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And The Violins Stopped Playing

(U.S.-POLISH)

Moscow A David Films production, in association with Film Polski, Tor Unit. Executive producer, Krzysztof Zanussi. Produced, written and directed by Alexander Ramati, based on his novel. Camera (color), Edward Klosinski; editor, Mirowslaw Garlicka; music, Leopold Kozlowski, Zozislaw Szostak; art direction, Teresa Smus-Barska; costumes, Elzbieta Radtke; production manager, Michal Szczerbic; associate producer, Judy Hecht. Reviewed at Moscow Film Festival, July 16, 1989. Running time: 119 MIN.

Dymitr Horst Buchholz
Zoya Maya Ramati
Roman Mirga Piotr Polk
Wala Mirga Didi Ramati
Shero Rom Zitto Kazann
Dr. Josef Mengele Marcin Tronski
Koro Wojciech Pastuszko
Pawel Jacek Sas-Uchrynowsky

■ **“And The Violins Stopped Playing”** is Alexander Ramati’s dramatization of the Nazi persecution of European gypsies during World War II, based on his own novel. Lensed on location in Poland (Kryzstof Zanussi exec produced), film has an authenticity of locale that contrasts with its highly invented story.

Between gypsy fiddlers, dances, camps and caravans, blossoming young love and death in Auschwitz, “Violins” abounds with color and human interest that should get audiences through the tragic final scenes. Tv programmers will likely be the most interested.

Dymitr (Horst Buchholz) is a sensitive violinist who learns that the Warsaw ghetto has been cleared of Jews and the Germans plans to move the gypsies in soon. He takes his wife (Didi Ramati) and teen-age son Roman (Piotr Polk) to a gypsy camp outside town and convinces the camp council they are in imminent danger. He is appointed camp head to lead them to safety, ousting the old leader who pooh-poohs the danger.

Dymitr’s son Roman falls for wild gypsy beauty Zoya (Maya Ramati) when he sees her dancing around the fire. Zoya already has been spoken for, and it takes a knife fight to win Roman her hand in marriage. The wedding takes place on the road, as the gypsies flee the omnipresent Nazis. Some Polish partisans warn them to break up the caravan and pretend to be Ukrainian peasants. Though they follow this advice, many are caught and killed.

Reaching Hungary, they are welcomed warmly and momentarily lulled into thinking they’re safe. It is then that a German patrol chances upon them and ships them to Auschwitz, a name Dymitr has heard before. The gypsies are treated better than the Jews, and Roman is privileged as interpreter for the sinister Dr. Josef Mengele. In the end, Zoya falls ill and dies, and Dymitr plays his violin in the camp’s gypsy orchestra while his wife goes to the gas chamber. Then the violins stop playing.

Story is tragic, but a varied pace and lots of gypsy gaiety keep it from becoming maudlin. Firmly on the gypsies’ side, Ramati shines them up quite a bit, with consequent strain on their believability.

Nonetheless, “Violins” is a watchable, highly dramatized film dealing with a little-known part of history.

Top-notch technical work includes cinematography by Edward Klosinski. —Yung.