

DVD REVIEWS

BEFORE THE RAIN Criterion DVD Review

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Reviewed by Ben Begley

"Before the Rain" is the first film made in the Republic of Macedonia after all the surrounding territories separated from the former Yugoslavia. The film was made during the bitter civil wars that were happening in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo that reached such high religious and ethnic based death tolls that it has been considered genocide. The conflict broke out between the Serbs who wanted a more unified state like Yugoslavia and the Croats, Bosnians, and Albanians who wanted independence. The war lasted for more than a decade and ripped these nations apart, many are still trying to pick up the pieces.

This film takes place partly in Macedonia, where an actual war never broke out, but there was still violent skirmishes and also in London, where the ripple effects were felt. "Before the Rain" is not your standard war film, in fact the war is never even shown, the focus of this film is what happens to people when war is right next door. How does it affect and destroy lives that are seemingly not involved. One of the monks in the film says "It's about to rain, the flies are biting. It's already raining over there." This whole image of rain is a metaphor for violence and war that is looming on the horizon and could come and consume these characters at any moment.

The story plays out in three parts. The first is about an orthodox Christian monk, Kiril, who has taken a vow of silence and one night stumbles across a frightened Albanian girl in his room. He hides her from a band of Christian militants that come looking for her claiming she killed their cousin. Kiril falls for her and they try to escape. I can't say anymore or it will give a whole lot away. Then the film goes to London and tells the story of Anne, a photography editor, who's having an affair with Aleksander, a Macedonian war photographer, whose just come back from Bosnia and is changed from what he's seen. Anne is pregnant and wants to figure out what is the best thing for her and the child amongst this turmoil surrounding Europe. Tragedy strikes her life in an unexpected way while having dinner one evening with her husband. Then for the final chapter the film





goes back to Macedonia and follows Aleksander as he returns home. He tries to ignore the tension between Christians and Albanians in his neighborhood, but when a young girl's life is put in danger (the same from the first story) he is forced to take a side and sacrifice himself in the process. The film ends where it began and shows the full circle of how the war was affecting all of Europe.



The film shows the circle of violence by having a cyclical plot and connecting all the characters together through senseless acts of violence that disrupt their peaceful, normal lives. This technique proves incredibly powerful because it makes the violence of war seem closer to home and that no one is safe when there is a war happening, even if it's not in your city. The far-reaching effects could not be more topical today. It seems that we live in a society that if it's not happening right in our backyard we find a way to ignore it. This film shows that eventually these conflicts that seem so far off will come banging down our door. The futility of violence and ethnic

hatred rings so loud and clear in such a simple and beautifully executed film.

Not only is "Before the Rain" incredibly powerful in how it's written and structured, but it's also beautiful in the way it is filmed. The sweeping shots of a pastoral and peaceful Macedonia in all its tranquil beauty serve as incredible juxtaposition to the violence that takes place in these same fields. The acting and writing is also pitch perfect. The film is pretty bleak, but rightly so. It offers no right or wrong answer to the conflict and merely holds up a mirror to the idea of war anywhere in the world and lets us all see how destructive and meaningless it all is.

SPECIAL FEATURES:

Since this is a Criterion release the features are of course amazing!! The transfer is so beautifully restored in a high definition transfer.

-A powerful and insightful commentary by a well know film scholar and the director

-New video interview with Rade Serbedzija who plays Aleksander in the film. This is a great 15-minute segment where he explains the process of how the script was pitched to him and how it came at a time where he felt exactly how the character was feeling.

-Behind the scenes in Macedonia is an incredibly succinct but well put together mini-doc about the making of the film. It shows how the crew consisted of Bosnians, Macedonians, French, and British and how they worked together, even though the British were looked at as having a sense of superiority. The director expands on his ideas and purpose for the film. This feature adds clarity to some of the more subtle references made in the film and is a great companion piece.

-There's also Soundtrack selections, on-set footage, stills from production, the director's

photography book, an early music video by the director, and incredible subtitles that handle the changes in languages very well.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

In a world where apathy is our daily routine, more films like this need to be seen. Too often war films just show the bullet riddled battlefield, which makes it easier to right off as something that would never happen to us in our comfy suburbs. The truth is, as this film shows, war finds a way to destroy everything around it and there is no limit to how far it reaches. This film is a must see and a fresh take on how futile all this fighting is. I cannot recommend it enough. A staggering achievement in simplicity and powerful storytelling with incredible relevance to today's world.