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BERLIN

AFTER THE END OF THE WORLD

(SLED KRAJA NA SVETA)

(DRAMA — BULGARIAN-GREEK-GERMAN)

A META BM-4 (Sofia)/Profit Film (Athens)/Saxonia Media (Leipzig) co-production. Produced by Bono Christov Bonev. Co-produced by Konstantinos Piperias, Tatiana Granitova.

Directed by Ivan Nichev. Screenplay, Angel Wagenstein. Camera (color), Georgi Nikolov; editor, Krassimira Velitshkova; music, Stepan Dimitrov; production designer, Rossica Bakeva; costume designer, Elena Deminkova; sound (Dolby stereo), Ludmilla Machalnishka, Yuri Chinov. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (Panorama), Feb. 20, 1999. Running time: 109 MIN.

Araxi/Mari	Katerina Didaskalo
Albert Cohen	Stefan Danalyov
Young Albert	Zlatil Davidov
Young Araxi	Zhana Dakovska
Avram	Vasil Michailov
Mazal	Tatiana Lolova
Father Isai	Georgi Kaloyantshev
Rabbi Ben David	Georgi Rusev
Mullah Ibrahim	Nikola Rudarov
Kostas	Jorgos Zizopoulos
Zulfie	Afina Papas
Teacher	Alexander Morfov

By DAVID STRATTON

One of the most accessible films to emerge from Bulgaria, this humane, affecting plea for racial and religious tolerance covers familiar territory at times and has a few rough patches but generally impresses thanks to a pervading spirit of generosity. Further festival exposure in the coming months seems a given, with TV slotting also likely.

Pic cuts back and forth between the present and a rose-colored past, the late '40s, when, in the beautiful old city of Plovdiv in eastern Bulgaria, not far from the Turkish border, people of different races and beliefs lived in harmony. Here the Orthodox priest, the Turkish mullah and the Jewish rabbi were close friends, and children of dif-

ferent backgrounds — Bulgarians, Turks, Armenians, Jews, Gypsies — played together. What isn't made clear is how this Balkan melting pot survived the upheavals of the recently concluded World War II, but, in any event, the postwar advent of communism is blamed for the destruction of this particular environment.

The best friend of Albert (Zlatil Davidov), a Jewish boy, is Araxi (Zhana Dakovska), a girl whose parents are Armenian; the children are inseparable. But Communist hard-liners, in their opposition to religion, soon create a rift in the community. The Muslim cemetery is destroyed and the Turks resettled; the Gypsies, too, are forced to leave the place where they've lived for hundreds of years. Seeing the

writing on the wall, the rabbi arranges for the Jewish community to leave for Israel. Meanwhile, Araxi's parents have attempted, unsuccessfully, to travel by train to Paris; unknown to Albert, Araxi's father is arrested at the Bulgarian border, while the girl and her mother are forced to live in poverty in a village near the prison camp.

Intercut with these scenes is a contemporary story, set in the late '90s. Albert, now a world-famous expert on Byzantine culture, returns to Plovdiv for the first time in 40 years. He meets Araxi, now married, and, in between catching up on old times, they embark on an affair. At the same time an unscrupulous lawyer is attempting to get Albert to sell his old family home (occupied by displaced people) because the area is to be developed into an international hotel.

Pic covers a lot of bases, including familiar scenes of Communist intolerance in the past and the evils of post-Communist market economies in the present. But Ivan Nichev, one of Bulgaria's most respected filmmakers, imbues even the most predictable material with a humanity that gives the film its soul.

Production values are lush, with the magnificent streets and houses of Plovdiv providing a picturesque backdrop to the drama.