

La leggenda del pianista sull'oceano (1998)

A baby boy, discovered in 1900 on an ocean liner, grows into a musical prodigy, never setting foot on land.

Director: Giuseppe Tornatore

Writers: Alessandro Baricco (monologue Novecento), Giuseppe Tornatore

Stars: Tim Roth, Pruitt Taylor Vince, Mélanie Thierry

Storyline: 1900. Danny Boodmann, a stoker on an American passenger liner, Virginian, finds a baby abandoned on the ship. He names the child Danny Boodmann T.D. Lemon Nineteen Hundred '1900' and raises the child as his own until his death in an accident on the ship. The child never leaves the ship and turns out to be a musical genius, especially when it comes to playing the piano. As an adult he befriends a trumpet player in the ship's band, Max Tooney. After several years on the ship Max leaves, and tells the story of 1900 to the owner of a music store.

Awards - 22 wins and 9 nominations

Golden Globes, USA 2000: Winner - Golden Globe Best Original Score - Motion Picture

Ennio Morricone

A wonderfully wistful mixture of melodrama and music. "The Legend of 1900" wistfully tells its creative, capriciously unpredictable, and musical tall tale with excellence in all aspects of film from sets to sound, costume to casting, and script to screenplay. Roth and Vince work well together in this plaintive, simple story which will captivate those who can make the leap of faith required to "buy in". A good film for all but critics, "Legend" will likely resonate most with those who equate living with musical expression. La vita è musica.

The story, told by the main character's best friend Max (Pruitt Taylor Vince) takes place on the Virginian, one of the luxurious ocean liners of the Titanic-era. It's an epic tale of jazz music, friendship, romance and magic. A baby boy is found on the Virginian by one of the ship's stokers. He names the boy after the name on the crate he was found in: T.D.Lemon. Since it's the turn of the century, 1900 is added as his surname. Tim Roth is 1900. Or more accurately: Danny Boodman T.D. Lemon 1900. It turns out that 1900 is a special boy. His gift for the piano makes him a legend. But in order to experience the the piano sound of the legendary master, you have to make a cruise because 1900 never sets foot on land!

The only one to come close to the way 1900's mind works is his friend and colleague Max, an accomplished trumpet player in the ship's band. As Max puts it: 'You're never really done for as long as you got a good story and someone to tell it to'. And boy does he tell a beautiful story. A story that will keep you mesmerized all through the film. There are scenes that will definitely put a smile on your face. For instance the scene when 1900 tries to cure Max from his seasickness by offering him a ride on his piano! And what about the piano duel?

Colorful and moving film dealing with a solitary man who becomes a gifted pianist in a luxury ship.

Nostalgic and sensitive picture with stirring drama, ravishing cinematography and moving musical score. An epic story of a man who could do anything, except be ordinary. Shortly after the Second World War, Max, a transplanted American (Pruitt Taylor Vince), visits an English pawn shop to sell his trumpet, there meets a shopkeeper (Peter Vaughan) and a peculiar musical single. Then Max tells the tale in flashback after learning a ship has been condemned (there was actually a registered ship named the SS *Virginian* which was built in 1904 and scrapped around 1954). As an abandoned infant is discovered aboard the luxury liner in 1900 and reared by an engine labourer (Bill Nunn) and the crew. As an adult is nicknamed Novecento (Tim Roth) and he has become an expert pianist, but since 1900 remains an enigma.

