

Cinema Paradiso Redux

For those who fancy foreign films, the recent fad for “director’s cuts” allows a second look at Giuseppe Tornatore’s beloved *Cinema Paradiso*, first released to American acclaim and audience delight in 1989, and now showing in cinemas again in an expanded version.

The Italian director’s first picture released in the U.S., it told the unabashedly sentimental and charming story of a small Sicilian boy, Toto, who befriends the local film projectionist Alfredo and encounters a fascinating world of cinema that will change his life. The flashback story, using themes of nostalgia as only the Italians seem able to do, is framed by the mature Toto, now a film director himself, learning of his old friend’s death and making a pilgrimage back to his small town to bury Alfredo and to rediscover long-buried memories.

This new version of *Cinema Paradiso* contains an additional 51 minutes of footage, extending the story to almost three hours and providing a whole new contemporary account of what the mature Toto learns about his lost love Elena (this was the version Tornatore had done for prerelease in Italy). The new material makes much clearer why Toto left the island to pursue his dream as a director and cut off all contact with his home town.

So...is the new version *better* than that originally released? You be the judge, but rest assured that the film looks as good as ever (I saw it in a pristine print), the performance of Philippe Noiret as Alfredo is as captivating as ever, the little kid who plays Toto (Salvatore Cascio) is as darling as ever, the town of “Giancaldo” appears as picturesque as ever, and the swooning themes of Ennio Morricone on the soundtrack are as beguiling as ever.

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