

## The Invisibles

An amazing story of Jews surviving Nazi Germany arrives with the new film “The Invisibles,” Claus Räfle’s gripping docu-drama about a real quartet of Jews in Berlin, four out of 1,700 who survived the war after February 1943, when Goebbels triumphantly and infamously declared the city “free of Jews.” Moving between cinemas, cafés, and safe houses, they were able to elude the Gestapo, Nazi officers, and police officials for almost two years.

The documentary has two contrasting modes: actual interviews with the four Jewish survivors featured and an effective dramatization of their stories in wartime Berlin, what the director calls a “hybrid format.” The witnesses are Cioma Schonhaus, Ruth Gumpel, Eugen Friede, and Hanni Lévy, all of whom tell their stories calmly and clearly, able to interject both pathos and wit. They are warm-hearted people, even forgiving, and you identify with them wholly as they recount their amazing stories.

Real figures who appear in the film but are not matched with contemporary witnesses include Werner Scharff, a Jewish artisan who was a fervent Nazi opponent and who miraculously escaped from the Theresienstadt concentration camp to continue the fight. To balance Scharff, there is Stella Goldschlag, an attractive 20-year-old who, under pressure, became a “catcher” for the Gestapo, fingering many clandestine Jews for capture.

The four principal protagonists as young people are played, respectively, by actors Max Mauff, Ruby O. Fee, Aaron Altaras, and Alice Dwyer. We follow their escape narratives in an intercut kaleidoscope of scenes as they lose or leave family and friends to find new covers and identities. Their ruses vary, from pretending to be a war widow to passing as an Aryan with dyed-blond hair. Their precarious livelihoods range from working as a passport forger to becoming a server of black-market meals to Nazi officers.

Director/co-writer Räfle is a veteran of feature-length documentaries for German television. He and his co-author, Alejandra Lopez, begin researching the fates of Jewish Berliners some years ago, and his experience establishes a strong documentary feel, heightened by periodically inserting black-and-white newsreel footage from wartime Berlin, showing the city in all its grim context.

A surprise of the film is that the four don’t just hunker down: they take serious risks to survive, such as Cioma, who dares to go to posh restaurants, or Eugen, who joins a resistance group producing anti-Nazi leaflets.

The film also highlights an important chapter in the resistance to Nazism: the fact that many thousands of non-Jewish Germans were part of a network of support for persecuted Jews. The nature of that support is shown in many ways in the film. Räfle himself noted that “since 1945, however, most of these courageous helpers have been silent about their contributions, often regarding them as completely normal. Their actions are only now being recognized much later. As of 2013, the Israeli Holocaust memorial Yad Vashem has honored over 24,000 of these women and men in the list of Righteous Among the Nations.”

It may be sometimes difficult to follow the multiple skeins of narrative in this picture, in part because the actors are rather similar, but the effort is worth it as “The Invisibles” triumph as too few did.

*(This film is not rated and runs 110 minutes.)*

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