian with some English and French; subtitles are needed for most viewers.
- **Performance:** Marcello Mastroianni plays a passive, observant, charming lead. Anita Ekberg, Anouk Aimée and Alain Cuny each get a major episode.

WATCH WITH KIDS?

15+ SUGGESTED AGE

Ratings range from FR all audiences and BBFC 12A/FSK 12 to US unrated; the adult themes, three-hour length and subtitles make mid-teens a better fit.

Official ratings: US NR · UK 12A · Germany 12 · France TP

- **Good for:** Older teens curious about classic European cinema may enjoy the striking black-and-white images, Rome's glamorous setting, the sharp satire of fame and the media, and plenty to discuss.
- **May unsettle, distressing themes:** Despair, loneliness and loss are treated seriously and can be emotionally heavy, especially for younger or sensitive viewers.
- **May unsettle, mature themes:** Casual affairs, heavy drinking and decadent parties, with some suggestive moments. Nothing is explicit, but the focus is on adult lives.
- **May unsettle, pace:** Nearly three hours of loosely connected episodes with little conventional plot. Younger viewers may lose patience.
- **Explain first:** It is in Italian with subtitles and in black and white, so you'll need to read along throughout.
- **Explain first:** The story is a series of episodes in one man's life, not a single plot, so it may feel meandering.
- **Explain first:** It satirises celebrity, tabloid journalism and the Church's place in 1960s Rome; some jokes assume that context.

Talk about it after: *Why might the main character keep chasing excitement, and what do you think he is really looking for?*

Cinespective's own guidance, a draft. Check it against the official ratings and your own judgement.

After watching

CONTAINS SPOILERS

THE FILM, UNPACKED

CENTRAL IDEA

The film can be read as a study of a man who is surrounded by pleasure, fame and conversation but cannot find anything to commit to. Rome becomes a mirror of an age with abundant spectacle and fading belief.

THEMES

- **Spectacle replacing meaning:** Fame, scandal, miracles and parties are all treated as events to be photographed and consumed. The film asks what remains once the spectacle is over.
- **Ambition abandoned:** Marcello wants to be a writer but works as a gossip journalist. His drift shows how easy compromise becomes when it is also glamorous.
- **Faith and its counterfeit:** Religion appears as a parade, a media circus and a source of real longing, with the film unsure which of these carries more weight.
- **Intimacy and emptiness:** Women in the film offer attachment, play or escape, and Marcello keeps failing to meet them honestly. Domestic love is both a trap and a real need.
- **Modern Rome as ruin:** Ancient monuments and baroque fountains sit beside nightclubs and cameras, suggesting a city whose past is now a backdrop for pleasure.

Key scenes

Opening helicopter and statue

It sets the film's tone at once: a sacred image carried over the city while men in a second helicopter chase women on a rooftop. Faith, flirtation and modern machinery share a single shot, and Marcello is already above, not within, life.

Trevi Fountain

The famous night with Sylvia gives Marcello the closest thing to pure enchantment in the film. Its beauty is real and deliberately unreal, and the morning after shows how briefly it lasts. It is the film's central image of longing.

Steiner's home and its aftermath

Steiner appears to have the settled, cultured life Marcello admires. What happens to him removes the possibility that serious thought and family life offer a safe alternative, and it pushes Marcello further into drift.

Dawn on the beach

After a night of exhausted excess, the closing image sets Marcello's weariness against an unaffected, innocent figure across the water. Whether he can or will answer her is left open, so the film ends on distance rather than judgement.

Filmmaking

- **Structure:** A prologue, seven episodes and an epilogue, joined by Marcello rather than by cause and effect. The pattern of night and dawn becomes the film's rhythm, with repetitions that gradually add up to a pattern of decline.
- **Staging and design:** Piero Gherardi's costumes and sets, including a reconstructed Via Veneto, give each episode its own world. Gherardi won an Oscar for costume design.
- **Camera and composition:** Cinematographer Otello Martelli uses fluid movement, deep crowded frames and sudden stillness. The camera often keeps Marcello small within a space, emphasising his role as observer.
- **Music:** Nino Rota moves between jazz, popular tunes and church-like themes. The music comments ironically on scenes without ever telling the audience exactly what to feel.
- **Performance:** Mastroianni's relaxed, slightly detached presence lets Marcello be charming and hollow at once. Much of the film depends on how well viewers can read what he is not saying.

THE FULL STORY

The full plot, including the ending.

Marcello Rubini, a journalist who writes gossip while dreaming of a literary career, moves through Rome's nightlife. After an opening in which a statue of Christ is flown over the city, he covers the arrival of the American film star Sylvia. He spends a long night with her that ends at the Trevi Fountain.

At home, his lover Emma, devoted and possessive, attempts suicide, and he wavers between guilt and irritation. He also meets the wealthy Maddalena, who offers him a more casual, restless relationship. His father visits from the provinces and shows how little Marcello's life resembles anything that his father imagined.

