

MY FÜHRER: THE TRULY TRUEST TRUTH ABOUT ADOLF HITLER

A film by Dani Levy

89 minutes, color, 35mm, 2007



FIRST RUN FEATURES

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

December 1944: the “total war” is as good as totally lost. Goebbels, however, isn’t willing to be so easily defeated. On New Year’s Day, the Führer is supposed to re-ignite the public’s fighting spirit with an aggressive speech. The only problem is that the Führer can’t do it. Sick and depressive, he is avoiding the public. The only person who can now help is his former acting teacher, Adolf Grünbaum... a Jew.

Goebbels spirits him and his family out of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp and sets them up in the Reich Chancellery. Time is running out - the Führer has only five days to return to top form...

ABOUT THE FILM

For decades, there has been nothing humorous about Adolf Hitler’s reign in Germany. Because of “MY Führer”, this is about to change. Director Dani Levy presents his subjective views with a fictitious and provocatively bold interpretation of history. After his successful German-Jewish comedy “Go For Zucker!”, which has won numerous prizes and awards, Levy again proves his ability to carefully handle delicate themes: In “MY Führer”, he’s able to dissect the horror of National Socialism with a subversive humor.

Heading the cast of his comedy are the multi-talented Helge Schneider, who shines in his first character role as Adolf Hitler and the award-winning actor Ulrich Mühe (The Lives of Others) who plays Professor Adolf Grünbaum. With analytical severity and a refreshing lack of respect, Levy directly penetrates to the root of the Hitler phenomena: He exposes the Nazi rulers to ridicule, thereby dislodging them from the pedestal of historically factual documentation – with the awareness that fantasy often comes closest to the truth.

SYNOPSIS

It is December 25th, 1944. Berlin lies in ruins. The total war appears to be totally lost. Propaganda Minister Dr. Joseph Goebbels (Sylvester Groth) knows that the country needs an uplift and he already has an idea. The Führer (Helge Schneider) shall hold a flamingly aggressive New Year’s speech while standing in front of a cardboard background scene depicting an undamaged Berlin.

This will be broadcast on the Weekly Show throughout the entire country and shall succeed in once again mobilizing the masses for the war. The weak point: Adolf Hitler is, at present, only a shadow of his former “Greatness”. Demoralized and depressive, he hides in his office and avoids any contact with the public. The only man who can still help is the Jewish actor Adolf Grünbaum (Ulrich Mühe), who had given Hitler acting lessons at the beginning of his political career.

Bormann: “Would you be so kind as to let us in on your secret plan, Mr. Reichminister? Don’t we have the best actors and directors in the world, who also happen to be Aryan?! Liebeneiner, Harlan, Rühmann, Minetti? Why him of all people?”

Goebbels: “We need somebody who can inflame our Führer’s greatest obsession, which is his hate. Why should I then send somebody to him that he loves?”

So the astonished Grünbaum is pulled out of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp and brought to the Reich Chancellery. Before Goebbels receives him and divulges to him his plan, Grünbaum is first sent to take a shower and given a ham and cheese sandwich. Grünbaum takes the job, but under the one condition that his wife Elsa (Adriana Altaras) and his children Adam, Judith, Jakob and Benny are removed from the concentration camp and allowed to live with him under one roof. Goebbels accepts.

Grünbaum to his wife: “Hitler is down. I saw him; he’s broken. I don’t have a plan yet, but let me play around with the situation.”

At the beginning of their “collaboration”, Grünbaum shows up with a jogging suit for Hitler and prescribes him relaxation exercises. During the day Grünbaum works with the Führer, while in the evening he’s forced to justify his job to his family, who has a difficult time accepting that he’s not using this opportunity to kill the Führer. But Grünbaum, with his Jewish sense of humor, sees the undertaking as a game: “I don’t help him, I just tutor him.”

There’s already an incident on the first day, when the Führer intensely provokes his teacher: “Why don’t you defend yourself? Why doesn’t the Jew defend himself?” Grünbaum loses his control and slugs Hitler, who collapses unconscious on the ground. Shocked, Grünbaum believes that his fate is sealed. But when Hitler regains consciousness, Grünbaum’s violent act is void of consequence.

What they both don’t know: Their actions are being observed by Goebbels, Speer (Stefan Kurt), Himmler (Ulrich Noethen) and Bormann (Udo Kroschwald) through a one-way mirror on the wall. One in particular is especially worried about what this Jew does to the Führer: Albert Speer. He can hardly bear watching the proceedings.

Meanwhile, Grünbaum begins applying psychotherapy, in the course of which Hitler is taken back to his difficult childhood. A favorable opportunity arises as the Führer closes his eyes: Grünbaum quietly grabs an iron paperweight and cocks his arm back to strike Hitler dead. At that moment however, Hitler’s traumatic memories bring him to tears and for the first time Grünbaum sees the pitiful human behind the inhuman monster, and so he lowers the murder weapon. During the course of their working together, this seesaw effect in the balance of power between the “great” Führer and the “inconsequential” Jewish actor again and again repeats itself, with the subsequent emotional roller-coaster-ride leaving its marks in Grünbaum’s face.

Goebbels: “When you arrived from Sachsenhausen, you looked better.”

Grünbaum: “Yes, yes, the camp life... “

Goebbels: “Is better than its reputation.”

Grünbaum senses his growing importance and demands a higher price – the release of all the prisoners in Sachsenhausen. Goebbels is beside himself with rage at this attempted extortion and sends Grünbaum and his family back to the camp. But when Hitler refuses a change of teachers

and demands “his” Jew back, Goebbels is forced to relent. He brings Grünbaum back to the Reich Chancellery and pretends to yield to his conditions. Meanwhile, Goebbels and Himmler plan an assassination attempt against the weak Führer: A bomb shall be placed under the stage platform and Grünbaum shall be denounced as the assassin.

Now the “sessions” are beginning to escalate in their intensity. Grünbaum prompts Hitler to crawl on all fours over the floor and to bark like a dog. No humiliation is too great for Hitler, who increasingly expresses his innermost feelings and speaks more and more about the indignities he had suffered at the hands of his father. Outside, his followers appear increasingly worried about the course of events, but Goebbels ensures them that the Führer isn’t making a fool out of himself; he is instead actually being educated in the most modern rules of the actor’s art.

