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The TATTOOIST *of* AUSCHWITZ

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INTRODUCTION

The Tattooist of Auschwitz is the story of one man, Lali (Hauer-King), a Slovakian Jew, who, in 1942, is deported to Auschwitz, the concentration camp where over a million Jews were murdered during the Holocaust.

Shortly after arrival, Lali is made one of the Tätowierer (tattooists), charged to ink identification numbers onto fellow prisoners' arms. One day, he meets Gita (Próchniak) when tattooing her prisoner number on her arm, leading to a love that defies the horrors around them. So begins a courageous and unforgettable story. Under constant guard from a volatile Nazi SS officer Stefan Baretzki (Jonas Nay), Lali and Gita become determined to keep each other alive.

Around 60 years later, Lali (Keitel) now in his 80s, meets aspiring writer Heather Morris (Lynskey). Recently widowed, Lali finds the courage to tell the world his story. In recounting his past to Heather, Lali finally confronts the traumatic ghosts of his youth and relives his memories of falling in love in the darkest of places.



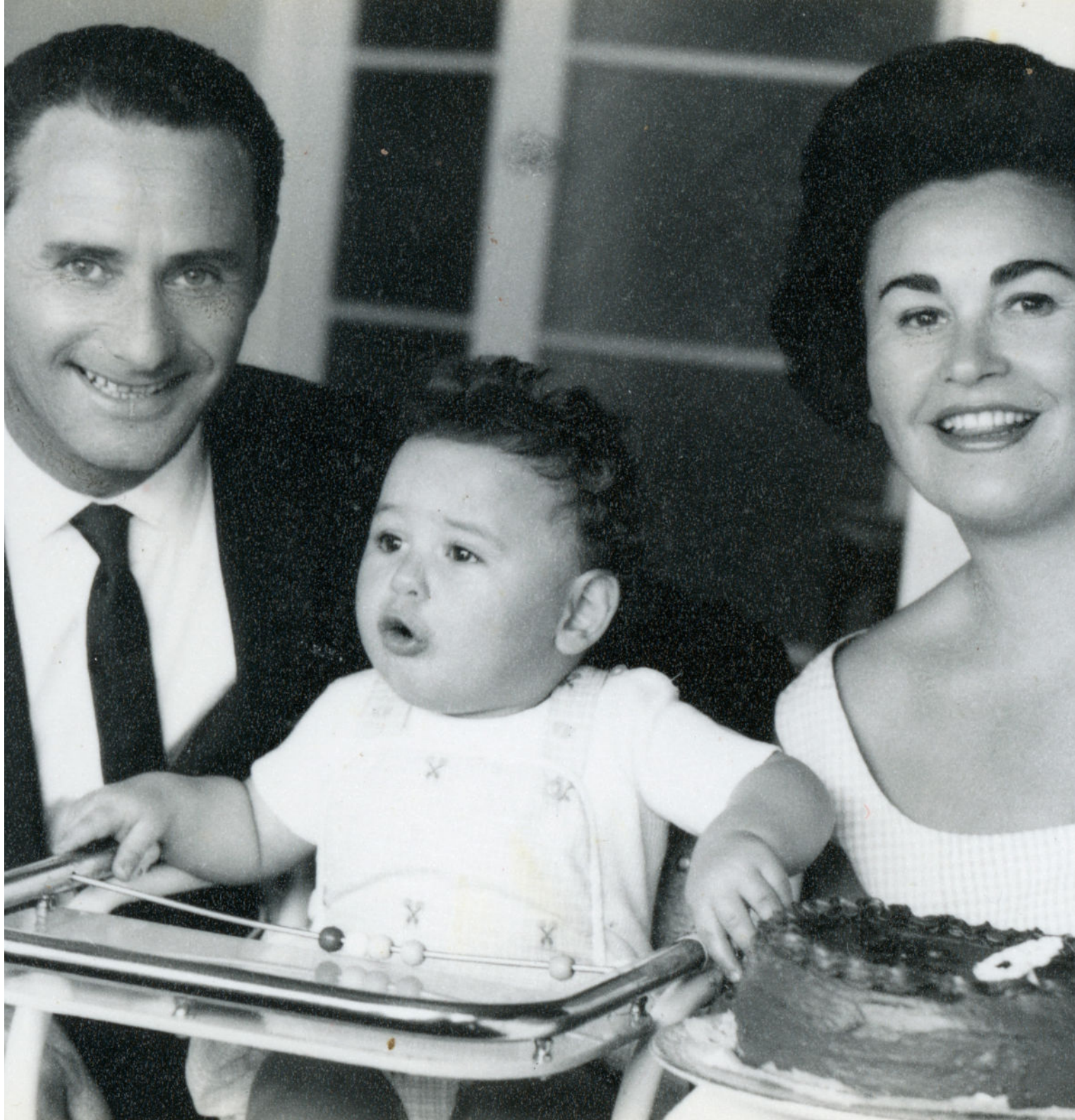
FOREWORD: A CONVERSATION WITH GARY SOKOLOV, SON OF LALI AND GITA SOKOLOV

What was your initial response when you found out that *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* was going to become a TV series?

I experienced many emotions. I always believed in my heart this was a story that needed to be told and a book or a film can only go so far – a miniseries has more time to explore the story in depth. Mum and Dad’s story has everything: romance, love, survival, and hope, all set against a backdrop of some of the worst of conditions that have existed.

You have watched all six episodes: what did it then feel like to watch your parents’ story unfold?

I don’t have the words. The respect that was given to my father and my mother and their story was beyond anything I could have imagined. I really hope the world feels the same way. It’s what I wanted for my parents: for the world to know their story. So, yes, it’s fantastic. Am I allowed to cry? →



“Mum and Dad’s story has everything: romance, love, survival, and hope, all set against a backdrop of some of the worst of conditions that have existed.”

Many relatives of Holocaust survivors say their family members never spoke about their experiences; how do you feel about the fact that Lali told Heather [Morris] your story?

Dad finally found someone he trusted enough to tell his story. He needed to tell it. I can’t imagine, knowing Heather, that he could have told it to anyone else. The world needs to know this story, especially now, where hope is really important. My Dad was always about PMA – positive mental attitude. When all else

fails, you’ve got to find a way to laugh. If you possibly can. It’s what kept my parents alive in the camp.

What was it like to see Harvey Keitel portraying your father?

There were moments when I couldn’t tell the difference between my father and Harvey Keitel. He was my father on every single level. If he wasn’t, I wouldn’t have spent so much time in tears. The way he portrayed Dad was beyond anything I could ever have expected. There is a saying in Jewish culture, kavod - which is the ultimate level of respect – and he gave that to my Dad. Just talking about it makes me cry! When Heather sent me a photo, I had to do a double take. I looked at it. Looked away. Looked again. I wasn’t sure if it was my father or Harvey Keitel. When I watched the series, I was in tears within the first ten seconds of the trailer because Harvey looked and sounded like my father. He had that little bit of hardness in his eyes that my father had. His eyes were my father’s eyes – when he spoke about my mother he was tearing up, which is what my dad did. I didn’t feel as though I was watching Harvey in the series, I thought I was watching my father.

Are there any particular moments in the series that are particularly memorable?

Where do I start? After watching the show, I couldn’t stop thinking about Harvey Keitel playing my Dad. Or the innocent love that Anna [Próchniak] has in her eyes. I thought about what Jonah [Hauer-King] must have learned about my father and about survival. How, when he looked at Anna, you just knew it was a love that would last forever. I don’t envy Jonas [Nay] playing Baretzki – it wouldn’t have been easy for him. I fully understand why he rang Heather before they started filming and said, ‘I don’t know how to do this’. The way he did it was phenomenal.

Melanie [Lynskey] did a phenomenal job. I didn’t understand until I watched the show what Heather herself had been through, hearing my Dad’s stories and then going home to her family. Heather filled a hole for my Dad when my mother passed away. I remember Heather saying to me that whatever happens, I’ll always take care of your Dad. I don’t think anyone else could have done the job that Heather did with my Dad. She gave my Dad so much respect.

In fact, the thing that really struck me overall was that each and every person on the show gave my parents’ story respect.

What did you think of Hans Zimmer’s score?

It lingers. It’s in the background, but it certainly sets the tone. The emotion that came with the music was a perfect fit for each and every scene. It reflected the harshness of the environment, but at the same time the melody had something uplifting about it.

What do you hope audiences will take away from the series?

I hope they will believe that bad times do end. You have got to stay positive as much as you possibly can. I hope that whatever people are going through, the show will give them a sense that there is a future. I know my parents’ story can help affect change; I get letters from people saying that they are taking their child to Auschwitz to educate them. I think one of the most important lines in the series is when dad asked mum, ‘Where’s God?’ They decided that God might not be there, but they could make things better for themselves. That’s an amazing legacy to leave people – there is always hope. ◆



IN CONVERSATION WITH CLAIRE MUNDELL, THE MAKING OF THE TATTOOIST OF AUSCHWITZ

Back in 2018, award-winning executive producer Claire Mundell (*The Cry*, *Mayflies*) and Creative Director of production company Synchronicity Films, couldn't help but notice that everywhere she went, people were reading the same book – *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*. She was intrigued. The book, which has now sold over 13 million copies worldwide, tells the remarkable story of Lali Sokolov, a young Slovakian Jew taken to Auschwitz, the Nazi's biggest concentration camp, in April 1942. Partly due to his proficiency in languages, the young Sokolov was forced to become one of the titular tattooists, or the 'Tätowierer'.

In July 1942, Sokolov tattooed the arm of a young Slovakian woman, Gita, and the two fell profoundly in love. He used his privileges as a tattooist to supply Gita and others with his rations and was determined to survive and spend the rest of his life with Gita. Defying all odds, the couple married after the war and moved to Australia, where they had a son – Gary Sokolov.

Mundell recalls reading the book written by first-time New Zealand born author Heather Morris and discovering that it was informed by a real-life story, "As a producer, I'm drawn to stories based on real life. It was clearly a very moving, emotional and epic story. And the idea of a love story set in Auschwitz was incredible; how could two people fall in love in one of the most notorious concentration camps?"

Lali's story spoke to me about our innate capacity for hope and survival. I hadn't seen such a story portrayed on screen before, certainly not for a mainstream global audience."

After speaking with Morris about adapting the story into a long-form scripted series, Mundell thought carefully about the responsibility and challenge of telling a story set in Auschwitz. "Until I started developing and producing *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, I hadn't fully appreciated the terrifying reality of the Holocaust denier and so became increasingly aware of the responsibility of adapting such a book. Although Lali and Gita's story was utterly compelling, we had to consider what justified bringing it to the screen. Earlier in 2018 I had seen several articles citing a Holocaust Awareness survey which claimed to show that 41% of Americans and 66% of American millennials, at that time, did not know what Auschwitz was. I found it inconceivable that ignorance of the Holocaust could be so extensive and was therefore curious why *The Tattooist* was selling millions of copies at a time when Holocaust awareness seemed to be in decline. But the book's success soon became clear – Lali and Gita's story of love and survival was truly inspiring. It offered hope in the bleakest of worlds, a sentiment all audiences can all identify with.

Although the book is set predominantly between 1942 and 1945, the issues that it explores – antisemitism, →

“In circumstances that are incredibly bleak, as they were in Auschwitz-Birkenau, any glimmer of light or hope is magnified. Acts of kindness and love become hugely important. They enable people to survive.”

intolerance and hatred – unfortunately remain relevant today. “Our purpose in adapting the book became one of honouring Lali and Gita’s love story in the hope that we could leave viewers with a changed perspective on antisemitism and intolerance.

