

WORLDWIDE

SUBSCRIBE

The Hand of God

Film ★★★★★



Photograph: Venice Film Festival

Time Out says

★★★★★

Paolo Sorrentino delivers a hauntingly personal memoir of grief, growing up and maverick footballers. Golazzo!

On June 22, 1986 in Mexico City, Diego Maradona scored the most controversial goal I in football history. He used his hand to punch the ball into the net against England, sending Argentina into raptures. But it was back in Naples, where he played club football, that the passion for the stocky maverick burned with the whitest heat.

Neapolitans like a teenage Paolo Sorrentino couldn't care less if he'd scored it with his hand, his head or his arse. He was basically Robin Hood in Italy's outlaw city – and he could do no wrong. His second goal of the game, in which he dribbled round the entire opposition team, hardly registered. They were still celebrating the first one.

The Naples reception that greeted the so-called 'Hand of God' – a phrase Maradona coined at the time – is recreated about halfway through Sorrentino's often sublime, occasionally frustrating but

Popular movies



Jockey



Everything Went Fine

always evocative and haunting cine-memoir. It's a symphony of car horns and yells of joy, and a key waymarker in a coming-of-age story that is intimately based on the Italian writer-director's own boyhood as seen through the eyes of terrific newcomer Filippo Scotti's Fabietto (think an even more rake-thin Timothée Chalamet).

Aside from iconic footballers – and this film comes with a serious trigger warning for English football fans – *The Hand of God* is backdropped by azure waters of the Gulf of Naples and a tapestry of extended family life that's a joy to witness. There's one ensemble al fresco lunch – replete with watermelon, affectionate (and not so affectionate) piss-taking and glorious views – that I could have watched in real time. The scene's payoff, involving the unveiling of an aunt's new boyfriend, is one of the guilty laughs of the year.

And it doesn't hurt either that Fabietto's dad is played by a Sorrentino's muse, Toni Servillo, an actor who brings every frame he's in to life just by being in it, or his prank-loving mum by the excellent Teresa Saponangelo. The sight of a mirthful mum and dad squashed comically onto a scooter with Fabietto to rescue the beautiful, troubled Aunt Patrizia (Luisa Ranieri) from her abusive husband could have spilled from a slapstick comedy. Things in *The Hand of God* are often funny and sad – all at the same time.

Sorrentino is an arch stylist – his Fellini-inspired odyssey *The Great Beauty* could just be the most visually striking film of the past decade – and his aesthetic has occasionally been used against him, especially in his homeland. All surface, no depth is the gist of those grumbles. But if an early flight of fantasy echoes that approach (which I personally love), *The Hand of God* is a more gentle piece of work – especially in its less fizzy second half. When tragedy strikes – bleakly, poignantly – the

[Things to Do](#) [Food & Drink](#) [Arts & Culture](#) [Travel](#) [Movies](#) [Music](#) [Metaverse](#) [Time Out Market](#) [News](#)

It feels like a churlish frustration to voice about a story so nakedly intimate and honest. Like Fellini with *Amarcord*, Alfonso Cuarón with *Roma* and Joanna Hogg with *The Souvenir*, albeit drenched in sunshine, Sorrentino pours his heart out in increments. Through Fabietto, he shows how his filmmaking bug first bit – like Maradona (who also appeared in Sorrentino's *Youth*), Italian maestro Franco Zeffirelli is a deus ex machina here, never seen but filming in town – and there's plenty of unashamedly male-gazy horndog antics too. Even Aunt Patrizia gets the eye.

And like *Call Me By Your Name*, an even more sensual depiction of sexual awakening and boyhood angst, it's also a film about how the things we latch onto along the way – the movies, the sporting heroes, the music, the cigarette smugglers – are a lifelong map back to our pasts. And, even, sometimes those things we don't: A VHS copy of *Once Upon a Time in America* sits plonked on the Schisa's telly throughout, resolutely unwatched. *The Hand of God* makes you wonder if Sorrentino is still thinking about it.

The Hand of God premiered at the Venice International Film Festival. In UK cinemas Dec 3. On Netflix Dec 15.



Written by [Phil de Semlyen](#) Thursday 2 September 2021



Cast and crew

Director: Paolo Sorrentino
Screenwriter: Paolo Sorrentino



The Many Saints of Newark



The French Dispatch



Petrol

Cast: Teresa Saponangelo
Toni Servillo
Filippo Scotti
Luisa Ranieri

An email you'll actually love

Get into a relationship with our newsletter. Discover the best of the city, first.

By entering your email address you agree to our [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#), and consent to receive emails from Time Out about news, events, offers and partner promotions.

Discover Time Out original video

Professor Sprout's Magical Greenhouse

Get us in your inbox

Sign up to our newsletter for the latest and greatest from your city and beyond

By entering your email address you agree to our [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#) and consent to receive emails from Time Out about news, events, offers and partner promotions.

About us

[Press office](#)

[Investor relations](#)

[Our awards](#)

[Work for Time Out](#)

[Editorial guidelines](#)

[Privacy notice](#)

[Do not sell my information](#)

[Cookie policy](#)

[Accessibility statement](#)

[Terms of use](#)

[Modern slavery statement](#)

[Manage cookies](#)

Contact us

[Advertising](#)

[Time Out Market](#)

Time Out Worldwide

[All Time Out Locations](#)

[Africa](#)

[Asia](#)

[Europe](#)

[North America](#)

[South America](#)

[South Pacific](#)

[SITE MAP](#)