**ESSAYS**

Kay Dreyfus

# ‚Truth' and the telling of the past in the bio-documentary film *Weintraubs Syncopators: Bis ans andere Ende der Welt*

This article is a critical examination of the telling of the past in the German bio-historical documentary film *Weintraubs Syncopators; bis ans andere Ende der Welt* (Sander and Süssenbach, 2000).[1] Analysis starts from, but also interrogates, the assumption that a documentary film shares a commitment to truth-telling with other forms of historical discourse. The discussion acknowledges the received notion that there is a fictive element involved in any structured retelling of the past (Rosenstone, 2006:91; Nicholls, 1991:107; Heilbrun, 1993:295–304), and recognises the complex layers of signification and interaction that can exist, in a film, between spoken text, images and music, the purposive ordering of which constitutes what Plantinga (1997:169) calls the film's "rhetorical project". The article focuses particularly on the film makers' handling of witness testimony, an element that may be seen to enhance the film's claim to represent actuality. It asks what the film's purpose is and how important absolute historical accuracy is to that purpose, as well as what kind of "truth" the viewer is invited to take away. The story demands that the film's German writers and production team nuance and explain not only a complex period in German history, but a difficult period in Australian

[1] Production details are as follows: Idee und Buch: Joerg Suessenbach; Regie/Realisation: Klaus Sander, Joerg Suessenbach; Mitarbeit: Axel Fischer; Kamera: Axel Fischer (BVK); Ton: Jan Bendel, Steve Foy; Schnitt: Uli Peschke; Tonmischung: Clemens Grulich; Sprecher: Leon Boden, Jenny Groellmann, Uwe Mueller; Projektentwicklung: Walter Brun, Henrike Maass, Corinna Volkmann; Produktion Australien: Anette Heidenreich, Wendy Oaks, Nimrod Sztern-Adidle; Produktionsleitung: Karl-Bernhard Koepsell, Karl Laabs; Redaktion: Heike Wilke (WDR), Olaf Rosenberg (Arte); Eine Produktion der Cine Impuls KG fuer den WDR in Zusammenarbeit mit Arte; Media (Der Vetrieb wird gefördert mit Mitteln der EU), 2000; duration 65 minutes. Credits and acknowledgements (including Australian crew and sources) may be found in the Newsletter No 8 of the Film Museum Berlin, May 2000, at http://www.marlenedietrich.org/pdf/News08.pdf accessed June 2009.

history as well. My critique asserts that, in realising a narrative requirement for a certain kind of opening and closing proposition, the film sets up a synchronicity that is more ideological than historically valid.

The topic is timely since, in late 2007, the Weintraub Syncopators came briefly before the notice of the Berlin public once again when the Neuköllner Oper produced Hans-Peter Kirchberg and Ulrike Gärtner's nostalgic (and necessarily ephemeral) music-theatre piece *Jazz Odyssee—Die Legende einer Showband* (Müller 2007), stimulating a degree of interest in the German media. I would assert, however, that this theatre piece could have neither the reach nor the potential influence of the film; to my knowledge the latter has screened in venues as disparate as the Jewish film festivals in Berlin, Sydney and Melbourne and at a jazz festival in the USA.[2] Though the film is highly conventional in its narrative structure and approach, it warrants critical attention as, at the time of its production and still, the only publicly available extensive account of the story of the Berlin cabaret/jazz band known as the Weintraub Syncopators, from its beginning in 1920s Berlin to its point of dissolution in Sydney, Australia, in mid-1940. Moreover, as Dan Sipe (1998:379) asserts, the medium of the documentary film is arguably a "major influence on the public's historical consciousness".