Himmler to Goebbels: “You have the situation under control, Mr. Reichsminister? I mean also the situation regarding the Führer’s emotions? And the emotions of the Jews? You know the power of emotions”.

Hitler though is enthralled: “Everlasting youth is once again mine. The Jew’s doing fine!”

Albert Speer, who’s been eavesdropping on Goebbels but has only understood one part of the conversation, warns Hitler about Grünbaum’s alleged assassination plot as the Führer seeks relaxation in a bubble bath. Hitler at first is unwilling to believe it but still confronts Grünbaum that same night. He allows himself to be quickly convinced of the absurdity of the accusation. His mood swiftly changes and he’s soon moaning his sorrows at the foot of the Grünbaum’s bed: “I’m so alone...the new year...the international situation...the loss of so many lives...” Like a child who’s had a bad dream, Hitler sneaks under the Grünbaums’ bedcovers, where Elsa Grünbaum first sings him a Jewish lullaby and then later, when he falls asleep, presses a pillow firmly down on his face.

It’s only in the nick of time that her husband stops her from suffocating him: “You would be doing exactly what he does...you’d be killing a defenseless human being”, rings out Grünbaum’s sharp accusation.

The following morning heralds the momentous day of Hitler’s speech. During the last preparations for the broadcast, half of Hitler’s mustache is accidentally shaved off, which so totally unnerves him that he loses his voice. Now Grünbaum, hidden under the stage with a microphone, shall deliver the fiery speech to the masses while the Führer lip syncs, frantically gestures and furiously mimics the called-for movements on the platform above. After some time, however, Grünbaum begins deviating from the text of the written and practiced speech and presents an utterly different interpretation of Germany’s situation, which, appearing to come from Hitler’s lips, leaves the assembled masses visibly astonished...

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The Führer is immortal, at least in our thoughts. The trauma of that time period has given rise to wild speculations and the continuing world-wide interest in our history is proven by such successful films as *THE DOWNFALL*, *SOPHIE SCHOLL: THE FINAL DAYS*, *THE BOAT*, etc. When Spielberg filmed *SCHINDLER'S LIST*, I was one of the "orthodox" critics who stood up against "making a cinematic image of the Holocaust." That film can recreate or feature something of that nature, the representation - even though authentic - of that misery was for me (being a Jew) a delusional and grandiose lie. The discussion over Benigni's *LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL* marked the beginning of a new age. May the Holocaust, through abstract reenactment intended to create a new perspective, be used to offer a tragi-comical portrayal of a father-son relationship? In my belief, most definitely! Benigni never attempted to claim that his rendering of that time and its horror was realistic. Benigni had ventured to an entirely different level. With his poetic fairytale set in a concentration camp, he was able to illustrate that childlike fantasy is indestructible.

I attempted to write like Karl May, who fabricated "his" world of the Indians and "his" world of the Arabs. The story and circumstances related in *MY FÜHRER* are fictitious, in terms of the existing factual knowledge of that time. Why? Because for me, the fantasy, the fable that isn't dependent on fact, is perhaps closer to the truth. Or to express that differently: I don't want to give these cynical and emotionally devastated people the honor of a realistic image. The "truth" that I want to tell is a different one. It's the story of a human drama, the moral tragedy of that time. In what type of historical environment did these leaders and followers of National Socialism grow up? With what type of ethical values? Which minds thought out these crimes, the injustices and the destruction of human life and how was it possible to bring millions of people to bear such a burden?

I came across Alice Miller, one of the best-known and popular psychologists of our time. In her book, *FOR YOUR OWN GOOD: HIDDEN CRUELTY IN CHILD REARING AND THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE*, is a chapter about Hitler's childhood and the "black pedagogy" of that time. Her precisely researched descriptions concerning the connections between pain suffered in his childhood and his later-arising feelings of revenge, which he used the system to fulfill, told me far more than dozens of depictions of the events themselves. The "analytic" trip that Hitler undertakes with his "therapist" Grünbaum is based then on factual material.

For quite some time I had been wondering why nobody had so far made a movie, whether comedy or drama, about this connection. I wanted to use comedy as the vehicle. If you'll permit me, I'd like to say that comedy is more subversive than tragedy. It can offer much that would not be possible to express with an authentically projected seriousness. It can depict circumstances in their raw and uncolored states, thereby revealing their actual wretchedness.

It's a fact that Hitler had an acting teacher before and during his takeover. His name was Paul Devrient (his autobiography: *MY PUPIL ADOLF HITLER*). Devrient became the Jew Grünbaum. That he's ordered out of the concentration camp in 1944 on his "last mission" is simply one rebellious step further into the fantasy. It's a known fact that Hitler wrestled with bouts of depression. The megalomaniac language, the master race worldview and Goebbel's

function in the overall propaganda – isn't all this rather inviting to the concept of a tragi-comedy? Of course I am far from being the first to entertain these ideas. THE GREAT DICTATOR or TO BE OR NOT TO BE come immediately to mind. I would like to use the means available to me to merge with this tradition.

PRODUCTION NOTES

In relation to other elaborate movies that have historical backdrops, MY FÜHRER was a quickly paced production, having taken about a year from the concept to the finished film. It was just after Dani Levy had written the first draft of the screenplay in July of 2005 that Stefan Arndt from X Filme had already begun the project's financing.

It was a very conscious decision to make a relatively "small historical" film. "We definitely didn't want to make it a huge 10 or 15 million Euro project", Dani Levy affirms. "I wanted that the film would be quickly financed and produced so that this rebellious and passionate feeling that I had while writing it would survive. I naively imagined that the irreverency of Jewish humor could also be appreciable in the production style." Stefan Arndt adds: "We started shooting MY FÜHRER after barely seven weeks of preparation, which is really breakneck speed when you consider that we had to conceive and build every location, sew uniforms and figure out how to depict a destroyed Berlin and how to turn Helge Schneider into an Adolf Hitler."

