

Document Citation

Title	Aimee & Jaguar
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Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	1999 Feb 15
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	61, 63
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Aimée und Jaguar (Aimee & Jaguar), Färberböck, Max, 1999

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largely conventional love story amid Germany's ever-waning fortunes of war and dramatic molehills like Lilly's husband catching the two women in bed and Felice's late-on confession to Lilly that she's actually Jewish. As in real life, pic ends with Felice carted off by the Nazis and a return to the movie's modern-day bookends in which an 85-year-old Lilly (Inge Keller, dignified) reminisces about her long-lost lover.

Most disappointing aspect of the picture is its failure to communicate, either visually or dramatically, the whirlwind force of the two women's affair and the sense in which each challenged the status quo. First-time feature helmer Max Faerberboeck (from legit and TV) directs in a style that will lose little on the small screen, with no overall visual design or sense of atmospherics. Largely shot in interiors, the production has a boxy, rather flat look, and both costumes and art direction have an applied rather than lived-in flavor.

Both Schrader and theater actress Koehler are OK, but there's a lack of real screen chemistry to make their relationship believable, with none of the supercharged sexual frissons that powered, say, Karoly Makk's "Another Way," a similar story of dangerous lesbian love. Script is little help, with loose ends, stray characters who come and go (such as Buck's husband figure), and an interesting actress like Heike Makatsch wasted on an ill-defined role.

Tech credits are solid, though Jan Kaczmarek's weak score does little to turn up the emotional heat.

VARIETY 2/15/99 8.6/63

FEBRUARY 15-21,

BERLIN

AIMEE & JAGUAR

(DRAMA - GERMAN)

A Senator Film release (in Germany) of a Hanno Huth presentation of a Guenter Rohrbach/Sentaor Film Produktion production. (International sales: Senator, Berlin.) Produced by Guenter Rohrbach; Hanno Huth.

Directed by Max Faerberboeck. Screenplay, Faerberboeck, Rona Munro, based on the book by Erica Fischer. Camera (color), Tony Imi; editor, Barbara Hennings; music, Jan A.P. Kaczmarek; art directors, Albrecht Konrad, Uli Hanisch; costume designer, Barbara Baum; sound (Dolby Digital), Benjamin Schubert, Michael Kranz; sound designers, Hubert Bartholomae, Fritz Dosch; associate producer, Gerhard von Halem; assistant director, Eva-Maria Schoenecker; casting, Risa Kes. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (competing), Feb. 10, 1999. Running time: 127 MIN.

Felice Schragenheim

("Jaguar") Maria Schrader
Lilly Wust ("Aimee") Juliane Koehler
Klaerchen Heike Makatsch
Ilse Johanna Wokalek
Lotte Elisabeth Degen
Guenther Wust Detlev Buck
Lilly (today) Inge Keller
Ilse (today) Kyra Mladeck
Eckert Ulrich Matthes
Keller, the editor Peter Weck

With: Rosel Zech, Margit Bendokat, Jochen Stern, Peter Weck, H.C. Blumenberg, Klaus Manchen, Sarah Camp, Desiree Nick, Patrizia Moresco, Karin Friesecke, Dani Levy, Lya Dulitzkaya.

By DEREK ELLEY

A grand, life-changing passion fails to stir the emotions in "Aimee & Jaguar," the true story of a brief but intense lesbian love affair between a conservative German housewife and a risk-taking Jewish underground worker in WWII Berlin. Prestige production by Senator Film, which opened the Berlin fest to muted reaction from international critics, looks unlikely to travel far beyond Teutonic borders.

Fast-risen star Maria Schrader plays Felice, a self-confident young woman who by day works under a pseudonym at a Nazi newspaper (from which she leaks sensitive documents to the Jewish underground) and by night hangs out in lesbian circles with her friends Lotte (Elisabeth Degen) and Klaerchen (Heike Makatsch) and lover Ilse (Johanna Wokalek), a maid.

At a concert one evening in November '43, Ilse points out her employer, Lilly Wust (Juliane Koehler), and Felice is both smitten and intrigued by the bourgeois mother of four, who is married to a soldier (Detlev Buck), sympathizes with the Nazis and takes male lovers on the side.

However, Felice and Lilly's social paths rarely cross, and, as the war goes increasingly badly for the Germans and Berlin suffers from more and more bombing raids, Felice courts discovery of her true identity by recklessly continuing with her underground activities.

An hour in, the central relationship belatedly cranks into action when Felice spontaneously kisses Lilly on the mouth one day and awakens hidden feelings in the heterosexual hausfrau. In the pic's only major sex scene, and the sole sequence that attempts to convey the depth of their emotional and physical passion, the two women make love — Lilly with tremulous desire, Felice with scarcely contained control.

With almost another hour still left, the movie then retreats back into a

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