The Weintraubs (as they became known in Australia) started life as the *Tanzkapelle Stefan Weintraub* in Berlin in 1924, a strictly amateur outfit made up of students trying to make some money on the side. There were several changes of personnel in the early years but by 1933, the band comprised the seven musicians who would come to Australia, six of whom were Jewish: Stefan Weintraub, Horst Graff, Emanuel Frischer (aka Manny Fisher), Cyril Schulvater, John Kurt Kaiser (aka Sydney John Kay) and Leo Weiss.[3] The seventh, Freddie Gordon Wise, was an American citizen and not

[2] The film is listed at http://www.jewishfilm.com/jz32.html#_eintraubssyncopators, accessed January 2008, a site whose purpose is to highlight notable films and videos of Jewish interest to aid in Jewish film festival programming. In 2008, it was also screened at the Lionel Hampton International Jazz Festival, University of Idaho.

[3] The name changes of some band members, before and after arriving in Australia, can and did generate some confusion. They were certainly a cause of grief to the Australian authorities; changing one's name unofficially during wartime was a breach of regulations.

Jewish. Each musician was extremely gifted, a multi-soloist who could play at least half a dozen instruments.
Despite their international celebrity, the musicians found themselves debarred from continuing employment in Germany by the anti-Jewish, anti-foreign racial and cultural policies of the incoming Nazi regime, so embarked on an epic 4-year touring odyssey that took them, between March 1933 and July 1937, around Europe, across Russia to Japan and then through the Far East to Sydney. In an interview with *Tempo*, a monthly music trade magazine, in December 1938-January 1939, the band claimed to have "played in 459 venues, in 230 cities, in 21 countries" and to have "traveled 105,000 miles". The band did not become a touring group as a consequence of the Nazi embargos against foreigners, Jews and "negro jazz"; touring was an important part of the band's activities from as early as 1928. Perhaps for this reason, the decision to leave Germany was easier than it was for other groups and artists. In the film, recurrent images of rolling train stock encode the journey metaphor and smooth chronological transitions.

The Weintraubs arrived in Australia in July 1937; by December 1938, they had secured a residency at an exclusive Sydney cabaret. But a series of events, some relating to general social anxieties directed towards nationals of enemy countries and some relating specifically to the musicians, brought them under official suspicion once war was declared. Most damagingly, the unsubstantiated civilian accusation that they had been German spies during their time in Russia resulted ultimately in the internment of three individuals in 1940 and the group's consequent disintegration, professionally and personally.
Graff, Weintraub and Kay were taken from their homes in the early hours of the morning of 6 June 1940 as part of a mass round-up of predominantly German nationals of military age who were living in Sydney's eastern suburbs, either close to or overlooking the entrance to Sydney Harbour, considered a highly sensitive military target. Though all three were subsequently released, the band never worked together again and Graff and Weintraub were, within a very short time, forced to find employment outside the music profession. The other musicians—the Polish brothers Manny and Ady Fisher

(Adolph Frischer, aka Ady Fisher, replaced Freddy Wise after the band's New Zealand tour), and Leo Weiss, a German national who was, however, not interned—continued to play at Prince's until the Fishers were drafted in August 1943.

The film positions itself in relation to two generic paradigms, in accordance with its targeted constituencies: primarily audiences at Jewish or music/jazz film festivals. On the one hand, the film is a musical "tribute", the function of which is to celebrate, record, recover and restore, and the dominant mode of which is nostalgia. On the other hand, it seeks to recount the historical story of the Weintraubs, a story which also evokes a paradigm instantly recognisable to a Jewish audience: the axis of exile, the journey towards survival, loss and dislocation. The film succeeds as a tribute film because the musicians it celebrates were first class entertainers and because the European context in which the band flourished is lovingly recreated through contemporaneous images and footage, supported by original recordings and performance clips. The account of the band's story, however, and in particular its Australian wartime experience, is less convincingly handled. There is no historical Australian footage; no attempt is made to contextualise Australia's internment policy. Instead, the film makers rely on second-hand testimony for explanation, and do not redress any of the misconceptions or reductions which arise from serious (but almost certainly unwitting) flaws in these accounts.

