

DAILY

VARIETY

ESCAPE TO LIFE: THE ERIKA AND KLAUS MANN STORY

(DOCUDRAMA — GERMANY-U.K.)

A Jezebel Films/Zero Film production. (International sales: SND Films, Amsterdam.) Produced by Thomas Kufus. Co-producer, Greta Schiller.

Directed, written by Andrea Weiss, Wieland Speck. Camera (color/B&W), Uli Fischer, Ann T. Rossetti, Nuala Campbell; editors, Weiss, Priscilla Swann; music, John Eacott; production designers, Johannes Wienand, Bader El Hindi; costumes, Gabriele Keuneke, Ivan Ingerman. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (New German Films), Feb. 11, 2001. (Also in Rotterdam Film Festival.) (English and German dialogue.) Running time: 80 MIN.

With: Conny Appenzeller, Albrecht Becker, Sol Bondy, Thomas Bronner, Michael Callahan, Dorothee von Diepenbroick, Cora Frost, Christoph Eichhorn.

A sibling survivor story of uncommon personal and political breadth, docudrama "Escape to Life" charts the tumultuous lives of Erika and Klaus Mann, talented, gay eldest siblings of German literary titan Thomas Mann. Item's pedigree — Andrea Weiss co-directed "International Sweethearts of Rhythm" with co-producer and nonprofit Jezebel Films partner Greta Schiller, while Wieland Speck helmed "Westler: East of the Wall" and programs Berlin fest's Panorama — will ensure popularity at gay and lesbian fests, with a possible theatrical window in specialty situations and vigorous life on cable and homevid.

Actually born a year apart, sibs often referred to themselves as twins and depended on each other for support not forthcoming from famous dad, whom they nicknamed "The Magician." Pic charts their creatively and politically fertile lives against the backdrop of midcentury global uncertainty and their subsequent exiles, moving from their stage, screen and literary successes (title comes from their 1939 book) to estrangement. Tech credits are fine, with dramatic segs illustrating Klaus' life bridging period footage. Narration is culled from their work and read in English and German by Vanessa Redgrave/Barbara Nusse and Corin Redgrave/Ulrich Matthes.

— Eddie Cockrell