

## Florida Film Festival: After Winter, Spring

Andrew Coffin - Winter Park Movie Examiner April 5, 2014



The first shots show a countryside so firmly rooted in the past that I thought I must be watching a period piece. *After Winter, Spring* is a documentary set in the Périgord region of France where the small community of farmers still adhere to traditional agricultural methods passed down for generations. Their way of life is fading for a number of reasons and the film, which chronicles life in this tiny farming village, is at turns melancholy, hopeful and profound.

Filmmaker Judith Lit grew up on a family farm in Pennsylvania that slowly succumbed to the outside pressure of modern agribusiness, and moved to France to try to capture the sense of purpose that her family received through farming. She moves to a farm in the French countryside and begins to document the lives of her neighbors, a close-knit group of families as they go about their daily lives and struggles. The film focuses on several specific people including Guy, a fifty-something farmer filled with boundless energy and optimism despite the hardships of small scale farming, and Alfred, an aged widower whose passion for his vineyard is unable to keep pace with his advancing years. The film spans several years as the farmers are beset by various troubles, including competition from large corporate farms, diminishing subsidies, and increased regulation from the European Union.

The filmmakers set an elegiac pace, letting the audience get to know the inhabitants of this little corner of France and it doesn't take long for us to become completely invested in their struggles. The cinematography is not showy, but it is impossible to not be taken with the pastoral beauty of the French countryside. Judith Lit obviously has great affection for her subjects, and she makes no secret that she favors this way of life; a kind of farming that is both traditional and sustainable. There are no real villains in the film, other than the specter of progress and the passage of time. Guy reflects this his children have no interest in carrying on with the farm after he is gone, and while he doesn't blame them, there is a palpable sadness in the possibility that this way of life is about to disappear.

None of these folk have any formal education, or are particularly worldly; They continually refer to themselves as "peasants" as a source of pride. In the simple ways they live their lives they are more insightful than most people. Good documentaries convey basic truths of the human condition, and *After Winter, Spring* certainly does that.