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A JEWISH LIFE

A FILM BY

CHRISTIAN KRÖNES, FLORIAN WEIGENSAMER,
ROLAND SCHROTTHOFER, CHRISTIAN KERMER

114 MIN. | AUSTRIA | 16:9

A-JEWISH-LIFE.COM



WORLD PREMIERE: DOCAVIV, TEL AVIV

PANORAMA 2021

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about the darkest era of human history. at
the same time a spotlight on current de-
velopments, raising timeless questions of
human nature. you think antisemitism is
phenomenon of the nazi era??

by no means!

LOGLINE

A JEWISH LIFE records the fateful events and twists in the life of Marko Feingold, depicting his survival in what must have been the darkest epoch of history. Marko Feingold's experiences during the Nazi dictatorship determined his whole existence, from his perception of his own life story to his understanding of the present day.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

A JEWISH LIFE is a portrait of one of the last contemporary witnesses of the Holocaust. By means of this film Marko Feingold's story and legacy is to be preserved as an immortal record. At the same time, current developments are also illuminated, timeless questions concerning morality, responsibility and human dignity are posed – and their limitations are indicated. Even at the great age that he attained Marko Feingold never tired of issuing warnings and encouragement, of standing up to anti-Semitic and antidemocratic tendencies, of fighting denial and deliberate forgetfulness. His memories have lost none of their immediacy as a warning from the past to future generations.

Marko Feingold was born in 1913 in Neusohl (Besztercebánya), which was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time and is today in Slovakia. He and his three siblings grew up in a Jewish quarter in the Leopoldstadt suburb of Vienna. After training in business, in 1932 he and his brother Ernst moved to Italy. There the two of them became successful and relatively wealthy as travelling merchants, but they returned to Vienna in 1938 – at a fateful moment. Shortly after the "Anschluss", the annexation of Austria by Germany, Feingold was arrested by the Nazis for the first time. When he was released he fled to Prague, but from there he was deported to Poland, though he managed to return to Prague with forged papers. There he was seized again, in May 1939, and later sent to Auschwitz Concentration Camp. He survived imprisonment in the concentration camps of Auschwitz, Neuengamme, Dachau and Buchenwald until being liberated in 1945. When the war was over he devoted himself to helping former concentration camp inmates, assisting tens of thousands of them to make the illegal journey from Austria over the Italian Alps to Palestine.

Marko Feingold was the only member of his family to survive the Holocaust, and memories of this period have defined his life. When he died in 2019 at the age of 106 he was the oldest Jew in Austria and President of the Jewish Cultural Community of the city of Salzburg, even though he never regarded himself as particularly religious.

With the aid of unique and previously unpublished archive material, A JEWISH LIFE accompanies Marko Feingold on his journey into the past. The film reflects on historical events, confronting the audience with the most inhuman period of the 20th century and illuminating the sometimes terrifying parallels between the past era and present social developments.

ABOUT THE FILM

After the international success of A GERMAN LIFE – with cinematic release in 13 countries, invitations to approximately 40 festivals, the publication of an accompanying book in 20 languages and an internationally acclaimed theatrical adaptation – A JEWISH LIFE is a logical continuation in terms of content while also expanding the production portfolio of Blackbox Film in the sphere of oral history documentary films.

A GERMAN LIFE tells the story of Brunhilde Pomsel, a collaborator during the Nazi regime who was the secretary of propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels. The second film in this series features the memories of Marko Feingold, a Jew who presents the perspective of a victim of National Socialism. Further productions are planned, examining the epoch from the perspectives of a child, a resistance fighter and a perpetrator. All the films will also investigate the relevance of events and attitudes to contemporary developments.

The will to remember and to confront fascism, along with its insidious roots, will be weakened with the death of the last contemporary witnesses. There is a very real danger that this empty space will be occupied by right-wing agitators. Thus Björn Höcke from the German far-right AfD party demands an end to the culture of remembrance, while Marine Le Pen utterly denies that large numbers of French people collaborated with the Nazis, while attempting to make anti-Semitism popular once more in France. In Austria one member of the National Council is of the opinion that the “Zionist money-Jews” are to blame for the present refugee crisis... to name just a few examples.

In Austria during recent years the number of prosecutions for glorification of the Nazis and Holocaust denial has almost doubled. Recent studies indicate that fewer than half of Austrian children under the age of 16 have any understanding of the term Holocaust. Just over 20% are aware that 6 million Jews were murdered during the Nazi dictatorship. Fewer than 20% are familiar with the name Adolf Eichmann.

In view of these developments we regard it as our responsibility to record the personal life stories of these last contemporary witnesses and preserve them for the future.

