



## BEHIND THE WHITE GLASSES

A film by Valerio Ruiz

2017 / Italy / 104 min. / In Italian & English

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**Synopsis:**

*Behind the White Glasses* offers a deep dive into the ground breaking life and career of Lina Wertmuller, the first woman ever nominated for the Academy Award for Best Director for her masterpiece *Seven Beauties*.

The documentary spans decades, from the unpublished pictures taken in Cinecitta, when she was Federico Fellini's assistant director on *8 1/2*, to the places where her most famous films were set, revealing the artistic and human universe of a woman who, with her unfailing irony and taste for the grotesque, has left her mark in all the fields of entertainment in which she worked: cinema, drama, television, music. The journey is accompanied by many exclusive interviews with the artists who witnessed her intense and constantly evolving career. Among them: Giancarlo Giannini, Marina Cicogna, Sophia Loren, Harvey Keitel, Nastassja Kinski, and film critic John Simon. The film features a long series of unreleased videos, images and songs written by Lina Wertmüller. *Behind the White Glasses* is a personal poetic portrait by Valerio Ruiz, her longtime assistant director and very close collaborator.

## Director's Notes:

*Behind the White Glasses* came about in a special circumstance that personally touched me: As a result of working together with Lina for the past ten years in different fields of entertainment, I have been able to get a deep insight into her artistic and human universe. This film is a journey in search of the places in Italy that Lina Wertmüller portrays with so much passion, emphasizing the differences, contradictions, dialects, beauty, in her films.

*Behind the White Glasses* is conceived as a narrative film and not exclusively as a documentary film both from the standpoint of the story that is narrated and that of the production structure. At several points, there is a "set," which, however, does not diminish the spontaneity of the memories and recollections of the protagonist. The idea behind this choice is the will of bringing Lina Wertmüller's story as close as possible to the story told through a film so as to suggest the idea that the cinema and filmmaking are life itself for a director like the passionate and relentless Lina Wertmüller and that it is impossible to separate one from the other. Therefore, it is not only a document, but a narrative that goes beyond the concreteness of the albeit rich and unparalleled facts that are presented and that speaks to people's emotions and introduces them to the human aspects of this artist.

Together with my personal knowledge of the director, the witnesses have the task of capturing the many facets of the world of Lina Wertmüller. The people interviewed are enshrouded in darkness, lit only by the colors of the Tiffany lamps that decorate Lina Wertmüller's house and that provide the backdrop to the figures. The witnesses therefore come from abstract places that at the same time evoke an intimate place of the protagonist.

The interviews reveal the most precious aspects of Lina Wertmüller's artistic world: her way of working, her personal use of filmmaking and editing techniques, her writing, the direction of the actors.

By providing many different points of view, the interviews capture Lina Wertmüller's talent in its entirety. After an in-depth and lengthy exploration of her work as director, I think it would be impossible – and perhaps even misleading – to portray her brilliance by looking for a definition and for logical explanations about the reasons of her artistic choices. The genius of an artist is ultimately his or her greatest mystery. Seeking to reveal it would be diminishing and belittling of the artist. The film therefore seeks to build inroads into the universe of the Roman director to gain knowledge about her with the aim of displaying her multifarious talent: watching Lina as she interprets a song is perhaps the most untainted way of transmitting her artistic genius to the audience without the need for academic critiques or explanations.

There were moments in the career of this acclaimed and acknowledged director - unmistakably characterized by her inseparable white glasses - in which she experienced failure, harsh criticism and even an unsuccessful film. The documentary also reflects these moments. The wisdom displayed by Lina Wertmüller as she recalls these difficult

moments in her career is uplifting and moving. The intention of this film, therefore, is to portray Lina Wertmüller. Not only the grotesque spirit that informs her films and plays, that nevertheless are given ample space in the documentary, but also her humane side, and disclose aspects of her personality that at times are hidden behind the image-mask of her white glasses. The narrative device is that of the portrait that offers a personal, poetic and unfettered point of view.

## **Lina Wertmüller, Biography of a Versatile Artist:**

Lina Wertmüller started her artistic journey by attending the Accademia Teatrale run by Pietro Scharoff. After completing her education at the Academy she started working with directors in the theaters among whom Salvini, De Lullo and Garinei & Giovannini. She worked both for radio and television as author and director of the first edition of the TV show *Canzonissima* and as author for Studio Uno.

In 1963 Lina Wertmüller started her career in the filmmaking world as assistant director and co-scriptwriter for Fellini on the set of *Otto e mezzo*. That same year marked her debut with *I basilischi*, a film that she conceived and directed and for which she wrote the script; and she also dubbed eight secondary characters. This was a delicate analysis of the youth of small towns in the South of Italy that she portrayed with an ironic and grotesque spirit. The film was immediately appreciated abroad and it received the Silver Sail award at the Locarno International Film Festival and other awards at the Vienna, London and Taormina film festivals.

In 1964, she worked with RAI for *Il Giornalino di Gianburrasca*, the first Italian musical-comedy. This was the first time that a television production used great theatre actors like Tofano, Valeri, Valori and high quality collaborators like Piero Tosi as set and costume designer and Nino Rota for music orchestrated by Bacalov, the winner of 3 Academy Awards. In 1965 she filmed *Questa volta parliamo di uomini*, her second movie, which starred Nino Manfredi, who was awarded the Maschera d'Argento. Then, using the pseudonym George H. Brown, she directed two musical comedies produced by Titanus, *Rita la zanzara* and *Non stuzzicate la zanzara* with Rita Pavone and Giancarlo Giannini, in his screen debut, as well as Giulietta Masina, Turi Ferro, Paolo Panelli and Bice Valori. She also directed a Western: *The Belle Star Story – il mio corpo per un poker* (1967) featuring Elsa Martinelli.

