



PREVIEW

The Hand of God

(È stata la mano di Dio)

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Director's statement

Naples, blue and blundering, joyful and merciless – you can't help loving her even when she hates you. The 1980s, infused with an unwarranted and inconclusive lightheartedness. The arrival of Diego Armando Maradona, the world's greatest soccer player. An event that feeds the hopes and dreams of a bedraggled and beleaguered populace.

The family, numerous and noisy, normal and naive, all striving for one and the same goal: happiness. The protagonist, Fabietto Schisa, age seventeen. A typical, vaguely exhausting adolescence. Real and unconditional love for his parents. Platonic and unconditional love for his beautiful, anguished Aunt Patrizia, whose unbearable pain, which is caused by the loss of her unborn baby after her husband beats her, lands her in the psych ward.

And then the tragic accident, so sudden and strange: the death of Fabietto's parents.

The grief is crippling at first. It doesn't make you cry or think or feel. Instead it takes you home, all alone, staring at familiar objects that have suddenly become meaningless, like dead bodies. Then, out of the blue, the realisation that he is free prompts Fabietto to look to the future. The discovery of cinema, which, in those years in Naples, was starting to be made with adventure and enthusiasm.

He longs to make movies – cinema being that celebrated monument that saves the sad lives of people like Fabietto, deluding both those who make it and those who watch it to recover the world they've lost. But delusions fill up our lives. Which is why cinema will never die.

The brief, bewildering, decisive encounter with an older director named Antonio Capuano, a vivacious, provocative intellectual who is both sentimental and contrary.

The painful estrangement from his beloved brother Marchino, an involuntary, invisible separation. Marchino, mindful of his own youthfulness, gives in to life.

Fabietto, mindful of his own premature old age, gives in to his dogged perseverance. Finish and flee. Finish and flee. That's what he has in mind, anyway.

The realistic vision of an invented mythological figure – a popular Neapolitan legend, that of the child monk – makes him suspect that, along with his perseverance, he possesses that elixir of cinematographic narrative: imagination.

The Hand of God attempts to talk about all this.

So what exactly is *The Hand of God*? A coming-of-age story that aims, stylistically, to avoid the traps of conventional autobiography: hyperbole, victimhood, pity, compassion, and the indulgence of pain, through a simple,

sparse, and essential staging. With neutral, sober music and photography. Cinematography's cumbersome apparatus will take a step back so as to let the life of those years speak, in the way I remember them – in the way I experienced them, felt them. Simply put, this is a film about sensibility. And hovering above everything, so close and yet so far, is Maradona, that ghostly idol, five foot five, who seemed to sustain the lives of everyone in Naples, or at least mine. That, too, is probably an imaginative lie. Or maybe it's the truth. No one knows for sure. No one but the hand of God.

Paolo Sorrentino

In *The Hand of God*, Paolo Sorrentino returns to the Naples of his youth to tell a story of a boy's turbulent coming-of-age – a story charged by its intimate link to Sorrentino's own past. It is a story more personal and more starkly emotional than any he has told. It dives into a living memory, an immersion into a beautiful, imperfect world that could not last. But it is also a soul-stirring tale about the drive to move forward, to create, to take any mystifying chances that you get, even amid immense sorrow.

It is the 1980s. Everyone in Naples is talking feverishly about Maradona, the illustrious soccer legend who it seems, almost miraculously, might come to play for the underdog local team. Promise is in the air, and teenaged Fabietto Schisa is drinking it all in. He might be an awkward outsider at school, but life is alright. His parents are volatile, flawed, yet still in love. Their family is boisterous, sometimes troubled, yet great fun. Lunches are long, family dramas play out daily, laughter is constant, and the future still seems far away.

Then, an inexplicable accident overturns it all. And, as Sorrentino once did in his own youth, Fabietto must find an escape from the depths of tragedy and grapple with the strange touch of fate that has left him alive. With the past shattered, yet his entire life before him, he charts his own course through loss and into the new.

This mix of devastation and liberation is something Sorrentino experienced at the precipice of his own adulthood. And while fiction and reality intermix freely in *The Hand of God*—so freely that even fantastical elements feel part of Fabietto's completely contained world – the film meticulously reconstructs the city and family atmosphere in which he grew up.

