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FILM REVIEW: Ukrainian Sheriffs (Roman Bondarchuk, 2015): Ukraine

Description

Ukrainian Sheriffs, a documentary from real-life partners, Director/Writer Roman Bondarchuk and Producer/Writer Darâ??ya Averchenko, tells the story of two men who received mayoral appointments to act as â??sheriffsâ?• in Southern Ukraine. The two men are a retired police officer with the look and demeanor of American television and film actor enforcer, Chuck Norris, and a Tony Soprano look-alike with a strong powerful presence who handles the heavier work including mechanical, electrical, and even plumbing!

Ukrainian Sheriffs is set in a remote village, Stara Zburjivka, near the Crimea in Southern Ukraine. It was shot over a period of three years culminating in a hundred and fifty hours of footage. The real story, however, begins to unfold in 2016. Russia has invaded the Crimea. Russian pro-separatists are taking up arms. Infiltrators orchestrate a political coup in the name of reform and progress at a town hall meeting. The locals, however, wonâ??t hear their bombastic appeals and walk out after the level-headed mayor affirms their commitment to each other and their belief in each other. Shortly thereafter, the mayor makes a bold move and hires two men to help keep the peace and restore some semblance of normal and civil human behavior. He does the hiring by cajoling the men to be MacGyvers taking on various responsibilities that normally fall under the auspices of maintenance and public works.

Ukrainian Sheriffs starts out in what might seem like a comical fashion as the filmâ??s two protagonists are fixing up a rather dilapidated looking, small yellow sedan with an upright, tiny Ukrainian flag perched over the driverâ??s side window. As luck would have it, the flag has soon flown away and the journey of the two Ukrainian Sheriffs has begun as they traverse unpaved, dirt roads making the rounds in the countryside.



One of the first stops is at a rural shack that the sheriffs refer to a villa, possibly because there are two similar structures built next to one another. Neither structure is much bigger than a large tool shed. The sheriffs make a few remarks over why they are there before proceeding to knock on the door. The door rattles and a scraggly looking couple emerges onto the front step. The Chuck Norris sheriff begins asking if the man had been beating his wife. The man responded he had but that he had good reason, though he couldnâ??t remember why, and that he and his woman had resolved it. The sheriffs asked the woman if she brought it on herself and she said she had. The man reached over and affectionately touched the woman. The sheriff then reprimanded the man for getting drunk and not showing up for work. He instructed the man to call his employer and let him know that he would be drinking and partying too hard to make it in to work the next day. This was good comic relief to some extent.

Unfortunately, the man winds up in prison by the filmâ??s end sending his tearful little woman love letters. She pondered and mused over love and their existence together in a very heartfelt, life-affirming manner. Unbeknownst, the man had been coerced a few years earlier into signing a complaint levied against him in order to make a law enforcement quota mandated from a remote office miles and miles



to his prior â??conviction.â?• our revealing a very human culture where the citizens are struggling to survive on a day-to-day basis in a setting close to a war zone with peripheral fallouts taking place right

in their midst. Through these vignettes an indomitable spirit is revealed as the citizenry comes together despite their difference and find a way to not only survive but to progress as a community, thanks largely to efforts and foresight of the mayor.

Ukrainian Sheriffs is the Official Submission of Ukraine to the Academy of Motion Arts and Science for Best Foreign Language Film. Definitely worthy of consideration. In addition, this slice-of-life documentary reveals the spirit of what I believe the French historian, diplomat and political scientist, Alexis de Tocqueville uncovered in his travels in early 19th Century America penned in two volumes (1935 and 1940) titled â??Democracy in America.â?•

After seeing the film, participating in the Q & A ,and attending the dinner reception that followed the screening, I agree with Director Bondarchukâ??s understated statement about the film, â??I made a very honest film. I would call it a tragic documentary comedy.â?• Yes, it is all that. And, itâ??s more than that. To me, itâ??s a film treatise wrapped up in a cozy documentary blanket. Nevertheless, Bondarchuk and Averchenko capture revealing prominent sociological and political tenets of a region under immense pressure amid heightened tensions. And they do it remarkably well with an often, and much needed, touch of comic relief. Highly recommended film.



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