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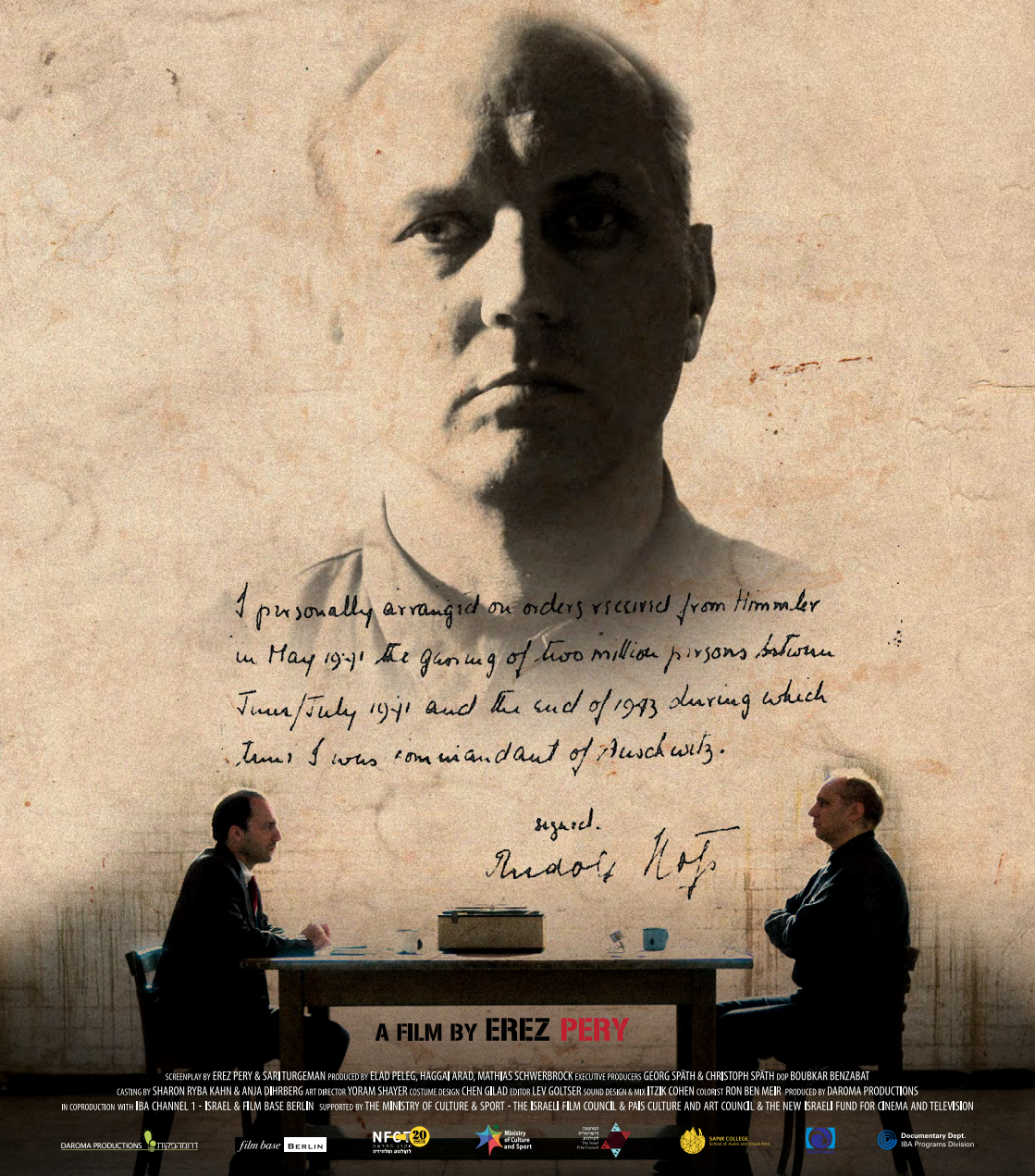
presents