The allocations of time in this 65-minute film are worth noting. The account of the first decade, from 1924–33, takes up thirty minutes, the four-year journey from Berlin to Sydney is covered in seventeen minutes, and the Australian chapter of their story occupies eleven minutes, of which three are taken up with a nostalgic recollection of Weintraubs' participation in the 1930 classic Josef von Sternberg film *The Blue Angel*. Insofar as the film indexes itself as a music tribute film, this is reasonable enough; Berlin in the 1920s and early 1930s was a fascinating city, culturally and musically, and the band's early film clips and recordings produce absorbing visuals and an attractive soundtrack. The journey through Russia and Japan is enlivened by humourous anecdotes of the musicians' on- and off-stage shenanigans from Ray Goldner, who was there, while recordings made with Russian and Japanese singers add an exotic

touch of local musical colour. This was no harassed flight of traumatized refugees. These boys were stars; earning fabulous money, attracting glamorous women, they clowned and partied their way across the world. Australia is probably the least interesting part of the story musically since there are no Australian recordings, though there is some live performance footage from a Cinesound newsreel from 1937. And yet, events that occurred in Australia are imbued with enormous significance.

Exile (1933) and internment (1940) frame the narrative—the band's early career is recounted through an extended flashback—and substantial rhetorical and dramatic weight attaches to the underdeveloped account of internment as the cause of the group's dissolution. Additionally, by virtue of the fact that the story begins with exile and ends with internment, a structural link is established between these two injustices, indirectly but noticeably establishing a comparison between two regimes seen as hostile to an element within their populations ("Jews" in Germany, "enemy aliens" in Australia). When I first saw this documentary, I was captivated by the music and intrigued by the story, but under-informed. Watching the film now, having spent some years on a close analysis of Australian material relating to the Weintraubs' wartime experience (and particularly of files preserved in the National Archives of Australia), I observe the ways in which film artifice blurs the distinction between what is historically authentic and what is reductive, and the ways in which it "create[s] a fiction in the name f truth" (Rosenstone:71).

## The layered narrative: chronicle, story and the film's "rhetorical project"

The opening sequence of the film quickly and clearly establishes its parameters and its mode. To an accompaniment of one of the band's many recordings and a succession of still photographs of the musicians and iconic images of cities (some including the musicians, others not), a narrative is set in place that establishes the film's thematic content with five key statements, edited out of what were clearly longer interviews with protagonists in and witnesses to the story. Two concern the journey and three relate to the music, establishing the musicians' versatility, uniqueness and celebrity. The

sequence introduces the two survivor protagonists (Ray [Fritz] Goldner and Ady Fisher) and two "experts" (a German jazz historian and a Japanese record collector). Goldner, the youngest of the troupe (he was born in 1915), joined the band as a stage assistant in Vienna in February 1935; Fisher came to Australia from Beirut in May 1938.

The structure of the film is orthodox: two decades in the life of the band are organised into a unitary, chronological story line, in which larger historical events are represented through their impact on this small group of individuals. Though particular musicians are highlighted in brief vignettes, the biographical subject is the band as a group, not its constituent members. In both chronology and the way it is put together, the film's narrative reproduces, almost exactly, that of the 1982 booklet by Horst J.P. Bergmeier, who is named in the credits of the film. Bergmeier's chronicle starts from discography and known performance venues, reconstructing chronology and changes in the band's personnel from evidence provided by recordings, programs and tour lists. Snippets of biography are interpolated, but the main purpose is to document and celebrate the recorded heritage. In the case of the film, this emphasis produces one consistently authentic element, the musical soundtrack, which is assembled from the band's recordings (including some made in Russia and Japan) and includes extracts from sound and promotional films in which it featured.

In imposing a narrative structure on the bare bones of Bergmeier's chronology, the film gives purposive shape to its arrangement of sounds and images, the means by which it projects its interpretation of the story. Particularly formulaic are the strategies—motifs that effect the transformation of chronicle into story—used to establish and conclude the narrative. The voice-over narrative begins with a "motif of inauguration" (White, 1973:5), positing "an initial 'steady' state that is violated and must be set right", or explained (Plantinga :126): "Berlin 1933….. the Weintraub Syncopators are one of the city's most popular jazz and show bands. But the young musicians cannot suspect that their lives are about to change dramatically". The film ends with what Plantinga (1997: 93) identifies as a common "terminating motif", a (ritual) celebration—in this case, a reunion, organised by Manny Fisher's wife Edzia in 1975. A group

photograph of the now elderly musicians appears briefly on the screen.

