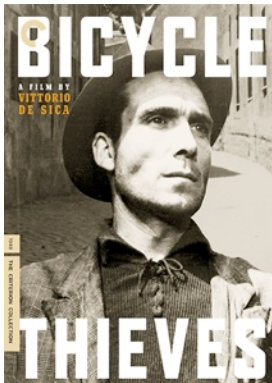


Viva l'Italia in grand cinematic style

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A quarter of a million Montrealers – the city's largest ethnic minority – trace their ancestry to Italy. And today many will be celebrating Republic Day, joining in spirit with Italy's 59 million people to commemorate the end of the monarchy and the birth of the republic by referendum in 1946. Here are six films to remember the old country by.

The Tree of Wooden Clogs (*Italy/France, 1978*) Awarded the Palme d'Or at Cannes, this three-hour slice of peasant life used non-professional actors to great success. Shot full-frame and artfully directed by Ermanno Olmi, it's a spiritual look at three families of farmers living on a large, quasi-feudal estate in Lombardy in 1898. British firm Nouveaux Pictures has the best-looking DVD, but Koch Lorber's North American release has removable subtitles.

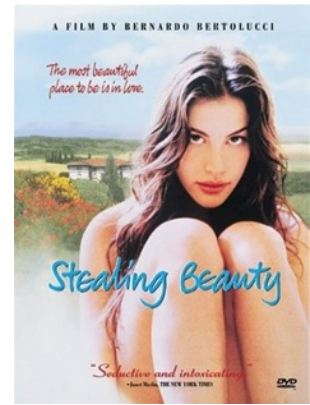


Bicycle Thieves (*Italy, 1948*) Vittorio De Sica's neo-realist classic about a poor father and son hunting for a stolen bicycle in postwar Rome is available in a new picture-boxed two-disc set from U.S. producer Criterion. Quebec film buffs have complained there are no French subtitles, but there are English subtitles and even a well-synced English dub (although inaccurate in spots, it's good for watching with the kids).

L'Avventura (*Italy/France, 1960*) The ultimate Italian art-film. Michelangelo Antonioni's story about the disappearance of a rich socialite on a yachting trip off the coast of Sicily came out the same year as Federico Fellini's better-known film, *La Dolce Vita*. The critics at Cannes judged Fellini's the better movie, but cinephiles are still divided. Criterion has a lovely two-disc set of this, too.

Cinema Paradiso (*Italy/ France, 1988*) Filmed in Sicily and starring French greats Philippe Noiret and Jacques Perrin (and a now-iconic gamin, Salvatore Cascio), this is on a lot of people's lists of all-time favourite Italian movies. Noiret plays an aging film projectionist in the 1940s who's befriended by a young boy fascinated by moving pictures. The new Weinstein/Genius DVD has director Giuseppe Tornatore's extended, three-hour version.

Stealing Beauty (*Italy/France/ Britain/1996*) Liv Tyler went on to bigger things like *The Lord of the Rings*, but she was never more exquisitely down-to-earth and sensual than here, in Bernardo Bertolucci's coming-of-age romance set in the hot Tuscan countryside. Jeremy Irons, Jean Marais, Sinéad Cusack and Rachel Weisz also star in this English-language film. Superb soundtrack (from Nina Simone to Portishead) on the Fox DVD.



The Best of Youth (*Italy, 2003*) Made as a six-hour miniseries for Italian TV, this underrated epic went under the radar outside Italy, given only limited release in cinemas on this side of the ocean. But there's plenty to like in its tale of two Roman brothers who go in opposite directions through the fraught decades of the 1960s through to 2000. On DVD, Miramax's two-disc set is widescreen, anamorphic and English-subtitled.

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