

“TRAIN TO ZAKOPANE”

A Film By Henry Jaglom

Henry Jaglom's latest, *TRAIN TO ZAKOPANÉ* (2018), is undoubtedly one of his finest achievements. Beyond questions of subject matter and theme, this much is certain: Only a sage, veteran filmmaker could have written a play and directed a film as mature and emotionally resonant as this one, Jaglom's first period piece and his least improvised. It surges with the age-conferred virtuosity displayed by filmmakers like John Huston with *The Dead* (1987), Max Ophuls with *Le Plaisir* (1952), or Luchino Visconti with *L'Innocente* (1976).

Train to Zakopané tells the story of Jaglom's father Simon as he crossed Poland via train in 1928. Anti-Semitism was, at that time, rampant in much of Europe, especially in Poland. In the film, Simon "Sioma" Sapir (Mike Falkow), a successful young Russian businessman, meets Katia (Tanna Frederick), a lovely nurse in the Polish army on a train-trip to Warsaw. He is faced with a life-changing dilemma when they fall madly and mutually in love: he discovers that she is fiercely anti-Semitic. Will he reveal to her that he is Jewish? Will he move toward love, or will he move toward revenge? Will he kiss and tell? Their weekend stopover in the resort town of Zakopané haunted Jaglom's father for a lifetime. Does that story not sound remarkable for a play and a film?

Jaglom integrates analog video clips he shot with his late father before his death in 1992. His father reticently discusses his memories of his whirlwind affair with the Polish army nurse, and its aftermath. These grace notes are all accented by dynamic performances by the entire cast, especially Tanna Frederick, who gives her best performance in a very difficult role. I don't know who could have done that quite as well, even with Henry's multi-dimensional script. She has to be wretchedly hateful, yet still alluring to Sioma and to the audience -- a very difficult balance to strike -- and does she strike it! Equally powerful is South African-born and romantically handsome Mike Falkow. The ending is shattering, especially when the film cuts back to Jaglom's real father finishing his own account of the story.

Editor Ron Vignone's often exquisite visual effects, which expand the stage space in which it was shot, suggest the studied artifice of stylistically bold "theater-based" films like Eric Rohmer's *Perceval le Gallois* (1978) and Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit* (1981) -- in Jaglom's film, it is apropos that his father's testimony frames these treated, expressively lit monochrome visuals. Thus, it becomes much more than the filmed record of a stage production.

The film was the hit of this year's Los Angeles Jewish Film Festival. When it hits your city in 2018, take my word for it, it'll be one of the best films you'll see in the entire year. It definitively proves Jaglom knows full well how to stage scripted material as much as he knows how to milk the improvisatory sequences that have been his wheelhouse from jump street. I rarely ever write about new films in this manner, but this one is a master stroke.

---DAN KREMER