

Published August 27th, 2014

'Two Lives' a Fascinating and Dark Movie

By Sophie Braccini



Actresses Juliane Koehler and Liv Ullmann star in "Two Lives." Photo provided

behind the iron curtain. The film is set in 1990 after Germany's reunification. A law firm intent on gaining compensation for these victims of deportation seeks Katrine, who escaped East Germany and reunited with her mother in adulthood. As one young lawyer's inquest develops, an even darker picture begins to emerge.

This German drama was written and directed by Georg Maas, based on real facts and a novel by Hannelore Hippe. It's an unbelievable story of manipulation, betrayal, and murder, and of the Stasi - the secret police agency of the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany).

The movie is gripping and played with remarkable talent, especially by the two main actors, Juliane Koehler (Katrine) and Liv Ullmann (Ase), who gives a touchingly restrained and sensitive performance. There are a few weaknesses in the plot; some elements are not well explained or completely plausible, but it is nonetheless enthralling.

The visual beauty of the movie is also worth noting. The scenes set in the 1940s are filmed in mute tones with splashes of red; the present day is filmed in a magnificent Norwegian countryside, wave-battered and wind-scoured, streaked with rain and snow.

The themes include guilt, resilience, the supremacy of love above all else, and the power of destiny. German filmmakers continue to courageously explore the darkest hours of their country's past, from Nazism to the Stasi.

"Two Lives" will open Aug. 29 for at least one week at the Orinda Theatre, the only Bay Area venue showing this year's Oscar finalist from Germany.

This month's International Film Showcase in Orinda features "Two Lives" ("Zwei Leben"), which portrays the cruel destiny of people crushed by historical events beyond their control and the inhumanity of a totalitarian regime. The film, based on true events, is skillfully crafted and constructed - a noir mystery where glimpses into the past peel away layer after layer the lies that are covering a terrible truth.

The story begins during the occupation of Norway by Nazi Germany during World War II, when a Norwegian girl, Ase Evensen, falls in love with a German soldier who later dies on the Eastern Front. She gives birth to a little girl, Katrine, who is taken away by the occupying forces to be raised in a Lebensborn orphanage set up by the Nazis for foreign-born Aryan children. In the 1940s, hundreds of such children were taken from their mothers, many of them ending up in East Germany

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