



Laurent Lucas and Lola Dueñas are the latest actors to portray the real-life “Lonely Hearts Killers”

## New York Film Forum Forbidden Films

May 13–19, 2015

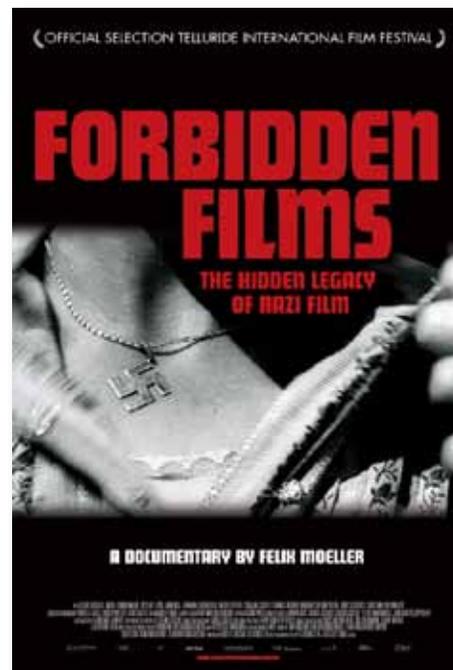
Felix Moeller’s documentary focuses on the troubling heritage of Nazi filmmaking during the years of WWII—a subject mostly hidden to the outside world until now. While many filmmakers left Nazi-dominated Europe and reached stellar heights as creators of what came to be known as film noir, their compatriots who stayed home—high-caliber directors and film artists—produced motion pictures under what may be termed the blackest and most sinister regime in human history. The thriving German movie industry produced 1,094 films during 12 years of Nazi rule, all of it overseen by Joseph Goebbels’ Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda.

After German capitulation, the Allies took control of all German film production. The occupation authorities did not allow any film to be exhibited in Germany that had not received Allied approval, which meant that films made during the Nazi years were initially banned.

The German film industry had been the lone rival to Hollywood from the 1920s on. The rivalry continued into the 1930s and ’40s. German filmmaking after 1933 had strong production values, innovative photography, and solid, entertaining films based on well-written scripts—yet every aspect of it was leashed to the Ministry of Propaganda and in thrall to Nazi ideology. Nothing was untouched by it, no matter how

saccharine the entertainment. And Goebbels meant to entertain! He frowned upon direct propaganda, looking with admiration to Hollywood. He envied the ease with which American filmmakers produced films people wanted to see. He wanted German filmmaking to fulfill that ideal—yet still be Nazi through-and-through.

Some Nazi films were commissioned by the government, intended to promote political measures. Anti-British films were a staple in Germany, such as *Ohm Krüger* (1941). *Heimkehr* (*Homecoming*, 1941) dealt with ethnic Germans in Poland. It completely



respective pathologies. But forty minutes in, it takes a bold turn—to say more would spoil it, but rest assured you’ll know the instant it happens—that cleaves the movie in two. It now becomes wildly subjective, going crazy along with its doomed lovers. Du Welz’s daft decision deserves respect, but it will likely split the audience as well, with some preferring the control of the first half while others revel in the abandonment of the film’s own rules. Put your correspondent in the former camp. As *Alleluia* progresses it becomes both more unpleasant and preposterous, the notion that this deranged twosome could insinuate themselves into anyone’s lives impossible to swallow. (As for Gloria’s young daughter, she’s conveniently written out of the script.) Dueñas and Lucas deliver brave, committed performances in service of a movie that ultimately leaves them behind.

—Vince Keenan

reverses the war’s reality, showing the Poles doing to Germans what the Germans actually did to the Poles. *Jud Süß* (1940) was released simultaneously with the ghettoization and mass murder of Polish Jews; it was made to justify actions already underway, to prepare the German people for the disappearance of their Jewish neighbors and ready them for the war of racial annihilation in Eastern Europe. Himmler declared it mandatory viewing for SS units. *Ich Klage An (I Accuse)*, (1941) was a cinematic plea for euthanasia, used to bolster measures sought by some in the medical profession who wanted to murder the “mentally unfit” in psychiatric institutions.

Were these films actually seen by the public? Consider: One of the highest-grossing films of modern times, *Titanic* (1998), drew 18 million German ticket buyers the year of its release; *Avatar* (2011), 11 million. In 1940, 29 million tickets were sold for *Jud Süß*. *Die Große Liebe (The Great Love)*, (1942), a glorification of sacrifice and war, drew 25 million German viewers the year of its release. The following year, one billion movie tickets were sold in Germany! By contrast, 2012 movie attendance in Germany totaled all of 120 million ticket buyers.<sup>1</sup>

Should Nazi films be banned? At least 50 of them have still never been exhibited in Europe for public viewing. In America, the Office of Alien Property took possession of

<sup>1</sup> Unlike the United States, which calculates a film’s success by box office receipts, European nations have always maintained a system that counts tickets sold, not the cost of the tickets.