“I therefore set about attaining the rights to this emerging bestseller and once secured began the process of development.”

Mundell sent a copy of *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* to Australian writer Jacquelin Perske, with whom she had collaborated on *The Cry*. Perske’s initial response was similar to Mundell’s, how to honour a story set in a “very dark place in history”? She started by spending a week with Morris and Story Producer Ruth Underwood in Melbourne, discussing the process of writing the book with Ludwig ‘Lali’ Sokolov. “Heather, who had never written anything before, spent a long time talking to Lali. She went to see him several times a week and they became incredibly good friends with a very special bond.”

The team had extensive conversations with Heather Morris about her time with the late Lali Sokolov, and

carefully considered the best approach to convey the story in a long-form TV series. Although Morris details her meetings with 87-year-old Sokolov in a brief Postscript at the end of *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, she isn’t a presence in the novel itself. However, Perske thought it would be interesting to include those meetings in the narrative structure of her script. “I realised it would allow us to deal with history and memory as this is Lali’s deeply personal story of the Holocaust. So, the script switches between old Lali talking to Heather in his apartment in Melbourne and young Lali’s horrendous experiences in Auschwitz.”

Mundell notes that the team set about creating a narrative storytelling style that enables the show to examine the nature of post-trauma and memory. “Through Lali’s developing relationship with Heather Morris, the series shows the purpose that telling his story truly served – the unburdening of years of repressed trauma; his recognition and, ultimately, banishment of the ghosts of his past; and the release from his very complex survivor’s guilt.

As he tells Heather his story, we see Lali’s fragmented memories. The more painful they are, the more difficult to recollect – the darker side of his memory holding him back from fully sharing. People from his past such as Aaron, Baretzki and Tomas come alive to him in his apartment, manifestations of his trauma. Unseen by Heather, they talk to Lali about their experiences giving us insight into the nature of memory and the narratives we construct, showing us that history is more than just one simple truth – it’s made up of multiple threads and every one has meaning and value.”

Perske, who as lead writer worked alongside episode writers Gabbie Asher and Evan Placey, and Story Producer Ruth Underwood, also considered how to balance the darkness of the Holocaust with hope and

humanity. “I think the response to darkness is to find the light. In circumstances that are incredibly bleak, as they were in Auschwitz, any glimmer of light or hope is magnified. Acts of kindness and love become hugely important. They enable people to survive.”

Determined to ensure the series contained as much historical and cultural authenticity as possible within the confines of the drama, Mundell, along with the cast and key crew members, consulted with and visited the Auschwitz Memorial and Museum, several times during development and production.

Mundell also enlisted Naomi Gryn as the Historical and Jewish Cultural Consultant.

Naomi Gryn was an ideal choice for the challenge of dramatizing Lali’s real-life story on screen. Naomi was the conduit between production and Holocaust research, understanding the objectives of each given her experience both as a filmmaker for projects such as *Chasing Shadows*, the memoirs of her father Rabbi Hugo Gryn, a child survivor of Auschwitz, and as a researcher for works of Holocaust historians including Sir Martin Gilbert and Sir William Shawcross.

A central element of honouring both Lali and Gita’s story and the prisoners of Auschwitz was the recreation of the camp, which production undertook over seven to eight weeks in the middle of a bitter Slovakian winter. “We knew we could not ever recreate what happened in Auschwitz,” explains Mundell. “We could only give audiences a sense of the terrible events that took place. And so the show doesn’t shy away from violence. It’s quite confronting. Tonally – in terms of everything from lighting to music – we had to be clear that we are telling a love story in a place that is evil beyond your wildest imagination and that, I hope, encourages people to spread love instead of hate.” ◆



CASTING THE SERIES

Equally vital was securing two young, emotionally intelligent actors able to take on the enormity of playing young Lali and Gita as part of an experienced international cast and over 5,000 supporting artists across the shoot. Mundell wanted Jonah Hauer-King to play young Lali pretty soon after optioning the book. "He is a complete superstar. He's been our North Star throughout the project. We ended up having a five-hour lunch because he thought he was pitching to me. Jonah himself is Jewish and said at that lunch he'd do anything to be involved because the story meant so much to him." Jonah reciprocated Claire's sentiments, "I had that rare feeling where you feel like you have to be involved and would do anything to be involved."

Of Jonah's co-star, Polish-born actress Anna Próchniak, Claire notes that she was an exciting discovery in a mammoth casting process that saw many actors read for the supporting roles. "Anna read for many other smaller parts but we kept bringing her back to read a bigger part after every audition. She stood out. Eventually we realised the part we really wanted her to read for was Gita and when she did we realised immediately that she is the perfect Gita; she has an intensity, strength and resilience to her as well as this inner light." →

“Having these Hollywood actors join the series was ‘a dream come true’ for Mundell.”

Later, Academy Award nominee Harvey Keitel, born in New York to Jewish immigrants, joined the cast as the older Lali along with New Zealander superstar Melanie Lynskey as Heather Morris. Having these Hollywood legends join the series was “a dream come true” for Mundell. However, finding an actor to play Stefan Baretzki, the vicious, sadistic Nazi SS Officer in charge of Lali, was less straightforward. “We had to be careful not to portray Baretzki in a sympathetic way, but equally we didn’t want him to be a caricature or cliché. German-born actor Jonas Nay (star of Deutschland 83/86/89) plays him in such a chilling, unhinged way that is full of depth and unsettling emotion.”

It is unusual for a single director to work across a series, especially one as challenging as The Tattooist of Auschwitz, but it was important to have both a consistent vision and a fixed point of reference for the cast and crew. Mundell watched the work of Tali Shalom-Ezer and thought she would be an interesting fit for the project. “Tali approached the story with rigor and passion. To have one director across six episodes is a massive achievement, and the way she works with actors is incredible.”

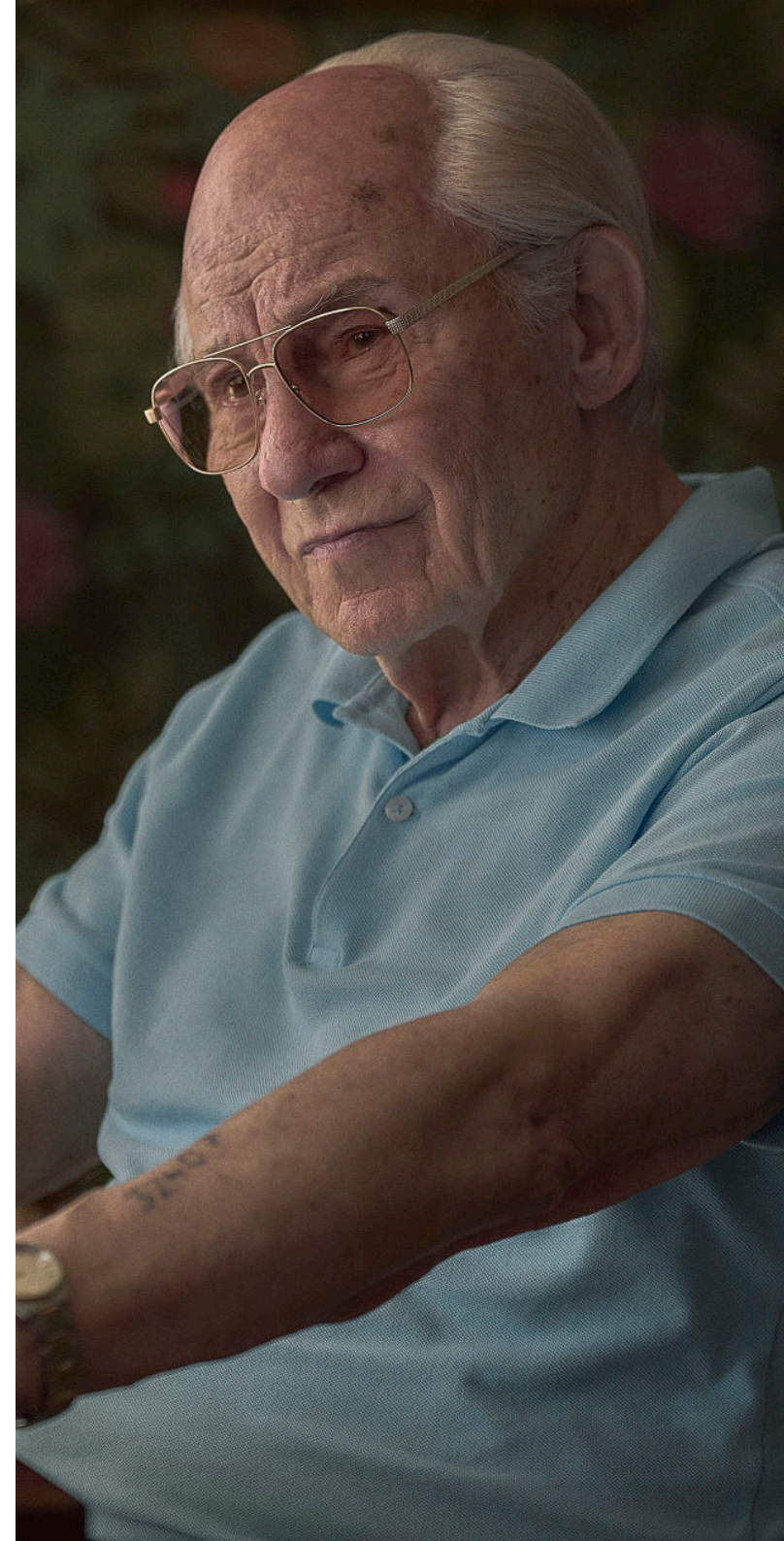
Shalom-Ezer explains that she was looking for actors able to express how dehumanising Auschwitz was. “The people imprisoned there were broken. Completely broken. And it’s a challenge for an actor to express this. We also tried to create an ensemble of actors

from all over Europe, so that German roles were played by German actors, Hungarian roles by Hungarian actors and so on. It was unique, I think, to have such an incredible mix of nationalities.”

Most of the filming took place in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia and Lali Sokolov’s home country, which Shalom-Ezer had to consider on two fronts. Most of the cast and crew were not only isolated from their families and friends, but “I also wanted to ensure we were mindful of and respectful to the many people on set, from the actors to the local crew, who had a personal connection to the Holocaust story.”

Due to the traumatic subject matter of the series, Mundell decided from the outset to engage Solas Mind, which offers mental health and wellbeing support in the creative industries. One-on-one counselling appointments were available around the clock and in a variety of languages to accommodate the international cast and crew. “Because of our responsibility to portray what happened to Lali, and all those imprisoned and murdered there, we had to do our best to depict Auschwitz ” explains Mundell. “So, in addition to the usual pressures of a high-end shoot, I was conscious that our team would be recreating extremely distressing scenes and events. It was therefore imperative that we supported everyone’s mental health on and off set.”

Of the many highlights for Mundell in the making of the show, the chance to work with composers Hans Zimmer, Kara Talve and Score Producer Russell Emanuel has been hugely significant. “To work with Kara and Academy Award winner Hans’ score has been incredible. Their dedication and respect in creating the musical backdrop to Lali’s story has so inspiring to witness and I can’t wait for audiences to hear their beautiful work.”





THE LOOK OF THE TATTOOIST OF AUSCHWITZ

In preparation for *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, hair and make-up [HAMU] designer Frances Hounsom (*After Life*), delved into first-hand accounts of Auschwitz survivors. She then created a series of watercolour paintings as visual references for the production. “The colours that came to mind were a lot of blues, dark greens and browns. Very earthy tones that also suggest sadness. I worked closely with Stevie Herbert, the production designer, about her colour palette to ensure consistency in the visual style of the series.” It might not necessarily be captured on camera, but the mud is never just mud: it’s grass, it’s dust, it’s blood.”

