

Immediately following his tribute. "We the Living" was screened, with an introduction calling attention to the archeological work that was done to prepare it for its first public screening in 44 years.

The three-hour movie was banned by the Mussolini government after a five-month run in 1942 and it has not been seen since.

But Rand, herself, helped in the restoration project, praising this "illegitimate child" for being more faithful to her book than the only other adaptation of her work, "The authorized 1949 Hollywood version of 'The Fountainhead.'" (Something similar happened in the early 1940s in Italy when Luchino Visconti filmed an unauthorized version of "The Postman Always

Rings Twice" that is still the best treatment of that James Cain novel.)

Although it's rather humorless, "We the Living" turns out to be worth the effort that has gone into putting it back together and providing it with the English subtitles it never had before.

Engrossing, lushly mounted, well-acted by Alda Valli and the very young Rossano Brazzi (who was never this good in his later American movies), it is set in Russia after the revolution and carries a strong anti-totalitarian message. Although it is specifically anti-communist, it clearly irked Mussolini as well.

The restoration job is exceptional, a labor of love that makes even the occasional scratches in the print seem to fit like character lines in an old face.

"We the Living" is probably going to be playing on the festival circuit for the next couple of years. Rand's followers could easily make it as much a cult film as "The Fountainhead."