THE INTERROGATION

BASED ON THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AUSCHWITZ COMMANDER RUDOLF HÖSS



A FILM BY EREZ PERY

SCREENPLAY BY EREZ PERY & SARI TURGEMAN PRODUCED BY ELAD PELEG, HAGGAI ARAD, MATHIAS SCHWERBROCK EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS GEORG SPÄTH & CHRISTOPH SPÄTH DOP BOUBKAR BENZABAT
CASTING BY SHARON RYBA KAHN & ANJA DIHRBERG ART DIRECTOR YORAM SHAYER COSTUME DESIGN CHEN GILAD EDITOR LEV GOLTSER SOUND DESIGN & MIX ITZIK COHEN COLORIST RON BEN MEIR PRODUCED BY DAROMA PRODUCTIONS
IN COPRODUCTION WITH IBA CHANNEL 1 - ISRAEL & FILM BASE BERLIN SUPPORTED BY THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE & SPORT - THE ISRAELI FILM COUNCIL & PAIS CULTURE AND ART COUNCIL & THE NEW ISRAELI FUND FOR CINEMA AND TELEVISION

DAROMA PRODUCTIONS דרומרבקות · film base BERLIN · NFCT 20 · Ministry of Culture and Sport · Program Schwerpunkt Europa Film Council · SAPIR COLLEGE School of Audio and Visual Arts · Documentary Dept. IBA Programs Division

"We survivors of the Nazi concentration camps are often asked a symptomatic question, especially by young people: who were the people «on the other side» and what were they like? Is it possible that all of them were wicked, that no glint of humanity ever shone in their eyes? These questions are thoroughly answered by Höss's book, which shows how readily evil can replace good, besieging it and finally submerging it-yet allowing it to persist in tiny, grotesque islets: an orderly family life, love of nature, Victorian morality."

PRIMO LEVI – March 1985
Introduction to *The Commandant of Auschwitz* by Rudolf Höss
Translated from the Italian by Joachim Neugroschel

SYNOPSIS

In 1946, Rudolf Franz Ferdinand Höss, the longest serving commander of Auschwitz concentration camp, is awaiting trial in a Polish prison. Albert, a young and successful Polish investigation judge, is appointed to interrogate Höss and get a perfect confession out of him. The encounter between the two men will unveil the frightening routine and banalization of evil that took place in the camp.

By introducing the use of Zyklon B in Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss carried out the most efficient mass killing process ever known, which claimed the lives of approximately 1.1 million people. The film is based on the memoirs Höss wrote before his execution.

EREZ PERY

Erez Pery is the Head of the department of Audio and Visual Arts at Sapir College, Israel. He is the Artistic Co-Director of the Cinema South International Film Festival in Sderot. Pery has curated a number of major retrospectives of contemporary directors such as Carlos Reygadas, Brillante Mendoza, Bruno Dumont, Denis Côté, Pablo Larraín, Natalia Almada, Xiaolu Guo and others.

He is the editor of the critical anthology *Cinema South*, published every year by Sapir College. Pery is also a filmmaker and his short film *For an Imperfect Cinema*, about the history of radical struggles in Israel, was screened worldwide.

His doctorate dissertation, taken in the Department of Communications at the Hebrew University, focuses on ethic and esthetic issues in the representation of Nazi concentration camps in post-war documentary cinema.

The Interrogation is Pery's first feature film.

HONORS & AWARDS

Cinema South International Film Festival, 2004 – Grand Prize
Yad Vashem prize - Special achievement in the field of Holocaust research, 2006

INTERVIEW WITH EREZ PERY

"The film gives a unique insight into the inner principles and rationality of fascism reflected in the interrogations and personal annotations by Rudolf Höss. It shows his devotion to orders, that he received from Himmler, but also his inner emotional struggles with the daily duties of the mass exterminations." – **Erez Pery**

Why did you decide to make a film about Rudolf Höss ?

I have always felt that there is something about Auschwitz that is still relevant to our current reality.
My research led me to a fascinating and troubling encounter with Rudolf Höss, founder and first commander of the Auschwitz concentration and death camp. I had of course heard of him before - after all his reputation precedes him – but a personal encounter like this was made possible only when reading the diary he had written during his time in the Polish prison, awaiting his execution.
It triggered something intense in me, not shock, not rage but fascination and curiosity in light of the fact that Höss was like everyone else, a regular man from the crowd. He was no different from the rest, no better than anyone; he was one of us, normative, with no extreme characteristics, a man who followed orders, who did everything properly because it was required of him. Höss was perfect – an obedient son, a perfect soldier, a perfect Nazi, a perfect prisoner, a perfect husband, even a perfect witness who told the unembellished truth. When the final solution began, Höss also became the most perfect and pedantic executer of the 20th century.