While her relationship with director Tali Shalom-Ezer was crucial – “she listens to what everyone has to say, which is incredible” – Hounsom also focused on building trust with the actors. She watched them during rehearsals to understand how they moved, which she says is more important to *HAMU* than people might think. “For example, Anna [Próchniak] is like a dancer when she moves. She has this beautiful glow that I put on her cheeks to suggest a kind of inner peace, despite everything that is going on around her.”

During a scene where Lali is brutally beaten up, Hounsom applied a bleeding prosthetic eye on top of Jonah Hauer-King’s actual eye. Jonas Nay underwent a complete character transformation simply because

the actor, is “an utter ball of sunshine, fun, colour and life”, unlike his character, the Nazi SS officer Stefan Baretzki. “Baretzki uses amphetamine, so his eyes are constantly red, he’s always a bit sweaty, a bit on edge. Most of the SS officers are immaculately groomed, but we did a lot of research and his hair was fluffy at times, his uniform unbuttoned.”

Prisoners of Auschwitz were defined by tattoos indicating their camp numbers and roughly shaved heads. Hounsom says it was important to draw the tattoos, which were transfers applied with water by hand. “I drew over 1,200 tattoos. They were originally done by a needle dotting ink onto the skin; I worked with Naomi [Gryn, the Historical and Jewish Cultural Consultant] to create all the different numbers. We wanted to protect the identity of former or deceased prisoners, and any surviving relatives, so we opted to use fictional tattoo numbers and only used the real numbers for Lali and Gita who, whose numbers we knew were historically accurate. I made the fresh tattoos look bloody and sore and the older ones a bit more worn, a bit softer.”

Hounsom also consulted with the cast members who played prisoners about shaving their heads. “We could have offered bald caps, but aesthetically these don’t look as authentic. The prisoners at Auschwitz had their heads roughly shaved upon arrival, which was →

intentionally dehumanising, so I used a pair of clippers to recreate the patchy shave. We donated long hair to the Little Princess Trust, to make wigs for children with leukaemia who have sadly lost their hair.”

To transform Melanie Lynskey into Heather Morris, Hounsom designed a blonde wig (“this is the first time Melanie has been blonde on-screen”) that suited the actor’s skin tone. She worked with an American prosthetics designer on ears, teeth and a hairpiece for Harvey Keitel, who plays the older Lali.

Costume designer Ján Kocman, who a decade ago worked on *The Prisoners of Auschwitz*, worked closely with Hounsom, Shalom-Ezer and Gryn. He ordered original fabric made of wool mixed with cotton and dyed it to create the prisoners’ uniforms – “there were more than 5,000 supporting artists across the entire shoot, so it was a big task” – and around 140 pairs of shoes were made and then aged. Actors wore thermals beneath the uniforms, which had to look not only “dirty and destroyed” but also had to look loose as the prisoners become malnourished. The prison guards, meanwhile, had cotton uniforms in summer and wool in winter. “Keeping the actors warm was key; they were often half naked and barefoot in the snow.”

Kocman also had to consider the fact that the timeline jumps from the 1940s to the ‘60s to the 2000s. “The colour palette in the ‘60s is obviously very different to the one in the concentration camp. Detail is important: older Lali has a yellow kitchen in his Melbourne apartment and his mother wore a yellow apron at the start of the story. Lali sold fabric as part of his job, so he would look elegant before and after his time in Auschwitz.” ◆



IN CONVERSATION WITH TALI SHALOM-EZER, DIRECTOR AND CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

What was your initial reaction when approached to direct *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*?

I felt an immediate, strong connection to the story, and like many involved in the production, I have family and friends with direct experience of the holocaust. At the same time, I had this fear of how to tell a story about something I have never personally experienced and will never understand fully. My approach was therefore to respect the story. We all know that Auschwitz was hell on earth, and yet Lali fell in love there. That was incredible to me. Lali's memories of his time in Auschwitz were my guiding light; I tried to get as close as possible to his emotions and to express them on screen.

Are there themes in the series that weren't as prominent in the book?

The feeling of guilt wasn't as prominent in the book as in the series. Lali was not a regular prisoner – he was a tattooist with the rights that the position implied. He felt guilty about being, in some way, part of the Nazi system, and we try to highlight that. Gita's point of view wasn't represented in Heather Morris's book, but we felt it was important to understand her experience and so we made space in the series to imagine what Lali knew of Gita's time at Auschwitz, and how she felt about Lali.

The series also features the character of Heather Morris.

It felt important because Lali had never told anyone some of the stories he told Heather. The process of post-trauma is something I have explored in my work before and something that particularly drew me to Lali's story. In talking to Heather, Lali was going through a process of healing.

What was the most challenging aspect of taking the story from book to screen?

Every single aspect of this production was challenging. Every scene that we shot included the key cast alongside hundreds of supporting artists and hundreds of crew members, so perhaps one of the biggest challenges for me was telling an intimate love story on such a huge scale. Finding the right tone for the story was a challenge; it was a very collaborative job, with so many voices and thoughts. Some people found certain scenes almost unbearable to watch. We had to constantly ask ourselves if a scene was too light or if we were being respectful enough.

Was there a particular scene in the series that you struggled with?

For me personally, it was shooting the death march. It was freezing cold. I was able to wear my big coat and →





stand close to a heater, while the supporting artists had to perform in the cold. They had to look as though they had been in a concentration camp: naked, cold, crying. Humiliated by the guards. I was grateful for their commitment to the show and honouring the integrity of storytelling.

What kind of research did you do to ensure scenes like the death march were accurate?

We took research and historical accuracy very seriously. We read books, watched documentaries, visited Auschwitz several times, and read testimonies by Holocaust survivors. In one of them, a woman said that she was sure Auschwitz was an asylum when she arrived because the prisoners were behaving like psychiatric patients. They were dehumanised. Their souls were broken. We were very lucky to have Naomi Gryn onboard as our Historical and Jewish Cultural Consultant. Claire [Mundell, executive producer] set up a system so that everyone was able to direct questions to Naomi, who would then come back with a detailed response having consulted with multiple sources.

How closely did you work with cinematographer David Katznelson to create the visual language of the series?

Incredibly closely; I was never by myself because David was always with me to imagine the story together. We have very similar taste; we love to watch Eastern European movies. As I've said, many of cast and crew had a personal connection to the story. For a lot of them, it was their grandparents who had experienced or been killed in a prison camp, but David's father is a Holocaust survivor. It was very significant because David's father had told him so many stories and he was able to share those with us.

Can you tell us about the key cast members?

Harvey Keitel is a true artist. He was so passionate and eager. He was searching for something new in

“Finding the right tone for the story was a challenge; it was a very collaborative job, with so many voices and thoughts.”

each scene, which was inspirational. We were very lucky to get someone as talented as Melanie Lynskey to play Heather; she had to do so many scenes in which she is just listening to Lali's story and she delivers such a powerful performance in doing so.

Jonah Hauer-King might be one of the kindest people I've ever met. Playing Lali wasn't easy; he was doing [a regulated] fast a lot of the time, but he was always relaxed, calm and professional. Anna Próchniak is a dancer, a ballerina and so there's something very expressive about the way she moves. She wasn't afraid of going into scenes in the deepest way possible, even if it made her feel uncomfortable. It was a joy to work with her.

Jonas Nay is a brilliant performer. I've never seen such a contrast between an actor and the character he's playing. He's a sensitive person and I'm grateful that he agreed to go on this journey with us.

What do you hope audiences will take away from watching *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*?

To be able to see light – and love – in the darkest time in history. We are experiencing very dark times again now, so I hope the show will inspire the audience to believe in love. ◆

IN CONVERSATION WITH HEATHER MORRIS, AUTHOR & STORY CONSULTANT

When you were initially approached to sell the rights to *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, were you hesitant or thrilled?

It was a dream come true for me. I was thrilled because this was now a full circle. This is what Lali and I had dreamed of. I had written his story all those years ago as a feature film, but when I was approached with a view to it becoming a six-part miniseries, there was no hesitation. Being able to tell Lali and Gita's story over six hours rather than two was brilliant – I knew that it would be explored properly.

Do you think Lali would have approved of Harvey Keitel playing the older Lali?

Well, of course we didn't consider an older actor because Lali isn't an old man in the book. However, had he seen Harvey in the show, Lali would have thought he was looking in the mirror. It was unsettling to see how perfectly Harvey captured Lali. Harvey told me that he was using a voice coach to get his version of Lali's accent, but what he got in fact was Lali's accent to a tee. His mother was Romanian and his father Polish, so he grew up hearing eastern European accents. Oh my gosh, he nails it! We sat in a hotel in Bratislava and he asked how Lali walked and how he sat, so I had to slump in my chair!

And how did you feel about Melanie Lynskey playing you?

I was initially resistant to being a character in the TV series. Firstly, I quite like my privacy. Secondly, I wasn't sure how the millions of people who have read my book would react when Melanie appears in the series playing me. I wasn't concerned, I just wasn't sure how the new narrative would work – but as soon as I read the scripts, it was clear that it worked very well. She watched everything she could find about me and thought it was going to be a very difficult role to play because she's nothing like me. I don't think I'm noisy, but she's quieter. It's also the first time she's ever played a character who's still alive, so she was feeling concerned until she met me and I was able to reassure her that there was nothing she could do that would in any way offend or upset me. She is a honey. Just delightful.

What was your involvement with the cast and crew?

I spent time one-to-one with Jonah [Hauer-King], which was amazing. He was so invested in wanting the story to be told properly; like Harvey, he asked all these questions about Lali's behaviour. We all appreciate our Jonah time and relish it, because he is so dedicated to his work. I had a wonderful session with Jonas [Nay] while I was on set in Bratislava. →



“The very last thing I said to him was, ‘It’s time to go and join Gita. I will never, ever stop trying to tell your story.’ It was a promise that I will never let go of.”

He’s another amazing young man. I couldn’t help him very much in terms of telling him how to play a person as evil as Baretzki.

Were you able to talk to the cast and crew – especially the script writers – about stories that didn’t appear in your novel because there wasn’t room for them?

I spent an intensive week with Jacquelin Perske. After that week, Claire [Mundell] came to me and asked if they could bring me and old Lali into the script. Prior to that, Jacquelin had been given the book and was told to meet with me to discuss how to adapt it – clearly I must have over shared for them to create two new characters for the series. They were really

good at providing me with the drafts of the scripts as they were written and responded beautifully to my suggestions.

So it was a very collaborative process?

Yes, there are not enough words in the dictionary for me to express my gratitude to Claire Mundell, Adrian Burns, and the team at Synchronicity Films, for their passion, devotion and attention to creating a project I am so proud to have my name attached to.

Was it difficult to revisit some of the moments you shared with Lali with the cast and crew, since he passed away in 2006.

It was, but I knew I had to do it. I wanted to do it. Here’s the thing: I was with Lali two hours before he died. I knew he wasn’t going to see the sun come up the next morning. He was unconscious, so I got to do all the talking, which was very novel since I’d done pretty much all the listening for so many years. The very last thing I said to him was, “It’s time to go and join Gita. I will never, ever stop trying to tell your story.” It was a promise that I will never let go of.

I initially tried to sell the script around the world, but no one was interested. It was the wise words of my sister-in-law that ended up changing everything: she got fed-up with me complaining about getting nowhere and told me to write a book. I have since thanked her many times.

How did you feel when you visited the set of The Tattooist of Auschwitz?

