



Two Lives Plus One

Directed by Idit Cebula
(based on Cebula's original screenplay)

Principal Actors: Emmanuelle Devos + Gérard Darmon & Jocelyn Quivrin

Principal Languages: French with some Yiddish



Éliane Weiss (Emmanuelle Devos) is the French-born daughter of Polish Holocaust survivors. She's always been "a good girl," stable, reliable, and dedicated to her family, but her father's recent death has caused her to turn inward. One day she receives unexpected encouragement from a surprising source, and she proceeds to make big changes that upset the daily lives of everyone around her.

Plays out as a warm family comedy with a sly punch to the gut.

Pen's Points:



Metro Chicago Release?

**Playing for one week beginning August 29th
at the Gene Siskel Film Center on State & Randolph:
www.siskelfilmcenter.org**

**Also available on DVD from Seventh Art Releasing:
www.7thart.com**

Éliane Weiss (Emmanuelle Devos) is just the kind of person you'd expect to see window shopping on a fashionable street in Paris. She's a stylish woman in her early '40s, certainly attractive if not quite "a beauty." Although devoted to her family, Éliane is a warm and affectionate elementary school teacher by day, and she also enjoys nights out with her gal pals. This is the woman she shows to the public; this is the Éliane everyone has known for years.

But there is another Éliane who is considerably more introverted, someone who is equally at home in a very different time and place. This private Éliane strolls comfortably around the streets of an old Polish *shtetl* somewhere on the outskirts of Warsaw. When the film opens, Éliane has just lost her father Jusek (Michel Feldman), and her mother Rénia (Solange Najman) is growing increasingly infirm and dependent. Soon they will both be gone, leaving nothing behind but their stories. And so Éliane starts writing them down, filling notebook after notebook with scenes and sketches, repopulating a world lost to the Holocaust.

Writer/director Idit Cebula has a light touch, but there's a serious side to this semi-autobiographical story in which Cebula casts herself as Éliane's fairy godmother. (Cebula plays an author who connects Éliane with her own publisher after they meet at a reading.) If you don't pay attention to what Éliane is actually writing about, then you won't really understand the dynamics of her interior drama.

Éliane's sudden absorption in this inner world creates chaos for everyone around her. Her husband "Sylvain" (Gérard Darmon) is a conventional guy who is totally comfortable in their marriage *status quo ante*, and their teenage daughter "Bella" (Maia Riviere) naturally thinks it's her turn to be the one having all the adventures. Similarly her colleagues at the school are all discombobulated when the always reliable Éliane becomes distracted and preoccupied. One day she suddenly buys herself a laptop computer, and tongues start wagging, but even though they all know she's writing "something," no one really believes that the writing itself can be the cause of all these changes. Perhaps it's her publisher "David Klein" (Jocelyn Quivrin) – an attractive young man who is also, gasp, German!

Devos is a superb physical comedienne, and Darmon has a clownishly long face which becomes increasingly sad-sack as his prominent eyes grow ever more puffy. Sylvain wants to prove that he's open-minded and supportive, so he asks Éliane to invite Klein to dinner. Suffice it to say, hilarious consequences ensue. But it's not just alcohol that makes her sick. Éliane is the daughter of Holocaust survivors, and resurrecting their childhood world is at best bittersweet. The depiction of her inner conflict is all that we will ever know about the depth of their sorrow.

Cebula makes ingenious use of her large, boisterous cast. She wants us to laugh, and she makes laughing easy for us. So she will probably forgive you if you think *Two Lives Plus One* is just a routine women's liberation comedy (as if there were already so many to choose from that we simply didn't need any more). She might forgive you, but I won't.

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Emmanuelle Devos & Gérard Darmon.



Writer/Director Idit Cebula on set.

Question: What Does the Title Mean?

Here is Idit Cebula's explanation from the official press kit:

"The title itself is a perfect reflection of the various ways one can interpret the film. One can read it horizontally and vertically. *Two Lives Plus One* could refer to Éliane's personal and professional life, plus the one that she dreams of. It could also refer to the lives of a man, his wife, and that of the third character, David Klein, who threatens to come between them. The title can mean different things to different people; it depends on the viewer's interpretation."

Here's my interpretation:

The first "two lives" belong to Jusek and Réni who gave birth to our heroine Éliane. But then Éliane and Sylvan gave birth to Bella, and one day her life might join with another, and the new life of Éliane's grandchild will begin. The core of Judaism is the story of generations. Adolph Hitler tried to end that story, but even as we all acknowledge the grievous damage he caused, we also know Hitler totally failed to accomplish his goal.



Lifelong movie buff Jan Lisa Huttner is the managing editor of *FILMS FOR TWO: The Online Guide for Busy Couples* (a website devoted to promoting films of interest to both male & female audience members). She writes monthly columns for Chicago's *JUF News*, as well as freelance articles for numerous print publications & websites. Her article on the 2004 Oscars for *Women's eNews* received the award for "Best News Writing – Web" from the National Federation of Press Women in September, 2005.



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