

big oscar contender

by J.A. Stephan

Cinema Paradiso
directed by Giuseppe Tornatore
Miramax Films

The spirited moviegoing of a small Sicilian town in the late 1940s to 1950s is brought to life in *Cinema Paradiso*, the creation of writer/director Giuseppe Tornatore. Already a Cannes Special Jury Prize winner and a Golden Globe winner for Best Foreign Film, this is a strong contender in the Oscar race.

Tornatore based this film on his own childhood experiences. Only his second feature-length work, Tornatore joined with veteran producer Franco Cristaldi to film in his native Sicilian village in only four weeks. Released to tepid reviews by Italian critics, this labour of love was saved from obscurity by Cannes. Success in France brought the film to North America.

Tornatore has embodied his own youthful ardour of the cinema in the character of Salvatore, whom we follow from innocence to maturity in a series of flashbacks. At eight years old (played at this time by Salvatore Cascio) Salvatore is a fatherless, precocious youth. By cleverly manipulating Alfredo (Philippe Noiret), the gruff, but lovable projectionist of the local Paradiso Theatre, he learns how to operate the projector.

Working together in the small room, cluttered with celebrity

photos, invoices, and loose film, Salvatore wins the heart of Alfredo and gains not only a mentor, but an adoptive father. Together, they deliver Hollywood escapism to their sheltered village.

At a time when cinema was a town's only exposure to the outside world, movies could become an adolescent's model for his own experiences. *Cinema Paradiso* illustrates this in Salvatore's teenage romance with a blond, blue-eyed, angelic beauty. Initially rebuffed, Salvatore (played now by an all too soft and pretty Marco Leonardi) stands outside her window in anticipation of a change of heart. His devotion is eventually rewarded, and the two frolic through a wondrous summer romance.

Their bliss, however, is extinguished by her prejudiced father, leaving Salvatore empty and disillusioned. Salvatore mimicked the greatness of screen romance, but it did not prepare him for the tragic twists of reality.

Approaching manhood, Salvatore is encouraged by Alfredo to leave the village. Sitting on a pier, surrounded by tangled heaps of abandoned anchors, Alfredo tells Salvatore that he will not achieve greatness unless he is willing to sever the ties binding him to the past.

The movies had been Alfredo's ball and chain. But, for Salvatore, they inspire him out of the village and into a successful career as a director. Although Salvatore earns fame and money, he does not abandon his unrealistic vision

of what life should be, or his sentimental longing for the innocence of youth. *Cinema Paradiso* celebrates both the power of the cinema to entertain, and its influence on the lives of its fans.

This film also captures the sense of community that existed among the fans of small town theatres back in the 1940s. In the village of Giancaldo, the men struggle as breadwinners, the women labour in the home and the children suffer the discipline of parents and teachers. But at days end, the family could indulge in the glamour of the movies.

The patrons crowded into the old rundown theatre with cement floors and fold-up chairs. Their intoxication with the cinema would sometimes run amok — a sold-out show or a delayed start would excite threats to trash the theatre. The Paradiso survived because it took the audience far beyond the village limits, and gave them dreams of a better life.

The communal catharsis people used to enjoy is hard to find in the 1990s as mini-theatres proliferate, VCR's offer a cheap excuse to stay home and urban living promotes individualism. Modern audiences can rarely participate in the thrill of watching something special.

For Salvatore, who returns to the theatre 30 years later, and for those about to discover it for the first time on the big screen, *Cinema Paradiso* is a sentimental journey back to a period when theatres were playgrounds for the community.

a forgettable cop flick

by Laura Martins

Loose Cannons
directed by Bob Clark
Tri-Star Pictures

It feels strange writing a review for a film I would normally forget five minutes after leaving the cinema.

Loose Cannons is yet another Hollywood film about the mismatched partnership of two cops. Gene Hackman plays an affable veteran cop stuck with a younger forensics expert (Dan Aykroyd) returning to the force after a two-year sick leave.

Unfortunately, Hackman quickly discovers Aykroyd hasn't fully recovered. Anytime Aykroyd encounters a potentially dangerous situation (which, alas, occurs throughout the film), his personality splinters off into various cartoon characters.

Typical of director Bob Clark's previous films (*Porky's*, *Rhinesone*), *Loose Cannons* lacks a logical or interesting plot. Hackman and Aykroyd are assigned to capture neo-Nazis responsible for a series of murders in Washington and thought to be in possession of a film depicting a soon-to-be Chancellor of West Germany as Hitler's close friend.

Sounds familiar? Well, the plot similarity to the allegations against Kurt Waldheim is merely an attempt by the producers (Aaron Spelling of *Charlie's Angels* fame and Alan Greisman) to add credibility and social/historical relevance to an otherwise dumb script. Needless to say, it doesn't



Dan Aykroyd will disappoint Saturday Night Live fans with his sporadic performance.

work.

Dom Deluise plays a porn peddler and the primary lead in the case. But interest in the case doesn't stop here. The FBI and the Israeli intelligence agency (Uzis) are also after the film.

Hackman's, more than Aykroyd's, performance makes this film barely watchable. A few scenes are funny, particularly one in which Aykroyd's personality changes into the Road Runner character. But Aykroyd's comedic ability only shines through sporadically. The best comedic moments are provided by Hackman's reaction to Aykroyd's bizarre behaviour.

Most of the film relies on the mandatory car chases, car

crashes and shoot-outs which characterize "buddy-cop" films. These are tiresome and neither Aykroyd nor Hackman manages to hold this film together.

In my mind, Aykroyd's comedic strengths as a writer and an actor were best realized on *Saturday Night Live*. His later feature film efforts, with perhaps the exception of *Ghostbusters*, pale in comparison to his earlier work in *Second City* (1972-74) and *SNL* (1975-79).

It is also unfortunate Hackman, like Bob Hoskins in the recent film *Heart Condition*, is cashing in on these silly cop movies. Hackman presumably must hope his fans will forgive and forget such a lousy film.

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