

### The new Cinema Paradiso

One of the greatest arguments in favor of home video, Giuseppe Tornatore's 1988 Cinema Paradiso, has been released on a persuasive two-platter Blu-ray by Arrow Films (UPC#760137976981, \$40). We first reviewed the 124-minute film on laser disc in Nov 91, and found it to be charming but inconsequential. About a young boy growing up in a small Sicilian town during the Fifties while working as the projectionist in the town's only movie theater, the film was a big hit and won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film, but it seemed to us that the praise and excitement surrounding it were, at the least, overstated, and, more possibly, delusional. There was nothing there beyond a little sweetness and some film references. But then Miramax issued the 173-minute Director's Cut on DVD (May 03), and it turned out to indeed be the profound masterpiece that people were mistakenly claiming the shorter version was. Basically, the film's entire third act, its very reason for existence, had been excised in a panic during the film's earliest screenings, losing, along with everything else, a major performance by Brigitte Fossey, who does not appear in the shorter film. Without spoiling too much, the first part of the film presents a nostalgic view of youth, and then in the final part, the hero, long since an adult, strives desperately to retrieve what had been lost with time—a honeyed but heartbreaking experience that is reflected beautifully in the metaphor of the many other films that have flickered across the screen during the course of this one.

We are always reminded that movies are first and foremost a business, and are only art when someone surreptitiously opens the Exit door and lets it slip in without buying a ticket. But however smart the distributors who scissored up the initial theatrical version of the film were from a financial standpoint, that version remains a travesty. Nevertheless, it has its own platter, while the 'Director's Cut' has another. Letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 1.85:1 (Tornatore sometimes frames images within the movie in 1.33:1 by including walls or columns of things to squeeze the sides of the picture; on the other hand, seeing the film clips letterboxed can be disorienting at times), the color transfer looks terrific, with rich, solid hues. The colors are deeper than they were on the DVD, and the image is sharper. The film defaults to a mono track, but there is also a 5.1-channel DTS track, although it serves primarily to give Ennio Morricone's graceful musical score a bit more body, and the noises in the theater a bit of an echo. Again, the sound is better detailed than it was on the DVD. The film is in Italian with optional English subtitles.

The Director's Cut platter comes with a trailer. The theatrical version contains another trailer, an excellent 55-minute reflection on Tornatore's life and career, with many clips of Sicily (like the film's hero, he began by making home movies, and then official documentaries about the Sicilian town and the land where he grew up) and of his various features (we hadn't realized that he had made the superb law thriller, A Pure Formality), along with a terrific 34-minute retrospective documentary about the film, which includes, among other things, an identification of all of the clips used in the kissing montage.

Finally, there is a commentary on the theatrical version featuring Italian film expert Millicent Marcus, who also inserts audio clips from Tornatore, although they pretty much repeat what he says in the documentaries. Marcus supplies a close deconstruction of every scene, talks a bit about the cast and the filmmakers, and discusses the differences between the shorter and longer version, and how some fans prefer one, while others prefer the other. In searching for the heart of the film's theme, however, Marcus misses an important point. "The myth of romantic love is based on its non-fulfillment, on its non-consummation. Romantic love is predicated on desire itself that can never be fulfilled, because fulfillment would mean disappointment. No fulfillment could ever live up to such expectation, and the cinema is about living in a state of unfulfilled desire that transcends the reality of daily life." What she says is wholly true of narrative, but not of aesthetics. The movies do tease you about impossibly idealized states of being, whether it is love or heroism or family or grace of some sort, but at the same time, a well made film is delivering a dynamic and fulfilling composition of light and sound that can easily be replicated by watching the movie again, and yet can touch your soul every time with its harmonic beauty. In John Keats' poem, *Ode to a Grecian Urn*, the lovers imprinted on the vase will never be united, but the artistry of the vase itself will never fade. The same can readily be said for the longer version of Cinema Paradiso.

### Another apocalypse

Imagine that, before the movies began, all of the westerns the public could read were published by just two companies. They each utilized the same archetypes and characters with the same skills, so that in reading one book or another, the actual innovations would be somewhat limited, especially by the monopolies the houses had on the authors to begin with. Good luck getting published if you weren't with one of the big two. And then imagine what the movies would have been like if they had come along and began adapting those western stories to the screen. The lack of variety might have strangled the genre before it really got off the ground.

