

Lively choreography can't save Swing Kids

NEW YORK (CNS) — As Hitler tightened his stranglehold on the German people in the 1930s, evidently there was a small group of music-loving youngsters nicknamed "swing kids" who resisted his ideas. *Swing Kids* (Hollywood) doesn't do them any justice.

The movie's message is fine — applauding their courage and warning us that passivity in the face of injustice can be disastrous for humanity.

The manner in which their story is dramatized, however, reeks of artificiality — a hollow Hollywood version of the horrors of the rampant anti-Semitism in 1939 Hamburg.

Robert Sean Leonard and Christian Bale play two music-mad best friends, Peter and Thomas, who very reluctantly join the Hitler Youth while hoping to continue as jitterbugging swing kids at night.

Thomas is gradually won over to the Nazi philosophy as Peter becomes more opposed to their Gestapo tactics.

Of course, ultimately they must face each other as fierce enemies, in a sugar-coated, thoroughly unconvincing

conclusion.

Everyone in this movie seems as phony as a four-dollar bill. The kids don't seem remotely German and the situations are so patently contrived it is pathetic. There is even an adoring little brother (David Tom) whose sole role is to manipulate audience sympathy.

The choreography, however, is lively and joyous, as the rebellious swing kids jitterbug and lindy hop to Benny Goodman, Count Basie and other banned black and Jewish musicians of the swing era.

Would that the rest of the movie exuded such passion, instead of settling for shallow characterizations under Thomas Carter's uninspired direction.

Because of some stylized violence, racial and ethnic slurs and an instance of rough language, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.



Frank Connor-Hollywood Pictures German youths who love all things American — especially the music of the Big Bands — become known as swing kids. Expressing their defiance on the dance floor, swing kids Peter (Robert Sean Leonard, left) and Evey (Tushka Bergen) dare to challenge the government's disapproval of their music.

Book offers disturbing account of Latin American victims

Good Friday People, by Shiela Cassidy; Orbis Books (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1991); 188 pages; \$10.95.

By Father John J. Philipps
Guest contributor

"This is not a book for the faint-hearted," Sheila Cassidy begins her *Good Friday People*.

And she's right. Cassidy vividly describes the suffering, anguish and injustices endured by people she has known in her work as a human-rights activist in Latin America and through her current position as director of a hospice-care facility in England.

Her "Good Friday people" fall into two categories: victims of violence and those who are physically ill. Beginning with Archbishop Oscar Romero, the

writer (herself once imprisoned and tortured in Chile for treating a wounded revolutionary) describes — often in graphic detail — the suffering of missionaries and social activists in Latin America. Her familiarity with the heroic stories of Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel, Maura Clarke, Jean Donovan — who were murdered in El Salvador in 1980 — reads like a 20th-century martyrology.

"Good Friday people" she also discovers in those who, for whatever reason, find themselves called to powerlessness and suffering: the Hebrew *anawim*, the little people, the marginalized, disenfranchised ones.

Poverty, as Cassidy understands it, does not simply mean deprivation of material things, but it encompasses a multitude of losses. Bereavement,

physical and mental handicap, illness, depression and plain ordinary loneliness and misery constitute Cassidy's poverty. She tells with warmth and tenderness of an Irish priest with multiple sclerosis, a little boy with a brain tumor, and a young woman with AIDS, seeing in each of them a reflection of Jesus' cross.

This reviewer might have asked for a narrower criterion for identifying a suffering human being as a "Good Friday person." It seems there ought to be at least an implicit relationship of one's suffering to the redeeming passion of Jesus. Simply a similarity to the suffering of Jesus is not enough. For that reason I was puzzled by her identifying as a "Good Friday person" an agnostic Chilean rock star, who was tortured and executed for "subver-

sive" activities against the government. However noble his cause might have been, or how bravely he might have endured his injustice, this choice was ambiguous.

Whatever clarity the book may lack in the definition of Christian martyrdom, it will certainly give the reader a better understanding of Good Friday's meaning and how Jesus' suffering continues in many people today.

"It is a book for Lent," she writes, "and as such demands that the reader, like Thomas, put his or her hand into the side of the crucified Christ."

She's right.

Father Philipps is pastor of St. Bridget/St. Joseph Church in East Bloomfield.

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