Nazi-era films after the war, and no recognition has ever been given to Nazi copyright holders nor have the rights of custodianship, curatorship, and receivership—currently exercised by the Murnau Foundation in Wiesbaden on behalf of the German government—ever been recognized in the United States.

This vast cinematic heritage is currently stored on cellulose nitrate film at the Federal Film Archive in Hoppegarten, near Berlin. Very few have been digitally “preserved.”

The German government and the Murnau Foundation appear to believe their countrymen should not be allowed to see the worst of the Nazi films. Far-fetched? In *Forbidden Films*, there are scenes of the Nazi films being

shown, today, at venues in Germany, France, and Israel. Afterward, Moeller interviews the audience about their reactions, and their answers are not consoling. A middle-aged man in Munich who viewed both *Homecoming* and *I Accuse* said he realizes now how bad things were for Germans in Poland and asks, “Why has this been suppressed for so long?” He has wholly swallowed the original Nazi propaganda about atrocities committed against Germans in Poland—and goes on to claim that the euthanasia film was “great” and “still relevant.” Is this different from people believing they knew something about slavery and the Civil War after watching *Gone with the Wind*? Yes, I think it is.

Yet the films are *at least* of high historical

interest. “There’s lots of uninteresting stuff you probably don’t need to show, like a lot of films today; not all the Nazi films are worth showing. But I think they’re excellent examples of propaganda, even if they are negative—I wouldn’t want to deprive anyone of them,” Oskar Roehler, a German film director, says in *Forbidden Films*. “Let everyone make what they will of them...especially if you’re a writer or historian—if you don’t know about these things, you know very little about our country.”

*Forbidden Films* (*Verbotene Filme*, 2012) is available as a Region 2 DVD with English subtitles at Amazon.de.

—Marc Svetov

## City of Lights, City of Angels French Film Festival

Held annually at the Director’s Guild headquarters in West Hollywood, is one of Los Angeles’ most popular film festivals. Patrons are cared for to an exceptional degree—coffee and croissants in the morning, wine and cheese in the afternoon, and cake served on the closing weekend. Most afternoon screenings are free, thanks to the Franco-American Cultural Fund, which produces the festival. It’s no wonder attendance has steadily grown over the festival’s nineteen years. Of course, none of this would matter if the films themselves weren’t good. Under the leadership of Executive Producer and Artistic Director François Truffaut, COLCOA brings in the best of recent French releases, including many U.S. premieres and retrospective screenings.

### **Two Men in Town**

*Deux hommes dans la ville*

April 27, 2015

Digitally restored, *Two Men in Town* (1973) reprises the popular pairing of Jean Gabin and Alain Delon from *The Sicilian Clan* (1969). In *Two Men*, Gino (Delon) is a safecracker recently paroled and trying to go straight. Germain (Jean Gabin) is a social worker and former police officer nearing retirement who becomes the younger man’s surrogate father. Both perfectly cast, it’s one of the last of Gabin’s many great performances and a high point for Delon, as well.

There’s tragedy in Gino’s past. One senses the weight of it on his handsome face. Now out of the pen, he moves to another town where a mechanic’s job awaits him. He meets local beauty Lucie (Mimsy Farmer) while trying to stay straight. His past catches up with him, however, when he bumps into his old crew,

which has also relocated and is itching to pull a bank job. The gang includes a hothead played by a young Gérard Depardieu. Gino is tempted, but brushes them off. That would be the end of the story if it weren’t for the small town’s cop, Inspector Goitreau (Michel Bouquet), who makes it his mission to put Gino back behind bars, bleeding heart Germain be damned. That Lucie is a bank employee seems too much of a coincidence to the detective.

Director José Giovanni (Joseph Damiani) who also wrote the screenplay, brings authenticity and passion to a fictional story that feels highly personal. From a Corsican background, Damiani was allegedly a Nazi collaborator. He spent nearly ten years in prison for a burglary that resulted in a death, serving part of his sentence on death row. Saved from the guillotine by presidential clemency, he entered the world of cinema through director Jacques Becker, who adapted Giovanni’s prison-based novel, *Le trou*, as a memorable 1960 film. *Two Men in Town* was remade in 2014, under the same title, with Forest Whitaker and Harvey Keitel playing the parolee and cop.

### **Next Time I’ll Aim for the Heart**

*La prochaine fois je viserai le coeur*

April 24, 2015

In *Two Men in Town*, Inspector Goitreau has a Javert-like tenacity and inflexibility that compromises his better judgment causing tragedy. It makes him a bad cop. Well, folks, you ain’t seen nothing yet. In *Next Time I’ll Aim for the Heart*, a chilling, darkly comic thriller from director Cédric Anger, Franck (Guillaume Canet) is a rookie officer who moonlights as a serial killer! He runs over a girl, and he likes it. So he kills again, and again.

As the festival program guide points out,



The New France and the Old France, represented by Alain Delon and Jean Gabin in *Two Men in Town*