

Miracolo a Milano (1951)

Miracle in Milan (Italian: *Miracolo a Milano*) is a 1951 Italian fantasy film directed by **Vittorio de Sica**.

The screenplay was **co-written** by **Cesare Zavattini**, based on his novel *Totò il Buono*.

The film stars Francesco Golisano, Emma Gramatica, Paolo Stoppa, and Guglielmo Barnabò.

The film, told as a neo-realist fable, explains the lives of a poverty-stricken group in post-war Milan, Italy.

The Milan Cathedral serves as a focal location in the film, and can also be viewed as symbolic of the miracle to which the film's title refers.

American special effects specialist Ned Mann was hired for the film.

Vittorio De Sica, in neo-realist fashion, used both professional and non-professional actors.

The film premiered in Italy on 8 February 1951. Later it was presented at the Cannes Film Festival in April 1951. In the United States it opened wide on December 17, 1951.

Awards

Wins

1951 - Cannes Film Festival: Grand Prize of the Festival, Vittorio De Sica; 1951.

Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists: Silver Ribbon; Best Production Design, Guido Fiorini; 1951.

New York Film Critics Circle Awards: NYFCC Award; Best Foreign Language Film, Italy; 1951.

National Board of Review: National Board of Review Awards 1951, Best Foreign Films; 1951.

Nominations

British Academy of Film and Television Arts: BAFTA Film Award, Best Film from any Source, Italy; Best Foreign Actor, Francesco Golisano, Italy; 1952.

Plot

This fantasy tale tells of Totò who, found in a cabbage patch, is adopted by Lolotta, a wise and kind old woman. When Lolotta dies he moves to an orphanage. At eighteen Totò (Francesco Golisano) leaves the orphanage and ends up in a shantytown squatter colony on the outskirts of Milan. Totò's organizational ability learned at the orphanage and his simple kindness and optimistic outlook acquired from Lolotta bring structure to the colony and a sense of happiness and well-being among the dispossessed who live there.

Totò is given a magic dove by the ghost of Lolotta and he uses its powers to grant wishes to those who ask. Eventually the dove is taken back by two angels who object to a mortal using its magic powers. When oil is found in the shantytown capitalists acquire it and the squatters are taken away ostensibly to prison. On the way, however, the dove is returned to Totò and his

wish for the freedom of his friends is granted. They fly away on broomsticks borrowed from the street sweepers in Milan's central square and circle around the Cathedral and then away, "towards a land where good morning really means good morning."

Vittorio De Sica wrote that he made the film in order to show how the "common man" can exist given the realities of life: "It is true that my people have already attained happiness after their own fashion; precisely because they are destitute, these people still feel - as the majority of ordinary men perhaps no longer do - the living warmth of a ray of winter sunshine, the simple poetry of the wind. They greet water with the same pure joy as Saint Francis did." De Sica, Vittorio. *Miracle in Milan*, 1968, Baltimore, Maryland: Pelican Books, p11

Bosley Crowther, film critic for The New York Times, liked the film and wrote, "The rich vein of sly, compassionate humor that Charlie Chaplin and René Clair used to mine with unparalleled genius when they were turning out their best satiric films, has been tapped by Vittorio De Sica in his *Miracle in Milan*, the widely proclaimed Italian picture that arrived at the World yesterday. And although this uncommon vein of fancy is away from De Sica's previous line, the great director has brought up from his digging a liberal return of purest gold." Crowther, Bosley. The New York Times, film review, December 18, 1951.

De Sica told us the stories like a father sitting at the edge of his children's bed before they went to sleep. There is no attempt to intellectualize. *Miracolo A Milano* and in a lesser degree *Il Giudizio Universale* are realistic fairy tales, or what today we call magic realism. The film is a gem from beginning to end and Toto is the sort of character that you accept with an open heart.

The storyline is not complex and shows us a life of found boy-orphan and particularly his connection into the community of poor people who together built themselves a hood of simple metal plate houses. This little city in another city lives own life and things are going fine. But one day there is a water resource found and a rich nobles man is getting interested in the buying the place. But as the title of the movie hints - there is a miracle taking place. Our character gets a wonder dove from his dead mother.

Director Vittorio de Sica and his cinematographer G.R. Aldo capture the atmosphere of postwar Milan with its deserted streets, ruined buildings and outwardly cold population in the depths of winter. Horses and carts still run up and down the streets; cars are a rarity except among the filthy rich. Poverty is rife: many homeless people wander up and down ransacking the rubbish-heaps and making do with very little, even half-empty bottles of alcohol thrown to them from passing cars.

The great Italian actor/director/writer Vittorio De Sica is probably best known for his neo-realism offerings, particularly the masterpiece *Bicycle Thieves* (1948). His next film, *Miracle in Milan*, begins with the title "once upon a time...", making it clear enough that this is a step towards more fantastical fare. While still exploring themes of class divide and the humility of the poor, *Miracle* is pure fairytale, starting out with a baby found in a basket and climaxing with a gathering of our homeless heroes flying away on broomsticks.