Born in 1970, Sorrentino was raised in the Vomero Quarter of Naples, on the hill overlooking the port city's sprawling panorama. When he was 16, both his parents passed away suddenly, wholly unexpectedly, of carbon monoxide poisoning from a faulty heater in the family's vacation home. By all rights, Sorrentino should have been with his parents that weekend. The only reason he wasn't also killed in the catastrophe is that he had been granted permission, for the first time in his life, to stay home alone to go see Maradona play away for Naples.

Sorrentino came to perceive Maradona, a man already tinged with divinity on the soccer field, as a force that protected his life. But it was also cinema that became a means of salvation for him, a detour from anguish. Escaping into filmmaking with a passion, Sorrentino started working as an assistant director. He made his screenwriting debut co-writing *The Dust of Naples* with Italian writer-director Antonio Capuano, himself a key character in *The Hand of God*. Soon after Sorrentino made his directorial debut with the comedy *One Man Up* starring Toni Servillo – the last film he made in Naples until he returned to direct *The Hand of God*.

From then on, Sorrentino wrote and directed his own films, including *The Great Beauty*, which won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, and the Oscar-nominated *Youth*, as well as the acclaimed HBO series *The Young Pope* and its successor *The New Pope*.

He gained global renown as a vivid stylist given to a wildly kinetic camera and exuberant storytelling. But when it came to *The Hand of God*, all that feverishness fell away, leaving behind something more exposed, and more accessible, than any experience he's created.

Production notes

THE HAND OF GOD (È STATA LA MANO DI DIO)

Written and Directed by: Paolo Sorrentino

A The Apartment *production*

Presented by: Netflix

Executive Producers: Riccardo Neri,

Elena Recchia, Gennaro Formisano

Produced by: Lorenzo Mieli, Paolo Sorrentino

1st Assistant Director: Jacopo Bonvicini

Casting: Annamaria Sambucco, Massimo Appolloni

Director of Photography: Daria D'Antonio

Editor: Cristiano Travaglioli

Production Designer: Carmine Guarino

Set Decorator: Iole Autero

Costume Designer: Mariano Tufano

Sound: Emanuele Cecere, Silvia Moraes, Mirko Perri

Cast

Filippo Scotti (*Fabietto Schisa*)

Toni Servillo (*Saverio Schisa*)

Teresa Saponangelo (*Maria Schisa*)

Marlon Joubert (*Marchino Schisa*)

Luisa Ranieri (*Patrizia*)

Renato Carpentieri (*Alfredo*)

Massimiliano Gallo (*Franco*)

Betti Pedrazzi (*Baronessa Focale*)

Enzo Decaro (*San Gennaro*)

Sofya Gershevich (*Yulia*)

Lino Musella (*Mariettiello*)

Biagio Manna (*Armando*)

Dora Romano (*Signora Gentile*)

Italy 2021

130 mins

Courtesy of Netflix

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

TV Preview: The Amazing Mr Blunden + Q&A with writer-director-actor Mark Gatiss and actor Tamsin Greig

Mon 29 Nov 18:15

Doctor Who: City of Death Sun 5 Dec 12:00

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI Mon 6 Dec 18:10

TV Preview: The Mezzotint + Q&A with director Mark Gatiss

Tue 7 Dec 18:10

TV Preview: The Tourist + Q&A with actors Jamie Dornan, Danielle Macdonald, Shalom Brune-Franklin and creatives

Tue 7 Dec 20:30

TV Preview: Ghosts Christmas Special + Q&A (guests TBA)

Thu 9 Dec 18:10

Patti Boulaye Sun 12 Dec 15:30

Woman with a Movie Camera: Bridget Jones's Diary at 20

+ Q&A with director Sharon Maguire Thu 16 Dec 18:00

Preview: Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy (Guzen to sozo)

Wed 29 Dec 18:00

NEW RELEASES

The French Dispatch

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Petite Maman

From Fri 26 Nov

Rebel Dykes

From Fri 26 Nov

Swan Song

From Fri 17 Dec

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