

Dear All,

I want to reach out with very good film news. On Friday, January 13, at the Lark Theater in Larkspur- we will be screening Julia Mintz's pathbreaking documentary- Four Winters. It will be there for a week, but on Friday there should be special guests.

The film consists of eight Jewish partisans, five women and three men, recounting their four winters in the forests of Eastern Europe during WW2. I suspect that many of you have little appetite for yet another holocaust documentary, even if the characters were resistance fighters and survived. And I understand and share that sentiment. But I hope that you'll come and sample this film because it's a unique kind of story telling, a very different approach to documentary film...and it makes for a profound experience.

If you don't mind me droning on a bit- the film takes a radically different approach to how to engage these astonishing stories. Mintz (the director) has decided to jettison film as art. She's not interested in any of the things that make life into art- which is exactly what movies attempt to do. Not Mintz. In her film, the whole is not greater than the sum of its parts. There is no over-riding, didactic purpose; no moral or historical lesson that gives her film (and perhaps the holocaust itself) meaning. We may choose to find meanings in these remarkable stories. We are, after all, art-creating animals. And Mintz's films says- create away. Find your own meanings. But what she has chosen to do is something smaller and larger. These eight people and their stories speak to us not as meaningful art, not as lessons to be learned- but simply as human beings relating what shaped and reflected their human specificity and their deeper humanity. And we find our own humanity being shaped a little bit, deepened a little bit, because of the stories they share.

The film isn't a cautionary tale (though rising anti-semitism makes it especially pertinent). It's simply listening to these people tell their stories...unadorned....of how they lived and fought. For example, a woman talks about her seventeen year old self, suddenly a partisan, for which she is completely unprepared- confronting a captured German soldier who helped murder her family. The partisans are going to execute him and she's asked if she would do it. And she recounts how she couldn't possibly do it, because the partisans saved precious bullets and executing Nazis was a hands-on process. But she says that she then thought about her father and brothers and sister and "Mommy," and then she told them she could do it. And this story, like the movie, reaches us on two levels. What she went through, what she did, is completely beyond anything I can even remotely understand. I engage the stories from a distance of awe and compassion. But then this old woman still refers to her mother as "Mommy." And you see her "Mommy" in her eyes. And so in that moment, I can completely understand and relate to her as someone my age looking back at the seventeen year old girl...whose "Mommy" meant everything to her. And throughout the film- these story tellers (complemented by previously unseen photos and film of life in a resistance group) take me to places that I can never possibly understand- and yet they become completely and complexly accessible. They tell their stories of violence, love, humor, sex, feelings of fear but also enormous power. It's especially unusual to hear so many stories from the perspective of girl and women partisans.

Sorry to ramble....and I do hope you will give this a try. It was transformational film watching for me.

I hope all of you- and those you love- are well...happy new year.....and love and warmest of wishes.....Harry (Chotiner)