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Film Reviews, by P.J.W.

Lost Child of Europe

THE SEARCH

(M.G.M.)

IN these days when the cold war between Russia and the west is gradually getting warmer and warmer, it is salutary to be reminded, even in a genteel manner, of some of the effects the last war had on Europe. *The Search* is a poignant reminder of one of the more easily forgotten aspects of war—the question of what happens to innocent families who become separated in the conflict. It was made by Lazar Wechsler, the Swiss producer of *The Last Chance*, and it contains much of the honesty, simplicity, and tenderness of that film. The action of *The Search* was shot in Western Germany and Switzerland, and the leading roles of the separated mother and son are played by two Czechs (Jarmila Novotna and Ivan Jandl), neither of whom had previously had any movie experience. These factors enable the film to achieve a kind of fundamental, almost documentary truthfulness, to which no Hollywood-produced epic of post-war Germany could hope to attain.

The Maliks are a family of Czech intellectuals whom the Nazis have sent to concentration camps, where they all die except the mother and her nine-year-old son. The film opens at an UNRRA camp where hundreds of displaced children are arriving every week in long trains of cattle trucks, dirty, ragged, hungry, and fearful. One of them, a boy whose sufferings have robbed him of speech and memory, and who has a slave labourer's number tattooed on his arm, escapes from the camp and hides in the bombed ruins of the city until hunger forces him into the open. His name, which nobody can discover, is Caryl Malik, and his mother is seen searching the highways of Europe for him.

But as the picture develops, the theme of the search becomes almost subsidiary to the story of the strange adoption of the lost boy by an American soldier named Steve (Montgomery Clift). This part of the film is warm, amusing, often quite funny, and full of hope for the future. Steve is a typical small-town G.I., as rough as a bag in his manner and dress, a man who likes his liquor raw, but who is at the same time idealistic, friendly, and rather naive. He brings the boy home, feeds him, tames him as if he were a wild animal, and gradually brings him to trust him. In fact he shows him the first affection he must have known since he lost his mother. He teaches him English, but he cannot restore his memory. While he has him in his care, how-

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "The Search."
FAIR: "Key Largo."

ever, he nostalgically tells him about America, and promises to take him there when his tour of duty is up. When he finds this can't be done immediately, he reluctantly takes the boy back to the UNRRA camp. There, miraculously, the waif meets his mother, who has been helping to look after the children there. So although the lost child is symbolically adopted by the American, in the end he remains to face the future in Europe with his found mother again.

To call *The Search* a film with a message would be an understatement. There are several messages in it, but the main theme is one that nobody can ignore. It is a plea for humanity, in particular for the bereaved women and children of the world. It is a plea, too, for greater understanding of the generation growing up in Europe with such memories behind them. And it is also first-class anti-war propaganda. In addition it puts in a word for the American way of life, and almost incidentally and since many of these children were Jews, for Israel. Since these are worthy causes, the result is a worthy film, despite its sometimes jarring sentimentality.

An outstanding contribution to the emotional impact of *The Search* is made by the photographs of bombed-out buildings against which much of the action is played. These terrible reminders of the destruction that can be wrought by modern warfare remain perhaps the picture's most vivid and haunting impression. Hardly a single adult German male appears on the screen, and the nameless German city of the film is a city of ghosts, empty, naked, and unforgettable.



EDWARD G. ROBINSON

"Mainly a study in the macabre"