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Review: Cold War

White snow and barren trees. A desolate village filled with the crumbled remains of bombed buildings. Sober images of the postwar Polish countryside.

A group of old men. Their worn faces weathered by war and poverty

Then, a song.

A somber tune with deep-seated tradition and pride. Sung right into the camera. Commanding the audience's attention and drawing them in. Music bringing life to a dreary land.

Historically, music has often been a light for people in the darkest of times. A way to remember the golden past, express hardships of the present and highlight hope for the future.

This is what Pawel Pawlikowski does in his film "Cold War."

"Cold War" is a melodramatic whirlwind of a romance that spans across Europe from 1949 to 1964.

The film opens with music directors Wiktor and Irena are traveling around the postwar Polish countryside recording traditional songs and scouting talent for their folk-song-and-dance ensemble.

A pan of the landscape and close up performances shows a gritty authenticity that captures the setting and tone and introduces the contrasting feel of the external environment with the internal music and romance in the characters.

One of the songs they record, performed by a peasant girl, is *Dwa Serduszka (Two Hearts)*. This hauntingly beautiful song becomes the anthem of the movie. As the film progresses, different renditions of this song express themes of the film and tells the story of the two principal lovers.

TWO HEARTS, FOUR EYES

Wiktor and Irena hold auditions for their ensemble, bringing young men and women from the country. Zula, a beautiful young girl with a dark and mysterious past and a beguiling voice, stumbles into the audition. Wiktor is immediately taken with her.

Dwa Serduszka becomes part of the show, a nod to the folk communities that inspired the group. Zula shines upfront singing lead as Wiktor conducts. Through the music and long, dotting glances across the crowd, Zula and Wiktor quickly fall for each other.

The brilliant cinematography continues, putting Zula and Wiktor in and out of focus, forcing the audience to hone in on the subjects. The film also draws the audience in by putting them in the crowd, giving them a front-row seat to the performances and the romance.

The group's manager, Kaczmarek, takes over and forces the group to adopt a new image as Soviet propaganda. Upset with a new direction of his project under the poster of Stalin, Wiktor plans for him and Zula to run away together to the other side of the Iron Curtain. However, Zula leaves Wiktor to escape on his own to Paris while she stays behind and continues her rise to stardom in communist Poland.

CRYING ALL DAY AND ALL NIGHT. DARK EYES, YOU CRY

Thus begins a melodramatic whirlwind of a romance that spans 15 years and several cities across Europe.

This film is not a history lesson. There is enough of a presence of the context to understand the high stakes their love is facing. The melancholy black-and-white world sets the bleak backdrop by which Zula and Wiktor's romance is illuminated.

Jumping through space and time, the film feels episodic, broken down into sections of Zula and Wiktor's life as they relate to each other.

YOU CANNOT BE TOGETHER

As time passes, we see their lives change. But through it all, their love for each other remains constant. They continue to create music, but in their separate lives apart from their true loves, performing is not the same.

When the lovers are reunited in Paris, time seems to stand still. Riding on a boat along the Seine at night, or dancing in a bar as it closes, their lives and their music are reinvigorated. However, their relationship is far from perfect. Their romance between this femme fatale and a jaded, old composer is one of volatile passion.

The music changes, demonstrating some of the themes of the film, as well as telling the story of Zula and Wiktor. The film score moves from folk songs to jazz classics from Ella Fitzgerald and early rock and roll from Bill Haley. Zula performs a sultry jazz rendition of *Dwa Serduszka* and records a French-translated version that becomes her first big hit and escalates her career as a Polish pop star.

Still, their clashing temperaments and extreme outside forces continue to pull them apart. However, despite their fighting or the strong arm of the Soviet Union, their love is unrelenting and they are compelled, despite all odds and circumstances, to find each other.

“Cold War” demonstrates that love and music can illuminate even the darkest of times and even drive us to risk all we have for them. Music brought Zula and Wiktor together and continues to carry their love affair across the Iron Curtain. The audience, too, is swept up in the enchanting score and romance set during a grim social-political setting.