

from its otherwise brilliant treatment of cuisines made possible by circulating people and food.

—ELIZABETH ZANONI
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Borsalino City.

By Enrica Viola.

Una Films, 2016.

78 minutes. Streaming format, color.

Enrica Viola's *Borsalino City* is a fascinating and much-needed documentary about the history of the renowned hat company—a tale of feuding cousins, calculated brand development, and the power of cinema. The birthplace of this global brand was the Italian city of Alessandria (Piedmont region), and its father was Giuseppe Borsalino.

Borsalino City moves chronologically through the company's history, which began in 1857 after its founder returned from apprenticing at Berteil, the famed Paris-based hatmaker. Giuseppe and his brother Lazzaro caught fashion and fortune at just the right time. Their hats became wardrobe staples of the elite, topping the heads of kings and statesmen literally around the world. Quality was Borsalino's calling card. In order to expand, they diversified their offerings and audience, sent salesmen around the world, won prizes at the world's fairs, and built an enormous factory in Alessandria. Borsalino cleared the way for "Made in Italy" to dominate the luxury goods market.

The story of the company itself is upstaged by amazing archival footage of factory life and by oral histories of laborers, taken in the mid-1950s. The main strength of the movie is the richness of these historical sources. The stories of the people themselves, their feelings about their work, and their respect for the leaders of the firm paint a picture of a company town where the workers actually liked the bosses. In this respect, we are reminded of the paternalistic mentality of many Italian family-owned fashion companies (Zenga is another example). In *Borsalino City*, we see the exceedingly rare synergy that can exist between owners and laborers and a respect that comes from the reciprocity of need. This respect is largely absent from the history of the clothing industry, and it exudes from this film.

Whereas these remarkable sources give the film its heart, the strong tie to the history of cinema gives it intellectual breadth and, at many times, depth. Borsalino grew as the world of motion pictures grew, and its hats were worn by

everyone from Charlie Chaplin to Marcello Mastroianni to Humphrey Bogart to Robert Redford to Leonardo DiCaprio. Indeed, the montage of Borsalino hats in film is quite impressive. The international focus of *Borsalino City* gives a special shout-out to French film noir of the 1960s, including the work of Jean-Luc Godard and the French fantastical gangster movie *Borsalino* (1970), named after the hat and featuring its signature logo (but with no character by that name).

Most unsurprising (yet most thought provoking) was the brand's association with gangster movies of the 1930s and early 1940s. It is hard to imagine Edward G. Robinson without *that hat*. This element of the Borsalino history is particularly interesting when taken in the cultural context. As film expert Eddie Muller points out, while most Americans could not embrace the gangster's lifestyle, they could appropriate his clothing. The Borsalino hat became a way for fashionable men to latch onto a potent cultural image while remaining law-abiding citizens. *Borsalino City* provides a clear trajectory of how the hat was seen on screen throughout the twentieth century. In this respect, the film is a needed asset for those interested in both film and fashion history, an important and thriving facet of cultural studies.

While the film's focus on the company history necessarily limits its scope, there remain some bigger-picture questions about Italian Americans, Italians, and the global fashion market that come out of *Borsalino City*. The film does little with the popularization of the fedora (a term used interchangeably with the term *Borsalino* by those in the know). I would have loved to have seen the director and the film's excellent interviewees take on the meaning of the fedora in menswear in the twentieth century. In the end, the film does not provide enough historical context to fully explain why men ceased wearing hats after 500 years of everyday use.

As a cultural historian who writes extensively about the fashion industry, Italians and Italian Americans, and twentieth-century consumerism, I feel the filmmaker celebrated all the reasons that Borsalino is such a definitive brand, but I would have loved to see that message go to the next level. Without Borsalino there would be no Versace, no Dolce & Gabbana, no Valentino, no Prada, no Gucci. Borsalino perfected the successful marriage of quality product and proactive marketing that ensured it became one of the most important brands of the last century. It was a model that every other Italian brand would follow. In this regard, *Borsalino City* successfully makes the case for the brand's historic and iconic status. Ultimately, it is an excellent film that celebrates Italian craftsmanship and cultural history.

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