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FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

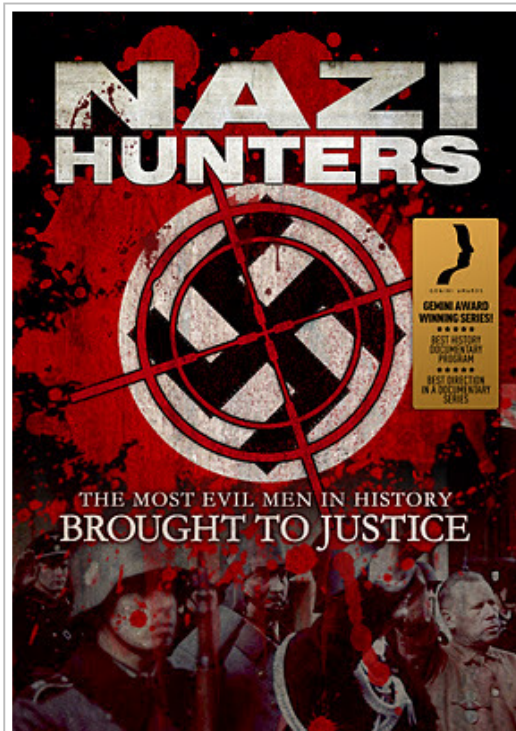
Through the writings and photography of Robert Barry Francos, a view of the arts and culture, including everyday life.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2011

DVD Reviews: Nazi Hunters

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Images from the Internet



Nazi Hunters

Various directors

Narrated by Fred Napoli

Double DVD set

Cineflix / MVD Visual DVD, 2010

352 minutes, USD \$19.95

MVDvisual.com

As a child of the '60s, there was always talk of World War II Nazi's being "out there," usually somewhere in South America. Even when it wasn't verbally stated, there was a presence, be it through the grocer and his wife's arm tattoos, or from seeing those gruesome films of concentration camps - including bodies in mass graves, toothpick thin prisoners, and executions into ditches - while in Hebrew School, which

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I attended before my bar mitzvah in 1968. It was there I saw the footage of Eichmann, the banality of evil architect of the *Final Solution*, though I don't remember the actual event in the early 1960s.

In 1998, I went to Auschwitz and Auschwitz-Buchenwald, and have been to a few of the Holocaust museums, such as the ones in Amsterdam and Washington, DC.

For my generation, World War II-era Nazis (as opposed to neo-Nazis or skinheads) have always been a part of the culture, even if it was the cute and cuddly ones of *Hogan's Heroes* and those from the mind of Mel Brooks. Sure, they would get scary again with the likes of *Eye of the Needle*, *Marathon Man*, *The Boys from Brazil*, or the more contemporary *Apt Pupil*.

But those cinematic villains were equal to others molded out of the propagandist cold war with Russia, or its modern equivalent of Muslim terrorists; scary and evil, but you knew they weren't real. Sure there was a fear based somewhat on historical reality, but none of them could come close to what the bona fide escaped Nazis meant, and especially for those of my parents' age. These were not fictional creatures of reimagining, but humans who had done horrific things to fellow humans because of ideology. Six million was an unimaginable number, though later we would find out that it was well over 10 million, when one counts in the infirmed, gays, gypsies, politicians, freedom fighters, etc.

That's just part of why this Canadian-Brazilian documentary series is so fascinating... and chilling. Through the eight 45-minute episodes, we watch as European activists and Israeli secret agents track down those power-mad cowards who escaped from Europe rather than face their own deeds/demons.

Apparently, South America was a haven for these ilk, thanks in large part to Juan Peron (husband of *Evita*), who was a business partner to the Nazi regime (is *that* mentioned in the musical?), and consequently welcomed them under his protection. And how did they get there? Many of these criminals were fostered by a right wing branch of the Catholic Church who supported the Nazis (who set out to rid the world of those *Christ killers*, right?), and then helped pay their way across the Atlantic into the safety of the Andes.

This is a stunningly well done series, with most of the key players giving testimony to the events, including married *Nazi Hunters* Beate and Serge Klarsfeld, Sam Donaldson of ABC News in New York, and the actual members of the most respected and feared intelligence agency in the world, Israel's Mossad, who carried out the capture of the likes of Adolf Eichmann and the assassination of others, such as Herbert Cukurs.

This is an important time for stories such as these. As time passes, and both the perpetrators and the persecuted of the *Final Solution* are

About Me

Robert Barry Francos

Currently living in Saskatoon (email at RBF55@msn.com for address). From 1977-88, I used to publish a print version of a music magazine in New York called FFanzeen, which dealt with the wide-ranging independent music scene. I also photographed many bands from the period (and since). Now I write this blog, and have a column at jerseybeat (dot) com (slash) quietcorner (dot) html. And the beat goes on.