Marcello admires his friend Steiner, an intellectual with a settled home and a gentle circle of friends. At the same time he reports on a staged religious miracle in which crowds gather around two children who claim to have seen the Madonna. A child is hurt in the crush, and the occasion turns into a spectacle.

Steiner later kills his two children and himself. Marcello is sent to tell Steiner's wife. This event leaves him more adrift than before, and he gives up writing for public relations work.

The film ends after a party at a seaside villa. In the morning, fishermen pull a strange sea creature onto the beach. Across an inlet, a young girl he met earlier calls to him, but he cannot hear her and does not follow. He rejoins the group.

BEHIND THE FILM

- **A reconstructed Via Veneto:** The famous Rome street, centre of the city's celebrity nightlife, was rebuilt at Cinecittà rather than shot on location. This gave Fellini control over crowds and lighting, and turned a real place into a stylised stage.

LEGACY AND CONNECTIONS

Its place in the lineage before → after

MOVEMENT

Italian Neorealism

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FILM

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THIS FILM

La Dolce Vita (1960)



FILM

8½ (1963)

Fellini turns the episodic, dreamlike method inward, making a film about a director who cannot find his next story.



FILM

The Great Beauty (2013)

Paolo Sorrentino's Rome-set portrait of a jaded writer openly borrows the structure, parties and melancholy of Fellini's film.



TRADITION

European art cinema of the 1960s

Its loose structure and interest in alienation in affluent society fed a wider wave of films about drifting, wealthy and unfulfilled characters.

Reception and reputation

On release in 1960 the film was both a scandal and a hit. Religious and conservative voices in Italy condemned it, while many critics praised its ambition and scale. It won the Palme d'Or at Cannes and did strong business in Italy and abroad, and its title entered everyday language.

It is now seen as one of the central works of European art cinema and Fellini's first great late style work. Early shock at its content has faded, and attention has moved to its structure, its images and its sad, ambivalent portrait of modern celebrity.

Awards Oscars and Cannes

Academy Awards: 4 nominations, 1 win (Best Costume Design, Black-and-White); nominated for Best Director, Best Story and Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen, and Best Art Direction, Black-and-White. Cannes: Palme d'Or, 1960.

Cultural impact beyond cinema

- **Birth of "paparazzi":** The press photographer Paparazzo, played by Walter Santesso, gave his name to the word "paparazzo", plural "paparazzi". It became the standard term for intrusive celebrity photographers in English and many other languages.
- **Trevi Fountain image:** Anita Ekberg wading into Rome's Trevi Fountain, calling to Marcello, became one of cinema's best-known images and a tourist-driven fantasy of Rome. It is endlessly echoed in advertising, parody and homage. Fellini revisited it in *Intervista* (1987).
- **Via Veneto style:** The film's picture of Rome nightlife, with sunglasses, dark suits and café society, fixed an image of glamorous Italian cool. Marcello Mastroianni's weary, elegant Marcello made him a worldwide icon of Italian screen style.
- **Shorthand for decadence:** Its opening, with a statue of Christ carried by helicopter over Rome, and its party sequences are cited as shorthand for modern spiritual emptiness amid luxury. Commentators often invoke them when discussing celebrity culture and media excess.

Its lasting influence

It established the long, episodic art film about a drifting protagonist and shaped how cinema depicts celebrity, photographers and nightlife. Fellini carried its freedom into *8½*, and Paolo Sorrentino's *The Great Beauty* (2013) openly revisits its world.

WHAT NEXT?

CONTINUE THE DIRECTOR

8½ (1963)

Fellini's next great film takes the same freedom of structure and applies it to a director's own creative crisis. It is the natural companion piece.

COMPARE ANOTHER APPROACH

L'avventura (1960) **COMING SOON**

Released the same year, Antonioni's study of idle wealth and emotional distance shows a much cooler, quieter response to the same postwar Italian world.

FOLLOW THE IDEA

Wild Strawberries (1957)

Bergman also follows a man reckoning with how he has lived, but through memory and dream, for a more intimate and Nordic view of regret.

EXPLORE THE ERA OR MOVEMENT

Breathless (1960)

Another 1960 landmark that broke with conventional storytelling. It is French, fast and street-level, where Fellini is Roman, ornate and expansive.

JUMP FORWARD

The Great Beauty (2013) COMING SOON

A modern reworking of Fellini's Rome that shows how lasting the film's images and attitudes have been.

FULL CAST AND CREW



Federico Fellini
DIRECTOR



Marcello Mastroianni
ACTOR
as Marcello Rubini



Anita Ekberg
ACTOR
as Sylvia



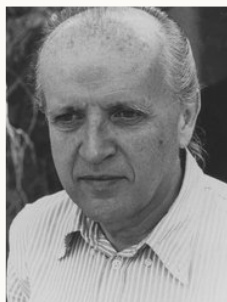
Anouk Aimée
ACTOR
as Maddalena



Yvonne Furneaux
ACTOR
as Emma



Magali Noël
ACTOR
as Fanny



Nino Rota
COMPOSER

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