It was way more confronting than I even considered it could be. I was on the set of a story that I had written about, that I thought I knew so well. But to then see the cast and supporting artists with their heads shaved – and to see the conditions in the barracks – was very confronting. The scale of the set was

incredible. I had to sit in a room quietly after that and look at the monitor and try to regroup.

After the publication of The Tattooist of Auschwitz, there was much discussion about the accuracy of the story. A report by the Auschwitz Memorial Research Center raised concern that the novel would become “for many readers a source of knowledge and imagination about the reality of life in KL Auschwitz”. You said to the New York Times in November 2018 that the book “does not claim to be an academic historical piece of nonfiction, I’ll leave that to the academics and historians. It is Lali’s story.” Did you feel that the TV series was perhaps an opportunity to ensure historical details were thoroughly checked?

This is a work of fiction based on the memory of one man. It is not the story of the Holocaust. My novel is not an academic, historical account. So many survivors have thanked me for telling Lali and Gita’s story – they see it, in many ways, as their story too.

Do you still get letters and emails from people all over the world who have read The Tattooist of Auschwitz?

I get thank you letters every day of the week. Today, for example, I had an email from a 39-year-old lady in Germany. It’s really humbling because I can’t comprehend how this book has touched people’s lives to the extent that people say their lives have changed or that they actively want to change their lives. It’s an awful lot to take in.

Lali and Gita’s story clearly still resonates today; why is it important to keep telling their story?

Six million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust. Lali and Gita survived and Lali shared their story. Many others have told their stories too; you can only thank them and ask them to keep telling their stories so that new generations learn about it and grown-ups don’t forget about that evil period of history. ◆

IN CONVERSATION WITH HARVEY KEITEL, MODERN DAY LALI

Had you read or were you aware of *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* when you were approached to play modern day Lali?

I had heard of it and came to reading it after I was asked to play the part. As strange as it might sound, I felt it was in the wind that Heather Morris's book and I were meant to come together.

What was your initial response to being offered the role?

My initial reaction was to bear witness. It's our duty to condemn the barbarism and inhumanity inflicted on Jews, gypsies, political dissidents and any of the communities that were persecuted by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

What kind of research did you do for the project?

I read texts by Eli Wiesel, Viktor Frankl. There are so many important and valuable books.

There were many videos of testimony by former prisoners of Auschwitz. There are some video interviews of Lali online... I watched everything I could get my hands on. I met a wonderfully spirited woman - not unlike Lali and Gita - named Celine Karp Biniarz, a "Schindler's List" survivor, who was at a friend's gathering to share her experiences with younger generations. There is also a beautiful short documentary by Alan Resnais called "Night and Fog," which is a must-see.

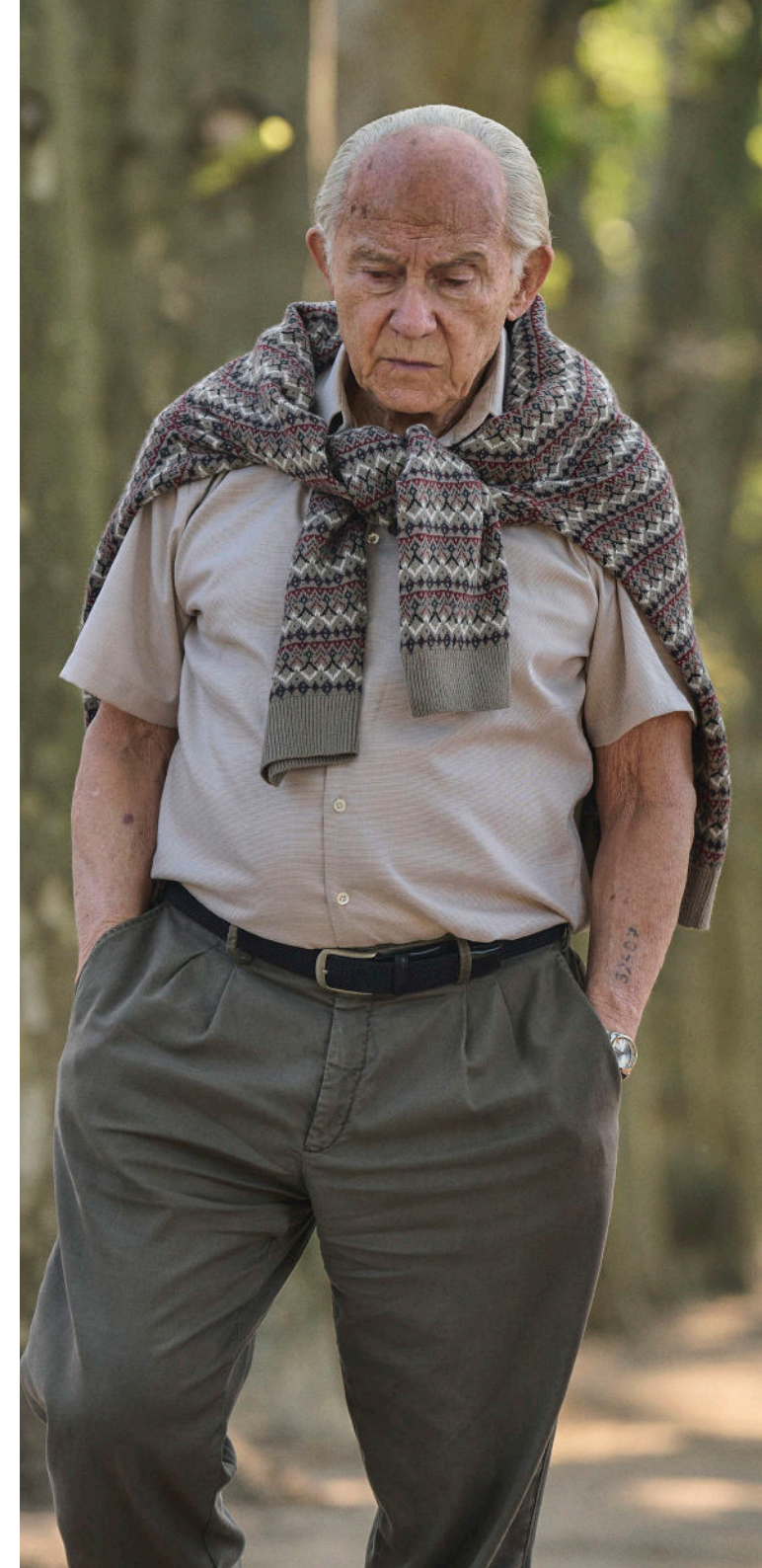
"I am honored to hopefully bring to light through our dramatization of Lali's story the horror of the Holocaust and keep this history relevant as there are fewer Holocaust survivor's alive to tell their own stories."

Heather Morris was blown away by your portrayal of Lali (it really is an exceptional performance). What did you ask her about Lali when you met?

I admired her for her willingness to immerse herself in the darkness of Auschwitz in order to pass on the horrible story of the victims in her beautiful and important book.

What was the biggest challenge in playing Lali?

I can't say it was a challenge. I am honoured to hopefully bring to light through our dramatization of Lali's story the horror of the Holocaust and keep this history relevant as there are fewer Holocaust survivor's alive to tell their own stories. →



Is it tougher to play real-life characters than fictional ones? Why?

I can't say which is which. In this particular instance, it was tough reimagining the experiences and traumas of a victim of Auschwitz. My duty as an artist was to portray as best as my talent would allow me to keep Lali's and Gita's story alive.

Did you find yourself thinking about Lali after you'd finished filming *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*?

The truth is in one's research of a story like this, it's overwhelming and it doesn't let go of you.

Why do you think it's important to keep telling stories like Lali and Gita's?

In Auschwitz, they would have a band to play beautiful music to greet the arrivals of new prisoners...often children, women - even pregnant women, and men as they disembarked their cattle cars to their final destination: Auschwitz. Beautiful music to serenade them as they were led to the gas chambers, to their deaths. The horror. Lali and Gita are one story. These two people managed to survive out of six million Jews who were murdered. They had to carry all they'd seen, they had to make choices no one should be forced into. The circumstances were inhumane, unfathomable to us now. It's a horror movie, but it really happened.

Lali and Gita's love for each other, miraculously led to their survival. Yes they were lucky, but they had to sacrifice things too. They had to live with those demons they encountered on their way to their survival for the rest of their lives. In that respect, no one survived Auschwitz. ◆



IN CONVERSATION WITH JONAH HAUER-KING, LALI IN HIS YOUNGER YEARS

What was your initial reaction when offered the role of Lali?

As soon as I heard that *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* was being adapted, I knew I wanted to be involved. It's a rare thing to have the opportunity to tell such a vitally important story.

Having read the book, it was hard not to feel daunted; I was honoured and excited, but extremely aware of the huge responsibility we all had to bring Lali's story to the screen in a respectful and authentic way.

What was your research process?

One of the first things I did was get on a plane to Kraków to visit Auschwitz. I'd been as a young man and found it completely overwhelming, but it was important to go back there in preparation. I needed to see the camp through a new lens, through Lali's eyes. From there, Naomi Gryn, (the Historical and Cultural Consultant) sent me an amazing list of research material to listen to, to watch and to read, so I just dived in. From that point, it was about finding the right balance between understanding the historical and socio-political context, reading survivors' accounts, and trying to research as much as possible about Lali himself and his experience there. He gave hours of testimony at different points which helped me to understand him. The final piece of the puzzle was talking to Heather Morris. I met her on a number of occasions and was able to ask all kinds of questions

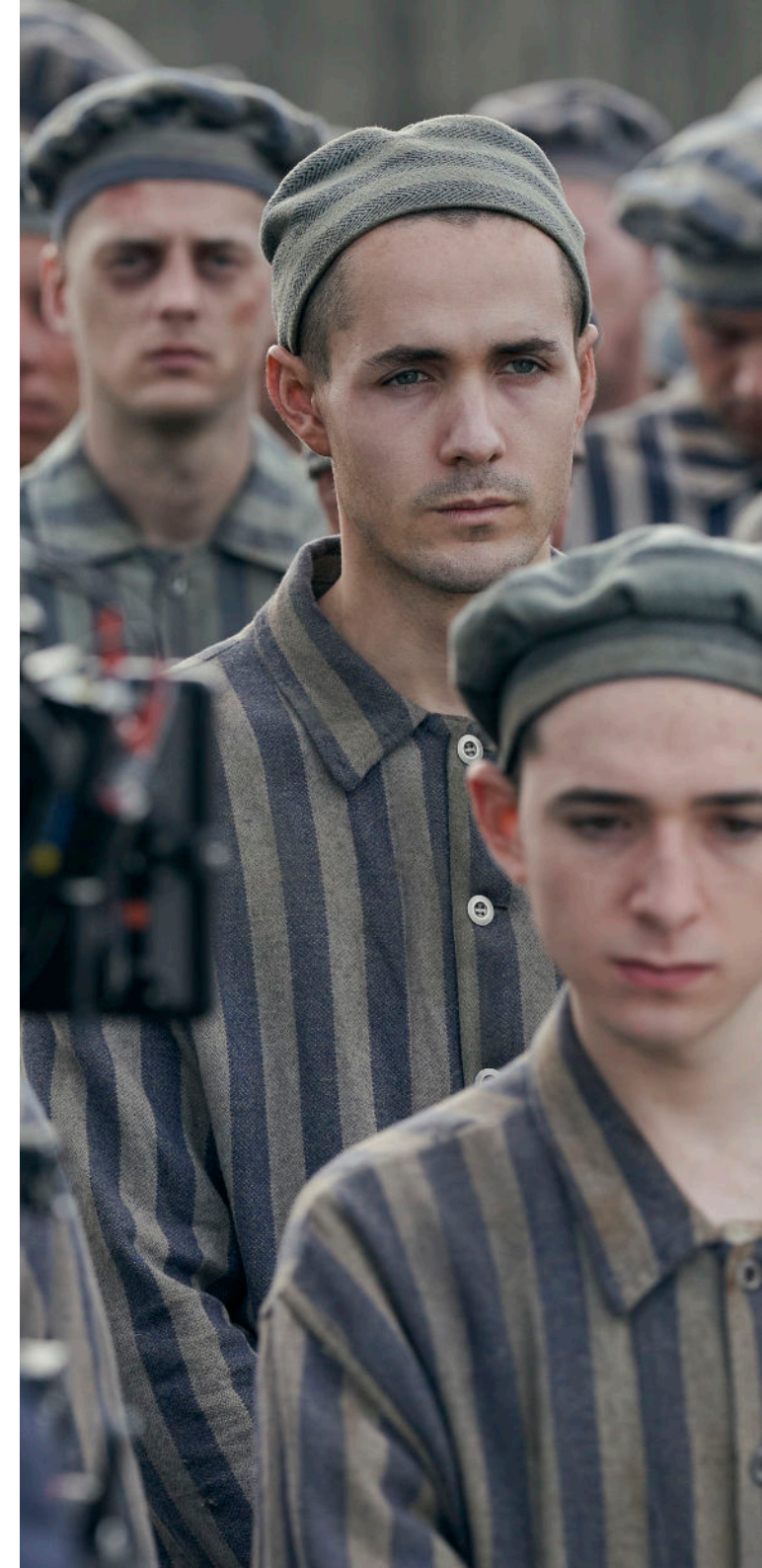
about Lali. This was truly special - she really gave me a sense of his kindness, his humour and his spirit.

