

# MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

## ETERNITY AND HISTORY: THE CINEMA OF THEO ANGELOPOULOS

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Presented with support from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and the Hellenic-American Chamber of Commerce, and with the cooperation of The Greek Film Centre (Athens)

### ***Alexander the Great (O Megalexandros)***

Saturday, July 9, 5:00 p.m.

1980. 210 mins. 35mm print source: The Greek Film Centre. In Greek with English subtitles. Directed by Theo Angelopoulos. Produced by Angelopoulos and Nikos Angelopoulos. Written by Angelopoulos and Petros Markaris. Photographed by Giorgos Arvanitis. Edited by Giorgos Triandafyllou. Music by Chalaris Christodoulos. Principal Cast: Omero Antonutti (as Alexandros), Eva Kotamanidou (Alexandros' Daughter), Mihalis Giannatos (Dragoumanos), Grigoris Evangelatos (Axelandos' Schoolteacher), Miranda Kounelaki (Mrs. Tzelepis).

Excerpted from an interview with Theo Angelopoulos, by Tony Mitchell, *Sight & Sound* (Winter 1980/81):

The first thing to be said is that it's the most simple film I've made so far. Its progress is linear, and it hasn't developed its stylistic form in the course of editing like the other films. There are no chronological jumps—the film begins on New Year's Eve in 1900 and proceeds from there, except for the final sequence when the little Alexander becomes Megalexandros and goes towards the city. Which is a modern city—present-day Athens, in fact—in contrast to the rural, turn-of-the-century world of the rest of the film. When the little Alexander enters the city, he brings all the experience of the century with him. He has gained a total experience of life, sex and death, and over it there is a great question mark. How long will the night last, and when will a new day break?

It's a more surrealistic film than *The Travelling Players*. It doesn't describe real events, but their sense and meaning, and concentrates on political and sexual consequences. It's a more 'poetic' film, whereas *Travelling Players* was more concrete.

Greek people have grown up caressing dead stones. I've tried to bring mythology down from the heights

and directly to the people, in *Travelling Players* and *O Megalexandros* [*Alexander the Great*]. The title should not be Alexander but Megalexandros, who exists in popular, anonymous legends and fables and has nothing to do with the historical Alexander—he evokes a totally different personage. For this reasons, we have had difficulty in finding a translation for the title. The legend of Megalexandros originated in 1453 under Turkish domination, and it has come down through oral tradition over the centuries. It embodies one of the deepest of Greek sentiments, that of waiting for a liberator, even a Messiah—he's a kind of Christ figure, and in the film is also identified with St. George.

The film is based on two sources. One is *The Book of Megalexandros*, which is an account of the legend, and provides the general climate of the film rather than the storyline. The second, more concrete source is an actual event of 1870, when a group of aristocratic English tourists were kidnapped by Greek bandits at Marathon. The bandits held them to ransom and demanded an amnesty from the government in exchange for the hostages. The government botched the whole business, and the exchange never came about; so the tourists were killed, and a scandal erupted. The British fleet blockaded the port.

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