

# 'Cinema Paradiso' revels in joy and power of movies

■ The friendship between a boy and an old man grows through a shared love of film



## 'Cinema Paradiso'

Starring: Philippe Noiret, Salvatore Cascio, Marco Leonardi, Jacques Perrin, Antonella Attili, Enzo Cannavale

★★★★☆

By Mason West and Rebecca Wilson  
Oregon Daily Emerald

The world of foreign cinema is shamefully overlooked by American movie-goers. The only hope foreign movies have of gaining widespread American attention is by receiving an Oscar nomination. Then, when we rent movies, we can see those honors on the cover and it will entice us to rent it. That's pretty much what we did, and it worked out just peachy.

"Cinema Paradiso" won the Oscar for best foreign film in 1989 against such competitors as "What Happened to Santiago" and "Jesus of Montreal." The film is from Italy and is thus performed in Italian, surprisingly enough. But the subtitles are yellow — the best subtitle color — so you don't have to worry about not being able to read them.

The movie is about the impact of one cinema on a small post-World War II Sicilian town. The town's only source of community entertainment is the ramshackle Cinema Paradiso. The movies, mostly American, break up the monotony of the depressed villagers' lives. However, there isn't too much to stir them up because the town priest has all the steamy scenes removed before public viewing.

Mason — It's like biting into a Twinkie and not finding any cream filling.

Rebecca — Or like when your parents said they were taking you to Disneyland, but they took you to Nebraska instead.

Salvatore, or 'Toto,' is a mischievous urchin, as well as the village altar boy, and he secretly watches the forbidden scenes. This creates hell for Alfredo, the theater's projectionist. Alfredo is played to perfection by Philippe Noiret, who is best known to American audiences for his portrayal of Pablo Neruda in "Il Postino."

Despite Toto's hyperactive personality, he and Alfredo eventually strike up a deep and lasting friendship as Alfredo teaches him the craft of movie projecting. The film is set in the 1940s, and it is important to understand that back then projectionists needed to constantly attend the film because it was in severe danger of catching fire. As luck would have it, one night the film does go up in flames, along with the theater and Alfredo's eyesight.

The theater is rebuilt and Toto, being the only person with the necessary skills, manages the projector throughout his childhood and adolescence. In this new era of the Cinema Paradiso, the kissing scenes stay in the movies, and new components are added to the movie-watching "experience."

Mason — Yeah, Regal Cinemas should looking into a merger with an escort service of some kind.

Rebecca — Hmm ... the movie and prostitution industries in one convenient location? Well, it certainly worked in Sicily.

But this "paradise" isn't for Toto. Alfredo tells him that he is destined to break free of the monotony and repetition of small-town life. Toto takes the advice and doesn't return until years later when he is informed of Alfredo's death.

This nostalgic movie is cool on the basic principle that Italian is an elegant language. If they were to say

"I stink of rotten tomatoes" in Italian, it would sound romantic and sexy. It is even funnier when you see John Wayne, dubbed in Italian, saying "I'm off to Oregon!"

Here are some other quotes that sound better in Italian:

"By God, they're kissing!" — theater patron

"I won't watch pornography!" — priest

"Everyone get out! This is my plaza!" — village idiot

"Go work in Germany, you and your Stalin!" — villager

Rebecca — Italian is an exclamatory language.

Mason — Yeah, and there sure is a lot of hitting in movie. Good to see that the Italians embrace their own stereotypes.

But humor aside, it is easy to think highly of foreign cinema because we don't have a good frame of reference for the dialogue (see above paragraph). Still, the acting in this movie is excellent on all accounts, especially by the young Toto.

Mason — Why do other countries always have better child actors than we do?

Rebecca — I hear they genetically engineer them.

Also, in keeping with the standards of foreign film, the cinematography is beautiful — something the bulk of American film has only recently caught up with. But it is the heartfelt story, not the images, that make this movie a pleasure to watch.

For the true movie lover, there is little more exciting than watching a movie about how great movies are. It's some kind of self-indulgent thing that is very common among the snooty movie-types who watch lots of foreign films.

Editor's note: Rebecca Wilson is a former Pulse editor and currently freelances for the Emerald.

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