As an Israeli director, why did you decide to give voice to a Nazi ? Did you have any moral issues while making the film ?

In Israel you hear mainly the stories of the survivors. Their testimonies became an important part of our culture. But rarely have we heard directly from the perpetrators. They stayed in the shadows and became the ghosts or the monsters that we must hate. We never really had the courage to look in their faces. Why? Because we will have to deal with their humanity. With the fact that they were human beings like us in a certain political situation that can easily repeat itself.
It is the great Primo Levi who gave me the courage to deal with Höss. Levi wrote the forward to Höss's autobiography when it was translated and published in English. Many people were angry at him – «why did you do it?» they would ask. This brave man wrote the following paragraph which gave me the moral and ethical routs I was looking for:
«We survivors of the Nazi concentration camps are often asked a symptomatic question, especially by young people: 'Who were the people on the other side' and what were they like? Is it possible that all of them were wicked, that no glint of humanity ever shone in their eyes? These questions are thoroughly answered by Höss' autobiography, which shows how readily evil can replace good, besieging it and finally submerging it – yet allowing it to persist in tiny, grotesque islets: an orderly family life, love of nature, Victorian morality.»

«Höss was perfect – an obedient son, a perfect soldier, a perfect Nazi (...) Höss also became the most perfect and pedantic executer of the 20th century.»

How does this story relate to your personal life ?

From an early age I was exposed to graphic descriptions of the Auschwitz horrors. My grandparents from both sides of the family were born in Poland and lost almost all their relatives in the Holocaust. My grandfather never agreed to go back to Poland with me, or return to his orthodox Jewish village called Goniontz. "Goddamn the Polish and the Germans" he always said to me. But I always felt the need and obligation to understand more, to cross the understandable barrier of hatred felt by my grandfather.

The film is based on Höss's autobiography. How much of it is in the film and how close are the character's words to the ones Höss wrote in his memoires?

All the words that Höss's character speaks in the film are taken directly from the autobiography. Sari Turgeman , my co-writer, and I chose the specific

lines and topics according to the themes that we wanted to deal with. We mainly focused on the question of work vs. moral values- Whenever he reached a crossroads that required making highly serious ethical choices, Höss chose his professional duty above the humanity that still existed in him. His choices weren't based on radical nationalistic ideology and not on violent hatred of Jews. They were based on cold considerations of survival, and loss vs. profit.
We've shorten the texts from time to time in order to go directly to the point, but we didn't invent a single word. The only words that are not taken from the autobiography are Albert's questions. His words are written by us. This is the fiction aspect of the film.

What other references did you use to write the script ?

We used many references from books about the holocaust, films, pictures. I also interviewed many professors and experts in that field. And I wrote my Ph.D at that time which corresponds highly with the film. The basic hypothesis underlying my research is the correlation between the extermination apparatus and the apparatus of the cinematic process. That is to say, the more a film delves into the depths of the Nazi extermination apparatus, the more it has to cope with the ethical and aesthetic limits of the cinematic apparatus and with the dangerous manipulation that is its own underpinning.

In your opinion, what does the Rudolf Höss case say about not only the Nazis but human beings in general?

There are many deep questions to which the answers are not simple but complex, and this is the challenge that Höss' s character confronts us with. The challenge of daring to see what parts of ourselves are reflected in him, of recognizing him as one of us but also being able to understand in which way he is different from us and of succeeding to see, through him, the human weaknesses that made him who he was. We are obligated to discuss these human weaknesses. We must not blur or suppress them. We must not associate them only with the valueless monsters, because the suppression of darkness only makes it darker, whereas bravely looking into the darkness allows us to learn, develop, and prevents us from making the same mistakes again. We must break the endless circle so that history will not repeat itself. Looking at the less flattering sides of ourselves may not be pleasant but it allows an important discourse regarding the idea of free choice between good and evil. Is this kind of free choice even possible? We cannot know, but we must try to believe it is.

«All the words that Höss's character speaks in the film are taken directly from the autobiography.»

The character of Albert is fictional. How did you create this character?

