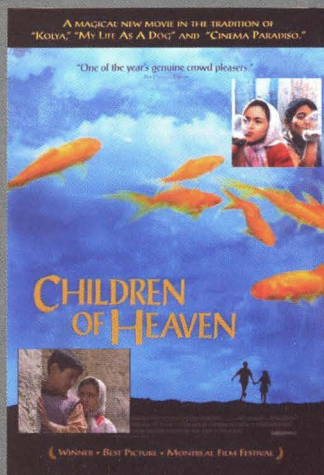


Children of Heaven (Bacheha- Ye aseman)



What is it about children and movies that make a movie irresistibly heart-wrenching? This emotional masterpiece by Majid Majidi has drawn rave reviews around the world, making the rounds of film festivals all over. Critics might have panned the film for being too simplistic – but the fact is it is a simple movie about simple emotions, taken beautifully.

The story revolves around the life of a young family and their daily struggles with penury. Set in Iran, the movie moves with ease between the narrow corridors of the poorer suburbs of Tehran, to the wonderful gardens of the rich. Just as it moves with ease between sadness and joy, Ali (Amir Farrokh), Zahra (Bahare Seddique) and a pair of nearly-torn shoes are the main protagonists of this movie. When Ali loses his sister, Zahra's shoes that he got repaired, life takes a very difficult turn for the siblings.

Mired in financial struggles, Ali and Zahra do not want to trouble their already hassled parents about the shoes. So they begin a daily routine of exchanging shoes – Zahra wears her brother's oversized sneakers to school everyday, races back halfway home where she meets Ali, who then proceeds to exchange footwear with her to race to his school to make it in time for class. The relationship shared by the two is so poignant, those easily prone to lachrymal enrichments might shed a few!

The movie ends with Ali taking part in a long distance race, especially to win the third place, which is... a pair of sneakers. Watch the rest to know how it ends.

PS: This movie lost the Academy Award for best Foreign Language Film to Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful*.

Year: 1997

Language: Persian

Director: Majid Majidi

Cast: Amir Farrokh Hashemian, Bahare Seddiqui

Verdict: If your sibling is your best friend, do watch this movie!

Rating: 4/5

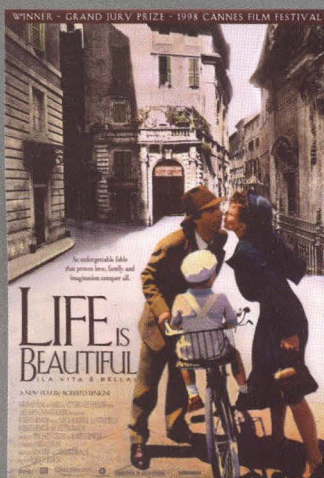
HOT: Brilliant child actors who portray the subtlest emotions with ease.

NOT: A predictable ending, but that doesn't really matter!

Role reversals

Urmila Pullat reviews two favourites about families and children; hope, love and sacrifice. Interestingly, these two movies competed for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 1998 Academy Awards

Life is Beautiful (La vita e bella)



This Italian award-winning film is exactly that – a winner. Roberto Benigni's masterpiece tells the tale of a family worn out by the Second World War. Guido (Benigni) is a Jewish man, married to a non-Jewish woman (Nicoletta Braschi), their lives based in Italy. Their little son grows up, happy and unaware of the harsh world looming around him.

The movie takes a sad turn with the portrayal of World War II Europe – both Guido and his son are taken to a Nazi concentration camp. His wife begs to be allowed to go with them, even though she is not a Jew, and she too is sent along with them.

Peppered with brilliant doses of simple humour, this movie looks shows us just how innocent a child's world is, and just how complex is a parent's love for their child. If its competitor for the Academy award for Best Foreign Language Film, 'Children of Heaven' shows us the children's efforts to shield their parents from the world's miseries, this movie shows us just the opposite – a parent's determined efforts, through jokes and play-acting, to keep the child from realizing that death may be very, very near.

Life is about keeping a merry face while your heart tears up into little shreds of despair. Life, in most parts, for many, is about protecting the ones they love. This movie is beautiful. If you haven't yet watched it, I am not sure what you are waiting for.

Year: 1997

Language: Italian

Director: Roberto Benigni

Cast: Roberto Benigni, Nicoletta Braschi, Giorgio Cantarini

Verdict: A movie that captures, so succinctly, the sacrificial bond between parent and child.

Rating: 4/5

HOT: Roberto Benigni's portrayal of the loving, laughing father.

NOT: The slapstick humour might irritate in parts, but it's not much of a downer.