Older Lali is played by Harvey Keitel. How do you feel about sharing the role with him?

It's phenomenal! A huge privilege. I grew up with his films. He brings all of Lali's charm, cheekiness and gravitas. There were also 65 cast members from all over Europe; Auschwitz was a place of many nationalities, ethnicities, and religions and having that kaleidoscope in the show gave it an epic scale.

What were the biggest challenges in playing young Lali?

Every aspect of it, in all honesty. I knew it was going to be very difficult not to bring a lot of my own baggage and preconceptions and even inherited trauma from these events. It is an unavoidably sensitive and painful period of history, and trying to bring it to screen felt overwhelming. But Heather gave me some great advice, which was to start by simply understanding Lali when we first meet him. Focusing on this young man from Krompachy, Slovakia, who was working in the fabric section of a department store in Bratislava. A man who was kind, and funny, and charismatic. Who had a love and appreciation for fashion. A man who wanted to fall in love and go to Paris. A family man. This was a helpful and grounding starting point, and acted as a small window into understanding him and what he then had to endure. →



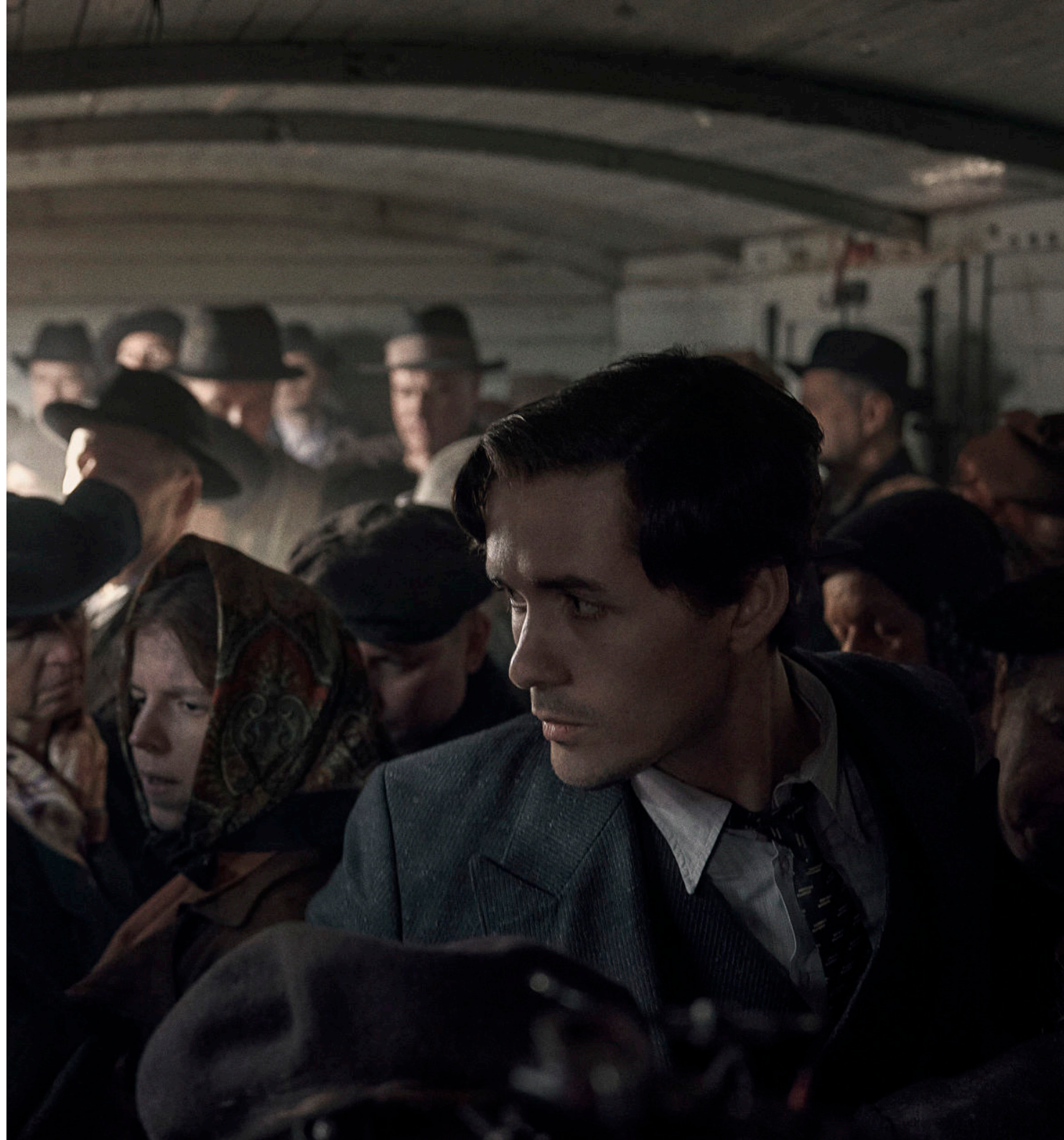
“I tried to focus on Lali as a young man and tried not to bring so much of the trauma that Jews have inherited. It’s a huge challenge because it’s unavoidably a sensitive and painful history.”

How did you work with Tali [Shalom-Ezer, the Director] on bringing Lali to life?

We were lucky in that we had a lot of time before filming to start working together - researching, rehearsing, and plotting the different emotional and physical beats through the whole series. We shared many survivor accounts that felt particularly meaningful and pertinent to Lali’s own experience. We discussed the need for me to undergo a physical change, which involved shaving my head and losing a lot of weight. Shaving my head was strangely one of the more difficult moments, but we were very lucky to have our very caring and sensitive hair and make-up designer Francis Hounsom, overseeing it all. Doing it in a different context would probably feel fairly innocuous, but the association of how and why people were made to look this way made it very poignant.

What was the most memorable moment of the production?

There were many, but I will never forget arriving at the Auschwitz set for the first time. I was driving from unit base where we would get ready every morning, and the camp suddenly loomed into view. The production team did an exceptional job in terms of its scale and detail and authenticity. It was quite alarming seeing the barbed wire fences coming towards me. It will stay with me for a long time.



IN CONVERSATION WITH ANNA PRÓCHNIAK, GITA

What was it about *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* that drew you to the story?

My partner gave the book to me when it was first published and said it would make a great movie or TV series. He wasn't wrong! When I read the script, I knew it wasn't going to be an easy story to tell, but I love playing characters that scare me, which Gita did. I had a gut feeling about the role so I wasn't surprised when I was offered it. But I was beyond happy to get to tell this story.

How did you prepare for the role?

It was the hardest and the most challenging role I've ever done, but also the most rewarding one. I shaved my head and lost weight. I thought that changing my image completely would be very difficult and emotional, but I was ready for it simply because it was what I had to do to tell Gita's story. I was doing it in memory of her. In terms of research, I'd already been to Auschwitz and Majdanek, which is in eastern Poland. There is something about those camps that you cannot describe in words. I'm from Poland, which means the subject of the Holocaust has been present in my life since I was a kid.

In terms of Gita's character specifically, there is one book that has been especially impactful and important for me. *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries and Letters of Ety Hillesum 1941-43*, a Dutch Jewish author who died in Auschwitz. Her diaries are recognised as the most important moral documents of our time and they helped me build Gita's background and work on her inner life. I watched Gita's testimony, which was recorded in 1997 when she was 72 and in which she

talks about her family, the camp and her life with Lali after the war. It was a very powerful experience that helped me bring her to life. I also watched other Holocaust survivor testimonies, which was especially useful in terms of exploring trauma in survivors, which is explored in some of the scenes set in the 60s.

You say it's the hardest role you've ever done – how did Tali [*Shalom-Ezer, the Director*] support you during the shoot?

Tali is extremely passionate about the project. She directed all six episodes, which meant she didn't have a break. She loves to challenge actors and I love being challenged, so it was a perfect match. It confirmed how important it is to be honest with each other on a project like this; to always remind each other to follow your instincts, listen to your intuition and be brave. As an actress, I need someone to encourage me to step out of my comfort zone and Tali did just that. I also created a safe space for myself so that I could sit with my emotions. I meditated every day, I went on long walks, I did yoga. I tried to stay as mindful as possible. It wasn't always easy, but my rituals helped deal with the stress of such a difficult subject matter.

How important do you think it is to continue telling stories about the Holocaust?

Extremely important. The world is so full of evil and hatred and it's getting worse. This is our responsibility to remember, honour and respect personal stories of Holocaust victims and survivors. We must prioritize educating the next generations, remind ourselves what man is capable of and remember that we shouldn't take anything for granted.



IN CONVERSATION WITH JONAS NAY, STEFAN BARETZKI

How did you prepare physically and mentally to play a role as complex as Nazi SS Guard Baretzki?

It wasn't easy because of everything I learned about him. There are even recordings of him at the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials in 1960, during which he was sentenced to life imprisonment. It was very disturbing to hear him try to defend what he did. At certain points I had to stop, I couldn't bear to continue to listen to him anymore.

His life was so different from anything I have experienced: he grew up with a violent father; he fled home as a young man and left his sisters behind; he was put in a position of great power, as an Auschwitz guard, at a very young age. The more I found out, the more I realised it was going to be a hard journey to embody this character.