Albert is a fictional character but he is based on at least 3 real historical characters - Jan Sehn, the Polish investigation judge who interrogated Höss prior to his trial and who was the one to give pen and paper to Höss in order for him to write his autobiography. The second one is Dr. Gustave Mark Gilbert who was an American psychologist who interrogated Höss during the Nuremberg trials and the third one was the criminologist and psychiatrist Prof. Stanislaw Batawia who had extensive conversations with Höss in Poland.

The film mostly takes place in the Interrogation room. Can you please explain this choice?

I was looking for a setting that can direct all the audience's attention towards the words of Höss and I realized that it had to be the interrogation room with all its banal objects: windows, door, guard, tape recording machine, glasses, chairs, etc. I wanted Höss to feel in control again and since he worked a lot from his office desk, I wanted to give him back his desk. Sometimes you can feel that he is no longer a Polish prisoner, but, again, the commandant of Auschwitz.

In what way are Albert and Rudolf different and in what way are they similar?

I think it's more a question for the audience to decide. But they are definitely mirroring each other.

ABOUT THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The Commandant of Auschwitz by Rudolf Höss

Rudolf Höss's autobiography was first published in a Polish translation in 1951 under the title *Wspomnienia* by Wydawnictwo Prawnicze, Warsaw. The German text was published in 1958 under the title *Kommandant in Auschwitz* by Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt. In 1985 Primo Levi wrote an introduction to the book that was translated in english and used in the American edition of the memoirs.

«This autobiography is of quite extraordinary interest. It shows with exactitude how ordinary little men were bewitched by the evil genius of Hitler which transformed them into mechanical instruments for a monstrous mass murderer, robots with nothing human left but a certain pride in their degradation.»

The Times Literary Supplement

Technical information
DCP/HD | 2016 | Israel / Germany | 84min | Historical drama

Cast

Romanus Fuhrmann – Rudolph Höss
Maciej Marczewski - Albert Piotrowski
Jacek Brzostynski - Tadeusz Cyprian
Shira Dotan - Girl in the hotel

Director
Erez Pery

Screenplay
Erez Pery
Sari Turgeman

Producers
Haggai Arad
Elad Peleg
Mathias Schwerbrock

Executive Producers
Georg Späth
Christoph Späth

Director of Photography
Boubkar Benzabat

Casting
Sharon Ryba Kahn
Anja Dihrberg

Art director
Yoram Shayer

Costume design
Chen Gilad

Editor
Lev Goltser

Sound Design & Mix
Itzik Cohen

Colorist
Ron Ben Meir

Producer
Daroma Productions

Coproducers
IBA Channel 1 - Israel
Film Base Berlin

Supported by
The Ministry of Culture & Sport
The Israeli Film Council
Pais Culture and Art Council
The New Israeli Fund for Cinema and Television

International Sales
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PRODUCTION COMPANIES

