

Berlin like made-for-TV-movie

Judgement in Berlin ★★ ½
Princess Theatre
October 27-30

review by Deviani Maher

In August 1978 a Polish airliner carrying East German passengers was hijacked on its way to East Berlin and was forced to land at Tempelhof Air Base in West Berlin. This incident inspired *Judgement in Berlin*, which is based on the book of the same title, written by U.S. District Court Judge Herbert J. Stern. Stern was the judge chosen to hear a case that would undoubtedly have ramifications on International Civil Aviation law.

The film focuses on the difficulty of passing judgement on others, specifically on the issue of whether or not an unemployed East German waiter was justified in hijacking a plane to rejoin his family in West Berlin at the expense of jeopardizing the lives of other passengers.

The hijacker himself has a surprisingly small speaking role. The drama is played out around him, so that he provides a focal point. Almost every action by the other characters seems to have the question of the hijacker's fate in mind. As well, there are many views of the Berlin Wall and we glimpse the profound impact on Berlin residents of living in a city divided by this physical construction.

One of the major flaws of the film is that it has the atmosphere of a made-for-television film rather than a big-screen production. The story would probably flow more coherently on the small screen. As well, the ending is a bit disappointing because the legal and emotional loopholes are too neatly resolved and there is an overemphasis on the patriotism of Judge Stern that becomes annoying after a while.

However, Martin Sheen gives an interesting portrayal of the judge who must confront his mixed feelings of being both American and Jewish presiding over a

court in West Berlin. The language in the courtroom scenes is thankfully not technical, and thus the events of the trial are easy to follow for those of us unfamiliar with American legal jargon. The international supporting cast includes Max Gail (of *Barney Miller* fame) as an attorney, Heinz Hoenig as the hijacker and Jutta Speidel as his accomplice. Sean Penn puts in a surprisingly credible performance as Guenther, one of the East German passengers who defects to the West.

Despite its flaws, the film is worth seeing to get one perspective on life in Berlin. It will also be an interesting comparison for those who had the opportunity to see the West German film *Wings of Desire* earlier this month.



Heinz Hoenig as the hijacker in *Judgement in Berlin*.

Caught is just Billy Graham propoganda

Caught ★
Famous Players Londonderry

review by Greg Pohl

This movie is about a very confused young man, Tim Devon (played by John Shepherd), who gets into trouble in Amsterdam. After finding out that he is an "illegitimate" child, he runs off to find his father, and ends up getting involved in theft, drugs, and prostitution. At the same time, Rajam Prasad (played by Amerjit Deu) is attending an international conference for evangelists in Amsterdam.

Of course, Tim and Raj eventually meet, and we could have had a decent movie examining the different paths that people take in life. Instead, we get a hokey story, with suitably hokey acting and dialogue. The one-dimensional characters are particularly unbelievable. All the 'bad guys' are completely bad, and all the 'good

guys' are completely good.

At this point I should make sure that nobody gets 'caught' unaware of the fact that this movie was put out by Billy Graham. Apparently he's realized how powerful the visual medium is, so he's using it to present his own beliefs. As a result, the movie ends up being nothing more than Christian propoganda. The advertisements in the newspapers don't indicate this fact very clearly, so quite a few people probably didn't know what they were in for until they arrived at the theatre, at which point they were greeted by attendants handing out religious pamphlets. This isn't any worse (and certainly less subliminal) than the macho military bullshit espoused by *Rambo* and *Top Gun*. Maybe these movies should be forced to carry a 'P' rating, to warn viewers that they contain propoganda. But I'm digressing.


Anyway, in the movie, Tim finds God, and a happy ending is shared by the 'good guys'. Sorry, but in real life it doesn't quite work that way. Christianity, like other religions, just tries to answer all those troubling questions like "Why are we here?" and "Where are we going?" Accepting a religion amounts to short-circuiting one's brain with circular arguments, so that no nagging questions are left hanging out like unconnected wiring. Turning over your problems to some supernatural entity is just a way to avoid dealing with them yourself. If that's how you choose to deal with life, then you'll probably enjoy this movie. On the other hand, if you prefer a more realistic approach, I suggest that you continue your search for intelligent film elsewhere. Rating (based strictly on cinematic value): one star.

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