

Rosenstrasse

Surrounded by family and friends, Ruth Weinstein (Jutta Lampe) an older Jewish woman of German origins, mourns the death of her husband in their New York apartment. She seems utterly cloaked in her grief, to a degree where her daughter Hannah (Maria Schrader) cannot reach her. An old acquaintance of the widow, Rachel (Carola Regnier), comes to console her but she is cruelly turned away by Ruth. Her comments to Hannah arouse her to seek the story of Lena Fischer and about her mother's past in Berlin.

Such is the framing story of *Rosenstrasse* ("Rose Street"), a new German film which tells a little-known true story of "inter-married" Jews in Berlin who escaped the Nazi regime. What the daughter learns is what her mother Ruth, then an eight-year-old child (Svea Lohde), went through when her parents were imprisoned in a Jewish Community Center in Berlin's Rosenstrasse in February 1943, and she is left alone.

A number of Aryan women married to Jews, knowing where their husbands are held, began to make a silent protest against this Nazi action, including the aristocratic Lena Fischer (Katja Riemann). She, discovering the abandoned Ruth, takes her in like a daughter and the two participate in the valiant protest. Over a tense week, during which their vigil is tested by authorities, their numbers grow. Finally, perhaps because of Lena's connections--her brother Arthur (Jurgen Vogel) is a decorated Hero of the Reich--the captives are freed, and the Weinstein family is able to emigrate and start a new life.

The story of this amazing, courageous effort of wills is revealed to the granddaughter slowly, while visiting the now 90-year-old Lena Fischer, the woman who saved her life.

There is rich human material here, yet, crafted by the very capable and intelligent German director, Margarethe von Trotta (*Rosa Luxemburg*), and her co-writer Pamela Katz, the emotions don't click in as they should. The casting is fine, especially the prominent German actress Ms. Riemann, as the younger Lena, rightly cast as an attractive and sensitive soul. Production values--the re-creation of wartime Berlin--are adequate. Yet, yet...

Potency is lacking somehow in *Rosenstrasse*. Part of it may be the fact that the framing story, including the somewhat self-indulgent travels of Hannah, seems tacked on and lame. The family saga elements pale by comparison with the facts of the real women's lives. The focus could have been more cleanly on the story of the protesting women; that would have been enough to sustain the drama. The final release of the prisoners should have been a knockout scene; somehow it just isn't. An intriguing side bar of the Third Reich, the *Rosenstrasse* story, deserves a better telling, perhaps in a heartfelt documentary.

(The film is rated "PG-13" for some mature themes.)

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