MY FÜHRER primarily plays out in Speer's gigantic building, the Reich Chancellery. The huge, cavernous rooms posed logistical problems for the director and the art department. How can you find such rooms when you don't want to build them in a studio? There were precisely two buildings in Berlin and its outlying areas that had the necessary features and that could function together: The former Russian barracks in Kramnitz and the county court in Charlottenburg. Both worked out. The exterior shots created completely different problems: For the Reich Chancellery's courtyard, the inner courtyard of the present Ministry of Finance (which was then the Air Ministry) was used.

Finance Minister Peer Steinbrück gave permission to shoot in his Ministry building and to make the old "landlord" Göring again perceptible for several hours with the flying of several Nazi flags. For the huge finale in the Berlin Lustgarten, which included the largest group of extras that Dani Levy had so far directed, the plaza in front of the Berlin cathedral was blocked off and transformed back to the era of National Socialism. "This was a shoot that you really couldn't keep secret", Stefan Arndt recalls. "It made the front pages of newspapers throughout Europe and I was pretty shocked to show up on the set in the morning, just as it was getting light out, to see photographers already sitting everywhere in the trees. When you have Hitler riding in an open car through a huge crowd screaming "Heil – " at such a historical location, you can't avoid that kind of attention."

Dani Levy decided early on not to meticulously follow the historical reality. He instead wanted to provide his fantasy with fine roots from the reality. "The nice thing about the job was being able to encourage the different departments – the art department, make-up and costume – to begin with a historical reconstruction and then let their imaginations take over." Indeed, production designer Christian Eisele particularly enjoyed that unusual sense of creative freedom: "Historical projects are always for me an extremely wonderful job. In this case the exciting attraction was envisioning the most intimate elements in the Führer's life – his bedroom, his bathroom...with the production design we could really add to the comedy aspect and give our fantasy free rein."

As opposed to his fancifully created private rooms, Hitler's office was reconstructed with a keen eye on historical precision, although instead of real and expensive marble, painted styrofoam was used. A true-to-scale model of the New Reich Chancellery was built out of burnished styrofoam, stone by stone. "This eerie, gargantuan landscape of ruins, with 300 meters of the Voss street destroyed on one side and the Reich Chancellery on the other, could not have been reproduced in any studio in the world", says Dani Levy. "We therefore decided to return to the old film tradition MY FUEHRER: THE TRULY TRUEST TRUTH ABOUT ADOLF HITLER— press booklet of model building, which is more my style than sitting week after week in front of a computer screen. In the world of model building I felt like a kid."

For the model & visual effects supervisor Frank Schlegel, the decision between model building and computer generation was a simple one: "Unfortunately in the last few years, the decision to go with the digital variation was often made too fast. Models were considered to be too old-fashioned and too expensive. I'm of the opinion however, that at least when it comes to big screen featurefilms, the best solution is a combination of model and digital, because with models, their surfaces and how they interact with light in front of a movie camera is often more convincing. Since Peter Jackson's excessive use of models in LORD OF THE RINGS, I've seen that more and more people in this country are again open to the idea of working with models. So fortunately, Dani Levy and his co-workers at X Filme agreed to my suggestion to recreate the Reich Chancellery and bombed-out Berlin with the help of a model using special effects techniques and then to digitally combine this model with actual, filmed elements. My colleagues and I finally built a model scene with a 17 meter-long Reich Chancellery and a 10-meter row of bombed-out houses. It gives the film a dimension that would have been impossible to capture in this quality by purely digital means with the available budget."

As with the art department, the costume department had to as well exaggerate the historical facts in a comical way. To Dani Levy's absolute favorite costumes belong the white jacket, exactly like the one Hitler actually owned, which boasted an invented black cape as an accessory and the little SS uniform for Blondi.

The core of the film, so to say its heart, is formed by an adventurous and innovative cast. "It was my absolutely first intuition to cast Helge Schneider as Hitler. I have no idea how that came to me", admits Dani Levy. "But the idea gnawed at me until I mustered up the courage and just called him. We did some rehearsals and I immediately loved Helge's way of playing, of trying out, of seeking. Our universes couldn't be further apart, but in essence we are very close." For the role of Adolf Grünbaum, the busy Ulrich Mühe was able to be won over. "Uli had this nice mixture of melancholy, calmness and cunning, which I always wanted Grünbaum to have", Levy confirms. It was always clear to us that the warmth of the film would depend on this character." Also for the composer Niki Reiser, who for the first time in his career was able to work with a big orchestra, "with drums beating and trumpets blaring", the approach to his work changed during the course of the job. "While at the beginning I was more oriented to the works of Richard Wagner or to Nino Rota's comedy film scores, aspiring to some kind of opulent Wagner parody, my interest turned increasingly more towards an almost minimalist, driving music that reflected the tension between Grünbaum and the Führer – and Grünbaum's ever-present conflict over whether to immediately kill the Führer, or to somehow eventually extricate himself from his own predicament. So the music was continually refined until it gradually found its final form

during the editing phase – thanks to the film’s dynamics, many pieces emerged virtually on their own.”

DANI LEVY INTERVIEWED: A KALEIDOSCOPE

First idea

Ideas never actually strike me like thunderbolts. They grow over the years somewhere in my system. Hitler and the Nazis have been haunting some part of me for a long time.

As a comedy

The moral engagement with the past, the academically “educational” movies of the last decades, also left their impressions on me. Maybe it was simply a desire to blur this clear line between good and evil, which seems to be always drawn for good measure. In a moralistic sense, it’s rare that something new is told and I had this itch to be a backseat driver in there for a long time.

The screenplay

Every author likes to newly define the border between fantasy and reality. This is easy in our profession; it’s an inherent part of our art. I love to fabricate and think that distorting hard facts in a historical reconstruction is a quite legitimate strategy. The writing of the screenplay was like an act of release for me. It literally flew out of me. I had, strangely enough, no scruples about combining the truth with untruth and to create fantasy that was based on historical fact. By my standards I wrote the screenplay very fast; it was about a half year after the first draft that we had already started shooting. I was afraid that the qualms and doubts that I definitely had would catch up with me if I waited too long. After the first draft I spoke with my mother, who had first-hand experience of National Socialism as a Jew in Berlin. I needed to know whether or not she had any substantial moral issues with my intentions. All that she offered was the crisp reply: “But I don’t want to hear any whimpering when the critics get a hold of you!”

