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Gerd Gemnden

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Gerd Gemnden : Continental Strangers: German Exile Cinema, 1933-1951 (Film and Culture Series) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Continental Strangers: German Exile Cinema, 1933-1951 (Film and Culture Series):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A New Approach to a Familiar TopicBy Michael SamerdykeI have to give Gerd Gemunden credit. He found a new approach to the topic of German emigre directors in Hollywood and

had something interesting to say. He approached the topic through close readings of 6 films that (apart from "To Be Or Not To Be") haven't been analyzed to death. Indeed, Gemunden is the first critic I've seen who approaches "The Black Cat" by looking at its politics and what it has to say about Interwar Europe. His approach to "Hangmen Also Die" avoids the "What did Brecht write?" approach others have beaten to death. He made me want to see "Act of Violence" for the first time and to give "Der Verlorene" a second chance (although his view of the film's flaws lines up with mine pretty closely.) I'm glad I read this one.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Authoritative and Enjoyable

By John Colaresi

Gerd Gemunden's 'Continental Strangers - German Exile Cinema 1933 -1951' concerns the German directors who made films in America that were anti-Nazi. Many of these films made before WWII weren't open attacks but cloaked their messages in stories set in the past to echo the current political situation in their native land. William Dieterle, who came to America years before Hitler took over, directed 1937's THE LIFE OF EMILE ZOLA, which won a few Oscars including Best Picture and featured emigres in front of and behind the camera, was no longer able to return to Germany after its release because of its defense of Dreyfuss who was Jewish and its plea for democratic ideals when Europe was losing them. Germany banned it not only for these reasons, but I'm sure Goebbels saw the parallel between Zola's books being burned with his own orchestrated bonfires. Surprisingly Dreyfuss's religion is only mentioned once (actually by a finger pointing to a ledger stating his religion) because in this film and others "Hollywood increasingly forced Jews to camouflage their ethnic and religious identity in the 1930's." The primary reason was commercial as to ensure Hollywood films would not anger Germany and its friendly neighbors where they were needed to be shown. As I stated in my review of 'The Continental Connection: German-speaking emigres and British cinema 1927-45' before WWII British films were devoid of anti-Nazi propaganda as not to provoke Germany but somehow two Conrad Veidt films about the suffering of Jews were allowed to be made probably because they were set in the distant past but received limited play outside of Britain and never in Germany for the same reasons. And like these British films "Hollywood filmmakers refrained from portraying the fight against Hitler as a cause against Jews both as primary victims and as active in the resistance to Hitler." As more refugees entered America with detailed stories of Nazi cruelty, films became more open in their attacks on Germany starting with 1939's CONFESSION OF A NAZI SPY directed by Anatole Litvak a Russian-German exile, almost like a documentary so audiences would clearly get the message. Another emigre, Ernst Lubitsch, directed the comedy TO BE OR NOT TO BE (1942) about German-occupied Poland but most critics and audiences missed its satire, finding it tasteless, and preferred Chaplin's lampoon THE GREAT DICTATOR made two years earlier. Fritz Lang's 1941's MANHUNT was an anti-Nazi thriller set in England and daring because it was released months before Pearl Harbor while America was still neutral. Lang's 1943'S HANGMAN ALSO DIE showed the plight of the Czechs living under Nazi tyranny which Lang avoided when he left Germany in 1933. Bertolt Brecht, another exile, worked on the script but was denied screen credit. Surprisingly, after the war many of these emigres who made anti-Nazi films were suspected of being Communists because Communists hated the Nazis and were targeted by the House on Un-American Activities: "Widely believed to be a haven for liberals and 'pinkos,' Hollywood became under scrutiny, especially filmmakers who had voiced opposition to Hitler before Nazi Germany's declaration of war, a phenomenon now labeled premature antifascism." Many of them didn't feel safe and were blacklisted like Dieterle and left the country as with Brecht who left for Paris the day after he testified in front of the HUAC. Those who returned to Germany mostly found indifferent or hostile receptions like Marlene Dietrich who was considered a traitor and spent the rest of her life living in Paris. Directors like Douglas Sirk, Robert Siodmak, and Dieterle had mixed success making European films and their work was ignored or dismissed in America as with Lang's remakes of THE INDIAN TOMB and THE TIGER OF ESCHNAPUR whittled down into one film for American audiences and quickly sank. There were others who chose not to return: "Beyond the many emigres and exiles who attempted a return with little or no success, there are, of course, all those who never wanted to come back to Germany or Austria. Some no longer felt any cultural ties; others could not imagine living in a country that voted Hitler into power or that had applauded the 'Anschluss.'" The book also explores postwar American films like Fred Zinnemann's 1948's ACT OF VIOLENCE which "underscores the impossibility of 'going home again' after seeing combat, of seamlessly picking up from where one left off." A major section of Gemunden's book is devoted to Peter Lorre's ill-fated return to Germany in 1951 to direct, co-write, and star in DER VERLORENE, a reflection of the current postwar times; a still is used on the cover. His sole directing job was dismissed unfairly as being too similar in style and inferior to Lang's Weimar-era masterpiece 'M.' It didn't help having comparisons of his character, Dr. Rothe who has killed, to his role as the child murderer in 'M': "In this climate the child murderer Hans Beckert and Roth is but a product of a much larger profound social, economic, and political crisis. Like Rothe, he suffers from a 'Zeitkrankheit' [roughly translated by meine Frau as a sickness of the times], the true scope of which not only escapes him but also those who hunt him down. Beckert and Rothe share the status of the victim-perpetrator who befuddles the jurisdiction that is in charge of them. 'M' famously leaves it up to the viewer to pass judgement on a truly complex case. DER VERLORENE advocates self-justice in view of the moral deterioration of both wartime and postwar society" something Germans didn't want to see. The film's failure was a personal blow to Lorre and he refrained from showing it in America for fear of McCarthy-era repercussions: "I don't think the State Department would like me to indict any other country's politics." Over the years

