

Why "Closer to the moon" is a flop

By Stephan Benedict



There are several aspects of the new movie directed by Nae Caranfil, shown at the Romanian Film Festival at Lincoln Center between Nov. 29 & Dec. 3, 2013 and at The Jacob Burns Film Center, between December 5 & 10, 2013, produced by Mandragora Movies, Ithaca LLC, Ranieri Group, Denis Friedman Productions & by Agresywna Banda.

First, the movie is simply not self-sustainable, requiring the audience the perfect historical knowledge of the original case of the bank robbery of 1959 in Romania. The way the movie is created, is totally confusing to the audience, especially the American one, who is unfamiliar with the case, including movie experts. Even if the fact was emphasized that it was based on a real story, it would still not be enough. For American audience those facts are hardly known.

There were three notable previous movies on same subject. First, the original **Reconstruction** played by the perpetrators of the robbery, who were forced to play their own roles. That movie was produced, distributed and viewed in 1960 only in special private screenings for the party apparatchiks, with the sole purpose of propaganda, for the Central Communist Party Committee members against the "Sionists", in order to give the party leaders a "good reason" to purge the party leadership of Jews.

The second **Reconstruction** was done by Irene Lustig, the grand-daughter of **Monica Sevienu**, the only survivor of the ordeal, who was originally convicted to death, but later on commuted to life in prison and few years later released and allowed to emigrate to Israel.

The third and most compelling movie was the **Great Bank Robbery**, the 2004 documentary of the known director Alexandru Solomon, who tried quite successfully to sort out the facts unraveled almost half a century earlier.

Even the Academy Award Oscar winner of 1997, **Life is Beautiful**, Roberto Benigni's best foreign movie touched a similar subject, making a slapstick and a parody of the Jewish Holocaust of WWII, was not very well received in Jewish circles for poking fun at their greatest tragedy and suffering of the last century. There was also Radu Mihaileanu's film, **Train de Vie**, in 1999 of similar nature, also not very well received in Jewish circles, having been withdrawn from the American theatres within one month.

This film is not compelling and funny at all, depicting some realities in very pale and indecisive shapes and forms, in an old fashioned Hollywood movie style of the 40's and 50's. The film is also messing around with Romanian history, when attempting to stress the number of Jews joining originally the Communist Party, when it was first created, which had hardly anything to do with the bank robbery of 1959.

For the sake of developing his task, the director created a completely artificial Jewish problem, (as if there wouldn't be enough of them in the real life). The reality was that all the original participants to the heist, even though ethnically Jewish, were neither religious, not practicing Jews.

The movie embodies a kind of joke that is tried to be "sold" to the audience as a good one, but in reality is a bad one, of a poor taste, full of un-necessary and suspicious Jewish innuendoes, bringing the movie to the brink of an undesirable characterization. In these types of movies, the border line between being funny and producing damages/ even subtle, is extremely thin and the risk of an adversarial effect proved to be a real and deciding factor.

<http://www.thejewishweek.com/arts/film/new-cinematic-waves-romania>

Trailer

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7i15HQHvwbI>