Staged reality

In Germany, the cinematic reconstruction of history is primarily done with the ambition of making it authentic and believable, as a replication of the learned reality. But this ambition, that a film can tell the truth – authentically reproduced and supposedly reflecting the historical facts – I’m quite critical of. This is seen at its worst in cinematic portrayals of the Holocaust. On the contrary, I find it almost pompous and egotistical to claim to succeed in portraying the Holocaust realistically. When I saw *SCHINDLER’S LIST* I was convinced you couldn’t do it. I know this sounds dogmatic, but I think we can’t visualize such events. Film is a form of art that requires some type of alienation, an additional level of reality, which enables an approach to such an actually indescribable theme. For *MY FÜHRER*, I had the feeling that I had to invent a surreal truth that was still relevant. Fairytales often tell truths about our reality and psyche.

Door opener

I believe that in a positive sense, the most important catalyst was *LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL* from Roberto Benigni. It was a film that moved into the forbidden, that allowed itself the unallowed. When I saw the movie, at first I was utterly confused – I found it overwhelming that such a fictitious and poetic fable was set in a concentration camp. This tradition of surrealistic reality has existed in Italy for centuries, especially where it concerns fascism. *SEVEN BEAUTIES* from Lina Wertmüller, for example, or Pasolini. In the DDR, Jurek Becker’s *JACOB THE LIAR* had a very unique, almost fairytale-like narrative style. Well, there were many inspirations.

Comedy

I love comedy. In a laugh lies the potential for insight. Maybe a comedy is more educational than a tragedy; I don't know. With humor you can possibly come closer to a political or psychological truth than with serious and faithful depiction. A comedy can overdraw, it can sharpen, and it can show contradictions and inconsistencies. The wicked fun that I had making this movie came from having the freedom to dismantle the characters as I desired. We all know what those gentlemen Hitler, Goebbels and Himmler were up to. You cannot transform the effect that they had, or their actions, with irony. It's too terrible for that. But you can degrade them in the psychological characterization, tear them down from the pedestal of monstrosity. I have the hope that a comedy offers the possibility of dissecting these figures to explore their souls, thereby learning something about the psychological state of that time.

Paul Devrient and Alice Miller

Fantasy contains components of reality; it's a creative handling of reality. So, it was two realistic and historical facts that inspired the story of MY FÜHRER. Some years ago the book MY PUPIL: ADOLF HITLER by Paul Devrient was republished. Paul Devrient was indeed Adolf Hitler's acting teacher. When I first heard about it, it was clear to me that this was material for a comedy. The idea that someone had come along to help Adolf Hitler with his speaking, breathing and presentation skills inspired my fantasy. It was actually just a small fictional step to turn Devrient into the Jew Grünbaum and to set the clock to December of 1944. In traditionally Jewish style, the acting teacher gradually becomes the psychiatrist. The lessons in class turn into hours of therapy. This is where Alice Miller, my second important source, comes into play. In her book, FOR YOUR OWN GOOD: HIDDEN CRUELTY IN CHILD REARING AND THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE, there's a chapter about Hitler's childhood. A Swedish theater group had created a play out of it, which my friend Holger Franke staged in Stuttgart. When I began work on the screenplay I once again pulled out Alice Miller's book. Her expressed theory, quite honestly, blew me away. She describes the direct connection between early childhood experiences and the resulting adult obsessions. Hitler had a split personality, was manic-depressive, sexually repressed and emotionally crippled. Germany was being led by a psychological invalid, a completely insane individual. I'm sure that the "Black Pedagogy" of that time had a direct influence on National Socialism.

Hitler's "difficult childhood"

Of course explaining Hitler's "difficult" childhood, or even excusing him for it, is not the film's aim. It is almost trivial, but relevant as well. Today we of course know that it is the crippled soul that is the primary reason for most crime. The interesting thing then, is the theory that the educational methods and penal system of that time were an important basis for the policies put into effect by the National Socialists. Alice Miller, who by the way relied heavily on the Hitler biography researched by Joachim Fest, had for me provided the fundamental ground material on which to base the comedy. I don't want to take a single-minded stand behind her theories, but in any case I definitely find them worth telling.

Humor

You can tell pretty mean jokes about people that are kindly characterized and you can tell even worse jokes about bad people. In the end, this always comes down to being a question of good taste; humor is as well an element of culture and very personal. When I shoot a comedy, I have

to remain aware of the fact that I will please some people and anger others, that some would prefer the humor to be more drastic, wild and crude, while for others the bearable dosage has already been exceeded. Especially when it comes to the Führer, the potential conflict is unavoidable. I can only be true to my own conscience and taste, and to those of the people that I trust. Humor is allowed to hurt; it may challenge the audience. To laugh about pain can also have a healing effect.

Jewish humor

In absolutely blatant style, Jewish humor is utterly unforgiving when it comes to well-liked and popular individuals, but at the same time it can appear almost conciliatory towards their enemies. I grew up in a very sarcastic, ironic and self-mocking family. There were no taboos and everybody made sharp, scathing jokes – and not least of all about ourselves. This is for sure imprinted on my character. I have to say that oftentimes I find Jewish humor not at all funny; instead I find it rather sad. There is a detectable melancholy and desperation in them. It's exactly this mixture that attracts me. The horror dissolves in laughter; the comical is actually tragic. I wrestled for a long time with the question of whether or not I should make Grünbaum's character a comedy figure, eventually deciding against it. I had the feeling that if I portrayed Grünbaum with the biting irony seen in the characters in GO FOR ZUCKER!, it could then backfire. I mean that humor requires a line of fire; you have to decide at whom to shoot.

