



Think Scripted TV Isn't Educational? Watch 'A French Village'

Robin Mizrahi

Posted on January 12, 2018 23:58



2 users

A French Village is considered "the first major French television series seriously to address collaboration during the Nazi occupation." It will also teach you a thing or two about the human conscience — and the lack of one.

A French Village drops its seventh season on Amazon this month, and it's a must-see for anyone interested in WWII history, human nature, and really good TV.

Based in historical reality, *A French Village* is a fictionalized account of everyday life under the four-year German occupation of Villeneuve, a picturesque town in southeastern France.

Beautifully directed, written and acted, this gritty and seductive (subtitled) French language series includes no combat scenes, instead choosing to focus on the battlefields of the human heart. Every day is a grim and complex struggle under the watchful, sadistic rule of the Nazis. Food is scarce. People spy on and rat out one another, and the smallest misstep can end in torture or execution. Yet life and love go on.

In Villeneuve, Germans control everything from city hall to police stations. They commandeer the nicest houses and hotels to use as their homes and headquarters. They issue strict curfew laws and draconian punishment for breaking them. They prohibit citizens from crossing into Free France. Jews are deported and never seen again. (During WWII, Villeneuve citizens **helped** the Nazis transport 75,000 Jewish villagers to Drancy, on their way to Auschwitz.)

A secretive and dedicated resistance movement forms and creates networks. They transport arms, covertly send information to the Allies, and attempt to protect Jews. Men and women alike risk immediate execution without trial if they're even suspected of being resisters.

The show follows 15 major characters whose lives unfold over 65 episodes—business owners, factory workers, doctors, farmers, teachers, and German soldiers. The top-notch French and German cast won't be familiar to most Americans, but they're all brilliant in their nuanced and intricate roles.

Some of the character-driven plots include avuncular Daniel Larcher, mayor of Villeneuve, who straddles the line between do-gooder and collaborator. Gorgeous, bored housewife Hortense is in love with seductive and evil German Commandant Heinrich Müller. Devious Marcel Larcher is a Communist resister forced into hiding. Lovely Lucienne is pregnant with a gentle, young German soldier's child. Charming and cunning Raymond Schwartz goes into business with the German Army.

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