

# Dark Lullabies: coming to terms with a painful legacy

By Michael D. Reid  
Times-Colonist movie reviewer

Some have called it a hoax. Others say we spend far too much time dwelling on it. But for the aged, emotionally-scarred survivors and their sons and daughters, the mass murder of six million European Jews by Adolf Hitler's Nazis during the Second World War is a historical event that cannot be shoved aside.

As society has attempted to come to terms with this monumental catastrophe, countless books, plays, films and an acclaimed television mini-series have dealt with the Holocaust and its impact on the postwar generation of Jews and Germans.

*Dark Lullabies*, a documentary produced by the National Film Board's women's unit, Studio D, is the latest and one of the most moving contributions to the growing body of films chronicling the events and impact of the Holocaust. It will be screened Wednesday at noon and 2:30 p.m. at the NFB Theatre, 811 Wharf St. There is no admission charge.

## DARK LULLABIES

NFB Theatre

A National Film Board production. Directed and edited by Irene Lilienheim Angelico and Abbey Jack Neldik. Running time: 81 minutes.

RATING: ★ ★ ★ ★

As seen through the eyes of filmmaker Irene Lilienheim Angelico, *Dark Lullabies* explores the impact of the Holocaust on some of the survivors' children, now in their 20s and 30s, and on Germans trying to come to grips with the crimes of the past.

Angelico's parents were married shortly before the Second World War and, soon after, were separated by the Nazis in Poland and interned in concentration camps. Fortunately, both survived and were reunited after the war, emigrating to the United States after the birth of their daughter.

In 1979, Angelico's father gave her a manuscript recounting his experiences during the war. It so aroused her curiosity she felt she must ven-

ture into the past to discover more about the war and its effects on herself and others of her generation. The result of her quest is *Dark Lullabies*.

In the film, we accompany Angelico as she heads to Israel to attend the First World Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, where many of the attending Jews hoped to find someone they had lost during the war; to Germany, where she interviews several Germans, including children and grandchildren of Nazis; and to Hitler's birthplace, where a woman who publishes books on his accomplishments explains that he was "a great man."

"I know something bad happened," she tells Angelico. "But so much is based on hearsay."

Interspersed with her probing and compassionate interviews is black and white footage of past atrocities — shocking, graphic scenes of naked, emaciated women and children being dumped into open graves, hollow-faced internees awaiting execution, and so on. It's been done before but



■ IRENE LILIENHEIM ANGELICO

that doesn't detract from the horror.

One Hungarian Jew, after visiting his hometown where thousands of Jews were executed during the war, remarks: "It suddenly struck me that all of these people are gone. They're dead, by a deliberate act of murder."

Many of those interviewed for *Dark Lullabies* — Jews and Germans alike — were overcome with emotion.

Many, but not all. Take the neo-Nazis, for example.

Smirks and chuckles, rather than tears, emerged during an interview with a group of neo-Nazis in one of the film's most frightening scenes.

"There is an international conspiracy that wants to wipe out Germans as a biological entity," explains a blond-haired, bespectacled spokesman, matter-of-factly.

"They want Germans to go around with guilt complexes."

What did they think of *Holocaust*, the American television series?

"It was very funny," replied one. "It was a Hollywood fairy tale."

Another German, son of a Nazi executioner, recalls discussions with his notorious father about the Holocaust.

"As soon as a question made him uncomfortable, he would evade it or call it silly. When I asked him a tough question, he'd refuse to answer."

Perhaps the film's most haunting scene of all is Angelico's long-awaited visit to Dachau 38 years after the end of the war. As a train pulls into the station, we observe the villagers undergoing their daily routines on a sunny day — storekeepers sweeping the sidewalks, children skipping down the street. In the distance, beyond the steeped roofs and beautifully-landscaped gardens, rise those smokestacks from the Dachau death camp — a harsh memorial to murder.

The tone of *Dark Lullabies* is best summed up by a comment made by Rivka Miriam, an Israeli artist: "I didn't understand it then and I don't understand it now."

Neither do most of this film's subjects, but Angelico's interviews have drawn out a fascinating assortment of opinions and responses to the most horrendous event of the century, and the humanity within its frames suggests there is still hope for a world-free of prejudice and hatred.

*Dark Lullabies* is a powerful and disturbing reminder of a grim past.