An element of ambiguity attaches to the account of this latter event and the preceding narrative, but it is an ambiguity that results from what is left out, not from what is said. No hint is given that not all the members of the band were present at the reunion and no reference is made to the two musicians who did not attend: Leo Weiss and John Kay. Perhaps coincidentally, these are two who were able to continue successfully in musical careers—a fact that is also missing from the film's end narration, which describes how, after the war, "most of the musicians" went on to do other things. In fact, Weiss continued, without interruption until 1952, to direct an orchestra at Prince's, the Sydney cabaret at which all the Weintraubs were performing between December 1938 and June 1940, when three of the musicians were interned. On his release from internment, John Kay took up a lucrative position as musical director for the Colgate Palmolive radio show; he later established and managed the Mercury Theatre (with Peter Finch in the early 1950s) and wrote a number of scores for Australian feature and documentary films before relocating to London in 1955. The effect of this omission is two-fold. First, it allows nostalgia to be the dominant affect at the end of the film, in lieu of the complexities that might arise from the inclusion of contradictory elements. Secondly, it preserves the hegemonic integrity of the text as a victim paradigm, reinforcing a thematic motif introduced at the start of the film.

The viewer can only speculate on the possible reason why all mention of these two individuals is avoided, but the omission could be read as reflecting one of the ideological conventions embedded in what film theorists call the "classic text", namely, to present a "well-defined chain of cause-and-effect which ends in satisfying closure" (Klinger 1984:37). According to such a view, "closure usually signals the ultimate containment of matters brought out in the narrative—the network of cause-and-effect is resolved, and the narrative returned to a final state of equilibrium" (Klinger:38). To admit exceptions to this formula is to disrupt closure and cloud the transparency of the explanation of the band's break up that constitutes the film's epistemological ending. Klinger (1984:37) notes "the expulsion of any feature which would distract from the

hegemony of the narrative line". Perhaps also for this reason Goldner's departure for Brisbane is situated chronologically in the post-war commentary, implying that his departure was somehow a consequence of the war, though in fact he went to Brisbane before the band's New Zealand tour early in 1938.

Nostalgia is specifically evoked by the introduction and framing of *The Blue Angel* segment, out of chronological sequence, five minutes before the end of the film. (Situated chronologically, this segment would have occurred earlier in the film, during the flashback to the band's career in Berlin cabaret before the advent of the Nazi regime, and particularly in the extended discussion of its defining relationship with Friedrich Hollaender, the film's musical director and composer.) "The exciting times have all become memories now", we have just been told, as a Sydney record collector describes how tefan Weintraub, as an older man, would come to the collector's house to listen to the old tunes and reminisce.
The personal nostalgia associated with Stefan Weintraub's memories becomes generalised through the use of the refrain of the popular song *My Melancholy Baby* (words and music by George A. Norton and Ernie Burnett, 1912) as the underpinning of the final ten minutes of the film, preceding and following *The Blue Angel* segment and continuing under the closing credits. Sung in English, the refrain is the final textual element of the film. The sentimental longing expressed in the lyrics and the upbeat musical arrangement work to neutralize grief, overlaying the impact of the darker realities of 1930s Germany, the heart-breaking revelations of the post-war era for many German Jewish refugees, or even the more profound layers of loss that are intimated within the film.