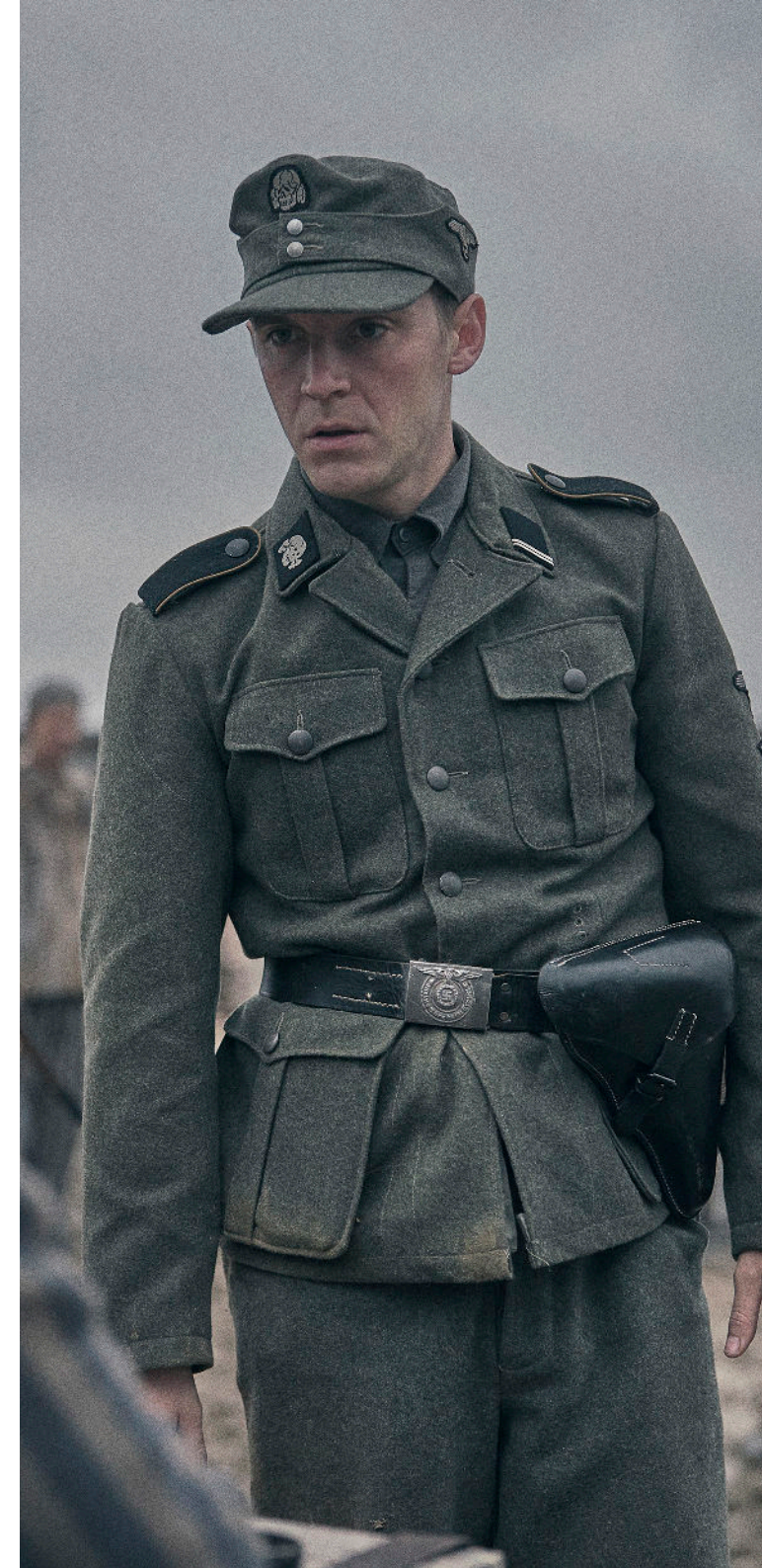
I didn't have to prepare physically – unlike many of the other actors, I didn't have to shave my head – but the mental preparation was heavy. Being German, I'm very well-informed on the Holocaust as it is omnipresent during history lessons at school. I did intense research on Auschwitz, specifically on young SS officers who worked there during that period of time. I talked to Heather Morris on the phone and then again when she came to the set in Bratislava. A lot of what Lali told Heather didn't make it into the original book, so some of that information found its way into my performance.

How did Tali [Shalom-Ezer, the Director] help you work with Jonah [Hauer-King, who plays Lali]?

I'm thankful for the preparation time I had with Tali and Jonah. We ran some intense scenes in a small room and I had to get into Baretzki's really brutal and sadistic relationship with Lali. I loved working with Tali; she's so focussed on performances, in a really artistic way. She didn't make me feel alone because of the character I was playing. I always felt valued. We talked about the fact that we weren't creating a caricature of Baretzki. He's volatile. It's hard to anticipate what he does next. He is always somewhere between brutal, drunk, high on amphetamines, close to a tantrum. He can switch in an instant. Tali explored all these aspects of his character with me so that I could get my head around playing a character that embodies pure evil.

What was the hardest scene to film?

There was one scene in particular that I was afraid of from day one. I was doing a very sadistic thing to Lali. I don't want to spoil anything, but Lali doesn't react as Baretzki expected him to and so Baretzki has a tantrum, grabs a child and covers the child's mouth and nose so he can't breathe. I was afraid of giving the child actor nightmares so I asked if I could meet him beforehand. I turned the whole thing into a game – he also covered my mouth and nose in rehearsal – and hopefully the scene wasn't so overwhelming for him. The first time I walked on set in a Nazi uniform was →



“I loved working with Tali; she’s so focussed on performances, in a really artistic way. She didn’t make me feel alone because of the character I was playing. I always felt valued.”

awful too. There was no escaping the fact that I was a German playing a Nazi who did abhorrent things.

How did you decompress after rehearsing or shooting those scenes?

I went jogging along the river in Bratislava just to get the stress hormones out of my body.

I also brought my music studio with me. I have a second life as a music composer for film and so I got on with that. Sitting in front of a keyboard most evenings was a nice way of exiting into a totally different creative world. Jonah is a musician too, so we talked about music between scenes as a distraction from the weird dynamic our characters had with each other.

Do you think it’s important to tell stories about the Holocaust?

I asked myself that question at the start of the production. Are there enough masterpieces about the Holocaust already? But then I thought of a younger generation who maybe haven’t seen those masterpieces and I realised how important it is to keep telling those stories. ◆



IN CONVERSATION WITH MELANIE LYNSKEY, HEATHER MORRIS

What drew you to the role of Heather Morris in The Tattooist of Auschwitz?

I hadn't read the novel at that point, so it was the quality of the beautifully written scripts. Heather was incorporated into the story through her conversations with Lali, which showed what a beautiful, trusting relationship they developed. She was able to draw stories out of him that nobody had been able to – Tali [Tali Shalom-Ezer, Director] described Heather as being the world's best therapist. I loved the way the scripts explored how we tell our stories: the parts we choose to keep to ourselves; when we are comfortable sharing and opening up about the darkest, most shameful parts of ourselves. I also love the way literal ghosts from the past come to visit Lali in his Melbourne apartment as he's telling his story.

How did you prepare for the role?

I've played a real person before and it's terrifying, but I've never been able to talk to the person beforehand. So meeting Heather was wonderful. She's a life force, so energetic. Before we started the shoot, she sent me a beautiful email pointing out that she's a very different person today than she was 20 years ago, when she embarked on this journey. She didn't have a ton of confidence, she was gentler but, following the success of *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, she had to learn to become a public person. She gave me her blessing to create a character that was some parts me, some parts of her when she was interviewing Lali,

and some parts of her now. Reading the novel also influenced my portrayal of Heather; I understood how spending three years talking to someone multiple times a week means you hear pretty much everything. Wearing the blonde wig helped too – Frances [Hounsom, hair and make-up designer] did a beautiful job of making me look like Heather without it looking as though I was completely in a costume.

How important do you think it is to continue telling stories about the Holocaust?

Massively important. I don't think there can be enough stories. Firstly, we are living in a very scary time in which there are people who deny the Holocaust ever happened. It's insane and disgusting. Secondly, what the prisoners went through in Auschwitz is unimaginable. I felt like I had a pretty solid knowledge of what happened during the Holocaust, but there were things in *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* that were new to me, that shocked me. Tali reminded us a million times that we weren't telling the story of the Holocaust; all you can tell are different survivors' stories, or those of the people who didn't make it / you are never going to get the full picture because the scope of it is horrific.

Why do you think people will be drawn to the show?

It's a reminder of how horrific the Holocaust was, but also an incredible story of a survival and a beautiful love story.





IN CONVERSATION WITH HANS ZIMMER, CO-COMPOSER

What was your initial reaction when you were approached to work on *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*?

The only reaction you can have when confronted with the subject matter is, 'I don't know how to do this. It's too serious. Too complicated. Too deep.' It's a love story set in a nightmare. How can you approach such a story with dignity and truthfulness? I come from a family of immigrants and my mother fled the Nazis in 1938, so I grew up with the stories. I grew up with the fear. As a composer, I had to think how I could show respect. How I could find a new voice. The story is, unfortunately, timeless and relevant. Ultimately, I kept thinking it's a love story, but not a simple one. Never a simple one.

Could you please expand on your personal connection to the story?

I was born in Germany, but my mother was a refugee who escaped the Nazis and fled to England. She later returned to Germany, but never took her German passport back. When I was growing up, I was just a kid amongst other kids. My mother didn't speak about the war, but you could sense her constant fear. I will tell you a story. When I went to the Berlin Film Festival in 1999 to discuss the score for *The Last Days* [a Holocaust documentary produced by the Shoah Foundation], I was on a panel at a press conference with Holocaust survivors and there was an atmosphere I wasn't expecting.

Some of the people I was with had come back to Germany for the first time since they were freed from

Auschwitz and the journalists were asking why we were bringing up these stories. Why they still had to hear them and so on. The people who were filming the press conference weren't really interested. Then it was my turn to answer questions and I said, 'You know, I have a bit of a strange relationship with my country. My mother was a Jewish refugee.'

As soon as I said I have a Jewish background, the cameras all moved in my direction and started to film me. I had a major anxiety attack because I'd just outed my family. I was sweating profusely.

Renée Firestone, a Hungarian-Jew who was freed from Auschwitz at the age of 14, noticed what was going on and took my hand. I don't know how I got through the press conference. I phoned my Mum immediately afterwards and told her I'd done something terrible. 'I told them who we are.' There was a long silence before she finally said, 'I'm really proud of you.' I think it's the only time she ever said it. So, you know, I have this complicated relationship with my country.

When you are sent a script like *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* – which is partially about storytelling itself – what is the first thing you do? How do you immerse yourself in the narrative?

That's a really interesting question because, as a teenager growing up in the milieu of a refugee mentality, I read every bit of history I could find on the Holocaust. Later, I got involved with Steven





Spielberg's USC Shoah Foundation. So, in a funny way, I knew too much. I had to figure out a way of making this not about the vast subject matter that is the Holocaust, but about these two people, Lali and Gita. I had to think about why we feel the need to tell these stories time and again. Each story is different. Each story is, at its core, about surviving inhumanity. Each story is a warning. So we feel compelled to revisit these stories and to figure out new ways of describing the unimaginable.

The great, late French author and Holocaust survivor Charlotte Delbo said that when they go to Auschwitz, 'they expected the worst - not the unthinkable.' Which is why we have a duty to go behind this curtain of unimaginable horror.

When you were exploring ideas for the score, did you alight on any particular composers or musical styles?

When you enter the land of Auschwitz, you are entering a world that you cannot imagine - therefore we have to make music in a way that we cannot imagine music to be. The German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno said in 1949, 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.' I think that can be extended to music. So it felt really important to write music that was on the one hand deeply human and the other deeply disturbing, cold, of another planet. A planet that we never want to visit.

Can you tell us about the themes and motifs in the score and what they represent in the context

of the series?

It's difficult to say that *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* is just a love story, but of course it is a love story. But in a context where love is a revolutionary act, an act of defiance. There is an overarching theme of horror, isolation, loneliness, survival. The two main instruments are piano and violin; the latter can sound beautiful, but it can very quickly sound scary, alienating, cold and inhuman.