Helge Schneider

It was an intuitive decision to cast Helge Schneider as Adolf Hitler; perhaps I should call it inspiration. The fact is however, when I was writing I was already imagining him as Hitler and became enthralled with that imagination without even knowing him. I then obtained his telephone number and called him. In our first conversation it was quickly obvious that he was particularly attracted to the fact that it wasn't going to be a Helge Schneider film, or even a Helge Schneider character. Despite the fact that we are completely different, I had the feeling that I was talking with a soulmate. We met and did some practice takes and I saw an actor that slid into the Führer's character with absolutely no effort at all. In the course of preparations the idea came to transform Helge's outward appearance in a physiognomic sense to reflect Hitler's character. He knew exactly what it meant to sit in the make-up department for three hours every morning, but I believe he used the time to get some sleep. Helge was immediately convinced about the idea of the make-up "mask"; he felt that it would also protect him. During the shoot I was astonished at his clarity and professionalism. He approached the character of Hitler like a musician playing a score, which he now played on the Hitler piano. He never attempted to infuse the character with morals; he just acted the part as realistically as possible and still very personally. This strange mixture of realistic portrayal and anarchistic humor – I think he really succeeded in creating something quite unique.

Ulrich Mühe

Uli Mühe is a very quiet, gentle and wonderful comedian. He had always moved me with his beautiful eyes. Then a film fell into my hands in which he plays a double role, GOEBBELS UND GEDULDIG. There he plays both Joseph Goebbels and his Jewish look-alike. As opposed to Hitler and Goebbels, I had – as I said – a much hazier idea of the Adolf Grünbaum figure. He is our identification figure, but as the "good guy", he's not loud and flashy and at first sight doesn't even appear comical. This means that I needed an actor who was able to move the

audience but nevertheless still be convincing as the hero of a comedy. I needed somebody who could do situation comedy without forgetting that he's a little Jew in the midst of the National Socialist's center of power whose life is continually in danger. With Uli I was able to explore the entire range of humor. From subtle humor to slapstick-like play, he remains very much in control of his method. The most difficult element of his character is the mixture of strength and weakness. Grünbaum could never forget that he was dealing with Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels and not some amusing lightweights. This might sound trivial, but it was actually one of his most difficult tasks. On the other hand, Grünbaum also had to project the intelligence, the cunning and last but not least the courage that I would expect as a viewer. I therefore needed an actor who had the capability of withdrawing himself but who as well dared to play out the weakness of his character. The moral task facing Grünbaum is the question of whether or not a Jew should let himself be given the function of Hitler's teacher, and if yes, what obligations would then result. From today's viewpoint it's easy to make a judgement.

German-Jewish homeland

I had a cast that I could only dream of. I again became aware of how many great comedians are in Germany. Actors with a dry, bizarre, self-mocking humor. It was pure pleasure to see this ensemble working together. For me, Sylvester Groth as Goebbels was a great comic discovery. Somehow, intelligent comedy lies dormant in hundreds of actors and also outside the comedy culture. The cliché that the Germans have no humor is for me utterly untrue. I feel completely at home here with my humor, as did my ancestors.

CONVERSATION WITH STEFAN ARNDT

What attracted you to the idea of producing a comedy about Adolf Hitler?

Actually, I once swore to myself that I would never make a movie that needed Nazi uniforms. I always wanted to depict the protagonists and antagonists of my movies as being rather complex, as opposed to drawing on the “eternally evil” two-dimensional Nazi figures. I never wanted to approach this theme without having a really good idea. A number of years ago Dani Levy had the idea that at some point a comedy should be made out of it. When he gave me the first draft of the MY FÜHRER screenplay to read in the middle of 2005, I had to throw my resolution away – this was exactly the right way to portray the Nazi’s insanity!

In a certain way there’s a similarity between MY FÜHRER and GOOD BYE LENIN!, which also portrays Germans coping with coming to terms with the past in a comical fashion.

As with the DDR theme, we have to ask very strong questions when it comes to the Hitler theme, like how amusing is it allowed to be, or how different, or whether or not we can better handle the theme with the devices of comedy. Even though the humor in GOOD BYE LENIN! was very important to us, no less important was the theme of family and how far one is willing to go for the sake of one’s mother. I find it better to follow up with laughter only after one has cried or has been really shocked. MY FÜHRER became the kind of comedy that I love the most: Laughing when you’ve just cried – and crying after you’ve just laughed.

Did you want to use comedy as a means of stating an opposing view from dramas that had also dealt with Hitler, war and fascism?

I see our film more as a counter view to certain TV documentaries that currently block out the well-founded documentaries from all channels, whether they’re public or private. I find it terrible that the following generations, who will no longer know people who actually lived through that era, will seriously believe that this presented mixture of artificial fog, fateful sounding narration and superficially reconstructed scenery supported by a little bit of archived material is how it actually was. In comparison to other feature-films, it is very important to us at MY FÜHRER that the story doesn’t come topped with the headline “this is how it really was”. In MY FÜHRER, Dani Levy chose the five days prior to New Year’s Day of 1945, in which everything that takes place is what was chosen to be told, without any obligation to say, “This is how it really was.”

In Germany there’s the widespread view that one may not make jokes about such serious themes. Did you have to overcome any resistance to this production?

When it’s about dealing with this theme, which is a particularly relevant theme here in Germany, you quickly realize that you yourself – so to say me – have some pretty healthy reservations. But at one point when they are overcome, then making the jump to the next level and thinking about a different form of realization, one approaching the theme with subversive humor and off-color jokes, is no longer such a big deal. If your question about any encountered resistance referred to

the project's financing, this time really everybody that we contacted immediately agreed. At this point, my great thanks to WDR, arte, BR, the Film Foundation NRW, MBB, FFA, Hessen-Invest-Film and everybody that contributed to the project!

How important was GO FOR ZUCKER! for the rediscovery of Jewish humor in German cinema?

Concerning GO FOR ZUCKER!, I was totally surprised with the initial reservations that we had to deal with. Even though the screenplay was very good and the project not at all expensive, Dani Levy and his X Filme producer Manuela Stehr nevertheless had huge problems securing the financing. That awoke a curiosity in me about where this fear of Jewish humor, which is a very German humor and something that we urgently need to make even better movies, actually comes from.

