movies ...

Czech movie one of year's finest

By Eie Klaw

In 1942 the Jews of Czechoslovakia were systematically taken from their homes and jobs and deported to concentration camps. The Shop on Main Street tells the story as it happened in one small Slovakian town. Tono Brtko, a poor carpenter, is made "Aryan controller" of Rosalie Lautmann's small store. Mrs. Lautmann, an old and partially deaf widow, is unaware of the world outside her shop. The movie looks at the story from Tono's point of view. In Tono the viewer sees a gradual enlightenement as Tono is treated like a son by Mrs. Lautmann. The realization that the old woman is a human being and even a lovable person divides Tono's loyalty to the government and to his family. Finally, when Tono knows that Mrs. Lautmann is endangered as outsiders begin collecting the Jews to be sent to concentration camps, he is faced with abandoning her or subjecting himself to the same fate by being branded as a "White Jew." Josef Kroner is brilliant as Tono Brtko. Kroner's performance demands that he be comic as the carpenter's hopes of living a happy and rich life, free close-ups of the main characters unites one of the central themes that somehow might have become melodramatic. Equally good is co-star Ida Kaminska as Rosalie Lautmann. Miss Kaminska, who is director of the Warsaw Jewish State Theatre, was exceptional in portraying the antithesis of the cruel world outside her shop. The fine acting of Miss Kaminska and Kroner as subtly was responsible for "The Shop on Main Street," winning this year's Academy Award for best foreign film.

The photography and direction are reminiscent of "The Passion Under the Cross." Slow motion scenes taking place in Brtko's imagination touchingly reveal the carpenter's hopes of living a happy and rich life. Fine close-ups of the main characters unites one of the central themes that somehow common people have turned into cruel hunters and animals of prey.

The polished acting of the supporting cast in addition to Miss Kaminska and Kroner together with the intriguing photography make this film one of the year's finest.