I worked on the score with [co-composer] Kara Talve, with whom I'd previously worked on *Prehistoric Planet*. She is a phenomenal composer: everything you hear that's good about the music is her; everything that's questionable is me. I am seriously in awe of her. I've done a lot of movies, so I knew that we couldn't get →

sentimental – Ridley Scott once said to me that ‘sentimentality is unearned emotion’ and I always try to remember that.

Kara understood immediately. She was the perfect person to work with because she has a true grasp of the history of this story. She’s a classically-trained pianist and her grandmother’s piano features heavily in the score. It’s hugely symbolic: her grandmother fled to Paris just before the Nazis came to round everyone up and she managed to find shelter at her piano teacher’s house. Throughout the war, the piano teacher pretended Kara’s grandmother was her own daughter. After the war, the piano teacher died and Kara’s grandmother emigrated to America, taking the teacher’s piano with her. So when you hear the piano in *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, you are hearing an instrument that has a sonic connection to the 1940s. I thought that was incredibly moving. It almost mimics the story of old Lali connecting to his past.

Lali and Gita’s story is told on an epic scale. How does the music evolve over the six episodes?

By trying not to make it epic. You can let the images be epic. You can try to imagine six million people being killed. But you can only access the story by the characters. You have to make the music personal and not generalise.

What kind of journey do you want to take the viewers on via these personal moments?

I think my job as composer is to give the viewer a little nudge to say, ‘You can feel something. You can have an emotional response.’ Just open the door for them and help them enter the story. No more, no less. It worries me when the music starts to tell you what to feel. The characters should be allowed to make autonomous decisions. One of the incredible cruelties of the Nazis was to take away people’s autonomy. You

also have to be careful that the music doesn’t interfere with – or even destroy – a good performance.

How did you collaborate with director Tali Shalom-Ezer?

Tali took on an impossible task and has created a beautiful piece of work. A true, honest, committed piece of work. Kara and I talked to Tali about trying to create something timeless, something that reminds you of the past, but that resonates now.

But ultimately, the conversation between a director and a composer is about the story on the screen – it doesn’t matter how many words you try to use. There is a constant fear that what you are composing is a disaster and that as soon as the director walks into the room, it will sound mono...

How did working on *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* compare to other projects?

It’s nearly impossible to answer that question. All I can say is that with this project we’re talking about an extraordinary moment in human history. At the same time, it’s not a history lesson, it’s an emotional lesson.

Why is it important to keep telling stories such as this?

Every time we look over our shoulder, there’s another barbaric inhumanity being committed in the name of some ideology. I think our job as filmmakers, storytellers, composers, artists is to remind humanity that love is the only cure to this evil. What really got me on this project was Kara’s family history. She brought something absolutely extraordinary and magical to a story that is so hideous.

I’m 66 so some of my school teachers were Nazis. The war wasn’t mentioned. My family didn’t talk about its history, but at the same time my Mum would pick a fight with anyone in a uniform. I guess I grew up bolshy.

“Every time we look over our shoulder, there’s another barbaric inhumanity being committed in the name of some ideology. I think our job as filmmakers, storytellers, composers, artists is to remind humanity that love is the only cure to this evil.”

One of the really interesting things about growing up in Germany is that there came a point where my generation started asking questions. ‘Daddy, what did you do in the war?’ The whole country had to have reckoning with their children. It’s essential we keep asking questions because we must never let this happen again. We must never forget.

Are you consciously aware of how your background influences your music?

It’s not a question I have ever asked myself and yet, as soon as you said it, I realised the answer. Yes. Absolutely. It’s always there. I’m always asking myself how I can contribute to making the world a better place. I’ve been thinking about how Germany was a nation of great philosophers, thinkers and artists and overnight it turned into this barbaric, murderous culture. We can’t say it will never happen again.

We have to be vigilant. Which is why I thought it was important to make *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*. Composers are storytellers. We help tell the story of humanity. ◆

IN CONVERSATION WITH KARA TALVE, CO-COMPOSER



What was your initial reaction when you were approached to work with Hans Zimmer on The Tattooist of Auschwitz?

I was immensely honoured, but then it quickly dawned on me that it would be a huge challenge. It's very important to do this story justice with the music. You don't always feel connected to the projects on which you work, but I felt incredibly connected to The Tattooist of Auschwitz.

Do you have a personal connection to the story?

I certainly have a personal connection to the Holocaust. My grandmother, Mathilde Mashabac, was about nine when the Nazis invaded France. Some Nazi SS officers turned up at her family apartment and knocked on the front door. They had a list. Mathilde's whole family was on the list except for her. It was, as you can imagine, a very rare situation. The officers asked who Mathilde was and her mother pushed her out of the way, saying it was none of their business. The whole family was arrested and Mathilde was left in the apartment. She escaped through the fire escape and ran to her piano teacher's house. Andre, the teacher, took her in and kept her for the duration of the war. She was working for the French resistance and hid many other Jews too. My grandma always used to say that music saved her life.

You already have a historical, familial link to the Holocaust, but did you immerse yourself in research for this project?

Before Hans and I even wrote a note of music, we read as many books about the Holocaust as we could. We read survivor testimonies. We went to Auschwitz and had a guided tour. It was very educational and emotional walking through the camp, especially as both of us had family members who were there. Of course you can never fully understand the horrors that went on there, but we had to gain a sense of what it must have been like. We also visited the set in Bratislava.

Were there any specific composers or musical styles that influenced your work on the score?

Before starting the scoring process, Hans, Russell [Emanuel, Score Producer] and I had a conversation about how the score should sound. Hans' overarching message was that we must not make it sound sentimental – there is a big difference between emotional and sentimental. The score had to be abstract and subtle.

Can you discuss the main themes and motifs in the score?

The main theme is love, but also hope and survival. There are themes for different characters; the theme

“My grandmother, Mathilde Mashabac, was about nine when the Nazis invaded France. Some Nazi SS officers turned up at her family apartment and knocked on the front door. They had a list.”

for Baretzki, as a twisted Nazi SS officer, had to reflect his troubled, dark character. There's also a spiritual theme which first appears when Gita feels a connection with God again. It's the first time you hear a violin motif. At one point, we had a group of four cellos and a bass sitting in a semi-circle and creating this emotional, dark sound.

And of course you played your grandmother Mathilde's piano.

It was always a dream of mine to use her piano in this context, to tell the story of the Holocaust. We worked with an amazing sound designer, Robert Dudzic, who asked us to record some really low piano clusters and even some percussive sounds, which he then put into a software instrument. So the piano isn't always recognisable. →

“Hans’ overarching message was that we must not make it sound sentimental – there is a big difference between emotional and sentimental. The score had to be abstract and subtle.”

Was this an unusual job in other respects too?

Yes; there are portraits of prisoners that are seen throughout the series. We had to create a very specific sound that kind of emulated a train – because the train system was a such a big aspect of the Final Solution. It’s a very odd sound.

How did you collaborate with the director?

Tali [Shalom-Ezer, Director] and Claire [Mundell, Executive Producer] gave us really constructive feedback on every single cue because of how sensitive the subject matter is. It was important not to overscore or put a cue in for no reason. They always wanted to make sure that the characters were leading the story and the music was subtly supporting them. It was a wonderful collaboration.

What journey do you hope to take viewers on with your music?

I hope viewers feel the dark and emotional moments of this story because it’s imperative we keep telling these stories. I also hope they feel that love and humanity under the darkest possible conditions can thrive. ◆



IN CONVERSATION WITH NAOMI GRYN, HISTORICAL AND JEWISH CULTURAL CONSULTANT



Can you explain what your background is as well as your role on the show?

I'm quite steeped in Holocaust background. My late father, who was a rabbi, was in Auschwitz as a 13-year-old boy and I've done several projects following his story. I worked with Historian Martin Gilbert on a series of Holocaust books and I've dipped in and out of Holocaust projects over the years.

What was your starting point when it came to approaching historical research *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*?

I started this journey working with Executive Producer Claire Mundell, Story Producer Ruth Underwood and Lead Writer Jacquelin Perske. We had calls across the globe from our lockdown bedrooms in Glasgow, London and Melbourne, often late at night or early in the morning. After that, I did research as questions arose. If it was a historical question, I started trying to narrow in on online sources to see what kind of information was out there. I've been in and out of the Wiener Library in London, which has a terrific collection of Holocaust literature. The most central source was of course the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum – so much is known about what happened in that one camp.

I returned often to certain key books. *The Auschwitz Chronicles* by Danuta Czech was incredibly useful; she

was Deputy Director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, had worked at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, and she wrote a daily account of what happened, from the transports' different places of origin to how many uniforms were issued. It's so thick that every time I got it out of the library, they brought me a beanbag to rest it on. I also relied heavily on *People in Auschwitz* by Hermann Langbein, a former prisoner in Auschwitz who possibly worked in the same office as Gita. After the war, he interviewed the different defendants at the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials, including Stefan Baretzki. I also used classic historical sources, but there's nothing like a first-person perspective. Since *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* is based on Lali's own recall, I felt that memoir as research was the most informative.

What were the inherent challenges of verifying Lali's experience of Auschwitz?

Lali shared his story with Heather when he was an old man, and those potentially flawed memories sometimes aren't backed up with historical evidence. There are several points in the drama when Lali is talking to Heather and we simultaneously see it as a dramatized event through his point of view. Then once Lali is alone, we repeat the same scene with a dramatised re-telling of what Lali knows actually happened to him but is unable or unwilling to share with Heather. For example, Lali remembers getting

“Lali shared his story with Heather when he was an old man, and those potentially flawed memories sometimes aren't backed up with historical evidence.”

penicillin for Gita when she had an infected arm, penicillin was first used in quantity when supplies of the drug were sent with troops making the D-day landings in June 1944, but it would not have been available in the infirmary in Auschwitz. We instead used medication that was more historically accurate.

How did you scrutinize the scripts for historical accuracy?

I tried to stress test every single thing that looked like a fact, whether it be a place name or a mode of transport or food. For example, I did deep research into a scene in a brothel for the scene with Baretzki in episode two; I contacted Robert Sommer, who wrote a book about brothels in Nazi camps who was terrifically helpful. I trawled through survivor testimonies; the USC Shoah Foundation in America has more than 50,000 testimonies that can be →



accessed online and there's an interview with Lali on the website of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

How did you approach the numbers with which prisoners were tattooed when they arrived at Auschwitz?

Deciding which tattoo numbers to give the cast raised so many issues. We knew which numbers to give Lali and Gita, but there was a more existential question: which numbers do you use for fictional characters? The numbers of real people or made-up numbers? We talked about this many, many times. We finally decided to make up the numbers, but to make them

appropriate according to when a prisoner arrived at the camp. We added a 'T' within the number so that we couldn't be using the numbers of real-life people in order to protect their dignity.

What other challenges did you encounter when trying to balance historical authenticity with the needs of a drama?

I felt like it was my job to be the mosquito that buzzes around everyone's ears whenever there was a conflict over the needs of the drama versus historical accuracy. Historical accuracy is very important to me because I often come across chilling websites created

by Holocaust deniers and they often use discrepancies to argue that the Holocaust never happened.

How important is a drama like *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* to increase awareness of the Holocaust?

Holocaust survivors are dying out so first-hand witnesses will no longer be around to tell people what happened. We will have to turn to different modes of storytelling to keep this history in our consciousness. Drama is a natural way to begin to process this dark chapter in human history; to help make the indescribable a little more intelligible for the rising generation. ◆

IN CONVERSATION WITH JACQUELIN PERSKE, LEAD WRITER AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCER



What were the biggest challenges in adapting Heather Morris' novel?

