

Chicago Tribune

A&E

SUNDAY

- "He Called Himself Surava" (star) (star) (star) (Erich Schmid; 1995). Interesting documentary about a firebrand Swiss journalist editor who defied the Nazis and censorship throughout World War II only to fall victim to Nazi-coddling Swiss politicians after the war. (German subtitled) 4:15 p.m. Film Center

NYDailyNews.com

DAILY NEWS | New York

FILMS

The Switzerland and World War II film series concludes tomorrow at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, 200 Eastern Parkway. "He Called Himself Surava" will be shown at 2 p.m., "Invisible Traces" will be shown at 4 p.m. and "Kaddisch" is scheduled at 7 p.m. (German with English subtitles).

The Goethe Institut Inter Naciones presents its Spring Film Program, which offers the best films from Germany in English subtitles, at Kinowelt Hall, located at 163 King St. W. On March 18, at it's an Eric Schmidt double-bill with Meier and He Called Himself Surava. On March 19 it's Fritz Lang's silent classic The Testament of Dr. Mabuse about an insane and evil criminal. For information call 416-593-5257.

Another journalist who was busy in the '40s was Peter Hirsch, the subject of *He Called Himself Surava* (Dec. 7 at noon). The editor of a left-wing Swiss newspaper, *Die Nation*, Hirsch regularly clashed with government censors over his reporting of German war crimes and his criticism of Switzerland's reluctance to admit refugees, especially Jewish ones. Hirsch wasn't Jewish, but when claims that he was became a distraction, he started writing under the name Peter Surava. It was a pseudonym, borrowed from a small mountain village, that he had already used on a book about his life as young ski instructor.

Astonishingly, the Swiss government was still accusing Surava of engaging in anti-German "atrocious propaganda" as late as 1944, when he went to newly liberated France to report on the murderous Nazi activities there. Ultimately, he was imprisoned on various trumped-up charges, including the crime of purloining the name of the village of Surava. After his release, Surava stayed inconspicuous for decades, writing under various aliases. In 1991, he revealed himself in an autobiography written after his secret police files were finally released to him; the files seem to suggest that, during the war, Swiss authorities actually passed information about Surava, a Swiss citizen, to the Gestapo. The writer died soon after director Erich Schmid's documentary was completed in 1995, but the film could hardly be more timely. In the wake of revelations about Swiss banking, this documentary offers another example just how impartial Switzerland's World War II "neutrality" really was.

Los Angeles Times

LOCAL U.S. WORLD BUSINESS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT HEALTH LIVING

AWARDS: THE ENVELOPE MOVIES TV MUSIC CELEBRITY ARTS & CULTURE

Swiss Filmmakers Find Gold

The nation's movies have long tackled thorny wartime issues, as the entries in the UCLA Film Archive's latest series prove.

January 15, 1998 | KEVIN THOMAS | TIMES STAFF WRITER



The UCLA Film Archive's "Switzerland and World War II," a series of eight films screening tonight, Saturday and Sunday at James Bridges Theater in Melnitz Hall, could scarcely be more timely, considering the current scrutiny of the supposedly neutral country's relationship with the Third Reich.

Actually, even before World War II was over, Swiss filmmakers were delving into their country's not-so-covert support of Hitler and its anti-Semitic policies. It's a smart move on the part of Pro Helvetia, the arts council of Switzerland, to have assembled this series showing that Swiss filmmakers have for a long time tackled what their government has evaded.

Erich Schmid's 1995 "He Called Himself Surava" (Saturday at 7:30 p.m.) is a thoroughly engrossing documentary about the amazing and harrowing life of journalist Peter Hirsch, which shows how freedom of the press can never be taken for granted.

Looking back on his life, Hirsch tells us that in 1940, at the age of 28, he became editor of the weekly Die Nation, which throughout the war maintained an anti-Nazi stance. But as circulation rose from 8,000 to 120,000, the paper won the enmity of the Swiss government, which censored it so heavily that by the beginning of 1945 Hirsch, who had taken the pen name of Surava (after an Alpine village), finally resigned. But that was just the beginning of his persecution--and of 45 years of working under a series of aliases--that lasted until 1991.

October 29th, 2012 02:44 p.m.

He Called Himself Surava

Director Erich Schmid Thomas In Person!

**Switzerland 1995, 80 min, 16mm, Dir:
Erich Schmid Thomas**

"Erich Schmid Thomas's awarding-winning 1995 documentary was one of the first films to lift the lid on officially neutral Switzerland's troubling relationship with Nazi Germany. Its subject is one Hans Werner Hirsch, aka Surava, a crusading journalist who became editor of the left-leaning Swiss-German weekly Die Nation in 1939. Determined to print the truth about the Nazis and their extermination of the Jews, and dedicated to opposing Switzerland's less-than-honourable refugee policy, he turned the journal into a symbol of anti-Nazi resistance, hugely increasing its circulation, but incurring the wrath of powerful Swiss enemies. The paper repeatedly ran afoul of government censors (photos of Nazi crimes were deemed "atrocious propaganda" damaging to a "friendly power"), Surava himself was subjected to anti-Semitic slurs and a campaign to expose him as Jewish (he wasn't), and he was eventually arrested, tried and convicted on trumped up charges. Reduced to poverty, his reputation ruined, he lived under an assumed identity for decades. Only after gaining access to secret police files in 1990 did he discover the true extent of the official campaign against him." Jim Sinclair, Pacific Cinematheque



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Screenings:

Thursday February 27, 2003 at 7:00PM