

L'Ultima Neve di Primavera

("The Last Snows of Spring")

Italy : 1973 : dir. Raimondo del Balzo

: 91 min

prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:

Video : Video Gems VHS R1035

[Renato Cestìe](#) [Carlo Lupo](#) [d]

Bekim Fehmiu; Agostina Belli; Nino Segurini; Margherita Horowitz

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A picture of robust good health – but the hand of death is on his shoulder

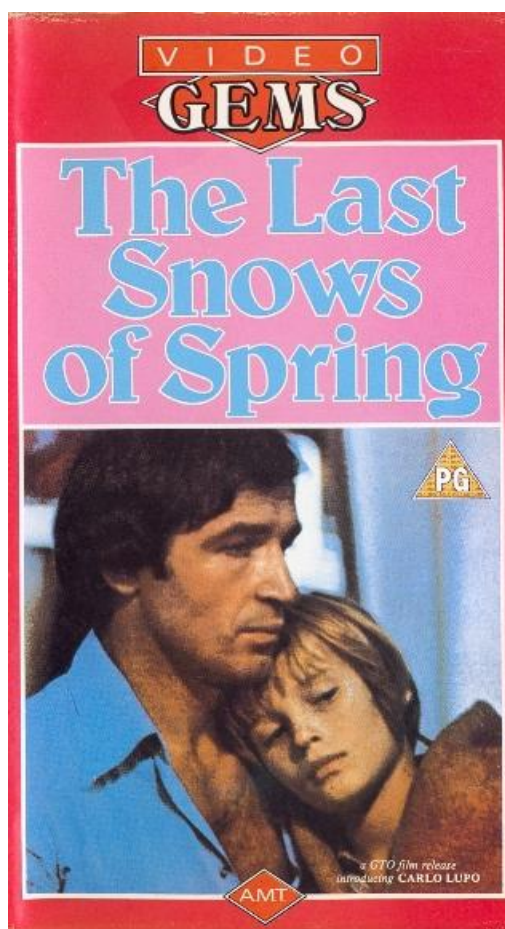
Source: The Moving Picture Boy

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"A 10-year old boy starts to die of neglect when his widowed father spends too much time forsaking his parental duties in favour of playboy activities and a jet-set life-style. With the onset of leukæmia remorse comes by the bucketful, ending with a particularly grisly final trip to the fairground. Never have the artifacts of high living seemed so unattractive, or a film looked so much like somebody's holiday snaps. More of the same was provided by "LAST MOMENTS" the following year."

Video - Video Gems VHS R1035 - sleeve notes:

"From the producers of "LAST SNOWS OF SPRING" and "LAST MOMENTS", a GTO film release introducing Carlo Lupo. A motherless boy aches for a father too lazy to share his love. Except with a woman in between. Filled with excitement and glorious expectations, nine-year old Lucas leaves boarding school to spend Easter with his father. On the way. He lovingly buys his father a present.



Togetherness is – a blood disease in the final reel...

But Lucas's expectations and trust are soon shattered. His father is away until the following day. Choking with the bitterness of rejection and loneliness Lucas resolves not to give the present to his father. Through the tear-stained eyes of a child this is the only way Lucas can make up for his disappointment.

In spite of the sad beginning the holiday improves, and Lucas persuades Roberto, his father, to take him to the mountains to enjoy the last snows of Spring. But while ski-ing, Lucas collapses. The pinewoods become waving shadows and snow whirls round him. Lucas wakes up in his hotel bed surrounded by his father and a doctor. The doctor's diagnosis – leukaemia.

Faced with this heart-breaking tragedy Roberto suddenly realises how important his son is to him. Spurred by guilt Roberto desperately tries to rebuild his son's trust and affection. Weeks of misunderstandings and frustrations suddenly, in a few moments, develop into a

strong and affectionate relationship. But is it too late? "

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Cestiè:

"This charming sandy-haired boy, the picture of health with his bright eyes and freckled button of a nose, became Italy's unlikely flag-bearer in the "Beautiful Death" genre launched by Terence Young's "L'ARBRE DE NOËL" and Arthur Hiller's "LOVE STORY".

