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FILM

Posted: Tue., Sep. 2, 2008, 7:07pm PT TALK BACK! DIGG EMAIL PRINT CONTACT RSS

DocuWeek

Yodok Stories (Documentary -- Norway)

By ROBERT KOEHLER

A Piraya Films (Norway) production, in association with MG Prods., the Rafto Foundation. Produced by Torstein Grude. Executive producers, Grude, Bjarte Morner Tveit, Mirosław Grubek, Therese Jebesen, Jan Ramstad, Krzysztof Talczewski. Co-producer, Grubek. Directed by Andrzej Fidyk.

With: Jung Sun San, Kim Joung Soon, An Myong Chol, Lee Young Kuk, Kim Tae Jin, Kim Hyok, Lee Min Bok. Narrator: Andrzej Fidyk.

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The well-kept secret of North Korea's murderous concentration camps sees the light of day in Andrzej Fidyk's important doc, "Yodok Stories," which documents a musical-theater restaging of the Yodok camp, whose survivors are included in the cast. A notable companion piece to Jim Finn's quite different "The Juche Idea," Fidyk's film, like Finn's, imaginatively peers deep inside North Korean communism to reveal a social system based on a brand of insanity that will make even hardcore anti-commies blanch. Theatrical, cable and vid are in play for this startling consideration of inhumanity.

Fidyk had filmed the doc, "The Parade," recording massive stadium "celebrations" of leader Kim Jong-il, and describes in v.o. that his ambition to make a film about North Korean prison camps morphed into an idea to hire defecting N.K. director Jung Sun San and produce a musical titled "Yodok Stories." Jung's company includes ex-prisoners and prison guards alike, all of whom tell nightmarish and consistent stories of torture, animalistic misery, even the cannibalism of young children. Fidyk's own Polish past under communism is unstated but relevant, while the pic is mindful to note that the horrors are current.

Camera (color), Toe Vollan; editor, Jan Mikolaj Mironowicz; music, Kyung Chan Cha CQ; musical lyricist, Hea Jung Yoo; musical choreographers, Yungsoon Kim, Jaek Oh. Reviewed on DVD, Los Angeles, Aug. 29, 2008. (In DocuWeek, Los Angeles.) Korean, English dialogue. Running time: 81 MIN.

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