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passing into whatever waits them, the recording of events that led up to the discrimination, the enforcement, and the after-effects are documents that must be initialized more fervently. This is especially true in a modern world of denial and reinterpretations (e.g., Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mamoud Abbass, James Keegstra and Mel's dad, Hutton Gibson).

One side aspect of this collection is the humanization of the Mossad. Always pictured as cold killing machines, a cinematic-type presumption, here we see them as fallible, with leaders taking missteps and causing the non-capture of Mengele, and the nervousness of some of its agents when dealing with Cukurs, for example. All of the Mossad members who are interviewed are "retired" agents, who are quite brave to admit their deeds, even after all these years.

The formulas for the episode are similar, but almost never redundant. We are introduced to the plan of the specific Nazi hunter(s) in the year they began on their crusade (be it 1964, 1971, or 1988, for example), and those who are planning or participating in it. Then there is a flashback segment to explain why, for example, Barbie is known as "The Butcher of Lyon," Mengele "The Death Angel," or Cukus "The Hangman of Riga." The men in this series were each responsible for the death of between 335 and 900,000 (both Jews and Gentiles), some by their design and others by direct action. Sometimes the footage is a bit graphic, such as mass shootings or dead bodies; the Nazis were infamous for keeping filmed records of their actions. Around this point in the story, we meet some Holocaust survivors with direct links to the action, such as one who lived through Mengele's twins experiment.

To help with the historical aspects are a number of authors whose books are focused on the period, such as Peter Hellman, Gerald Posner, Richard Rashke (*Escape From Sobibór*), and Guy Walters (*Hunting Evil*), the latter being the only one who appears in all eight episodes.

The next section is the actions that lead up to capture following into the feat of those steps taken, whether positive or negative. While much of this part is played out by actors in flashback mode, within this portion what I found particularly fascinating is the inclusion of the actual documents, photos and films that were taken at the time, including Sam Donaldson's pointed questioning of Erich Priebke on the street, or of Kurt Lischka (Gestapo Chief of Paris) as he leaves his house in Germany in 1971. Some of it is quite hard to watch, such as the photo of one of the subjects a couple of weeks after he had been executed by the Mossad.

The Hunters seem to be broken down into three types, and sometimes they overlap in their attempts. First there is the aforementioned Mossad, who seek justice, sometimes in the form of vengeance. Compelling to me are the Paris-based married hunter team of Serge Klarsfeld (Romanian/French Jew) and especially the incredibly brave

Beate Klarsfeld (Protestant German; Farrah Fawcett played her in a 1986 television movie). Their dedication is admirable to the point of you wanting to say, "They did *what?*" Gotta love these people; I wish I could be that brave about the Tea Party, but I digress... The final group tends to be mixed bag of journalists, such as Donaldson, and a French police investigator.

A surprising element is the minimal amount of time given to the most famous Nazi hunter, Simon Wiesenthal, at one episode, even if it was two of the biggest escaped Nazis as far as sheer numbers of deaths on their hands as the masters of Polish death camps Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Wiesenthal is - and rightfully so - the name that comes to mind first in the topic of Nazi hunters.

One of the surprising villains that come up again and again as collaborators is the Catholic Church, specifically a fanatical right wing branch called the [Knights of Notre Dame](#) (especially under the orders of Archbishop Lefebvre), who, as I said, aided and abetted the fugitives (and probably more during the war). That being said, I so admired the Mother Superior of a Monastery that was involved of hiding Paul Trouvier, a French collaborator who was brutal to both Jews and resistance fighters, as she compels matters into her own hands by taking the monastery's Bishop to task. I should point out that it is not the whole Church that is put under suspicion here, but this particular branch of right-wingers.

Also culpable through the whole series are governments, such as Germany and a number of South American countries, who are hesitant to take any real action (as in *that was the past*). John Stewart Mill once famously stated that, "A person may cause evil to others not only by his actions but by his inaction, and in either case he is justly accountable to them for the injury." This is true of ruling bodies, as well (e.g., British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's bowing to Nazi Germany's demands, or some present countries' reaction to Iran's nuclear capabilities).

While nearly 6 hours long, my attention was never taken away, nor did I feel it dragged in any way. The pace is fast, the people interesting, and it's even jaw-dropping, fingernail-biting exciting at times. One of the more fascinating documentary series I've seen in a very long time. It should come as no surprise that it's a multiple Gemini Awards (television in Canada) winner including Best History Documentary Program. I'm hoping there will be a second season.

Episodes:

1. Herbert Cukurs (Latvia: "The Hangman of Riga")
2. Adolf Eichmann (Germany: "The Architect of the Final Solution")
3. Klaus Barbie (France: "The Butcher of Lyon")
4. Erich Priebke (Italy)
5. Josef Mengele (Germany [Auschwitz]: "The Angel of Death")
6. Kurt Lischka (France)
7. Paul Touvier (France; only non-German)

8. Gustav Wagner (Poland: “The Beast”) and Franz Stangl (Poland: “The White Death”)



Posted by [Robert Barry Francos](#) at 12:01 AM 

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