In "L'ULTIMA NEVE DI PRIMAVERA", a big international box-office hit, Renato played the emotionally neglected son of a successful lawyer (Bekim Fehmiu). When his father shows belated affection and takes him off on a skiing holiday - luxurious surroundings pointing the familiar moral that money cannot buy love - Luca succumbs to leukaemia, and after a long illness bravely borne dies late at night, in his father's arms, in a deserted funfair.

Clearly believing that one could not have too much of a bad thing, the same marshmallow-peddler who had conceived this lamentable tale, Mario Gariazzo, rewrote it with a few differences as "IL VENDITORE DI PALLONCINI" and directed the result himself. This time Renato, as the neglected son of a drunken comedian (James Whitmore) wears himself to the point of terminal exhaustion and malnutrition in trying to earn, provide and housekeep for his father.

His death scenes are now even more prolonged and beautiful - with no disfiguring tubes up the nose - and doctors, nurses, parents and friends gather at the bedside to proclaim the radiant boy a saint and martyr.

Following its predecessor to the ultimate gasp, the film allows him to expire at a circus, guided heavenwards by the gnomish balloon-seller of the title. This wallow in glycerine tears, released in America and Britain (dubbed) as "**LAST MOMENTS**", should survive as a monument to the corrupted sentiments of our age.

Renato Cestiè, now the darling of Italy, had played nine further leads by his mid-teens, and by public demand was frequently allowed to survive till the final credits. He continued his career in more modest roles, and was seen for instance as the mute youth in the framing scenes of Zeffirelli's excellent film version of "**LA TRAVIATA**" (NL 83). He must have felt a pang of jealousy at the heroine's musical death."

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]



Pouting fawn – Renato Cestiè

One of a spate of weepies emerging from Italy in the seventies to feature delicate boys expiring of the vapours like heroines of the silent era. That the relationships in question were always inter-male tends to bely any lazy assumption that these films were aimed squarely at the female tear duct. **"THE LAST SNOWS OF SPRING"** enjoyed a modest theatrical release in Britain, although quite what appetite it strived to fill is a moot point. Whereas more recent "male-bonding" melodramas (we have to call them that, you know) - **"OVER THE TOP"**, **"A PERFECT WORLD"**, **"MAN WITHOUT A FACE"** - would not have brought a blush to John Wayne's maculine cheek, father/son sob stories of this ilk seem almost to hark back to the emotional extremities of Chaplin's **"THE KID"** or Jolson's **"SONNY BOY"**.

The heart-rending synopsis from the video sleeve gives us a rough outline of the plot – except that the central character's name is not Lucas, but Luca, and he is ten, not nine. His busy lawyer father takes him with some ill-grace for an Easter break at the coast, but insists on bringing along his girlfriend – much against her own advice, and to Luca's anger. Luca and Veronica do sign a truce – they gambol together through fields of sunflowers in fact – but when he catches her and his father lip-wrestling one evening his old jealousies re-emerge. The holiday is cut short, and back home Luca confronts his father for a "man to man talk" (sitting on his father's knee for the interview). When he learns that marriage to Veronica will mean he no longer has to be sent away to boarding school, and will see much more of his father, the boy is overcome with joy. And to celebrate their new understanding, dad says he can start back at school a week late, and the two of them will go off to the mountains together. Once at the ski resort however, dizziness leads to nosebleeds, and Luca wakes up in hospital. Time to reach for that "man-size" Kleenex...

We not only have to wrestle with indifferent post-syncing (much of Luca's conversations with his age-mate Stefanella are unintelligible) but a thunderous bittersweet score which will not allow us to forget the tragedy ahead. The film has that gawky look one associates with Seventies europorn titles – a desperate bid to look trendy and sophisticated, while the characters' thoughts are heard aloud in the fashion of "True Romance" thought bubbles. Cestiè as Renato is an adequate pouting fawn, but this is scarcely the kind of film in which memorable performances are made. He was 10, like Luca, and his other titles included **"LEONARDO DA VINCI"** (69), **"IL RITORNO DI ZANNA BIANCA"** (74), **"CUORE"** (74) and **"NOI NON SIAME ANGELI"** ("We're No Angels", 75).

See also **"IL VENDITORE DI PALLONCINI"**, and subject index under **BOATS & FISHING**, **BOY MEETS GIRL**, **CIRCUS / FAIRGROUNDS**, **DEATH / DYING CHILDREN**, **HOSPITALS / SICK CHILDREN** and **SEASIDE HOLIDAYS**.