And to what degree did the success of GO FOR ZUCKER! pave the way for a comedy about Hitler?

That success surely played a huge role, simply because it gives other people the assurance and the courage to go along with the next project. GO FOR ZUCKER! brought Jewish day-to-day life back into current German cinema and proved to the co-financiers that this can be successful. Just as failure on the one hand repels, success on the other hand attracts and definitely played a huge role in how smoothly the process of creating MY FÜHRER ran. For me it was particularly decisive that it was Dani Levy who was getting this comedy off the ground. In GO FOR ZUCKER! he showed just how intelligent, sensitive and entertaining a director he is. A Hitler parody from his pen – this filled me with mischievous anticipation from the very beginning.

How important was it for you to depict possible causes of fascism in your movie?

The film touches on every aspect of the complex question; how and why could it have gone so far in Germany; why during this time in the whole of Europe, dictatorships arose without a strong enough resistance from the people to prevent them. The psychologist Alice Miller offers an additional, interesting aspect in her parent-psychological interpretation (among others, in her book FOR YOUR OWN GOOD: HIDDEN CRUELTY IN CHILD REARING AND THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE) that goes beyond attempts to explain it by citing economical and political factors, which simply needs to reach a wider audience. In her explanations, Miller, by the way, often refers to work done by Hitler biographers and historians such as Joachim Fest, for example. Anyway, I'm very curious to see how people will react to experiencing a Hitler that is toppled from his pedestal, who suddenly gets in touch with his childhood traumas. This will surely make for some spirited discussion and debate over the existing taboos.

In terms of research and the screenplay, how strictly did you stick to the facts?

Naturally we did the historical research. When the screenplay was finished we took the additional step of asking a German History professor to check it for mistakes. I actually expected that he would toss it back in our faces because of its comical boldness, but he merely pointed out that certain terms we had used as a gag, such as "Lieutenant Colonel Captain Storm Unit Leader"

and “Captain Storm Unit Leader Senior Lieutenant” didn’t even exist. But it wasn’t about an exact reconstruction of the facts. Dani Levy expressed it quite well in the concept he submitted to the co-financiers: “I tried to write like Karl May, who invented “his own” world of the Indians and “his own” world of the Arabs. The situations and the story described in MY FÜHRER are, based on existing knowledge of that time, fictitious.” This gave us a lot of freedom on the film.

And in the realization? In the actual shoot?

When it comes to making movies it’s all about this seduction, the creating of illusions. In the big scene at the Lustgarten we cut in archival shots of jubilant people and if you look closely you can see that these pictures were first shot in the summertime, with everybody wearing shorts. The contrast between these grainy black-and-white shots and the color images is enough to create the illusion of unity. I find it fascinating how much you can accomplish with cinematic tools, such as changing reality, speeding up real time, escalating dimensions, rebelliously altering the content, maintaining tension and simply entertaining. Having achieved this, both for and with Dani Levy, was a lot of fun for me.

INTERVIEW WITH HELGE SCHNEIDER

How did you react when you first received the offer to play Adolf Hitler?

As far as I'm concerned, it's more attractive to play a bad guy. A murderer has always more to offer than some official clerk-type who gives his kids English lessons at home, goes out for dinner and sails around in a little boat. Also, the bigger the criminal, the greater the attraction to play his part.

Do you feel it's allowed to use comedy to tell a story about Hitler and National Socialism?

Laughing is more revealing and more revolutionary than embarrassed silence or inhibited concealment. The comedy is the only form of expression with which you can present such a story because it actually mirrors reality far more than a "realistic" form of depiction that never actually measures up to the original. The long interval of time that's passed makes it easier for an artist to risk focusing on the Third Reich. The inability to laugh about National Socialism has a lot to do with the fact that the people's sympathy makes them serious. They are often unsure because they don't know quite how far you're able to go. When you're dealing with humor there is this collective force that can backfire. Many people in a crowd might laugh, but many would not out of the fear of doing something wrong. Extreme seriousness can also bring on laughter; there are people who are so humorless, so embittered and so nasty that you are compelled to laugh about them because they're so grotesque, as with Adolf Hitler for example.

What was more important to your approach, the real Hitler in the Weekly Show newsreels, or the various depictions from Charlie Chaplain to Bruno Ganz?

If anything, then the Weekly Show, but actually not even that. I was able to get sound recordings that are generally inaccessible, which gives one the opportunity to experience Hitler in his most private possible atmosphere. There are very few of these recordings, but they told me far more about this person than the huge bulk of archived public show material where he's on a gigantic stage, ranting and raving as he did. The ambassador from Denmark or Sweden and Hitler have a conversation, which means that the one remains silent while Hitler starts bragging, throwing around numbers regarding his tank strength and soldiers, just like a child in a sandbox who says "but that's mine," "but I built it" or "that's me." The way he presents himself there, at the same time also being insecure and erratic, has clearly revealed much of this person to me.

INTERVIEW WITH ULRICH MÜHE

You play a character in MY FÜHRER who clings to hope in an actually hopeless time.

With Grünbaum, it's about the survival of humanity. In the moment where everything around is falling horribly apart and everybody, in a futile attempt to deny reality, is assuring each other that they're the greatest, this person represents a bit of humanity. I'm the only character in MY FÜHRER who's not allowed to bust loose in a comical fashion. It was very important for Dani

Levy that I, being on the side of the victims, held it together, that my character maintained the presence of mind to keep the situation under the Nazis always sharply in view.

Were you able to learn anything about yourself by playing this role?

I am always interested in the project as a whole, beyond my part. Because of that, I'm able to play a character such as Mengele for Costa-Gavras, a figure that really makes me feel sick. I know the setting in which this character exists and that it must be played well within that setting. For me the main thing is to make the character genuine and believable, whether this takes place in a horror scenario for Costa-Gavras, or in the humanity of an Adolf Grünbaum for Dani Levy. These two distinctly different figures are similar only in the authenticity with which they must be played. Whoever criticizes me for attempting to equalize these two characters with their diametrically opposed attitudes, in any way, doesn't know very much yet.

