



[Sarah's Key](#) at [Cornerhouse](#)

Reviewed by [Anne Ryan](#) August 2011

Films dealing with the Holocaust are now no longer rare, most try to derive some life affirming lesson from the horror – notably in 'Schindler's List'. The events depicted in Kristin Scott Thomas's new film '**Sarah's Key**' are less familiar – the rounding up of thousands of Jews in occupied Paris in 1942. This horrendous action was carried out by French police, the people were imprisoned in inhuman conditions in the Paris velodrome, the Vel d'Hiv, and then deported to the concentration camps.

Until recently this was an event largely ignored by the French, as part of a general amnesia where the national myth of resistance flourished.

The film shows the events through the story of one child as her fate is followed by a modern-day journalist played by Kristin Scott-Thomas. The round-up and deportation are shown in flashback, and we gradually learn the horror of Sarah's action which will overshadow her life; we also see how her family and Scott-Thomas' are linked.

The first half is fascinating, and though we may read about these events, their graphic depiction forces one to appreciate the reality of the nightmare in which these people are plunged.

In the flashback sequences there is a very confident performance by Melusine Mayance, while Scott-Thomas intriguingly portrays a woman balancing her own family and the demands of a story which takes over her life – discovering secrets which have been kept for half a century.

However after this plot revelation the film, directed by Gilles Paquet-Brenner, starts to feel like a TV movie, as it zips between Brooklyn, Florence and Paris – allowing a prominent cameo for Aiden Quinn, and perhaps in an attempt to gain an American audience. The ending is also rather convenient, and a little too comforting considering the horrors of the events.

The important question in 'Sarah's Key' is what would you have done? We all like to think that we would have been part of the resistance, but would we? Unfortunately after asking this question 'Sarah's Key' fails to really explore it.