

THE JEWISH CEMETERY IN BERLIN-WEISSENSEE



In Heaven, Underground

 61^{ste} Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Panorama
WINNER AUDIENCE AWARD

A Film by BRITTA WAUER

REGIERT VON BRITTA WAUER KAMERA KASPAR KÖPKE SCHNITT BERTHOLD BAULE TON FELIX HEIBGES, GARIP ÖZDEM REGIEASSISTENZ JANA WESTMANN STAMMFOTOS AMÉLIE LOSIER TONGESTALTUNG SEBASTIAN TESCH
TONPOSTPRODUKTION DIE BASISBERLIN MISCHTONMEISTER MARTIN GRUBE REDAKTION DAGMAR MIELKE RBB/ARTE, BIRGIT MEHLER RBB, HANS-GÜNTHER BRÜSKE SR PRODUKTIONSLEITUNG RBB RAINER BAUMERT
HERSTELLUNGSLEITUNG KARSTEN AJURICH PRODUZENTIN BRITTA WAUER FILMKOMPOSIST KARIM SEBASTIAN ELIAS MUSIK EINGESPIELT VOM BRANDENBURGISCHEN STAATSORCHESTER FRANKFURT
MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG VON STIFTUNG NEUE SYNAGOGE BERLIN - CENTRUM JUDAICUM, FAMILIE-GÜTER-MOLVIDSON-STIFTUNG, URSULA-LACHNIT-FIXSON-STIFTUNG EINE GEMEINSCHAFTSPRODUKTION VON BRITZKA FILM
MIT RBB UND SR IN ZUSAMMENARBEIT MIT ARTE MIT FREUNDLICHER UNTERSTÜTZUNG DURCH MEDIENBOARD BERLIN-BRANDENBURG, DEUTSCHER FILMFÖRDERFONDS IM VERLEIH DER EDITION SALZGEBER WWW.SALZGEBER.DE

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 BRITZKA FILM

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 DEUTSCHER
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Synopsis

In the north of Berlin, concealed in a residential area, surrounded by walls and covered with a primeval forest of trees, rhododendron and ivy - such is the Weissensee Jewish Cemetery.



It was created in 1880, is about 100 acres in size, currently contains 115,000 graves and is still being used for burials. Neither the cemetery nor its archives have ever been destroyed – it is a paradise for gatherers of stories.

Britta Wauer and her camera man, Kaspar Koepke, went time and time again to the Jewish Cemetery and found it a very lively place - people from around the world visit and can tell of Jewish, Berliner and also the German history that this place is filled by.

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The plan makes it look like a Renaissance garden: a geometry of right-angles, trapezes and triangles. But anyone entering these grounds feels that this is an enchanted place. Dew and mist, high trees, thickets. Between all this, pillars, stones, ivy and a small fox entering from the right. The Jewish Cemetery in Weissensee seems like a fairytale forest in the middle of the German capital. It is the largest Jewish cemetery in Europe that is still being used for burials. It could house some eighty-six football fields.

Walking over the cemetery is like walking through a history book. The list of famous artists, philosophers, lawyers, architects, doctors, religious teachers and publishers that are buried there is a long one. But above all, Weissensee is a very lively place: on its huge grounds Argentinean extended families search for

the tomb of their predecessor, restorers paint graves with sparkling stars of David, whilst the slight man in the cemetery registry hands out documents about relatives to a busload of expatriates. The birds of prey expert counts the hawks' fledglings and an eighty-year-old tells of how he fell in love with a girl from his school here – during sport class on field A8, right there, where today the colourful graves of the Jews from the former Sowjet Union are found. The Weissensee Jewish Cemetery is now 130 years old and has never been closed. The cemetery belongs to the few institutions in Germany which, even during the Nazi era, remained under Jewish administration. The most astonishing thing is that neither the cemetery nor the archives have ever been destroyed – it is a paradise for story gatherers.

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Director's Statement

It is more than a challenge to fairly handle the fates of more than 115,000 departed souls and their relatives in a film. There is no chance of being comprehensive. A list of famous names, a sequence of lifetime achievements or recounting sad deaths do not make for an interesting film. Yet Weissensee has earned this.

The screen should not to be filled with graves, ivy and gravel, but with people telling of the rich lives that was once led in Berlin. For me it's a matter of personal connections. The idea was one of pursuing some few fates and letting protagonists who were personally connected to the dead tell the tale. People with memories, feelings and thoughts are central. They should play the main role in the film and make plain to the viewer what is precious about Weissensee. Naturally the era of Nazi dictatorship overshadows all other events. But the film does not want to restrict itself to recounting deaths from those years. To reduce the dead of Weissensee to their sad ends is a falsification. Many of those buried there completed unusual things, achieved something special or experience something strange. The film also wants to tell of funny, absurd and thoughtful moments, and of a great love – one without a happy ending.



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BRITTA WAUER is an award winning director and producer for documentary films. She was born in Berlin in 1974, studied at the Berlin Journalist School and realized her first TV documentary in 1995. After working for Spiegel TV in Hamburg for two years, she studied film (directing/producing) at the German Film and Television Academy Berlin (dffb). Since then, she has directed documentaries focusing mainly on contemporary history, current affairs and biographies. In 2005 she founded her own production company „Britzka Film“.



FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTED)

2001 **Death Of A Hero**
Documentary, ZDF/ARTE, 55 mins
German Television Awards 2001

2004 **The Rapoports**
with Sissi Huetlin Doc, ARTE, 60 mins
Grimme Award 2005, MoMA, NYC 2006

2005 **Berlin - A Square, a Murder & a Famous Communist**
Documentary, ZDF/ARTE, 50 mins

2008 **Gerda's Silence**
Doc, Zeitsprung Entertainment, 90 min
Audience Award Best Documentary
Schwerin, 2009

2011 **In Heaven, Underground**
Documentary, Britzka Film, 90 min
Panorama Audience Award
Best Documentary Berlinale 2011

In Heaven, Underground

Accolades:

- „The most beautiful film about a cemetery ever made“ CINEMA, Germany
- „Poetic and exquisite“ THE NEW YORK TIMES
- „Astonishing... an indelible must-see film“ THE FORWARD
- „A marvellous entertaining documentary... It is as charming and delightful a film as one will ever encounter.“ THE HUFFINGTON POST
- „In Heaven Underground is a delightfully upbeat look at death“ THIS WEEK IN NY
- „Stunning... gorgeously photographed“ PASTE MAGAZINE
- „A playful, poetic and all-around charming documentary“ THE LA TIMES
- „An engaging and surprisingly playful movie“ NY MAGAZINE
- „It's a wondrous, captivating and genuinely heartfelt documentary“ NYC MOVIE GURU



The Book

“The Weissensee Jewish Cemetery, Moments in History” is a related book in German and English contains over 140 historic and current photographs

published by be.bra verlag, Berlin available at www.amazon.de



The CD

Original Soundtrack by KARIM SEBASTIAN ELIAS

BRANDENBURGISCHES STAATSORCHESTER FRANKFURT

published by Alhambra Records available at www.amazon.de