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Das Autogram

(The Autograph)
(WEST-GERMAN-
FRENCH-COLOR)

Berlin, Feb. 25.

A Proovobis Film, Berlin, in coproduction with Von Vietinghoff Film Production, Berlin, and Euro-America-Films, Paris, in collaboration with Second German Television (ZDF), Mainz. Features entire cast. Written and directed by Peter Lilienthal, based on the novel "Cuarteles de Inverno" by Osvaldo Soriano. Camera (color), Michael Ballhaus; editor, Siegrun Jäger; sound, Hartmut Eichgrun; sets, Lilienthal; music, Juan José Mosalini, Claus Bantzer; art direction, Georgio Carrozzoni; tv producer, Christoph Holch. Reviewed at Berlin Film Fest (Competition). Feb. 25, '84. Running time: 92 MINS.

Cast: Juan José Mosalini, Angel del Villar, Anna Larreta, Hanns Zischler, Nicolas Dutsch, Georges Geret, Pierre Bernard Douby, Vito Mata, Luis Lucas, Dominique Nato, Agostinho Faleiro, Asdrubal Pereira, Roman Pallares.

Peter Lilienthal's "The Autograph" can be viewed as the last film in an unofficial trilogy of docu-fiction features on Latin America, the two earlier films being "The Country Is Calm" (1975) and "The Uprising" (1980). There was also an important docu on free elections in Chile, "La Victoria" (1973). All leave little doubt that Lilienthal, raised in South America (Uruguay, Argentina) after the family emigrated from Germany in 1939, is a filmmaker as much attracted by political events in Latin America as he is with the contemporary West German experience.

"The Autograph" at this year's Berlinale also had its parallel in the official Argentine entry, Héctor Olivera's "Funny Dirty Little Wars," one of the real finds at the fest. Both are based on novels by Osvaldo Soriano, a respected Argentine writer whose themes treat his country's record of dictatorships in the post-World War II period. This one is set in a provincial village and the story comes across as a moral parable rather than a self-contained or probing narrative.

Two likable individuals, a musician and a boxer, are commissioned by the authorities to come to the town to participate and perform in a folk festival. As soon as they arrive at the station, however, they are met by brutal military police and searched for evidence of conspiracy or insurrection. This brings the two together, particularly when the chances are good that the population will support them as spokesmen for freedom of conscience. The songwriter, Galvan, is already suspect to the secret police for the lyrics in the songs he composes and sings, while the boxer, Rocha, has been brought here as a setup loser to the army's champion.

A kind of showdown occurs when an autograph is requested by gangster-type enforcers of the public peace — the fighter gives it, the singer refuses. The rest is then constant harrasment and orders to leave the city at once — that is, after the folk festival is over and the boxer has lost his rigged fight. Each decides to resist in his own way, however, even though the cause is lost at the outset. In the end, the friends are back on the train again, lucky to be alive after a series of dangerous adventures.

Tale (filmed on locations in Portugal) is too simplistic to be effective. Dialog and performances by nonprofessionals are commendable, as usual in Lilienthal's films. But the festival version was the dubbed-into-German one for some inexplicable reason, a faux pas that aggravates. —*Holl.*