

## **La Vita è bella / Life is beautiful (1997)**

When an open-minded Jewish librarian and his son become victims of the Holocaust, he uses a perfect mixture of will, humor, and imagination to protect his son from the dangers around their camp.

**Director:** Roberto Benigni

**Writers:** Vincenzo Cerami (story and screenplay by), Roberto Benigni (story and screenplay by)

**Stars:** Roberto Benigni, Nicoletta Braschi, Giorgio Cantarini

Academy Awards, USA 1999

### **Winner**

Oscar Best Actor in a Leading Role - Roberto Benigni

Best Music, Original Dramatic Score - Nicola Piovani

Best Foreign Language Film - Italy.

### **Nominee**

Oscar Best Picture - Elda Ferri, Gianluigi Braschi

Best Director - Roberto Benigni

Best Writing, Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen - Vincenzo Cerami, Roberto Benigni

Best Film Editing - Simona Paggi

This film provided us with something that everyone in one or another shape or form needs - Hope. The movie showed the cruelty of life and yet managed to shed some light and insight into the beauty of love and life in general.

"Life is Beautiful" is a film about love, optimism, courage and inner strength.

"Life is Beautiful" is an unforgettable film. You go through emotions you were surprised could have for a fictional film. The story, although totally implausible, is uplifting and depressing at the same time.

This is one of those movies that have a lasting effect on you. After watching it, you found that it has less to do with the Holocaust and more to do with the human feelings and the beautiful relationship of a father and his son. The Holocaust provides the ultimate context, that brings and highlights the story and adds yet another deep dimension to the movie. The realism of the movie is not its strong point, but then again it is not supposed to be; this helps in bringing the audiences to a state of mind away from reality, focusing on the feelings generated by forgetting about all external events and developments of the war. Despite that, the movie does not fail to point out an element of the Nazi psychology demonstrated by the doctor who was obsessed with riddles. This portrayed the Nazi 'state of mind' (if ever such an expression existed) as a sick mentally disturbed state. Life is really beautiful as we watch Guido's relentless efforts to make

a lovely exciting experience of the concentration camp to his son. We get exhausted just watching him going through his painful day and yet you smile as he speaks to his son and makes him laugh.

*Life Is Beautiful* manages to walk the extremely thin line between humor, fantasy, and tragedy. Sure, the film is clearly comedic, but nevertheless it manages to very effectively communicate the tremendous losses suffered in the Nazi concentration camps and has scenes at least as intense as any scene in *Schindler's List*.

This may be one of the best films ever made.

Roberto Benigni's *Vita e bella*, is in many ways similar to Chaplin's *Great Dictator*. Both are comic attacks on fascism. Benigni initially accesses the emotions of his audience through simple comedy, which is a pleasant mix of Keaton and Chaplin. Romance ensues with his real life wife Nicoletta Braschi. The first half of this film has been seen by various critics as being inferior to the second, but this is certainly not the case. In the first section we follow the delightful romance that will eventually lead to marriage and the creation of the wonderful Giosue (Giorgio Cantarini).

It is the first half where the audience can laugh the loudest and delight at the immense comedy talent of Benigni. Unlike so many films nowadays there is nothing crude or coarse, his is simple innocent humour, which is all the more effective. The way he ties together little strands in the film to create comedy elements shows a great writing ability, and a mastery of timing when it comes to their execution on screen. Various incidents related to the rise of anti-semitism and fascism in Italy show that there are sinister forces at work which come to the fore in the second segment.

Guido (Benigni) moves events on from Tuscany in 1939 to the last year of the war in a concentration camp. In this period he and Dora (Braschi) have had their son Giosue (Cantarini). The five year old greatly reminds me of Toto in *Cinema Paradiso*, and plays an equally important role in his prospective film (though in *Paradiso's* case it is at the beginning of the movie). The relationship between the two is very similar to that of Jackie Coogan and Charlie Chaplin (though Benigni, unlike Chaplin, keeps the best of the comedy moments). Guido attempts to keep from the boy the horrors of what is going on, and this eventually manifests itself as a game where the aim is to score 100 points, with the winner winning a real tank (which, of course appeals to the young boy). Comic moments are still present, that involving Guido's translation of the rules of the camp is particularly notable, but it becomes somewhat more difficult to laugh when we consider the gravity of what is going on.

The emphasis begins shifts, and we realise that this is a film about human spirit above all else. Guido not only appeals to the audience due to his comedy and sheer pleasantness, but also in the way that he loves his family and the measures that he will go to to protect them.

Benigni shines like a lantern throughout the picture, showing that he is a talent, not only in comedy terms, that far outshines his peers. Cantarini is a delight, and Braschi also plays her part well. There is even an appearance by *The Magnificent Seven's* Horst Buchholz as Doctor Lessing, a man who events change for the worse.

Benigni did everything in this film. He wrote, produced, directed and probably swept the floors at night. There is that much raw energy in this film. There really is. For someone to have that kind of vision is truly incredible. And not only is the film a terrific cinematic experience because of the importance and seriousness of the subject matter, but it is one of the funnier films I've ever seen. When Roberto is translating the German soldiers instructions to his son so

that he isn't scared, it is at that moment that you realize you are under his spell. He's got you and no matter how much scepticism you may have about the film you know you're witnessing a classic in every sense of the word.

*Life Is Beautiful* takes the premise that love and hope can survive the most trying of conditions, in this case a Nazi concentration camp. It seems to be a movie with the central message that you can find hope in anything or anyone.

This film never tries to be realistic in the modern sense of film critique, this film freely admits to being contrived, this film unashamedly focuses on the characters at the expense of portraying an historically accurate reality.

The film is driven by ideals, of romance and of selflessness. This film clearly asks the watcher to suspend belief, to enter into its fantasy, to embrace the human emotion as elucidated through the characters. Not only is this film not an insult to anybody who has ever been persecuted (Jew, Chilean, African, Russian, Japanese, Chinese, Cambodian - the list of persecution goes on), rather it heightens empathy for such people in this plight, through the use of poignancy. Its intent is never to trivialise such.

Surely the film is engaging the viewer on an emotive level, evoking empathy for the individual case, for the desperation that sees a father moved to unthinkable extremes in an attempt to prolong the life of his son. Thus - surely, Guido's actions should not and never were intended to be 'realistic' but rather he is - to our despairing eyes, simply pathetic ie he is evoking pity. How any discerning fair minded person could honestly and objectively brand this film as disrespectful and hateful because of comedic elements, is missing the point by oceans.

Wonderful fable plenty of amazing fantasy, lively comedy and sad tragedy. This is a poignant and moving fable about a sacrifice to save a son and a wife. It's an unforgettable story formed by two halves that proves imagination, family and love conquer all; as Benigni's focus is on the love between daddy, mummy and son. The first part results to be an Italian comedy style, the second is horror along with humor. It concerns upon Guido (Roberto Benigni, a magnificent rubber-faced funny man), a Jewish man who has a wonderful romance with the help of his humour, but must use that same quality to protect his son in a Nazi death camp. He's a madcap romantic man and women wish him. But he falls in love with Dora (Benigni's real-life sweetie Nicoletta Braschi). Every day Guido dreams of marrying her, under Nicola Piovani score. When the Second World War spontaneously breaks out, he and his family is imprisoned at concentration camp. Guido is determined to save his lover and son (Cantarini) from dangers around them. His effort sometimes is pure fantasy, though with ruse he pull off more impetus to keep his son and accomplishes feats no man could realistically execute. Guido fabricates an elaborated game to convince his child that the whole ordeal is an endurance proof to be won with prizes forthcoming, as it turns out to be a special contest to win a tank.