

Italian diva Sophia Loren still firing on all cylinders in ‘The Life Ahead’



CHENNAI: Sophia Loren has been part of a league of actresses who brought a new meaning to cinematic performance and the Italian diva who has not been seen in a feature film in more than a decade, makes a rare appearance in the latest Netflix streamer, “The Life Ahead,” interestingly directed by her son, Edoardo Ponti.



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With masterpieces such as Vittorio de Sica’s “Two Women” under her belt, 86-year-old Loren gives a breathtakingly moving performance as Madam Rosa in “The Life Ahead.”

As a former sex worker, she takes a street urchin from Senegal under her care, showering him with love which becomes a life changer for the boy who has been committing petty crimes.

Adapted from Romain Gary's novel, "The Life Before Us," the movie is high on emotions, a tearjerker in fact, and is set in the southern Italian port city of Bari.

It also stars Ibrahima Gueye as orphan Momo who is under the guardianship of the sweet Dr. Coen (Renato Carpentieri).

"The Life Ahead" begins dramatically with Momo snatching Rosa's handbags as she is out on the street shopping. When Coen finds this out, he forces the boy to meet Rosa and offer an apology. The boy does so very, very reluctantly, and realizing that the elderly woman would be an excellent ward for Momo the doctor cajoles Rosa to take him in.

There are moments of beauty as there are of tension and conflict. Momo is at first hostile to Rosa, clearly unhappy at the loss of his freedom which he enjoyed under Coen.

He still manages to sneak out and sell drugs on the streets, but as time goes by, begins to get fond of Rosa, and she too, despite her initial reluctance, veers around.

Scenes such as when Rosa suffers from temporary memory losses or when the boy smuggles her out of her hospital bed are lovely. And Loren's nuanced performance is Oscar worthy — she is as regal as she is vulnerable.

Ponti does not let his work turn despairing or dark, although the subject of abandoned children is heavy. He offers variety as well, of a parent fighting to keep their child and a shopkeeper who never ceases missing his wife.

All the time, Momo watches them and discovers a sense of belonging while the audience watch him blossom.
