

THE GERMAN SOCIETY'S

Friday Film Fest Series



Aimée & Jaguar

CREDITS:

Director: Max Färberböck
Screenplay: Max Färberböck and Rona Munro
Based on the book *Aimée and Jaguar* by Erica Fischer
Cast: *Lilly Wust*: Julianne Köhler, *Felice Schragenheim*: Maria Schrader
Ilse: Johanna Wokalek, *Günther Wust*: Detlev Buck

BIOS

Max Färberböck attended film school in München and later became a theater director in Hamburg, Heidelberg and Köln. In Germany he is known as the director of television serials and also as a writer-director of made-for-TV movies. *Aimée and Jaguar* was his first feature cinema film.

Rona Munro is an English writer who has written plays for the stage, radio and television. She was the co-author of several of renowned English filmmaker Ken Loach's films.

Erica Fischer was born in England to her native Austrian parents and with her family returned to Austria in 1948. She has worked since the 70s as a journalist, writer and a translator. When Lilly Wust was 80 years old she told her story to Ms. Fischer. The book *Aimée and Jaguar*, first published in 1994, was based on long intense interviews and discussions, extensive research by Ms. Fischer and the voluminous letters, poems and diaries of Lilly and Felice during the Second World War. It has been translated into 11 languages.

AIMÉE & JAGUAR: LOVE IN THE APOCALYPSE – Brian Conboy

It may seem strange and unlikely, that when civilization is coming to an end and all manner of destruction and cruelty reign supreme, one might find true love. But this eerie incongruity and others like it permeate *Aimée and Jaguar*, a wartime story set in **Berlin in 1943-44**. Images of horrendous explosions from **Allied bombs** mingle with those of **Weimar decadence** in smoky nightclubs. An atmosphere of glamour, frivolity and certainly a plethora of stunning women in chic styles inhabit a crumbling world of fear, deprivation and violent death. Within this world of fear and horror, where death lurks constantly, the love affair at the center of the story and indeed the emotional life of all the characters take on an air of desperation and recklessness. Out of fear and horror people are compelled to find ways to make themselves feel good.

The film takes us to the surreal world of Berlin during the brutal and appalling last years of the Third Reich. The Allies are steadily demolishing the city with bombing; deprivations and hardships are ever increasing; most of the men are off at the front and the women, those not evacuated, are in most ways fending for themselves at home. **Felice**

Schragenheim is a writer for a Nazi publication but also a bohemian poet. She and several of her girlfriends are Jews in hiding and with help from an underground network manage to stay one step ahead of the Gestapo. Being gay she forms an attraction from afar for **Lilly Wust**, a housewife who has been awarded a medal by the Nazi government for bearing four children and whose husband is away on the Russian front. Felice writes Lilly an anonymous love letter, initiates a contact and their illicit affair is off and running.

It is one of the ambiguities of the story that two people with such disparate qualities come together. But they do and their affair becomes all the more intense as the devastation around and the danger to themselves increase.

The film *Aimée and Jaguar* is decidedly a woman's film and perhaps also a feminist one. Women characters are center stage throughout the film and their concerns and issues dominate. We are presented a world of women conspicuously without men: of women keeping each other company and having parties and other social gatherings with women only. Men are often negative characters, Nazis, Gestapo, abusive husbands etc, or have only a very fleeting and superficial presence in the narrative. Lilly receives the nurturing and tenderness she needs from Felice and gets precious little of it from her rather brutish husband on his brief leaves from the front. In the final scene an elderly Lilly receives solace and companionship from Ilse, one of Felice's friends during the war period. Again, in this film's worldview, women confront the great anguish of their lives with only each other for comfort and wisdom, while men are irrelevant and absent in their inner worlds. It is this feminist theme that is at least partially responsible for the great success and resonance of *Aimée and Jaguar* and Ms. Wust's story in general.

Aimée and Jaguar is based on the true story of real life characters Lilly and Felice as told by Ms. Wust to writer Erica Fischer and published in a book of the same name in 1994. Ms. Wust survives to this day and still resides in Berlin. Indeed the film begins with an elderly Lilly in contemporary Berlin as her home where she

lived for many years is finally being cleared out by movers. Time is finally erasing the last vestiges of her life and Lilly can only hang onto a few cherished photos and other keepsakes. The film is neatly book-ended by this scene and one at the end, which is also set in the present. A cloud of sorrow and loss hangs heavily over Lilly in both scenes and they serve to symbolize the importance of the memory of the Nazi period, the immense weight of its horror and the persistence of it in German thought and culture.