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Veronika Papp and Erzsi Pastor on a neighborly spying mission

Engrossing 'Angi Vera' from Hungary

10/19/79

The party gets its lumps

By Jeanne Miller
Theater Critic

DONT BE PUT OFF by the theme of "Angi Vera" — the inhumanity of the Stalinist era in 1948 Hungary.

For the Hungarian entry in the Film Festival is a thoroughly engrossing drama about a young, uneducated 18-year-old girl of the title who is drawn into the "new world" of social justice that was beginning to emerge at that time after the trauma of the war.

The film, which will be shown tonight at 7 at the Palace of Fine Arts Theater and tomorrow at 7 p.m. at the Castro, begins as Vera complains at the Communist Party meeting about irregularities and corrupt practices at the hospital where she is employed as an orderly.

Concluding correctly that the honest and impressionable girl would be a perfect subject for indoctrination, party officials send her to a party school where she begins to study Marxist politics and to prepare herself to become a productive member of the new Communist regime.

At the school, the shy Vera makes some friends and

finally falls helplessly in love with her instructor, Andre, a married man who returns her love.

Vera, though she is sensitive and vulnerable, becomes a perfect robot for her Communist mentors, particularly when she falls under the influence of Anna, a militant former underground member who is held in high esteem by the party hierarchy.

When Vera and Anna are sent out on a canvassing mission, actually a spying trip on their neighbors, Vera willingly signs a false report implicating an innocent worker.

But when Andre's wife leaves for a short visit to Budapest, Vera sneaks into his room and their love is consummated. Apparently the Stalinists of that era were very puritanical and considered such dalliance an unforgivable breach of party discipline.

So Vera, brainwashed by the inflexible Anna, confesses her dereliction at a devastating "self-criticism" session with her fellow students and party big-wigs.

Pal Gabor's eloquent script and sensitive direction bring alive his characters with shattering impact. His indictment of the repressive nature of socialist thinking makes one wonder why he is not in exile.

The performances are uniformly excellent, particularly those of Veronika Papp in the title role, Erzsi Pasztor as the dogmatic Anna and Eva Szabo as one of Vera's earthy schoolmates.

★ S.F. FILM ★
FESTIVAL