**Witness testimony and the thinning of evidence.**
In a compilation documentary such as this, spoken word combines with images and music not just to evoke the past (though the film does this quite powerfully), but to make us feel something about the story being told: "[Film] does not simply provide an image of the past, it wants you to feel strongly about that image…Film does more than want to teach the lesson that history hurts; it wants you, the viewer, to experience the hurt (and pleasures) of the past"

(Rosenstone:16). The witness-centred "voice of testimony" is used to substantiate or provide evidence for the film makers' or text's argument and to elicit feelings from the viewer. Onscreen witnesses testify to or describe the events depicted, enriching the expressive texture of the narration with their empathetic appeal while the onscreen close-up of the expressive human face allows us to register the power of past events by observing their impact in the present (Nicholls, 2001:42.). The use of real people, so-called "social actors" (as distinct from theatrical performers, Nicholls, 2001:5), reinforces the film's "claim to be an authentic recreation of the world as it was for these people", even though we no longer witness them "engaged in historical situations and events but in reflection and recall of such events" (Nicholls, 1991:252).

The visual element is critical: "We not only benefit from *what* is said, but from the visual and aural information available in *how* it is said – from facial expression to gestures to inflections of the voice" (Plantinga:162.) So, for example, at the start of the film's main narrative, Ady Fisher, one of the two surviving musicians interviewed live, describes how, shortly after the Nazis took control of government, a young girl spat at him in a tram and called him "*Jude*" ["Jew"]. "We loved what we did", he says, "but they just didn't want us any more". This simple sentence, spoken by an old man with tears in his eyes, resonates with everything we know about the subsequent fate of Germany's Jews during the 1930s and 1940s. Given the power of the affect, it may seem that the person on screen speaks directly to the viewer but in fact his/her contribution is significantly mediated by what Plantinga (1997:151, citing Paul Messaris) calls "propositional editing". Only fragments of interviews are included, the questions are not heard and the questioner is not present, so the viewer has no knowledge of the larger content of the interview, either in terms of the give and take of dialogue or of the structuring role of the interviewer.

Though editing operates to "maintain logical continuity between individual viewpoints" (Nicholls, 1991:45.) and create a uniform perspective, there is, in fact, a complex of subjectivities among the witnesses in this film. Only two "subject-protagonists" appear in the film: Ray [Fritz] Goldner (the only witness to have been with the band in Russia) and Ady Fisher (who only played with the band from

May 1938). Other witnesses include bystanders (people who knew the musicians personally or heard them play) and experts (principally jazz historians who can "place" the music and musicians in a wider musical and cultural context or substantiate claims about the quality of the musicianship). Archival interviews recorded in the past with now-deceased protagonists are absorbed into the voice-over narration.

Not all individuals speak of events of which they have direct knowledge, so that hearsay replaces testimony, at times at key points of the narrative. The explanation of why the Weintraubs broke up, for example, is divided between Stefan Weintraub's widow Bonnie, and Manny Fisher's wife Edzia, neither of whom was married to her musician husband at the time of the events of which she speaks:

> (hesitantly) The Weintraubs broke up on account of the war…and …um they were called in Australia displaced persons of course and….ah…life began to be a little more difficult for them here. (Bonnie Weintraub)

> Around the middle of 1940…Stefan Weintraub, Horst Graff and John Kaiser get turned in as Germans into the internment camp in Victoria. It's based on the belief that they are transmitting on Thursday nights through the radio some secret codes as spies to the Japanese. As hard as it is to believe, that's what the Australians are claiming and sending them off to an internment camp. (Edzia Fisher)

Bonnie's hesitations are intriguing, as is her evident discomfort in talking to the camera, a discomfort not evident in her earlier appearances. Her description of the musicians as "displaced persons" is inaccurate (though probably not deliberately intended to mislead), since "displaced persons" is the term used for post-war refugees. Its effect, though, is curious: "displaced persons" are clearly victims, of circumstance and the events of war; "enemy aliens", which is how Stefan Weintraub was classified, justly or unjustly, at the time of his internment, designates a group to which suspicion could hypothetically attach itself (and did). Her statement that the Weintraubs broke up on account of the war, while ultimately true, is so broad as to be largely uninformative, and also seems to contradict her earlier remark that Australia was a "safe country to be in…. far removed from Europe where trouble was and that's why

they stayed". No further explanations are offered of what changed or what difficulties the musicians encountered.