the film has grown in stature and recognized for its own merits instead of being in the shadow of 'M.' One obvious error due to a typo: On page 186 producer Erich Pommer is quoted as saying "When I saw Germany for the first time since 1943, I couldn't believe it: The taste of the audience had not only remained on the same level, no, it had even regressed." It's not 1943 but 1933 when he fled the country and returned after the war in 1946. If Pommer was there in 1943, he would have most likely been sent to a death camp. One quibble: On page 6 Gemunden states: "Important stars of 1930's German cinema such as the English-born Lilian Harvey and Heinrich George briefly tried their luck in Hollywood sound film" but they "gave up after their plans did not pan out, only to assume major billing under Goebbels." That is true about Harvey's four films that underused her talents. As far as I know, George came over to play Wallace Beery's role in a German remake of M-G-M's THE BIG HOUSE when dubbing dialogue wasn't perfected and he had a part in another MGM film, WIR SCHALTEN UM AUF HOLLYWOOD, made for German-speaking audiences, about a tour of the studio where you can see American stars like Buster Keaton and John Gilbert trying to speak German with interviewer Paul Morgan, an Austrian who later died in the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1938. If M-G-M or another studio tried to put George in English-speaking films, that's an area needing more research. Harvey is mentioned in 'Journeys of Desire' an excellent encyclopedic comprehensive guide to European actors who came to work in Hollywood but not George. Overall, 'Continental Strangers' is highly informative and highly readable. There's more details about people and films here than I mentioned so I would recommend it to anyone interested in this subject.

Hundreds of German-speaking film professionals took refuge in Hollywood during the 1930s and 1940s, making a lasting contribution to American cinema. Hailing from Austria, Hungary, Poland, Russia, and the Ukraine, as well as Germany, and including Ernst Lubitsch, Fred Zinnemann, Billy Wilder, and Fritz Lang, these multicultural, multilingual writers and directors betrayed distinct cultural sensibilities in their art. Gerd Gemunden focuses on Edgar G. Ulmer's *The Black Cat* (1934), William Dieterle's *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937), Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be* (1942), Bertolt Brecht and Fritz Lang's *Hangmen Also Die* (1943), Fred Zinnemann's *Act of Violence* (1948), and Peter Lorre's *Der Verlorene* (1951), engaging with issues of realism, auteurism, and genre while tracing the relationship between film and history, Hollywood politics and censorship, and exile and (re)migration.

Deftly, Gerd Gemunden combines perceptive close readings of select films with sharp archival investigation to show how some key movies of classical Hollywood came-in often fraught manner-to engage with the evils of fascism. By understanding cinema as a complex negotiation over political meanings, from production to final results onscreen, this volume represents a major contribution to the literature on the Hollywood emigrés and their cultural work. (Dana Polan, New York University) *Continental Strangers* is a necessary and most compelling pendant to Thomas Doherty's *Hollywood and Hitler, 1933-1939*. Indeed, these two recent releases provide an impressive ensemble. Doherty depicts how American film studios reacted to Nazi terror in both direct and less overt ways. Gemunden fills out the picture in a series of intriguing case studies devoted to filmmakers who fled Hitler and settled in Southern California. Sensitive to the variety of ways in which German film artists experienced emigration and exile, Gemunden's book remains admirably attentive to the historical determinations and textual shapes of Hollywood's anti-Nazi features. (Eric Rentschler, Harvard University) A lucid and comprehensive account of German filmmakers in American exile, this book also offers a poetics of displacement and alienation. It adds another chapter to the story about Hitler and Hollywood and contributes to a deeper historical understanding of political cinema at a moment of crisis. (Anton Kaes, University of California, Berkeley) A welcome and well-researched survey. (Cineaste) Gemunden's work... makes a valuable contribution to film history... (Journal of American History)... a richly contextualized and nuanced reading of exile cinema... (American Historical) A most important book. (Clayton Dillard Slant Magazine) About the Author Gerd Gemunden is the Sherman Fairchild Professor in the Humanities at Dartmouth College.