The comic book genre is still in its infancy but some of those problems that we fantasized about with westerns have indeed manifested in the otherwise exciting display of fantasy characters and effects. Some guy who ruled Egypt is still hanging round trying to control things? He's a character in two DC comic book TV series adaptations, and a similar guy is

the primary villain in the Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment Marvel adaptation, X-Men Apocalypse, available as a DVD (UPC#024543226468, \$30) and as a Blu-ray 3D / Blu-ray / Digital HD release (UPC#02454329-3795, \$50). The film is generally considered to have been a disappointment, but there is nothing specifically bad about it. The third film in the re-setting of the series, extending that timeline to the Eighties (there is an unfortunate meta-joke when two characters come out of a film theater having just seen Return of the Jedi and complain that the third movie in a trilogy is 'always' the worst), the film re-establishes the characters from the previous movie, X-Men Days of Future Past (Nov 14), updates their status a bit, adds some new characters, and then unfolds the inevitable narrative where the powerful villain pits the two groups of characters, the 'good' group led by James McAvoy's character and the 'bad' group led by Michael Fassbender, against one another. The characters must see through their conflicts and unite in order to prevent the villain from destroying the world.

Running 144 minutes, the only problem with the movie is that it is too much more of the same. Directed by Bryan Singer, the narrative has the same rhythm and build up to its final battle that so many other comic book movies have had and, despite the expensive details, the movie plays very much like yet another TV series. The introductions to the characters with new powers (one character runs very fast—sound familiar?) are enjoyable but not exceptional, and except for explaining how McAvoy's character lost all of his hair, the film just has nothing new to offer. It is well made and fairly entertaining, but the quality of its creative invention does not justify its energy and scope.

Other than reinforcing the manner in which some characters can hover in the air, no thematic or narrative component to the film is served by the 3D effects, but for the most part, the effects are fairly enjoyable. There are a few computer graphic shots where the dimensionality is limited or uninteresting, but any footage with at least some live action in it will have a prop, a grouping of characters or a perspective that enhances the fun the film is trying to generate. When a group of missiles is launched, for example, the 3D effects change a rather mundane and relatively common shot into an intriguing vision of individual needles rising into the sky in tandem, and when the characters fight by tossing about large objects, the bulk of those objects is enhanced and the impact of them is similarly amplified.

The film is letterboxed with an aspect ratio of about 2.35:1. The color transfer looks fine, and the 7.1-channel DTS sound on the BD has a busy and grand mix that is more engaging than the 5.1-channel Dolby Digital sound on the DVD. Both presentations have an audio track that describes the action ("The fire explodes into the library, shattering a fish tank, and Quicksilver races students out. He pauses at a girl by the fish tank, scoops some water and the fish into a bell jar, and puts the jar into the girl's hand. He whisks her away."), alternate French, Spanish and Portuguese audio tracks and optional English, French, Spanish and Portuguese subtitles. There are 28 more minutes of deleted scenes that basically provide additional character detail, a cute 13 minutes of bloopers including wrap party footage, a collection of production photos and development artwork in still frame, and a very good 64-minute collection of production featurettes that cover the cast extensively but also use their involvement in the film's different sequences to highlight how many of the major moments in the film were achieved. The 3D platter has no special features except for the audio description track and the other language tracks, two additional language tracks, and fourteen subtitled tracks, including English. The DVD has alternate French and Spanish audio tracks, optional English, French and Spanish subtitles, 8 minutes of bloopers, and the still frame segment.

Both the BD and the DVD have a commentary track featuring Singer and producer Simon Kinberg. The BD also presents the commentary on alternate French and Spanish tracks, and both the BD and the DVD cover the commentary with optional English, French and Spanish subtitles. The pair talk about everything from the staging of various sequences to their goals in creating and executing the film, and describe what it was like working with the cast and the crew. Singer is adamant that the Jedi gag was not a jab at X III The Last Stand (Nov 06) and director Brett Ratner, though he seems less aware that the joke may be on him. He also makes the laughable error of confusing The Philadelphia Experiment with The Philadelphia Story, which is fodder for a great comedy skit that is never going to happen, and rather bizarrely claims that the band, Rush, is his favorite group, and then credits them with the Eurythmics song, *Sweet Dreams*. But for the most part, his talk is highly informative, even as it overlaps some of what was covered in the production featurettes. "I'm not a big handheld fan and yet, every once in

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