The choice of Edzia Fisher to explain the circumstances surrounding the internment of three of the musicians in June 1940 is even more intriguing since, not only was she not married to Manny Fisher at the time, but he was not one of the three interned. Moreover, Stefan Weintraub is the implicit subject of the end of the film: his memories frame *The Blue Angel* flashback and his estrangement introduces the post-war reunion. So why does his widow not speak about Weintraub's internment?

There is indeed a link between an (unproven) allegation of espionage and the internment of the three musicians named by Mrs Fisher, but the charge involved the band's activities in Russia (see Dreyfus 2008) and is not mentioned in the film. Mrs Fisher's recollection is, I believe, based on another, later, incident that is recorded in the Fisher brothers' wartime security file in the National Archives of Australia. As is mentioned in the film, Ady and Manny Fisher, together with Leo Weiss (a German national who was not interned), continued in their employment as musicians for some time *after* the other members of the band had been interned. In March 1942, after Pearl Harbour, an internal military security memo, reporting a phone call from a local Passport Guard, noted that a group under the name of "Manny Fisher's Sextet" was broadcasting from radio 2UW on Thursdays. The memo concludes, "as the majority of the band must be subject to suspicion, perhaps an inquiry might be made as to the facts and the material broadcast ascertained".[4] Inquiries into the content of the broadcast were duly made and Manny was interviewed by Military Intelligence,[5] but there is no record of any further action on this matter.

With its historical inaccuracies left unscrutinised, Mrs Fisher's anecdote serves only to trivialize the legitimate military and national security concerns that shaped Australia's internment policy in 1940, however prejudicially applied. The most cursory examination of a Sydney newspaper of 6 June 1940, the day on which the three musicians were arrested, would have alerted the film makers to the

[4] Initialed memo, 9? March 1942, File C123/1, Item 1211, 'E. & M. Fisher,' NAA.

[5] Handwritten note, dated 20 March 1942, File C123/1, Item 1211, 'E. & M. Fisher–1211,' NAA. A transcript of the broadcast, reports of the interview and detailed notes on the individual musicians are included in the file.

reality of domestic concerns about the war, and of the internment operation that took place on that day. Page 1 of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 June 1940, carried a report of heavy German bombing in central France. High levels of anxiety attached to the apparent ease of the German conquest of Europe and the pressure on British and Dominion forces (witness the evacuation from Dunkirk). In the same newspaper (p. 9) they would have noted how, after the fall of the Low Countries in May 1940, fears of fifth column activities among "phony" refugees, particularly those of German and Austrian nationality (so-called "enemy aliens"), had triggered vigourous local debate over whether or not *all* refugees should be interned for the public good. The problem is that internment was not universal. Inconsistencies and injustices often arose from its selectivity, particularly in the treatment of Jewish refugees, who were targeted and often interned, as indeed were Graff and Weintraub, along with Germans associated with or sympathetic to the Nazi Party. It could be argued that all three of the Weintraubs, as Jews, were interned unjustly, though an official case was assembled against each individual. But no distinction was made in the classification of Jews and non-Jews of German and Austrian nationality as "enemy aliens" until 1942, when a class of "refugee aliens" was created, or more comprehensively in 1944, when the definitions in the National Security (Aliens Service) Regulations were amended (Bartrop 1988:275, 278.).

Various issues cluster around the relationship of filmmaker and witness in a documentary film. First there is the historical status of the evidence itself. As in oral history, witnesses claim the authority (or surrogate authority, as in the case of the wives and widows) of a first hand knowledge of events that results from "having been there". For example, Edzia Fisher, as Edna Sztern, interviewed both Manny and Ady Fisher for the Shoah Foundation in July and August 1996. But does this formal connection enhance her reliability as keeper of her husband's memories? In film, because of the way they are subsumed into the narration, "oral histories tend to function… as pieces of argumentation rather than as primary source material still in need of conceptual organization" (Nicholls, 1991:252.) Ethical considerations attend the film-maker's relationship to witnesses as real people: how is the testimony of witnesses to be contested or

qualified within a film "without running the risk of appearing to disbelieve, discredit or mock them?" (Nicholls, 1991:252). On the other hand, the absence of oppositional testimony or contesting voices, as here, may raise the question of whether the filmmaker has chosen to include only those anecdotes that smoothly advance or support the rhetorical argument of the film.
The brief, out of context witness statements included in this film are too mediated to support a discussion of the vexed relationship between memory, witness and testimony. At issue here is neither the reliability of the witnesses nor the value of their subjectivity. At issue is the effect of the statements as they are included and the film makers' failure, as in the examples (discussed above) that carry significant evidential weight, to navigate between memory as it survives within families and the detailed historical record as it survives in public archives.