When I read the book, I was totally engaged with the extraordinariness of a love story taking place somewhere like Auschwitz. The fact that it was a real-life story made it even more appealing.

What were the key narrative challenges?

I thought it would be hard and upsetting for people to watch six hours of TV set solely in a concentration camp. I met Heather Morris and she talked about the process of writing *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*: when she met Lali Sokolov, she had never written anything before; she went to his flat two or three times a week to listen to his story; they became great friends; they formed such a solid bond that he shared stories with her he'd never shared with anyone before. It was so fascinating to hear her talk about their friendship that I thought it would be interesting to fit it into the script. We asked Heather if she would mind being a character and she agreed, which was wonderful. The narrative structure of the TV series allows us to deal with history and memory. By framing it as his story of the concentration camp, it's clear that Lali's isn't the definitive history of Auschwitz.

How closely did you work with Heather Morris?

I spent a week with her, picking her brain for eight hours a day. After that, she was always available via

email and we sent her scripts at various stages. She was very generous in the sense that she gave us her blessing to make the TV series our own.

What kind of historical research did you do?

I read lots of books. I checked and cross-checked facts with our Historical and Jewish Cultural consultant Naomi Gryn and our team of researchers. But for me it's all about character. It's about finding a way into Lali or Gita's story and building it from there.

How did you balance the darkness of Auschwitz with moments of hope in the script?

When human beings are at their darkest point, humour for example, is quite often used as a coping mechanism. Any glimmer of light becomes magnified.

How did you feel about the casting of the show?

It's just fantastic! It's always a delight for a writer; the imaginary character disappears from your head and is replaced with a real person. Melanie Lynskey playing Heather was my dream casting. And Harvey Keitel as old Lali is absolutely perfect.

What was it like going on set for the first time and watching the characters say their lines?

I'd been working on the script for three or four years, through the pandemic – it was a long development process. During prep when I saw Jonah [Hauer-King]

“It was as though Lali and Gita had just walked into the room. I burst into tears. They had lived in my mind for so long and suddenly they were made real.”

and Anna [Próchniak] in character, in costume and with their heads shaved, it was as though Lali and Gita had just walked into the room. I burst into tears. They had lived in my mind for so long and suddenly they were made real.

Why should people watch *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*?

It's about one of the most epic and horrendous events in European history and it's important that we don't ever let it happen again. It's also a beautiful love story about two people who find each other and survive in the darkest of places.

MAIN CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES



LALI IN HIS YOUNGER YEARS draws on his natural ingenuity and sharp wits, his resourcefulness and his carefully calculated courage, to survive the most horrendous concentration camp of modern times. His survival instinct is married with kindness, though it disappoints him that he is not as altruistic as others. He helps as many as he can but is haunted by the certain knowledge, he can't help everyone. As the series develops, so does his realisation of the injustice of his own survival over others – where no individual deserves it more than any other.



GITA is very different from Lali. She doesn't cling to or battle with any sense of self-worth, won't talk about who she was before, and won't even reveal her full name, because she recognises its irrelevance. She'll never be that person again. But she knows that she can give love, and that's what sustains her and the people she meets in Auschwitz – her willingness not just to give, but to go on believing in love. She is a pragmatist to Lali's optimist – but crucially, through loving him, buys into his hope and supports his wild schemes, often coming up with some of her own. This is the foundation of a relationship that will stand the test of time.



STEFAN BARETZKI is a Nazi SS guard, a weak young man who has suffered a difficult childhood at the hands of a violent father and is now in the dangerous position of wielding disproportionate power. He both torments and idolises Lali; seeking his guidance whilst exacting acts of cruelty; enabling Lali's love affair with Gita one moment and threatening their lives the next. Lali treads a fine line with this mixed-up murderer. Baretzki was tried in Frankfurt in 1960 and sentenced to life imprisonment. He killed himself in prison in 1988.



MODERN-DAY LALI When Heather meets Lali and he tells her his story, he is struggling under the weight of his grief for his wife, Gita, who has recently passed away. Whilst telling his story, it soon becomes clear that he still carries a huge burden of shame: for having survived where others didn't, and for all the things he did to survive. What Heather discovers as she gets to know him is the darker fear he also carries – that he crossed an unthinkable line in accepting the duty of a tattooist, and that he's no better than the SS officers who brutalized him and his fellow prisoners. But in spite of the darkness of his story, we get to know a man of extraordinary positivity. A man who is haunted but not broken by the horrors he's experienced; who is buoyed by his triumph over them. A man who in his very essence instils hope and the belief that anything is possible. It's this that draws him to Heather because she shares the same essence.



HEATHER is a forthright woman, whose pragmatism about the darkness of the world does daily battle with her wonder at it. When we, and Lali, meet her she is in her early 50s and is working at a hospital; her children have now grown and flown the nest. She is dependable, big-hearted, and loyal but has a childlike sense of fun. She enjoys the finer things in life, as does Lali, and neither of them will apologise for it.

OTHER RECURRING CHARACTERS

AARON is also Slovakian. Lali meets him before being transported to Auschwitz. He is only 18, and Lali plays the protective big brother to him. They are blockmates in Birkenau.

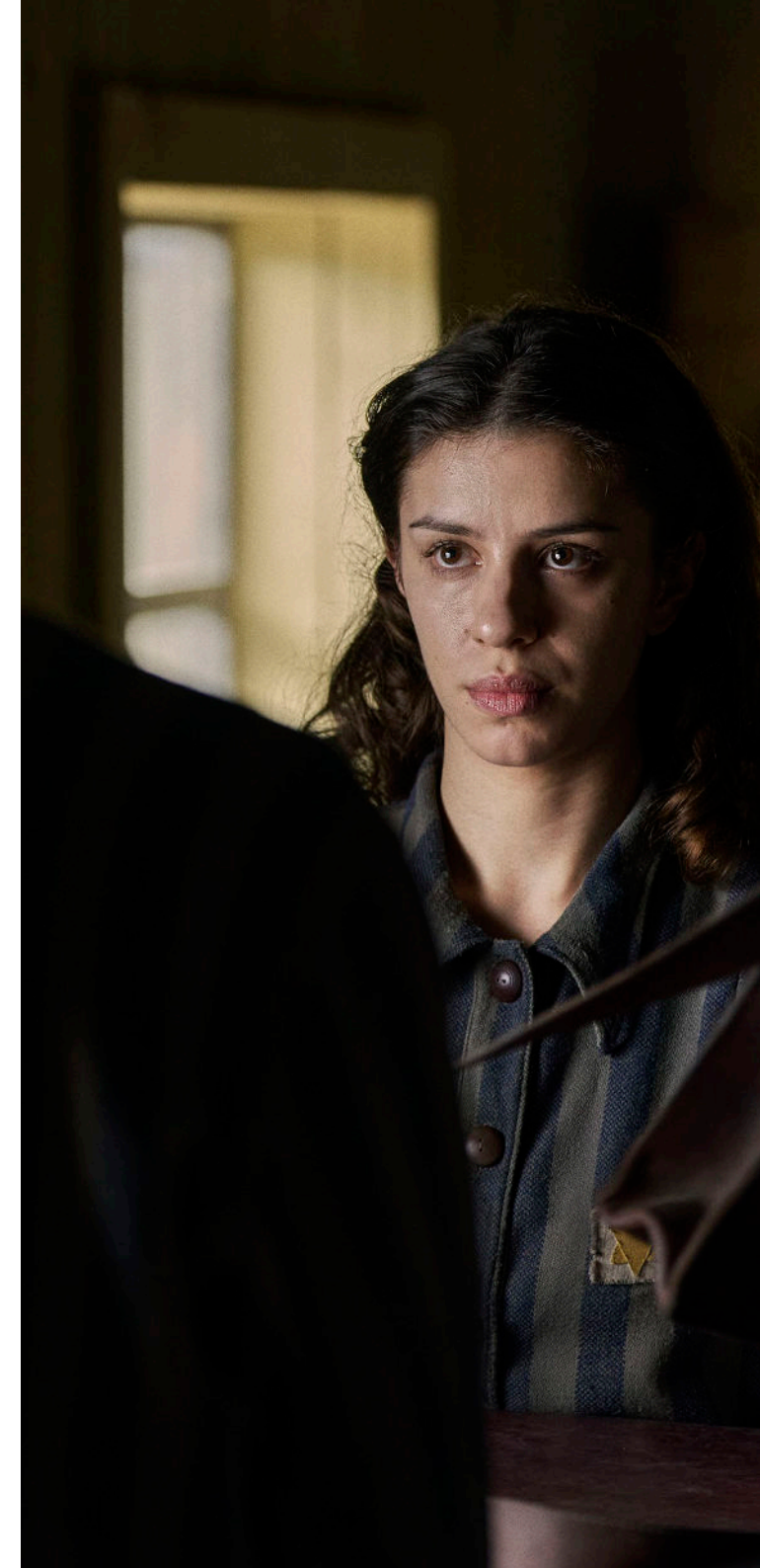
TOMAS Tomas loses hope when he learns his pregnant wife has been murdered – and with nothing left to lose, tries to escape, knowing it will be a suicidal mission.

MARTIN is a more forgiving former blockmate of Lali's – he has a live-and-let live attitude.

HANNA and **IVANA** are Gita's closest friends in the camp, both are Slovakian, both arrived in the camp at the same time as her, and the three stick together, living in the same block throughout. They are Gita's confidantes and remain loyal to her even though at times they disagree with the risks she takes for Lali, and the danger Lali puts Gita in. They both work in the Clothing Warehouse and help Gita smuggle items out for the black market.

CILKA is a frightened young Slovakian girl, who is only 16 when she arrives at the camp. She is beautiful and not yet aware of what it will afford her, nor what it will cost her. When she meets Gita in the administration block, she is hardened to her fate. Her fierce will to survive is the equal of Lali's, but fortune will not favour her in the same way it does him.

NADYA is part of a huge contingent of Romany prisoners who arrive in the camp in 1943 and are moved into the block where Lali has been living. Although he treats them with disdain when they first arrive, Lali and Nadya soon form a very close friendship – she reminds him of his sister.



PRODUCTION



With special thanks to our Slovakian crew mates Spectral s.r.o, the Roma community of Zlaté Klasy who performed as extras to comprise the Gypsy camp that Lali stayed in, and Solas Mind, who provided 1:1 counselling appointments for our cast and crew during filming.

The shoot lasted
84 days

The production involved over
5000 supporting artists (based on overall catering figures across the shoot)

The VFX were overseen by Alan Church (VFX Producer) and Simon Giles (VFX Supervisor) using teams from Union VFX and Untold Studios

300 crew were employed, with an average of
191 on set each day.

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SHOW CREDITS

The series will be available from May 2nd on Sky Atlantic and streaming service NOW in the UK and Ireland, Italy, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, Peacock in the US and Stan in Australia.

Directed by Tali Shalom-Ezer, *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* is executive produced by Claire Mundell through her company Synchronicity Films and is produced in association with Sky Studios and All3Media International. The series is a coproduction for Sky and Peacock. Jacquelin Perske is Executive Producer and lead writer for *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* alongside episode writers Evan Placey (Associate Producer) and Gabbie Asher. Serena Thompson is Executive Producer for Sky Studios.

NBCUniversal Global TV Distribution and All3Media International are jointly handling international sales of the series. Stan, Australia's leading local streamer is taking the Original rights to the series in their territory, with SkyShowtime taking rights for Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Sweden.

