

Princess and the Warrior, The



A Film Review by James Berardinelli

Rating: ★★★★★ (out of ★★★★★)

Germany, 2000

U.S. Release Date: 6/22/01 (limited); 7/6/01 (wider)

Running Length: 2:09

MPAA Classification: R (Violence, profanity, sexual situations)

Theatrical Aspect Ratio: 2.35:1

Seen at: 2000 TIFF

Cast: Franka Potente, Benno Furmann, Joachim Król, Marita Breuer, Lars Rudolph, Melchior Beslon, Jürgen Tarrach

Director: Tom Tykwer

Producers: Stefan Arndt, Maria Köpf

Screenplay: Tom Tykwer

Cinematography: Frank Griebe

Music: Reinhold Heil, Johnny Klimek, Tom Tykwer

U.S. Distributor: Sony Pictures Classics

In German with subtitles

German filmmaker Tom Tykwer first gained a measure of international recognition in 1997, when his second feature, *Winter Sleepers* received attention outside of his native Germany. Then came the 1998 Toronto Film Festival and the debut of [Run Lola Run](#), which became one of the hottest and most talked about properties in Toronto that year. 1999 saw *Lola* reach U.S. art house screens, where it attracted huge audiences (by art house standards, that is) and became an immediate favorite of the under-40 crowd. Now, with expectations set unreasonably high, comes Tykwer's follow-up to *Lola* -- and, incredibly, the director meets those expectations.

Although Tykwer uses many of the same flourishes that made *Lola*'s style unique, the tone and pacing of *The Princess and the Warrior* are much different. *Lola* was an explosion of riotous color and kinetic energy; this movie is more restrained and thoughtful. It also has greater thematic depth and resonance. In fact, there's so much to say that it's difficult to know where to begin...

Franka Potente, who has traded in her bright red hair from *Lola* for blond tresses, plays Sissi, a meek nurse at a psychiatric hospital whose daily life represents a sea of monotony. One day, her path crosses that of Bodo (Benno Furmann), an ex-army officer who can't hold down a stable job. Because of something Bodo does, Sissi is struck by a truck while crossing a street. Unaware that he was the cause of the accident, Bodo slips underneath the stopped truck to escape the policemen who are pursuing him. There he finds Sissi, immobilized and struggling to breathe. Acting quickly, Bodo saves her life, then vanishes. Two months later, once her recovery is complete, Sissi seeks out her savior, only to find a bitter individual who wants nothing to do with her. But his rejection is not enough for Sissi, who believes that destiny brought them together, so she continues to pursue Bodo - only to have fate throw another curve ball in her direction.

The Princess and the Warrior has one of the most thought-provoking and intelligent scripts of any movie I

have seen in recent months (it's lone rival: [Memento](#)). The final fifteen minutes can be interpreted in one of any number of ways, and the conclusion that you reach will affect how the rest of the movie looks in retrospect. Tykwer's screenplay refuses to talk down to the audience or to explain things that are open to individual interpretation. The ending, which concerns the redemptive power of love, will likely mean something a little different to each person who sees the movie - and it's the mark of an accomplished director to achieve such a thing.

Thematically, *The Princess and the Warrior* has a lot going on. One of Tykwer's pet issues - that of fate and coincidence guiding our lives - is in play here, as it was in both *Winter Sleepers* and *Run Lola Run*. The film also explores ideas about life, death, guilt, salvation, and male anger towards women. Tykwer finds a way to blend everything together into a production that challenges as much as it entertains.

Stylistically, although *The Princess and the Warrior* borrows from *Run Lola Run*, it does not attempt to repeat the earlier film's feel. There are some *Lola*-like moments, such as Bodo's flight from the police and the opening credits trip of a letter to the post office, but it doesn't take long for this movie to stand on its own and for Tykwer to show that he is going in a different direction. *The Princess and the Warrior* plays like the modern-day fantasy the title hints at, with Tykwer's restless camera and relentless musical score creating a surreal atmosphere.

Potente, who was wonderful as *Lola*, elevates her acting a notch for Sissi, a multidimensional character who changes and grows as *The Princess and the Warrior* progresses. The star quality evident in her earlier work is confirmed here. Her co-lead, Benno Furmann, is effective at showing both sides of his "warrior" character - the angry, self-hating individual and the tender man buried beneath. Solid performances abound from the supporting actors and actresses, many of whom play inmates in the ward where Sissi works.

Often, a director's follow-up to an acclaimed work results in a letdown. Thankfully, *The Princess and the Warrior* represents a step forward for Tykwer, not a step backward. Those who like stories with clean, unambiguous resolutions will probably not appreciate (or understand) the freedom and latitude offered by *The Princess and the Warrior*'s conclusion. But for anyone who esteems the experience of participating in a movie rather than being a passive observer, this film comes with a "Do Not Miss" label. It is the reason I review movies.

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