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'Balloon' - a riveting true story at the Orinda Theatre

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Photo provided

by the fearsome political police to make their escape together.

The film, directed by Michael Herbig, is built on tension and keeps the audience on the edge of its seat from start to finish. It is suspenseful, orchestrated with precision, and played very effectively by a talented group of German actors. The human aspect is at the core of the movie; it plays on looks and subtle ambiguities, making the audience feel what it must have been like to live in a country where one was always at the mercy of denunciation and vigilante justice.

The scenario deals with the questions the parents ask themselves about their children: Do they have the right to put them through such risks? Hundreds lost their lives during attempted escapes. If caught, the repercussions on the families would be devastating. These people were not heroes, or at least did not think of themselves as heroes or hot-headed, but they had an uncommon courage. One cannot help but wonder what they would have done in such circumstances. The movie can also make the audience reflect on immigrants today, and what some of them are going through in the hope to give a better life for themselves and their children.

This new presentation by the International Film Showcase is an American premiere. Aficionados of the Showcase will find similarities with "The Little Comrade," the Estonian film that was presented last month. It is a different period, a different country, but there is the same theme of what totalitarianism does to human beings, with those who passively submit, those who collaborate, and those who fight, sometimes risking their lives.

The movie will open Sept. 6 at the Orinda Theatre for at least one week. For more information, go to www.orindamovies.com/

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