

An Act of Defiance is a polished struggle film for the patient viewer | Citypress

🌐 Web Clip

26 Apr 2019



An Act of Defiance is a polished struggle film for the patient viewer

City Press Grethe Kemp

SHARE



The Rivonia Lawyer: An Act of Defiance is a film with nuance and depth that stays true to the facts and politics of the time
Pictures:supplied

An Act of Defiance

Director: Jean van de Velde

Starring: Peter Paul Muller, Antoinette Louw

4 stars

And that's the problem with our struggle history – we're all aware of the Mandelas, the Walter Sisulus and the Steve Bikos, but there are many, many more brave men and women who aren't part of our general knowledge.

The beautifully filmed *An Act of Defiance* (which also goes by the title *Bram Fischer*) by Jean van de Velde puts front and centre the story of Fischer (played by Peter Paul Muller), who became famous for legally defending the Rivonia trialists in 1963, among them Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada and Govan Mbeki.

They were accused of treason after being caught at Liliesleaf farm with plans to use explosives in guerrilla warfare to upend the apartheid government.

An Afrikaner himself, it was considered shameful that Fischer would defend black and Jewish anti-apartheid activists. But Fischer was an ardent activist himself and the head of the then banned SA Communist Party.

At least once a week I find myself on Bram Fischer Drive in Johannesburg, which goes past the MultiChoice buildings. I'm ashamed to say that up until this point I had only a vague idea of who Fischer was. I knew he was a struggle figure and a lawyer, but that was about it.

was a struggle figure and a lawyer, but that was about it.

He and his wife Molly (Antoinette Louw) held strong antiracist and anti-apartheid views.

While the Rivonia trialists were eventually given life sentences – of which Mandela served most of his 27-year sentence on Robben Island – many believe it was Fischer's brave defence that meant they did not receive the death penalty.

Much of the film takes place in the bland background of the courtroom and impatient viewers might find it a slow watch.

But this is a film with nuance and depth that stays true to the facts and politics of the time. I really appreciated the depiction of Fischer's wife, Molly, who was an activist in her own right. So often the role of women in the struggle is marginalised.

Moreover, it shows how cruel the apartheid government was to those who opposed it. Eventually, Fischer was imprisoned for his communist and anti-government activities. He was diagnosed with cancer while in prison and was denied treatment for several years.

He was allowed to leave prison eventually due to his ill health and was placed under house arrest but died a few weeks later.

His family wanted him buried next to Molly, but the government ordered him cremated. To this day his ashes have not been found.

An Act of Defiance first hit the film festival circuit in 2017 and at the Netherlands Film Festival was awarded the Golden Calf for best actor for Muller's role as Fischer and the Golden Calf for best script.

It won the Dorfman Best Film award at the UK Jewish Film Festival that year.

We live in a world where facts and fiction get blurred

In times of uncertainty you need journalism you can trust. For only **R75 per month**, you have access to a world of in-depth analyses, investigative journalism, top opinions and a range of features. Journalism strengthens democracy. Invest in the future today.

Subscribe to News24

Related Links

Wooala! is a local show your kids are going to love

OPINION: Do we really need the Leonardo building?

A new report shows Africa's top 50 most 'validated' artists

READ MORE ON:

ANTOINETTE LOUW

FILM

APARTHEID

Paid content

|