

Nackte Unter Wölfen

("Naked Among Wolves")

East Germany (D.D.R.) : 1963 : dir. Frank Beyer : DEFA

: 125 min

prod: : scr: Bruno Apitz : dir.ph.:

.....
Fred Delmare; Erwin Goschonneck; Gerry Wolf; Armin Mueller-Stahl; Krystyn Wojcik;
Boleslaw Potnicki; Peter Sturm

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	KBytes	Ω □ ≠ Z ♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
2979a	1½	2	0		- - - - -	No	<i>unseen</i>

Films and Filming - October 94 - review:

"It has become fairly plain by now that the most keenly felt and naturalistic films about the last war - and about the concentration camps in particular - have emerged from Communist countries, from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Russia, and now East Germany. Whereas British and American film-makers seem to regard the war as something almost in the nature of a sporting challenge, the Iron Curtain countries view it through grey, disillusioned eyes.

"NAKED AMONG WOLVES" is typically bitter in outlook, and the rush to freedom at the end of the film cannot erase the memory of what has gone before. The memory of Buchenwald concentration camp has been limned indelibly on the minds and features of its survivors. The film focusses on a curious display of communal bravery during the final days before the Liberation in the bleak spring of 1945. A Polish prisoner, arriving with a transport from Auschwitz, conceals in his suitcase a little child. The camp underground movement bicker among themselves but eventually agree to shield the boy from the SS, even though it leads to torture and death. Finally, with the Americans only a few miles away, the prisoners rise against their captors and the SS flee in confusion.

There are several anomalies in the film. How is it that the little boy looks so chubby and well-fed, after his journey from the Warsaw ghetto via Auschwitz to Buchenwald? What is the explanation for the incredible bravery with which some of the prisoners withhold the whereabouts of the child, under torture? How

has such an arsenal of guns and ammunition been acquired and been hidden for use in the closing fight?

But the film's virtues far outbalance its faults. The script is excellent, rich in visual comments and lines of dialogue that etch in a gallery of characters: Kremer, the dour, rock-like leader of the underground movement, reluctant at first to protect the child and then the most faithful in the end; Hofel, reminded of his own young son and so human in his hours of torture; the little Pippig, forever bustling around and silent to the last; and the SS men themselves, one seeking to ingratiate himself with the prisoners so as to save his neck at the Liberation, another sly and firm, meeting the underground communist movement on its own terms.

The central thesis of the film is of course made perfectly clear: without the spirit of communism all would be lost in the unceasing war against fascism. But one accepts the propaganda, just as one accepts the propaganda of Eisenstein or Pudovkin, because the material and the director's treatment of it have a weight and significance of their own. And, paradoxically enough, it is the individual contributions of the prisoners rather than their communal effort that remain uppermost in one's memory of this intelligent, bitter film."

The United Artists Story note:

"Concentration camp drama."

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Adapted by Bruno Apitz from his own novel. Released in the US by United Artists. It's not known who played little Pippig. I think that to criticise an eastern bloc film on the Second World War for propagandising communism is to lose sight of who principally defeated the Nazis, and who sustained the greatest casualties of all the combatant nations. The Second World War was a positive vindication of Soviet communism, even though Stalin was holding the reins in his bloody hands, and very few WW2 films from the west (including "**SAVING PRIVATE RYAN**") are free of the taint of nationalist propaganda. It would be very interesting to compare this film directly with the later "**LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL**", which also deals with a small boy's life in one of the Nazi death camps. The contrast in tone between the two could hardly be more stark, but which is more true to its subject matter?

See subject index under **PRISON** and **WAR**.