

## “Cinema, my love”

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I know, it's crazy, but sometimes I sit here, look at the hall and say: “Buddy, you're not useful anymore”. **Ennio Cosentino** is 81 and he talks to his *Cinema Italia*, from the stage to the empty stalls, in the dark. He talks to his cinema hall as if it were one of his children. The cinema, as art, is his fiancée, he says, while that hall is as if it were his eternal baby. Or rather, **a 660 seats on two floors great big baby**, a giant who is already 52 years old and who still has got much to say and teach. Somma's *Cinema Italia* holds out despite the “invasion” of the local multiplex, attracting every weekend an audience of 15,000 people.

**“I'm 81 and I've been working in this cinema**, which was built by my father, since 1958”, Ennio says, in his leather jacket in a very *The Matrix* style, but just shorter. “I've got cinema in my blood: my mother was a soprano, singing during the silent films while holding me in her arms in the 20's. What else could I do in life, if not love cinema?”

### **This hasn't been the only cinema you've run, has it?**

“No, it hasn't. This cinema is my property. Four years ago, I had to close the *Odeon*, the other cinema of Somma, which was a bit smaller. But during the 80's I've also run 12 cinema halls at the same time, among Rho, Somma, Sesto Calende, Venegono and also Vimercate. I toured the whole of Lombardy because of this passion. I was just the Bassetti's manager. I would come back home at 1 a.m. after the showings and get up at 6 a.m. to go to the factory.”

### **Can you still fill up this hall?**

“Unfortunately not, not with the films. But now we also use it for concerts and theatre. There aren't the queues of the past anymore, nor the films.”

### **When was the last big queue for a film?**

“In 2001, for *The Mummy*. And then, the multiplex came.”

### **What have they meant?**

“An age has ended. Technology has destroyed society, we're too far one from another, and the multiplex are an example of this. Our mind is distracted from what life is, the vision of the film itself is abstracted. But we can't do nothing, it's evolution.”

**It's a bit a paradox: right now cinema is technology and 50 years ago it was an innovation...**

“But the cinema was a technology that didn't distract from other things, on the contrary, it created moments of aggregation. Today we eat popcorn, and the film is soon forgotten, we don't even discuss of it anymore. The distributors that I supply from, seem to want me to close, too. Just think they make me pay the minimum of the tickets I should sell for the showings, in advance. It's absurd.”

**But haven't you thought about approaching 3D showings?**

“It's too expensive: you need €120,000, the glasses, and the equipment to clean them. And then I don't believe in it totally. I went to a 3D showing, and of course it's an interesting effect, but it risks being just a little fun. *Avatar* is a good film even without the 3D, and I showed it, too.”

**And how about turning *Cinema Italia* into a multiplex?**

“(He opens his eyes wide.) Never.”

**What does give you more satisfaction today?**

“I like discussing about the films I see. I'm so happy when then the audience come to me and say that I chose a very good one. Just think there are still some women who come and kiss me (he laughs). But, by this time, the demanding spectators are few. They have reduced by 90% compared with the ones of the best years.”

**Which years?**

“Those of *Ben Hur*, *Two Women* and *The Vice*. The years of the cinema as a point of reference, not of consumption. As a thermometer of life. Today we don't have films like that anymore: the multiplex needs a lot of films, and quantity is an enemy of quality.”

**What about the last masterpiece?**

“*The Gladiator*, no doubt. Or last year's little film that almost nobody saw, *The Concert*. It was beautiful.”

**But if everything changed and the takings are different from then, what is it that makes you go on?**

“I'm keen on cinema. It enters in your blood like a child or a fiancée that doesn't go out. Cinema is part of my life. This is where I grew up, between great actors and bad films. I tore off tickets and cleaned the floor, and all this, waiting for great stories to show to the public.”

**It seems to be inside *New Paradise Cinema*...**

“A lot of people tell me so. But it's normal: all of Italy's one-screen cinemas find themselves in this condition, in this violent and maybe inexorable decline.”

**Why hold on, then?**

“Because you need to fight before you die, otherwise you're a coward. You must fight for your love. That's my contribution to cinema.”

**What about the future?**

“I don't wanna think about that. Now I'm here, in my cinema.”

Ennio takes me for a tour around the empty hall. He proudly shows me the big stalls he installed by reducing to a hundred of seats.

He proudly turns on the lights.

He steps onto the stage, looks towards the white screen and then the empty stalls.

“A perfect hall”, he says smiling, “just perfect.”

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