Robert Enrico's

Au nom de tous les miens

For those who lived through the real Holocaust, the television miniseries Holocauat was nonetheless traumatic. In once-occupied countries like France, the showing of the series became a subject for furious debate - vociferous denials that the Holocaust had ever taken place and a resurgence of anti-Semitism. Some film producers felt there was a need for more films about the terrible wartime martyrdom of the Jews of Europe, and began casting about for stories. The France-Canada coproduction Au nom de tous les miens, which recently had its world premiere in Montreal, is one of these films.

Martin Gray (Majekc Grayevsky) is a 58-year-old Warsavian, and a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto, the Treblinka death camp, the Polish underground, the Soviet Red Army, and various business endeavors in the U.S. and France. In 1970, while living in the south of France, Gray's wife and family were killed in a forest fire, and Gray, after contemplating suicide, turned instead to writing. His 1971 autobiography, "Au nom de tous les miens" ghostwritten by French novelist and presidential advisor Max Gallo, would sell 35 million copies worldwide and be translated into 19 languages. Gray held onto the film rights for 10 years, until French producers Andre Diaqui and Jacques-Eric Strauss and Franco-Italian film director Robert Enrico persuaded him they could make a film that would be faithful to the book's message of a life.

Au nom de tous les miens thus faithfully Gray's story, beginning with his family's forced move into the Warsaw Ghetto, his adolescent discovery of black-marketeering and his descent into the inferno, in a chronicle of horror that never ceased, the gray's desertion from the Red Army in its victorious rampage across Germany. While the postwar years would find Gray living a more or less normal life, that normality would be shattered by the second holocaust that consumed his immediate family - his grandmother, parents and younger brothers having died in the first. The film concludes with its beginning, where a sheltered Martin Gray (played by Michael York) strongly resembling Gray himself resolves to tell the story of those he loved, the film's English title.

The book is a very slick commercial product: a page-turner, propelled along by ceaseless action. The film, while not quite as slick, is nevertheless on a respectable par with television's standards of big-screen fare: lots of sound and fury, tolerable amounts of blood and gore: feats of courage; in short, the Cecil B. De Mille version of history. His 1971 autobiography, Au nom de tous les miens leaves something to be desired. But if you assume a public that knows nothing about what transpired in Europe during the years 1939-1945, then the film is at least a point of departure.

When considered from the vast American-know-nothingness, such lingering traces of an educational purpose do nonetheless manage to reflect favorably on Canada's participation in the making of Au nom de tous les miens, even if the point of it all remains an American TV sale or Majors deal. Associating Canadian filmmaking, even remotely, with the European tragedy, confers a kind of much-needed dignity on those Canadians involved with the production. Enough, surely, to conclude that the experience can, will and should be repeated.

Still, one of the amusing games that can be played with Canada's not especially amusing official coproductions another kind of game played by producers and bureaucrats in tall buildings is called Guess What's Canadian? In This Officially Canadian Film. In this round, the clue is that Au nom de tous les miens had 20% Canadian participation, so you shouldn't set your expectations too high.

Time's up. If you answered "Not bloody much", you're right. Of Canada in this two-hour film one finds a three-minute interior sequence set in a Montreal apartment that's actually supposed to be in New York, as well as the odd brief exterior also masquerading as the good old US of A. Informed sources report that there's hope a little more Canada (where two months of shooting took place) may yet appear on the six-screen minutes slated to hit the box this spring.

Happily, there's another side to the coin. While there may not be much of Canada on-screen, Canadians behind the camera and behind the desks have done more than their 20% worth to bring this film to a theatre near you. Remarkably sharp eyesight is required to read the miniscule print at the bottom of the made-in-France presskit, but it does in form that the film's Canadian executive producer was Los Angeles' own Pierre David; that Claude Heroux (the other half of the team that recently brought us Going Berserk, an authentic piece of L.A. Canadian) was the Canadian producer; that Montreal production company Les productions mutuelles was one of the co-producing parties, along with Canadian dollars from the CFCD and Radio-Canada. And now, Canadian independent distributor Rene Malo has brought the completed film home, so to speak, to recoup some of the $2 million Canadian that went into the making of Au nom de tous les miens.

Michael Dorland

AU DE NOM DE TOUS LES MIENS 4


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