Are the techniques and skills that you as Grünbaum teach Hitler also ones that you use in your work?

There were indeed memories from acting school and also experiences with colleagues that came up. When you're used to playing in the theater every night you don't need to bother with the exercises, but when you haven't worked for some time you naturally have to keep your vocal cords and respiratory tract in good shape.

THE ACTORS

Helge Schneider as Adolf Hitler

Helge Schneider was born in 1955 in Mühlheim an der Ruhr, where he still lives today. Having passed a test for the exceptionally gifted, he was allowed to begin a study of the piano at the Duisburger Conservatorium at the tender age of 16, which he later is continued in favor of pursuing his other varied interests. Starting in 1977, he toured as a musician and singer in various formations through the republic; he accompanied silent movies on the piano, was hired for radio and TV recordings, wrote film scores, composed his first music for his own bands and received the Mühlheim Promotional Award For Art and Science. It was in 1984 that he began working evening shows as a musician and comedian. His first album came out in 1989 and was titled "Seine Größten Erfolge." Five more albums followed in the course of only three years. With "Guten Tach" in 1992, he finally achieved his breakthrough: Helge Schneider became one of Germany's best-known artists, even today performing on numerous concert tours in various incarnations – sometimes solo, with big-band accompaniment, with the rock band "The Firefuckers" or as a trio with Jazz legends Jimmy Woode and Pete York. In December of 2006 he again went on tour, his show titled "I Brake Together!" He as well authored eight books, including the thriller *Zieh Dich Aus, du Alte Hippe* (1994) and the travel fiction *Globus Dei – Vom Nordpol bis Patagonien* (2005). In 2003 he won acclaim for his first theater piece, "Mendy – Das Wusical," which he staged at Bochum's Schauspielhaus. Since his debut in a leading role as the title hero in "Johnny Flash" (1986) from Werner Nekes, Helge Schneider has increasingly applied himself to the medium of film. In 1987 he made his directing debut with the short film "Stangenfieber" and in 1993 he directed and acted in his own very first feature-film "Texas – Doc Snyder halt die Welt in Atem." One year later, "00 Schneider – The Search for Nihil Baxter" followed, then in 1997 came "Praxis Dr. Hasenbein". He also lent his voice to characters in such animated films as "Felidae" (1994), "The Little Bastard" (1997) and "Käpt'n Blaubär – Der Film" (1999). Additionally, in 2004, "Jazzclub – der Frühe Vogel Fängt den Wurm" hit the cinemas, again with Helge Schneider simultaneously working as author, leading actor, composer and director.

Ulrich Mühe as Professor Adolf Grünbaum

Ulrich Mühe, born in 1953 in Grimma, Saxony, studied acting at the "Hans Otto" Leipziger School of Theater after which he landed an engagement in Chemnitz. In 1992 Heiner Müller secured him as a guest in his production of "Macbeth" at Berlin's Volksbühne and one year later, Mühe moved over to the Deutsche Theater in Berlin where, because of his talent for adaptability, he soon advanced to become the star of the ensemble. After the altering of Germany's political climate, diverse engagements found him performing on various stages, including the Vienna Burgtheater as well as in Hamburg and Salzburg. During his stage career he was brilliant in classical pieces from Goethe, Grillparzer and Lessing as well as in Sarah Kane dramas and popular comedies from Carl Sternheim, Oscar Wilde and Yasmina Reza. In January of 2004, his own Heiner-Müller production "Der Auftrag" celebrated its premier at the Berliner Festspiele. In addition, Mühe can be seen in various roles in over 50 feature-film and TV projects. His screen breakthrough came in 1985 when he played the role of Friedrich Hölderlin in Herrmann Zschoche's film biography "Hälfte des Lebens". He became known in the international arena

through his work on Bernhard Wicki's successful later work "Spider's Web": For his characterization of the careerist Theodor Lohse, Mühe was honored with the Bavarian Film Prize. Since then he's appeared as the chief publisher in Helmut Dietl's con-man satire "Schtonk!" (1991), as the tyrannical farmer in Hans W. Geißendörfer's archaic drama "Snowland" (2004) as well as the murderous concentration camp doctor Mengele in Constantin Costa-Gavras' film version of Ralf Hochhut's play "Amen – Der Stellvertreter" (2002). He stood three times in front of the camera for Michael Haneke: In "Benny's Video" (1991), in "The Castle" (1997) and, on the side of his wife Susanne Lothar, in "Funny Games" (1997). Since 1997, he's been particularly visible on TV as the forensic doctor Dr. Kolmar in the crime series "Der Letzte Zeuge" - a character that has earned him the German TV Prize, among others. His most recent success was his performance in the featurefilm "The Lives of Others" (2005): For his characterization of the Stasi spy Gerd Wiesler, Ulrich Mühe was honored with European Film award as best Leading Actor, the Bavarian Film Prize, the German Film Prize as well as the Bernhard Wicki Film Prize for Best Leading Actor.

Sylvester Groth as Dr. Joseph Goebbels

Sylvester Groth was born in Sachsen-Anhalt in 1958. He completed his acting studies at the State Academy of Drama in Berlin (later the Ernst Busch Academy of Drama) and since that point has performed on the most important stages in the German speaking countries, including the Berliner Ensemble, the Munich Residenztheater, the Deutsche Theater in Berlin, the Vienna Burgtheater and the Berliner Schaubühne. During that time he worked with such renowned directors as Peter Zadek, Klaus-Michael Grüber and Robert Wilson. Additionally, he delivered stellar performances at the Schauspielhaus Zurich in the title role of Shakespeare's "King Richard II" as well as in Oscar Wilde's comedy "Bunbury". Parallel to his theater career, Sylvester Groth as well stood before the camera in diverse feature-films. It was as early as 1982 when he received recognition in the DDR for his leading role in Frank Beyer's film adaptation of the novel "Held for Questioning". Since then he has appeared in numerous films, including Joseph Vilsmaier's "Stalingrad" (1992) and Ottokar Runze's "The Volcano" – as well as playing the role of the amorous poet Clemens Bretano in Dagmar Knöpfel's "Requiem for a Romantic Woman" (1998). Furthermore, particularly in the last several years, Groth continued acting in outstanding TV productions. A few examples would be Dominik Graf's "Reise nach Weimar" (1996), Max Färberböck's "Jenseits" (2001), Kaspar Heidelberg's "A Light in Dark Places" and "Lulu" (2005), from Uwe Janson. For his characterization of a cold and calculating Stasi agent in Hermine Huntgeburth's "Romeo", he was honored with the Special Award at the Baden-Baden TV Film Festival as well as the Adolf-Grimme-Prize in 2002.

