

Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 120 minutes

This feature from IFC Films debuts on demand on cable and digital platforms March 27th.

Audiences have been spoiled over the past couple of years when it has come to standout war movies. Recent productions like *1917*, *Dunkirk, A Hidden Life* and *Jojo Rabbit* have raised the bar, offering new, unique (and sometimes very personal) perspectives on these battles, as well as pushing technical boundaries to their limit. The new film
Resistance
offers yet another spin on the formula, focusing on the real tale of a figure who the world would eventually know under a different name (Marcel Marceau). While the true story is remarkable and sections of this film are engaging, the story is delivered in a routine manner and comes across in spots as melodramatic.

Set at the beginning of WWII, the story follows Marcel (Jesse Eisenberg), a Jewish immigrant living in France who is focused on his performance art. This comes much to the chagrin of his parents, who find his ambitions selfish and would prefer that he take up the family business. Marcel’s eyes are opened to the war effort after being asked by local Boy and Girl Scouts to help care for orphaned Jewish children. Entertaining and calming the kids with his performances, Marcel develops a fondness for the children and also befriends the troop leaders, including Emma (Clémence Poésy) and her sister, Mila (Vica Kerekes).

When the Nazis occupy France, the group must determine what to do with the kids and decide if they will join the French Resistance.

One can understand how the filmmakers may have wanted to go into great detail in establishing Marcel and telling his story as accurately as possible. But there’s a lot of material to filter. Early on, we witness the protagonist confronting and coming to terms with his family over his artistic proclivities, and also see romance slowly bloom between Marcel and Emma. Viewers also spend time with Gestapo leader Klaus Barbie (Matthias Schweighöfer), with whom Marcel and the others keep coming into contact.

The leads also take time getting to know the French Resistance and deciding if they can actually fight on the front lines with them.

While a few of these elements are important, several could have been trimmed. In the end, the numerous threads and subplots bog down the running time. The movie also makes the strange decision to use General George S. Patton (Ed Harris) at the open and close. He walks out before U.S. troops to give a speech at the beginning and end of the film about the heroism of Marcel and the others.

It’s an entirely unnecessary and extraneous bit. Still, one positive is that at least the picture looks good and the locations are impressive even when the plot itself drags.

In fact, it’s only in the final third that these characters find their true calling and the tension builds. Essentially, Marcel and the others resolve how they can best fight back and introduce a desperate, dangerous plan. It’s here where things come into focus and the film hits its stride. In fact, the journey leads to a taut and stressful climax as the characters struggle to sneak past Nazi checkpoints and trudge through the French Alps with soldiers hot on their trail.

One wishes that the movie had focused primarily on this facet of the lead’s experiences.

The cast members are all fine and do their absolute best. There are some chilling exchanges between Barbie and Marcel. But at times the screenplay resorts to using tropes. There’s even a

moment where, after suffering a great loss, one of the young stowaway children gives the depressed resistance members an uplifting monologue about moving forward and fighting on.

The youngster does quite well with the eye-rolling lines, but regardless, it is laid on a little thick.

Resistance isn’t a bad movie and there are some individual sequences here and there that make a strong impression. Still, it’s unfortunate that such an incredible true story hasn’t been properly distilled and doesn’t quite come together to make a bigger emotional impact. The artist featured in this biopic may be one of the greatest in his field, but this adaptation of his story is only moderately successful.

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For the Sun