

Lodz Ghetto bridges past and present

by Carolyn Martin

As a documentary on the Polish ghetto where thousands of Czechoslovakian and Polish Jews were forced to labour for the Nazis before being sent to death camps, *Lodz Ghetto* is a moving work.

Kathryn Taverna and Alan Adelson's film is, however, something more: an intimate portrait of the people who lived in the ghetto — the courage of some, the cowardice of others and the hunger of all.

It's a film that doesn't simply assign the tragedy to history, but bridges the past and the present, where the buildings of the ghetto still stand as desolate concrete testimonies.

Lodz Ghetto includes colour slides taken by an unknown German, several minutes of Nazi film and footage of the ghetto as it appears today. But it is mainly composed of black and white photographs taken by the ghetto inhabitants themselves. The story of the ghetto is theirs, compiled from their diaries and read by actors, in-



Captive Jews gather in front of a Nazi photographer in a picture from Kathryn Taverna and Alan Adelson's film *Lodz Ghetto*. Even 50 years after the picture was taken, it is hard not to see their gaze as a silent accusation against the inhumanity of their treatment.

cluding Theodore Bikel.

Author Jerzy Kosinski is the voice of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, the

ghetto's chairman, who begs an assembled crowd for their children in order that others will not be taken. He

film

Lodz Ghetto
directed by Kathryn Taverna and Alan Adelson
featuring the voice of Jerzy Kosinski
produced by the Jewish Heritage Project

eventually urges his fellow Jews to "Volunteer for the transports."

Lodz Ghetto begins with the language of legends. "Listen and believe this, even though it happened here, even though it sounds so old, so distant and so foreign." Yet the film explores the complexity of the ghetto's reality.

There is Rumkowski, who has deluded himself into thinking that, by giving away a little more each time, he can somehow save the rest. There are those who are resilient and selfless, and those who betray out of fear.

A woman secretly gives her hus-

band a portion of her bread, feeling he needs it more. He hides his swollen hands from her so she won't worry. A man abandons his son, leaving him hiding naked in a laundry basket. The quiet, reflective voices and stark images that accompany them pierce us to the core.

The film's power lies as much in what it doesn't show as what it does. Nooses are hung around the necks of those about to be executed, but the shot freezes just before the final moment of death. We hear of Jewish police throwing children out of hospital windows, but the most poignant shot is of a single empty bed.

The horror the film lays before us is the inhabitant's long suffering of hunger and uncertainty. There are shots of the naked, angular wasting bodies of children, of two women kissing each other goodbye through a wire fence and of a young boy receiving his deportation notice, his haunted eyes cast upward towards the man whose hand appears in the frame.

Life and death in *Lodz Ghetto* was a reality for 200,000 people (only 800 of whom survived); by bridging the gap in years, the film brings the tragedy much closer. A photograph of Rumkowski dissolves into current footage of the railroad tracks he travelled to his death. We watch Beethoven, who once lifted the ghetto inhabitants' minds beyond their captivity, being played in the present.

By the film's end, we feel so close to the people in the ghetto that when Russian tanks finally roll through the streets of Poland, we are unable to feel any real relief because they have been too long in coming, too many people have died.

Lodz Ghetto premieres at the Bloor Cinema from October 4 to 10.

Sisters struggle for equality



Dionne Brand and Ginny Stikeman's documentary *Sisters in the Struggle* is an honest examination of the experiences of Black Canadian women. Using interviews, newspaper clippings and music, they create a unique cinematic style. Presenting the experiences of such engaging persons as former Mayoral candidate Carolann Wright and human rights activist Sherona Hall, the film examines difficult questions of race, gender, class and sexual orientation. Free at the Euclid Theatre, 394 Euclid Ave., October 5 at 7 and 9 pm, and October 6 at 3 and 5 pm. Also at the NFB's John Spotton Theatre, 150 John Street, on October 17 at 8 pm for \$4. For more information, call 973-9606.

Rambling Rose a powerful coming of age story

by Heather Burkett

film

Rambling Rose
directed by Martha Coolidge
starring Laura Dern and Diane Ladd
produced by Seven Arts Studios

Rambling Rose is a film about an alluring, sexually-promiscuous, Southern Belle (played by Laura Dern) who comes to live with a Southern family to help care for their

children. The story centers around the effect that Dern has on the family.

The film is shaped by the impressions of 13 year-old Buddy Hillyer (Lucas Haas). Buddy, as a grown man, brings us back to the year 1935 and his first crush on Rose.

The innocent, youthful feeling of first-love flavours the entire film. Rhythmic, toe-tapping Dixie music helps create a light-hearted pre-WWII feeling is established.

The intriguing thing about *Rambling Rose* is that, although set in 1935, the women in it are strong and independent. Indeed, most of the characters seem to be contemporary people.

Diane Ladd, who plays Mother Hillyer, has some of the most powerful scenes in the film. In an effort to control Rose's sexuality a hysterectomy is proposed. It is Ladd, in a moving monologue, who defends Rose from the mutilating hands of the male doctors.

This is not a typical Hollywood "women's film with overwrought dialogue, melodramatic acting and plot developments.

In fact it is sensitive and witty; though at times, it seems to border on inanity. For instance, near the end of the film, Rose ironically explains to Buddy Hillyer that, "Girls don't want sex, girls want love."

These rare moments of poor dialogue are fleeting. It is easy to overlook this fault because the acting is so good.

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