



FILM: 8 ½

FDG RATING: 3.4 ☺☺☺○○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Frederico Fellini: *director/writer*  
Marcello Mastroianni: *actor, Guido*  
Bruno Agostini: *actor, Bruno Agostini*  
Sandra Milo: *actress, Carla*  
Anouk Aimée: *actress, Luisa Anselmi*

DATE: April 19, 2020

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: 8 ½

Federico Fellini's 8 ½ opens with a strange, surreal dream sequence that sets the tone for his film about a successful film maker in a creative crisis, struggling to find a suitable subject for his next film. It's a film about film making with the protagonist, Guido, being constantly pestered by an entourage of characters including a harem of hopeful actresses pleading for a part, script writers, camera men and set designers urgently requesting more details about the film, and his producer expressing worry about the budget, all forcing Guido to escape into his fantasies and memories, many of which parallel Fellini's own past including his infidelities and uncertainty as a film maker. Fellini conceived 8 ½ after being creatively exhausted from the international success of *La Dolce Vita* in 1960 and according to one published critique, for the first time in his directorial career, found himself without a new concept ready and so decided to make a film about his crisis of inspiration.

The opening dream sequence, has Guido trapped inside a claustrophobic car in a bumper-to-bumper traffic jam with grotesque faces staring at him. He struggles to escape through the vehicle window, floats up over the cars ascending up to clouds feeling free and then suddenly notices his ankle is tethered to a rope that is held by his associates below who pull him back to reality.

Tinged with surrealism, the film can seem overwhelmingly strange and puzzling especially in 1963 when it was released. Arguably, the first feature film to explore the subconscious, a published critic noted that "the mark of modernism in art is self-reference, 8½ surely goes beyond any predecessor in having itself as its subject." One theory is that Fellini had been in Jungian psychoanalysis which focuses on dreams and fantasies as a gateway to self-understanding. His preoccupation with internal thoughts, memories, desires, and anxieties consume his film as Guido fluidly moves between his conscious reality and then retreats into the world of his subconscious mind, a fantastical playground where he tries to sort out his many entanglements. The flashbacks have a truth to them.

One of our resident reviewers said the film is actually less than meets the eye exploring a basically simple concept; a criticism that aligns with some critics in the mid-1960s who dismissed 8½ as autobiographical trivia, brilliant on its surface but devoid of significant content. Nevertheless, we agreed it was very artfully made. Even for our group of film enthusiasts, 8 1/2 opened our eyes to the unbelievable pressure on film makers with so many people making demands. There is a constant sense of confusion with Guido seeming to say, "I can get away with this", as his entourage has completely bought into the phantom film that hasn't even taken form as a concept.

There is, however, a huge extremely expensive spaceship being built on a platform since presumably, Guido's next film will be a sci-fi. This is completely incongruous conceptually and visually but most likely represents Guido's ultimate yearning to escape. At the end of the film, it is disassembled to signify Guido has reached self acceptance.

Extremely colorful, entertaining, theatrical type characters populate 8 ½, becoming a recognizable Fellini-esque style that following generations of film makers copy as well as the fantastical dream sequences, and his iconic parade of characters striding to circus-like melodies usually at the end of the film and sometimes at the beginning. One discussion participant suggested that the film could be approached as a character study.

Some favorite scenes are a flashback to Guido's adolescence when he remembers skipping Catholic school with his buddies to scurry to the beach where they give some coins to a voluptuous woman (of questionable repute) to sensually dance the rhumba for them.

Another is the very revealing surreal dream scene where, in a large room, Guido is surrounded by a harem of devoted women. Almost all are women he has slept with or fantasized about: his wife Luisa, his mistress Carla, Saraghina (the voluptuous woman on the beach), his sister-in-law, an aged show girl, a flight attendant, and an exotic dancer among others. One woman says, "He's a darling...he acts like a boy. But he's really very complex."

(Obviously Fellini's admission of his own idiosyncrasies). Guido wants to control them like a ringmaster in a circus but can't.

Marcello Mastroianni's, is outstanding as Guido. He had just starred in Fellini's internationally successful film *La Dolce Vita* so the director cast him as the protagonist in *8 1/2*. (He is regarded as Italy's biggest film star of all time.)

The interesting title, *8 1/2*, refers to the 6 feature films, and 3 short films Fellini had made by 1963 which could be counted as a total of *7 1/2* so this one would be next in the numerical sequence. But an early working title for *8 1/2* was more apropos, *The Beautiful Confusion*.

A very entertaining and, at the time, innovative, film that inspired and still inspires many filmmakers. In fact, for those familiar with Fellini's films, we often recognize Fellini-esque style elements in current films especially those that explore the mystery of artistic creation,

In 2018, BBC writer Nashawaty, said: By the time of his death in 1993, Federico Fellini had won four best foreign language film Oscars, tying him with his countryman Vittorio De Sica for the most wins by any director. But 25 years after he died, the long shadow of his legacy reaches far beyond awards and accolades. After all, not only was the maestro's vision so singular and hypnotic that it introduced its own carnival-like adjective into the cinéaste vernacular ('Felliniesque'), his movies also showed generations of film-makers the way forward – how to experiment and take risks by marrying confessional storytelling with bizarre flights of imagery.

Only a seven of our usually large gathering of discussion participants joined the discussion on *8 1/2* but as remaining film loyalists, we definitely felt a sense of admiration for this influential film maker. So even if a couple of us thought the film didn't have much to say, we enjoyed the flamboyant way he said it and mounted a fairly favorable score of 3.4 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!

Adriane Dedic, [adedic@pacbell.net](mailto:adedic@pacbell.net)

[www.filmdiscussiongroup.com](http://www.filmdiscussiongroup.com)