

# Locarno Fest Films

Wednesday, August 31, 1977

## San Gottardo (SWISS-16m-COLOR)

Locarno, Aug. 23.

Filmkollektiv Zurich Distribution release of Filmkollektiv Zurich AG production. Features entire cast. Directed by Villi Herman. Screenplay, Herman, Eve Martin; camera (color), Renato Berta, Hans Sturm; editor, Elisabeth Waelchli, Rainer Trinkler. Reviewed at Locarno Film Fest, Aug. 13, '77. Running time, 90 MINS.

With: Hans-Dieter Zeidler, Maurice Aufferi, Dimitri, Roger Jendly.

A fine blend of historical re-enactment and documentary footage of today looking at the human, political and social side of the building of a great railroad tunnel through a mountain in 1872 and beginning to widen it for regular car traffic since 1972.

It never falls into the trap of historical tableaux and color for their own sake. It does not go in for didactics either. Rather, pic manages to give a general and particular picture of the workers' lot and the higher-up planning in this undertaking which would link the Rhineland, mainly militaristic Germany at the time, with Italy and the Mediterranean through a Swiss mountain and built by the Swiss with German and Italian help.

A Swiss banker is behind it and a Swiss engineer. They seem imbued with progress if not blind to the politics involved, as Germany sees it as both a commercial and military undertaking, and also exploiting mainly emigrant workers at the time. Even today most workers are from abroad. Conditions are better of course but less work makes layoffs easier and lung diseases are still

prevalent.

But the first tunnel led to appalling losses in life. Film has some particular scenes of an Italo worker wreaking vengeance on a man firing him for no reason or being exploited by townspeople who will not accept company script. Villi Herman displays adroit flair in his period segs showing the militia killing strikers and the powerful both attacking and condoning conditions.

Since the characters remain fairly surface, though not their problems and stations, film might be chancey in more commercial outings. But it should find festival, archive and school interest not to forget tv use on its unusual historical perspective on a great manmade undertaking for progress plus specialized use on its theme and coherent treatment. Herman appears a director to be watched in being able to make a viable arresting film out of this sprawling undertaking. Well shot and easily amenable to be being blown up to 35m usage.

—Mosk.