The picture contains drama and nostalgia completely wrapped in an enjoyable story between a lone pianist and a trumpet player. The story is narrated with great sense and sensibility, the intelligent screenplay based on monologue Novecento by Alessandro Baricco was written by the same Giuseppe Tornatore. Slightly overrated but excellent all the same time, the picture is enjoyable and entertaining, but overlong. Magnificent performance from Tim Roth as virtuoso pianist in the ship's orchestra who has superstitiously never set foot off the boat and Pruitt Taylor Vince as his trumpet man friend. Good acting from remaining cast such as Bill Nunn as Danny Boodmann, Clarence Williams III as Jelly Roll Morton, Mélanie Thierry as The Girl, Gabriele Lavia as Farmer and Peter Vaughan as 'Pops', the Shopkeeper. Glowing cinematography with scenarios colorfully and splendidly photographed by Lajos Koltai who reflects the elegant scenarios. As exterior shots of the ship are the inspired blueprints of the SS *Lusitania* and her sister ship the SS *Mauritania*, the ballroom in which 1900 plays his piano in had a dome similar to the dome the SS *Mauritania* had in her ballroom during the transatlantic period. Rousing and moving score musical by the veteran master and prolific Ennio Morricone who was nominated with a deserved Golden Globe. The picture was well directed by Giuseppe Tornatore who made similar nostalgic films including good actors, such as the excellent "Cinema Paradiso" with Philippe Noiret, "Malena" with Monica Belucci, "The star maker" with Sergio Castellito and "Baaria" with Raoul Bova; being his English-language debut feature titled "The professor" with Ben Gazzara. Rating of "La Leggenda del Pianista Sull'Oceano" (original title) or "The Legend of 1900" or "The Legend of the Pianist on the Ocean: Better than average, well worth watching for exceptional cinematography, first-rate acting and wonderful score.

What they all have in common, besides beautiful cinematography, is that they try, quietly and modestly but nevertheless ambitiously, to investigate some aspects of the very essence of the human soul. The emotion used by many such movies, especially the ones directed by Tornatore, is nostalgia: by understanding the pain of irrecoverable loss we are supposed to understand what we truly needed. These movies express perfectly HL Mencken's definition of the artist as "one who observes the eternal tragedy of man with full sympathy and understanding, and yet with a touch of god-like remoteness."

This movie has classic moments, cinematic to their core. One of those special and masterful cases where the musical score is the story, as if the screenplay was built around the music. One of Morricone's best.

Full of magical situations made for cinema and cinema only. At times the music takes over the visuals, as to the very powerful minimalism of a face of a woman backed by exquisite and subtle piano piece, to the other extreme, of compelling and dynamic visuals which move with the music, as when the whole ship rocks in the middle of a storm, while the pianist frenetically plays a full sized tail piano rolling across the ballroom, talk about rock and roll.

There is a great moment in *La Leggenda del Pianista Sull'Oceano*: a musical duel in which meek pianist 1900 (Tim Roth), right after playing at vertiginous speed an impossible piece (much to the dismay of his smug adversary), gently touches an incandescent piano string with a cigarette, which is immediately ignited.

Tornatore's bittersweet drama/character study crackles with creativity, emotion and wit. Roth is excellent as 1900, a childlike musical genius who refuses to leave the ship where he works as an entertainer; Pruitt Taylor Vince's portrayal of his best friend is vivid and engaging.

The ending is surprisingly moving: Roth's last monologue could be his finest moment as an actor. Ennio Morricone provides the memorable score of a movie where music plays an essential role.

Giuseppe Tornatore's work will always be compared with his excellent "Cinema Paradiso", a beloved film of audiences all over the world. He is a talented filmmaker who has worked extensively in the Italian cinema with success. "The Legend of 1900" shot in English presents a challenge for the talented director in that it is basically a film with an European sensitivity that does not work too well with a wide distribution. It is based on a monologue by Alessandro Baricco, the author of "Silk".

Mr. Tornatore's stories are basically a look to the past as "Malena", "The Star Maker", "Baaria" and "Cinema Paradiso" prove. The director's love for his native land translates well as the setting for his films. Working in his native Sicily makes his films to immensely well felt, something that seems to be lacking in this venture. In this ambitious epic, the director adapted the material for a larger than life portrait of a man whose love for the sea proves to be his own doom. This ambitious canvas does not have the same feeling as his more intimate depictions of a society he knows well.

Tim Roth is fantastic in the lead role, displaying extraordinary range. He renders a believable pianist, but more importantly, he simultaneously brings the character dynamism and depth. When he is playing the crowd he is the flamboyant showman, yet when he is alone or with Max (Pruitt Taylor Vince) he is reflective and moody.

The music is exquisite. Ennio Morricone is a prolific composer whose career spans 40 years. He has scored over 400 films including "The Good, The Bad and The Ugly", "The Untouchables", "Disclosure", and "Twister". His ability to find the right music for the multiple moods in this film is astounding.