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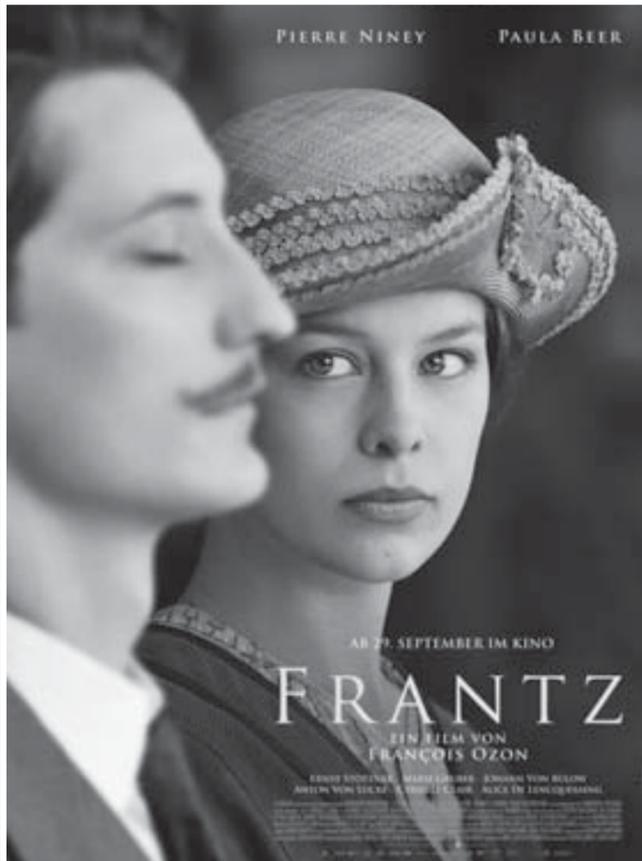
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'Frantz': Love, lies and secrets during WWI

By Sophie Braccini



"Frantz" will be screened at the Orinda Theatre.

Photo provided

Dramatic and sentimental are two of the many adjectives that characterize this month international film presented in Orinda Theatre, "Frantz."

The French/German film touches on many themes such as betrayal, remorse, redemption, forgiveness, courage and the intense absurdity of war. It is also, and perhaps foremost, a compassionate and beautiful portrait of a woman who finds the strength to live in war-torn Europe at the beginning of the 20th century.

French director François Ozon chose to reinvent 1930 Ernst Lubitsch black and white silent film "Broken Lullaby." The movie starts in a small German town just after World War I. Every day Anna goes to the grave of her betrothed, Frantz, who died during the war. One day she sees there Adrien, a young Frenchman depositing roses

on his friend's grave. For Frantz' family and for the Germans in the small town, the presence of the Frenchman in the wake of a bitter defeat provokes passionate reactions. War has created deep scars that even the youth's hopes and dreams will not heal. Anna will grow and transcend her condition, opening a door for hope, even if we all know what will happen 15 years later.

Most of the time the historical movie is filmed in black and white, with elegance, slow but endearing timing, and with a lot more surprises that expected at first. It is the first time that a French film addresses German people's feelings after the first world war. It is done with subtlety and compassion, with mirror effect between the French and German perspectives, highlighting the complete inanity of war.

Ozon explained in interviews

for French magazines that he wanted to explore the themes of secrets and lies and that he believed that these themes would carry more strength told in a dramatic time of grief and terrible loss such as WWI in Europe, when millions were killed on all sides. Lubitsch's film was made in 1930, and the director had not, of course, anticipated the World War II. It ended with a new hope of French-German friendship that Lubitsch, a German pacifist that immigrated to the U.S., believed in. Ozon has a different perspective; he shows in his movies the rancor and humiliation created by the Versailles' treaty and, with no desire to judge, points out the emerging signs of revenge.

The character of Adrien, the Army private that survived the war, has been deeply wounded; he suffers what we would call PTSD today. Anna has suffered a great loss, but she has more strength and a fiercer desire to continue to live. The two main characters have a difficulty in explaining their emotions and their inner struggles. Ozon shows that it is through art that they best communicate, via poetry, music or painting. He shows that when people exchange through culture, an understanding is born and bridges are created. Art is a door to enter into the soul of another person, of another people.

The movie is filmed sometimes in German and sometimes in French, with English subtitles of course for American distribution. Ozon said that German was the first foreign language he learned in school and that he had great pleasure filming with German actors. German actress Paula Beer, as Anna, is a classic beauty, full of charm and appropriate self-restraint who dominates the cast, even if Pierre Niney, who plays Adrien, is also completely believable and touching.

"Frantz" will play for a week at the Orinda Theater, starting April 21. More information and tickets at lamorindatheatres.com.



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Project Empathy: opening young minds

By Sophie Braccini



JM students participate in Project Empathy.

Photo Sophie Braccini

In the Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School large gym on March 16, sixth-graders with blindfolds over their eyes sat divided into seven groups, each led by two or three eighth-graders. One group clumsily try to spread jam, mustard or ketchup on a piece of bread. Another group attempted to navigate a small obstacle course with the help of a cane. A third group struggled to pour liquid in cups of different sizes without spilling, while a fourth group tried to put on clothes with their eyes shut.

The idea to teach these sixth-graders what it might feel like to be visually impaired came from Campolindo High School junior Audrey Moore, who started her search for heightened empathy when she was just 13.

Three summers ago, Moore was a precocious and inventive teen who was bored. Her mother asked her to do something productive with her time, so she decided to invent her own camp, creating a series of experiences, living the

lives of people very different from herself. One example was when she confined herself to a wheelchair for a few days. Her cousin sometimes pushed her when she went downtown, and Moore remembered how shocked she was when people addressed her cousin, instead of talking to Moore directly. She remembered how she felt somewhat invisible, and that it had a profound impact on her.

The next summer she designed a camp for younger kids to experience what it was like to live a much less privileged life. They had to live on a few dollars a day, collect and sell refuse, and live for a day with very little water.

This year Moore created an entire empathy experience for middle school students as part of the Campolindo Interact Club.

Moore worked with her club's classmates to design experiments for the 27 eighth-grade leadership class students. The idea was to train them first, and then have them meet with all the JM sixth-graders and

have them experience some of the challenges faced by blind people.

Moore explained that the blind-folding part of the activity helped develop empathy for a person adjusting to a visual impairment. It was followed by a discussion with station leaders emphasizing the capabilities of the blind and how they adapted to their situation. The JM eighth-graders created their own experiments for the sixth-graders and conducted the discussion groups afterward.

Moore's objective was not to have the students pity visually impaired people, but to open the doors of empathy in their hearts and minds. While the stations did focus solely on the blind, Moore believes that empathy, once developed, is not limited to just one group of people. She thinks that when we become aware of the lives and feelings of others, our empathy grows.

Her experience inspired her to show empathy toward others, and to spread empathy to even more people until it reaches a critical mass, creating a positive impact and spreading compassion. She hopes other Interact students will continue this new program after she goes on to college, and adds that she and her classmates could expand the program to other middle schools in the area.

Moore says that she grew up with the message of understanding in her family, but that it was only when she started her experiments that those messages became her reality.

Moore, who has always been attracted to studying the sciences, is thinking of studying neuroscience and exploring how empathy happens and impacts the brain. She says that now is the perfect time for more empathy; it's something that the world needs.

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