

'Dark Lullabies' is a must-see

By David Levy

A noted Canadian Jewish filmmaker, the daughter of Auschwitz-surviving parents, has combined her talent with her heritage by producing a film for Canada's prestigious National Film Board that is most definitely in the must-see category.

Irene Lilienheim Angelico is a sparkling little slip of a girl of around 40 who was born after the war in Germany where her parents, by the further miracle of their own survival, were reunited after a 1939 marriage torn asunder by the Nazi invasion of Poland. Despite a busy life working on one film after another as researcher, editor and director, directing several documentary films for the NFB, she was haunted by the knowledge that she could well have never been born because of the Holocaust. She was and is, therefore, to her parents the very symbol of their survival and that of the Jewish civilization exterminated in Europe by Nazi bestiality.

Irene Lilienheim Angelico was haunted by much more than that too — the fact that those in Europe who committed the atrocities that produced the Holocaust also produced children, and those children, like herself, would now be adults, her contemporaries. Who are they? Where are they? How do they live with their terrible heritage?

Moving cinema-verite

The answers — for lack of a better word — make for very moving cinema-verite, almost a docudrama except that nothing, alas, had to be invented for effect. Early in the film, Irene herself breaks down in tears in asking an interviewee why, oh why, didn't people intervene when they saw what was going on with the Jews. But as she moves from Israel to West Germany to look up her contemporaries who share the opposite side of her heritage — the offspring of those who killed Jews — her emotions admirably defer to theirs. One of them, a soft-spoken woman whose lovable old grandfather had been sentenced to 14 years of imprisonment for his killer past, wept as she told of her inner turmoil in trying to reconcile the picture of her grandfather as it had developed in her heart as she grew up and that which invaded her mind as another, terrible picture emerged in the objective world.

Thus Irene meets some very fine young Germans, and they remind us of the complexity of coming to terms with the Holocaust in the contemporary mode. But she also seeks out the neo-Nazis and the less threatening but more maddening Hitler junkies of her own age. The two male neo-Nazis she interviews — that is, paramilitary types — offer the tired and typical inventions about the alleged invention of the Holocaust that we were all tortured with by Messrs Zundel and Keegstra here in Canada. One of them said the film footage of the thousands of emaciated bodies being bulldozed in the death camps had been artificially produced by montage techniques. And it

was here that Irene's interviewing technique faltered in that she failed to ask what they would think if it were proven to them that the footage were absolutely genuine. The assumption that they would disapprove of the mass slaughter of Jews remained, for me at least, intact in terms of logic but unresolved in terms of all else.

The Hitler junkie interviewed by the Irene in Germany was a woman selling Hitler memorabilia in a kiosk at the site of Hitler's Berghof retreat at Berchtesgaden in south Germany near the Austrian border, which is now a tourist attraction though the actual villa was razed by American troops at the end of the war. This woman appeared to be in a permanent state of rapture over the intensity of the love that Eva Braun had borne for Hitler. She also showed Irene her favourite picture of the Fuehrer. She was uncomfortably aware that many people dislike Hitler to this day, but this did not diminish her own nostalgic yearning for a tyrant under whose tyranny she never lived.

It was at this point that my own feeling of hopelessness became overwhelming. This woman not only placed a love story above a story of man's inhumanity to man as an object of preoccupation, she also showed that she saw truth as being strictly relative, in this case, relative to which side won and which side lost the war. She believed the case against Nazi Germany gained legitimacy only because it lost the war.

Dark Lullabies is a movie that very badly needed to be done, and Jewish Canadians can be very proud of the sensitivity and professional skill with which Irene Lilienheim Angelico has done it. It is the sort of document that shows us how to come to terms with Germany's guilt at a deeper level than the mere noting of the extenuating circumstances that made all Germans guilty except only for those actually tortured and executed by the Nazis. This film might have benefited from some reference to the latter, but this is not a serious deficiency in the light of what it did show of contemporary German guilt feelings.

Listen to my Sounds (Please Don't Forget)

By Ashley S. Fine

Dedicated to my Zaida, Jack Ross and his family I never met.

The string of the guitar vibrates
Upon the dark hollow box of wood
and makes a sound.

The thread of my heritage too,
vibrates and tremendous sound is heard from the
open wounds of my history.
Is it Shlomo I hear? Yechezkeil? Aharon?
— or is it their sisters, mothers or wives?

I weep. Why can I not tell? My God, it is them all.

The sounds are torrid.
They scream from the gullet of my people's past
lunging from the facefilled graves
— to mine ears.

What? Can't you hear? Why can't you hear?

Is it not clear? Don't you smell the
lifeless, taste the air and hear the Shmah?
Or is it Kaddish?

I weep. Why can I not tell? I know — because it is both.

Much time has passed since the open pits and the lead
and the heat and coals and the gas and the cries.
Now, even grass grows on the burned red ground
where I hear the voices, where I hear so much sound.

My tears have fallen to the wet paper below and
the torment has stopped — for now.
Oh I know my ears will ring again
— they always do
For the burden I bear is a heavy one.
I have been chosen. I swear — I will never forget.

Written after seeing the movie "Dark Lullabies".

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