**Conclusion: What does this documentary document?**

The documentary film, by taking what Plantinga (1997:18) calls an "assertive stance" in relation to actuality, makes a claim to represent *the* world (not "a" world) as it was (Nicholls, 1991: 109), and our complicit belief in or acceptance of this claim is essential to the communication of the film maker's view or argument (Plantinga :18, 220).

If this film is to be taken seriously as a contribution to the public discourse on its topic, then truth has to matter. But while such an affirmation is easy to make, it is less easy to apply in all the situations generated within the complex medium of film. Rosenstone (2006:28), for example, problematises the proposition by asking what kind of truth it is that we should look for: factual, narrative, emotional, psychological or symbolic. Ady Fisher's statement "they just didn't want us any more", enhanced as it is by temporal placement at the start of the film, undoubtedly carries emotional "truth". Is it of consequence, then, that the "we" of whom he speaks cannot be the Weintraubs, despite the contextual implication that it is, since he did not join the band until May 1938 in Sydney, or that he did not leave Berlin until 1935, not in 1933 as the commentary implies? We respond because, irrespective of such details, his

comment encapsulates all the gratuitous and arbitrary lawlessness and localised brutalities of the early months of the Third Reich. Similarly, the manifest discomfort and hesitancy of Bonnie Weintraub's attempt to explain why the Weintraubs broke up has an implicit emotional truth, aimed at protecting the memory of her husband. However, in its reliance on recollection (witness and testimony) to provide explanations of key historical incidents, the film appears to offer a somewhat uncritical endorsement of views that are, at times, partial or inaccurate.

There is one aspect of the Weintraubs' story that makes it rather different from many other exile stories, inasmuch as their career did not end when they left Berlin. Already established as a successful touring ensemble when the musicians took their decision not to return to Germany, they simply continued doing what they had always done, albeit with local variations that may be appreciated from recordings used in the film. In this they stand in contrast, for example, to the Comedian Harmonists, a contemporaneous vocal group, also from Berlin but not all Jewish, which broke up once the Jewish members left. In terms of the questions the film poses and then answers, it is internment, not exile, that marks the end of the group as an entity. It is Australia's treatment of the musicians, not Germany's, which emerges as responsible for the group's artistic destruction. Plantinga (1997:131) writes that "formal endings guide the backward-directed activity of the spectator in comprehending the film". It is a matter of importance, therefore, whether three sentences of flawed witness testimony are enough to do justice to the complexities of Australia's wartime internment policy.

For most theorists of film as history, the reductive pressures within the textual narrative, its "thinning of data" (White, 1998:1197, citing Rosenstone) are the single most problematic feature, especially when allied to a strong drive towards presenting "a unified representation of a subject, marked by a clear contextualization of knowledge within a relatively conventional structure" (Plantinga:115). For me, this film's usefulness as a historical document is undermined by the unevenness of its representation of two very different social, political and cultural environments

(Germany and Australia) and by a simplistic appeal to the subjectivities of its target (Jewish or musical) audience. Most difficult, even if largely unnoticed, is the implied synchronicity between the film's opening—Nazi treatment of the Jews [expulsion, exile]—and its ending—Australian treatment of the same group of Jews [arbitrary internment, loss of profession]. Though Australia's World War II refugee policy has deplorable aspects (which are well documented in the scholarly literature), there are no parallels to be made between a totalitarian regime with murderous racial policies and even a temporarily de-liberalised wartime democracy.

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