After working as scriptwriter for some time for Cayatte, Sollima and Festa Campanile, Lina Wertmüller returned to film directing: *Mimi metallurgico ferito nell'onore* (1972) starting the golden age of her career. With this film, she brought a new couple to the attention of Italian audiences: Giancarlo Giannini and Mariangela Melato, a perfect match for portraying Italian stereotypes. Lina Wertmüller used extremely original settings with painstaking attention to detail, especially once she started to work with Enrico Job, brilliant set designer and costume designer. They became a couple both at work and in private, a partnership that lasted for more than forty years. There is a somewhat elaborate style in the ironic and typically lengthy titles of Lina Wertmüller's films. Examples are *Film d'amore e d'anarchia, ovvero stamattina in Via dei Fiori nella nota casa di tolleranza* (1973) featuring the Giannini-Melato couple; *Tutto a posto e niente in ordine* (1974); *Travolti da un insolito destino nell'azzurro mare di agosto* (1974), also featuring Giannini and Melato.

With *Travolti da un insolito destino nell'azzurro mare di agosto* and *Pasqualino Settebellezze* (*Seven Beauties*), she attained international recognition. She became known to the American market and was the very first woman to obtain a nomination for the Academy Award for Best Director.

In the 80's she directed several movies with international casts: in 1985 she directed Harvey Keitel and Angela Molina in *Un complicato intrigo di donne, vicoli e delitti*, then with her film *In una notte di chiaro di luna* (1989) featuring Peter O'Toole, Faye Dunaway, Rutger Hauer and Nastassja Kinski, she proved to be a forerunner in dealing with the AIDS issue.

For the theatre, she wrote *Due più due non fa più quattro* (1968), directed by her friend Franco Zeffirelli. Then she directed *La cucina* by A. Wesker (1969), *Amore e magia nella cucina di mamma* (1979), *L'esibizionista* (1994), *Gianni, Ginetta e gli altri* (1995), *Storia d'amore e d'anarchia* (2002), *Lasciami andare madre* (2004) and *Molto rumore (senza) rispetto per nulla* (2005), *La vedova scaltra* (2007). More recent productions include *Il giornalino di Gian Burrasca* (2010) featuring Elio, and *Un'allegria di secolo* (2013).

In 1986, she made her debut in the opera world at the San Carlo Theatre of Naples and at the Stat Opera of Munich with Bizet's *Carmen* and then at the Opera House in Athens with *La Bohème*. In 2007, she mounted *Le nozze di Figaro* for the Tuscia Opera Festival. With Raffaele La Capria she adapted for television *Sabato, domenica e lunedì* featuring Luca De Filippo, Pupella Maggio, Luciano De Crescenzo and Sophia Loren whom she had directed in *Fatto di sangue fra due uomini per causa di una vedova... si sospettano moventi politici* (1978). Then came *Io speriamo che me la cavo*, in 1992, with Paolo Villaggio. She made a comeback to the cinema with *Ninfa Plebea*, a film based on the novel by Domenico Rea and *Metalmecanico e parrucchiera in un turbine di sesso e di politica* (1996), a film in which Lina Wertmüller flaunts her unmistakable grotesque spirit in dealing with class struggle issues. In *Ferdinando & Carolina* (1999) she tells the story of King Ferdinando of Bourbon and his marriage with Caroline, daughter of Marie Therese of Austria.

During her career she directed several documentaries, also for RAI, among them *Una domenica sera di novembre* (1982). For l'Enciclopedia Visuelle française, *Vivaldi* (1992). For Russia 90, *The Russian Soul* (1993). For television, she directed *Il decimo clandestino* (1989), based on a story by Guareschi, with Piera degli Esposti and Dominique Sandà. *Francesca e Nunziata* (2001) based on the novel by Maria Orsini Natale starring Sophia Loren, Giancarlo Giannini, Raoul Bova and Claudia Gerini, and *Mannaggia alla miseria* (2009). Her most recent work is a documentary entitled *Roma, Napoli, Venezia... in un crescendo rossiniano* (2014), the first 4k project produced by RAI, Dept. Tech Strategies.

## CREDITS

### Cast

Lina Wertmüller  
Marina Cicogna  
Caterina D'Amico  
Masolino D'Amico  
Isa Danieli  
Domenico De Masi  
Piera Degli Esposti  
Laura Delli Colli  
Giancarlo Giannini  
Rutger Hauer  
Roberto Herlitzka  
Harvey Keitel  
Nastassja Kinski  
Raffaele La Capria  
Pierluigi Leonardi  
Muzzi Loffredo  
Sophia Loren  
Rita Pavone  
Martin Scorsese  
John Simon  
Piero Tosi  
Massimo Wertmüller

Director: Valerio Ruiz  
Scriptwriter: Valerio Ruiz  
Director of Photography: Giuseppe Pignone  
Editing: Pierluigi Leonardi  
Art Director: Virginia Vianello  
Musical score: Lucio Gregoretti  
Executive producer: Leonardo Recalcati  
Sound designer: Stefano Di Fiore  
Producer: Leonardo Recalcati  
A production of: Valerio Ruiz  
Recalcati Multimedia S.r.l.  
White Glasses Film S.r.l