

Beautiful People

How a particular political context can affect personal lives has been the serendipitous theme of several very different recent movies in Washington. *Beautiful People*, the most intricate of these, is also one of the most intriguing to hit our screens in a while. Directed by Jasmin Dizdar, a Bosnian naturalized in the United Kingdom, the movie is one of those omnibus films presenting a disparate mix of story lines that somehow come together (*Magnolia* is another recent, though very different, example).

In this film, the Bosnia War is the key event while the core institution which touches most of the characters is a National Health Service hospital. It houses a harried doctor whose marriage is coming apart; his patient, a young Bosnian mother-to-be whose baby resulted from a rape; a rebellious woman doctor-trainee who comes from a very upper-crusty family; and her patient, a gentle Bosnian basketball player injured in an automobile accident. There is also a Serb and a Croat, refugees from Bosnia but loose in London, who both end up in the emergency ward after a street battle, but continue their struggle in the ward refereed by a tough nurse. Not to mention a BBC producer prone to disaster coverage (as in Bosnia) and three benighted soccer hooligans...as well as several others.

If it sounds complicated, it is, and the picture introduces each of its story elements briskly and without ceremony, requiring the viewer to be attentive. And paying attention pays off for the filmgoer. As the myriad strands of warp (Londoners) and woof (Bosnians) wind together, a tight fabric of human desire, pain, and solidarity is formed.

There are no stars, only semi-familiar English actors (some folks will recognize Charlotte Coleman from *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and Nicholas Farrell from *Chariots of Fire*)--and a batch of Balkan unknowns. The star is Dizdar and his very smart, very contemporary script and his hands-on directing (this is his first feature film). One of the best things you can say about *Beautiful People* is that, as it winds down to its end, you have identified so with this melange of people that you want the movie to continue, to see what happens to them next...

(*The film is rated "R" principally for rough Bosnia wartime footage.*)

(April 2000)