Dani Levy (Screenplay & Director)

Dani Levy was born in Basel in 1957 and has lived in Berlin since 1980. He performed on stage in Basel (1977 – 79) and in Berlin (1980 – 83) before he made his debut as a director with SAME TO YOU (1986) for which he soon afterwards received the Best Film Award at the Vevey Comedy Festival. He was honored with additional awards for his 1988 film ROBBY KALLE PAUL (Audience Award at the 1989 Max-Ophüls Festival) and for I WAS ON MARS (FIPRESCI Award for Best Film in San Sebastian), which he had finished in 1991. His short film OHNE MICH (1993) earned him the Best Director Award from Hypobank at the Munich Film

Festival. It was in the next year that Dani Levy joined up with Stefan Arndt, Wolfgang Becker and Tom Tykwer to found the production company X Filme Creative Pool. *STILLE NACHT*, which was X Filme's very first project, ran in the International Competition at the Berlin Film Festival. In 1997, Levy directed the thriller *MESCHUGGE*, which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival and won both the Bavarian Film Prize and the prize for Best Cinematography in 1999. That same year, Levy shot *THE SECRET* in Iceland and Munich, the first 360° film for the "Autostadt" (Automotive theme city) of Wolfsburg. In the spring of 2001, Levy shot his first video clip. The clip, "Adriano – Letzte Warnung", was for the band Brothers Keepers, which is a collective of 14 Afro-German artists. In the next year, the family drama *I'M THE FATHER* followed. For a short period in the summer of 2004 Dani Levy returned to the theater, staging "Freie Sicht aufs Mittelmeer" for the Theater Basel, which premiered in September of 2004 and recorded for television in 2005. For his turbulent comedy *GO FOR ZUCKER!*, Dani Levy was the recipient of numerous awards, including the 2005 German Film Prize in the categories Best Screenplay, Best Director and Best Film, as well as the Ernst-Lubitsch-Prize.

Stefan Arndt (Producer)

Stefan Arndt was born in 1961 in Munich. Together with Tom Tykwer, Dani Levy and Wolfgang Becker, he is a founder and partner of the creative association X Filme Creative Pool, as well as co-founder and member of the executive board of the film distributor X Verleih. In his capacity as producer he was responsible for, among others, Dani Levy's *STILLE NACHT*, *MESCHUGGE* and *I'M THE FATHER*, Wolfgang Becker's *LIFE IS ALL YOU GET* and *GOOD BYE LENIN!*, Sebastian Schipper's *GIGANTICS*, Tom Tykwer's *WINTER SLEEPERS*, *RUN, LOLA, RUN*, *THE WARRIOR AND THE EMPRESS* and *HEAVEN*, Achim von Borries' *LOVE IN THOUGHTS*, Mennan Yapo's *SOUNDLESS*, Oskar Roehler's *AGNES AND HIS BROTHERS* as well as Andreas Dresen's *SUMMER IN BERLIN*. His present projects include, besides Dani Levy's *MY FÜHRER*, Maria Schrader's debut film *LOVE LIFE*, which was adapted from Zeruya Shalev's best-selling book of the same title, the first X-Animation film *THE THREE ROBBERS*, adapted from Toni Ungerer's children's book as well as the international co-production *DSCHINGIS*. Together with Michael Ballhaus and Peter Schneider, he's in the midst of preparations for the film project *VIVALDI*. In 1984, the selftaught producer co-founded the Berlin Sputnik-Collective. In 1992, he established the production company *Liebesfilm* along with Tom Tykwer, one year later producing Tykwer's directing debut film *DEADLY MARIA*. In June of 2003, Stefan Arndt was honored as the "European Producer of the Year" for his production of *GOOD BYE LENIN!*. Since January of 2001, he's been a member of the Film Production Film 20 syndicate and since September of 2003, Chairman of the Board of the German Film Academy.

X Filme Creative Pool

Under the name X Filme, the three directors Wolfgang Becker, Dani Levy and Tom Tykwer and the producer Stefan Arndt joined forces in July of 1994 to discover new possibilities and better methods of developing and producing ambitiously high-quality and audience-g geared movies within the framework of a collective production company. Since 2000, Manuela Stehr has been onboard as producer and co-managing director for X Filme. With the creation of their film distribution division X Verleih in 2000, X Filme's unique philosophy was able to be

implemented: Directors, producers and film distributors working cooperatively in close proximity to further enhance the development, realization and distribution of their films – since 2006, all under the same roof.

CREDITS

THE CAST

Adolf Hitler
Prof. Adolf Grünbaum
Dr. Joseph Goebbels
Elsa Grünbaum
Albert Speer
Heinrich Himmler
Lieutenant-General Rattenhuber
Martin Bormann

Helge Schneider
Ulrich Mühe
Sylvester Groth
Adriana Altaras
Stefan Kurt
Ulrich Noethen
Lambert Hamel
Udo Kroschwald

AND AS GUESTS

Kurt Gerheim
Eva Braun
Secretary

Ilja Richter
Katja Riemann
Meret Becker

THE TEAM

Director and Screenplay
Producer
Production Manager
Line Producer
Director of Photography
Cinematographer & Miniature Director of Photography
Production Design
Model & Visual Effects Supervisor
Costume Design
Make-up

Original Music

Dani Levy
Stefan Arndt
Marcos Kantis
Peter Hartwig
Carl-F Koschnick
Carsten Thiele
Christian Eisele
Frank Schlegel
Nicole Fischnaller
Gregor Eckstein Jeanette
Latzelsberger
Niki Reiser