

Film Review: ‘Sarah’s Key’ Unlocks the Ever-Present Past

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 30, 2011 - 8:35am

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CHICAGO – The old saying, “those who cannot remember the past is doomed to repeat it” applies succinctly in “Sarah’s Key,” a Holocaust film with a French twist. Kristin Scott Thomas plays an American journalist who uncovers the facts in a less-remembered incident that reverberates to now.



This film is essentially about the incident itself and the aftermath. The event is a rock thrown into a pond, with the waves from the splash resonating over 60 years. This is the French side of the Nazi occupation, and their complicity in the round-up and extermination of the Jewish population in Paris. The characters may be fictional, but this horror story of the war cannot hide its abominable truth.

Julia Jarmond (Kristin Scott Thomas) is an hot-shot American journalist who has taken a job in Paris with an investigative magazine. While her husband Bertrand (Frédéric Pierrot) renovates an apartment he got in a family inheritance, Julia becomes intrigued with the history of the address. It seems that Bertrand’s family had procured the dwelling during World War 2, after a Jewish family who had lived there had been rounded-up in the infamous Vel’d’Hiv incident.

The family’s name is Starzynski, and their youngest daughter is Sarah (Mélusine Mayance). When the French authorities raid the apartment Sarah manages to lock her brother in a closet, and hold onto the key. She and the rest of her family is taken away, and held in a sports stadium in Paris called the Vel’d’Hiv, As describe in the film, this place is “a million times worse than the New Orleans Superdome during Katrina.” It is packed with Jewish prisoners, with little food, water or waste facilities. It becomes a putrid weigh station for the concentration camps

Sarah becomes obsessed with getting her brother freed, even after she is separated from her parents and ends up in a different camp. Her overriding assignment becomes escape, and when she manages to do it the rest of her life unfolds based on the result of what happens when she finally turns her key. It is up to an American journalist 60 years after Sarah’s story to uncover the truth.

“Sarah’s Key” has a limited release, including Chicago, on July 29th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Kristin Scott Thomas, Mélusine Mayance, Aidan Quinn, Frédéric Pierrot, Niels Arestrup and Charlotte Poutrel. Screenplay by Gilles Paquet-Brenner and Serge Joncour. Directed by Gilles Paquet-Brenner. Rated “PG-13”

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Mélusine Mayance as Sarah and Niels Arestrup as Jules in 'Sarah's Key'
Photo credit: The Weinstein Company

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