The highlight of the 1987 Miami Festival was another Italian film—one made 45 years ago. In 1942, Scalera Films produced a four-hour film in two parts (Noi Vivi and Addio, Kira) based on Ayn Rand's first novel, We the Living. Although her name appeared on the credits ("dal romanzo di Ayn Rand"), the film was made without the writer's authorization or knowledge.

Rand, who had left her native Russia for the United States in 1926, wrote We the Living in the early Thirties, while she was working in the wardrobe department at RKO. The novel, set in the Soviet Union, was partly autobiographical and fiercely anticollectivist. According to its current distributor, the movie played to huge crowds for several months, apparently until the Mussolini government—realizing that its anti-Communist sentiments were also anti-state and implicitly anti-Fascist—banned it. Rand learned of its existence after the war. In 1968 her attorneys located the original nitrate negative in Rome and bought the film. Rand is said to have preferred Noi Vivi to the only other movie adaptation of one of her novels, The Fountainhead, though she had worked on the screenplay of King Vidor's film. She collaborated with her attorneys and producer Duncan Scott in the preparation of a shortened version of the Italian film, subtitled in English. Rand died in 1982; work on the film was completed with the cooperation of her estate. It was this 170-minute version that was shown at Miami.

Howard Roarke, she dreams of building bridges and skyscrapers. Kira falls in love with Leo (Rossano Brazzi), a penniless former aristocrat. For both of them, their country has become "an immense prison covered with snow and stained with blood." Leo is tubercular. When Kira discovers that Andrei (Fosco Giachetti), a secret police officer, has fallen in love with her, she becomes his mistress to finance Leo's stay in a sanatorium. Leo, cured, turns out to be an ungrateful wastrel. Kira decides to attempt an escape from Russia across the border, alone on foot. The film, at least the version seen at Miami, ends here. The novel's ending is stronger: Kira descends from a train near the Latvian border and puts on her mother's wedding dress to camouflage herself in the snow. Shot by a border guard, she bleeds to death in the drifts.

In 1942 Brazzi and Valli were at the beginning of their careers; they make a devastatingly glamorous young couple. The film's acting honors, however, belong to Giachetti, who, at 38, was a veteran of many films, in most of which he personified the exemplar of the Fascist hero, a moral and serious "man's man." Here he is extraordinary as the Bolshevik functionary, too lucid for his job, unlucky in love and in politics. After his purge trial, he shoots himself and is declared a Red hero.

The film is adequately directed by Goffredo Alessandrini, who, although he began his career as an assistant to Alessandro Blasetti in 1929, was no Blasetti. He directed a number of commercial romantic melodramas and Fascist propaganda films, and managed to stay married to Anna Magnani for five years. There are a few wondrously atmospheric scenes in We the Living; what was clearly lacking was an epic budget commensurate with the epic screenplay. If not a masterpiece, it is a fascinating and precious chunk of film history. I could not be more grateful to everyone who had a hand in its restoration.