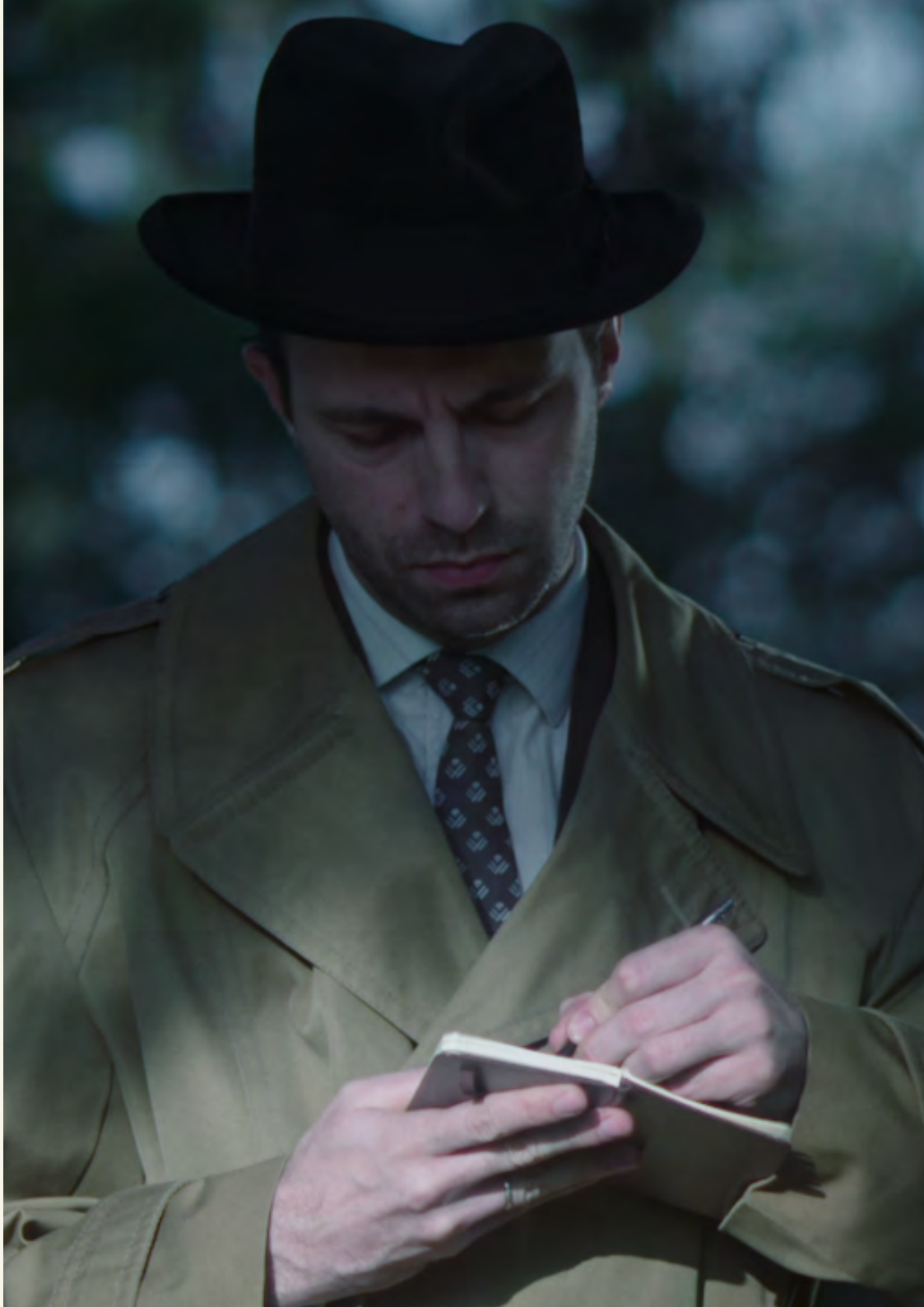
DAROMA PRODUCTIONS דרומהפקות

Located in Israël, Daroma strives to bring the individual back to the center and mainly produces films that deals with social issues. Our mission is to give a voice to the "others," the ones that aren't represented in the mass media. Daroma, founded in 2009, already has16 projects for cinema and TV, seven of which are already completed. Haggai Arad and Elad Peleg are the executive producers and managers of the company. They have produced *Red Leaves* which won the Best Debut Film award at the Jerusalem Film Festival before touring in festivals all over the world. They also produced the documentary *Life according to Ohad* which screened at DocAviv and Santa Barbara Int'l Film Festival among others. They are currently working on the post-poduction of *Amal (Between two Worlds)* that was presented during the "First look" work in progress event of the 2015 Locarno Film Festival.

film base BERLIN

Film Base Berlin produces feature films for the German and international markets and is run by Mathias Schwerbrock. After producing the films *Nightsongs* and *Hamburger Lektionen* with acclaimed director Romuald Karmakar, Film Base Berlin co-produced the Indian Bollywood Blockbuster *Don 2*. In 2012 Film Base Berlin produced the Berlin shoot of the South-Korean feature *The Berlin File*. The company also produced the European shoots for the TV Series *The Transporter* and *The Man In The High Castle* for the Amazon Studios. Mathias Schwerbrock also works as line producer and has been producing Marjane Satrapi's last film *The Voices* and Bill Condons *The 5th Estate*.

In 2014 Mathias Schwerbrock co-produced Sharon Rhyba-Kahn's documentary *Recognition* and following that Erez Pery's *The Interrogation*.



CONTACT

wide
International Sales

T +33 1 53 95 04 64
F +33 1 53 95 04 65
infos@widemanagement.com

9, rue Bleue - 75009 Paris - France