



SON OF SAUL

Autumn
Season
2016

Release: 2015

Cert (UK): 15

Language: Hungarian

Runtime: 1 hr 47 mins

Director: László Nemes

Writer: László Nemes, Clara Royer

Cinematographer: Mátyás Erdély

Cast: Géza Röhrig, Levente Molnár, Urs Rechn



It has sometimes been suggested that there's little more to be said, in cinematic terms, about the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust, that it has been churned over too often. The single-minded power and visceral immediacy of Nemes's achievement, rightly acclaimed and awarded, prove otherwise.

Has there ever before been a film where so much of the action happens off screen? For much of its length, László Nemes's film (his feature debut) holds its close-up gaze on the grimly obsessed features of its protagonist (or, Dardennes-style, on the back of his head). Meanwhile the soundtrack assaults our ears with a cacophony of disconcerting noise. And, much of what does show on the screen is at the edge of the frame or out of focus, with figures appearing as dark, fuzzy shadows. Some of the time we're left to guess what the offscreen noises indicate. At other times it's all too easy to tell.

Nemes worked with a Dogme style set of rules, two of which were:

- Staying with Saul means not going beyond his own field of vision, hearing, or presence.
- The camera is his companion; it stays with him throughout this hell.

It is shot entirely with a 40mm lens, which emphasizes Saul's surroundings and is in the now unusual Academy aspect ratio of 1.375:1 to achieve a portrait-like narrow field of vision.

It took 34 years for Hungary to win its second Best Foreign Language Film. (Mephisto (1981) being the other.) It was so far out in front of the other contenders that the Award was almost a formality.