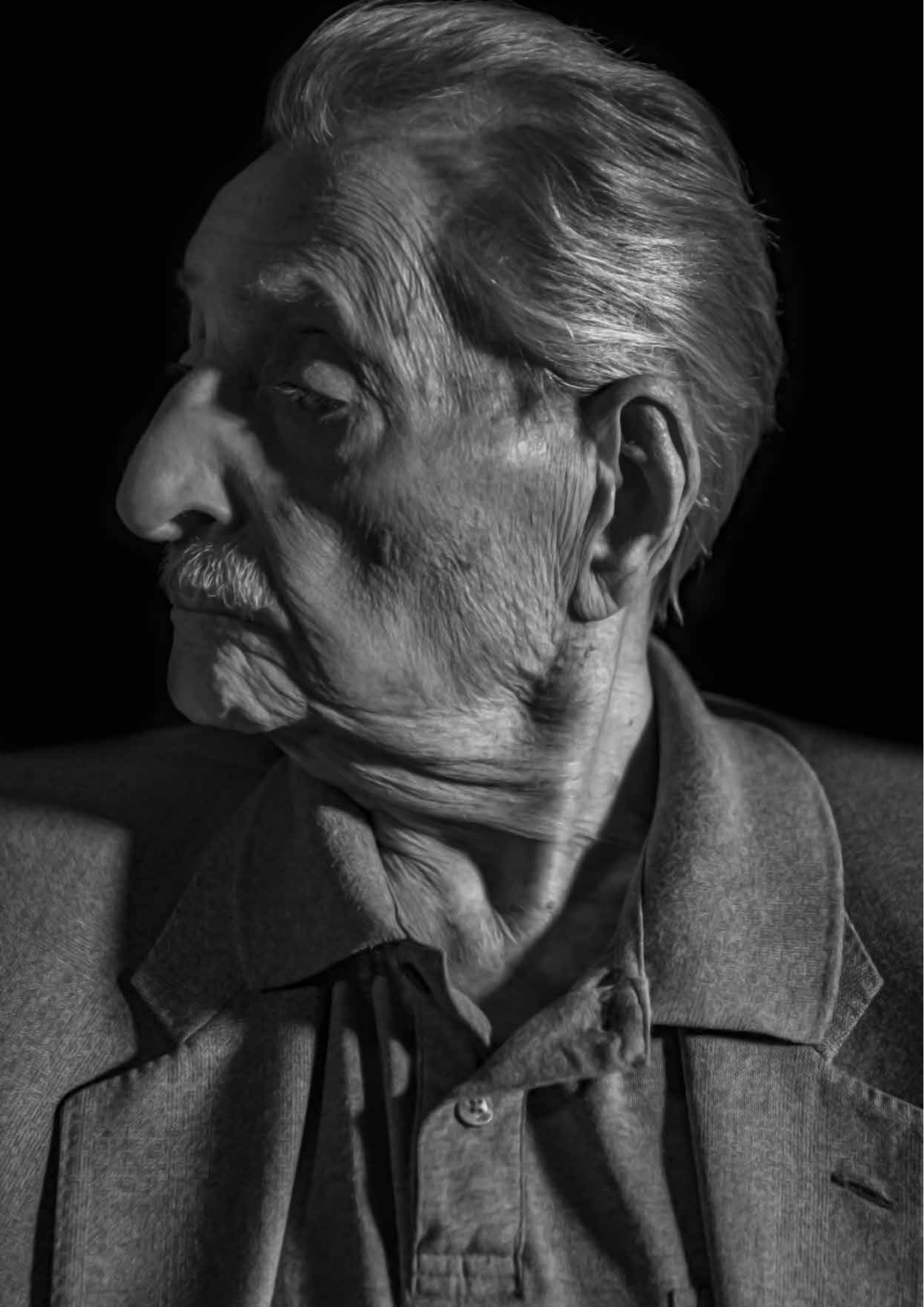
DIRECTOR'S NOTE

For those of us who have grown up in the peaceful, wealthy democracies of Europe, the world which dominated Marko Feingold's life seems unbelievably distant. Many people consider that the danger of war and fascism has been banished forever, so it's no longer necessary to confront those issues. We want to demonstrate with our films just how fragile our society is: the dangers have by no means been overcome, and that is precisely why constant attention to these subjects is crucial. The films show how quickly and unexpectedly social attitudes and political systems can shift, and how watchful we must be in order to recognize these dangers in time and take action against them before it's too late.

At present populist movements all over the world are again gaining ground on a large scale; right-wing attitudes are on the march everywhere, and intolerance has once more become socially acceptable. At times like these, precisely because anti-Semitism is increasing once again and the Holocaust is denied with mounting frequency, it's crucial to regard the past not purely from a closed, historical perspective; instead, the links to current events must be revealed. The aim is not to claim "equivalences" but to develop analogies. We must never permit our history to be forgotten, for those who suppress their own past share responsibility when that history repeats itself.

We would consider it a welcome development if A JEWISH LIFE can serve as an essential, timeless contribution to the understanding of Austrian history, while also influencing current discussions. Marko Feingold's memories present the audience with a segment of Austrian past which has been suppressed... and, in many cases, with current developments too. His depictions are marked by a striking vitality, he employs wit, charm and impressive gravity – and his accounts are thoughtful while filled with infectious vivacity.

In our documentary films we attempt to preserve experiences and recollections of the last contemporary witnesses from being forgotten. Because only what is captured on film can be preserved in the collective memory.



ARCHIVE MATERIAL

Film recordings of the Second World War are important contemporary records, though they seldom comply with standards of historical objectivity. Newsreels, as well as educational and propaganda films made by the various combatant nations, are highly one-sided and subjective; they are generally sophisticated in form but questionable in terms of content. Films from this era were always staged in subtle fashion, events clearly orchestrated for the camera. However, this does not detract from the veracity of the footage; the fact that it has been manipulated makes it even more horrific.

Many of these historical film recordings have been revised over the last few decades both in terms of visual content (editing/coloring) and also on the level of sound (music/commentary), thus falsifying them for new usage. It is our intention to adopt an artistically open, uncommented approach to these films, thus providing unusual insights which are clearly differentiated from the familiar footage and which leave judgement to the viewer. The US Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Stephen Spielberg Film and Video Archive have facilitated the production of unique film contributions and previously unpublished raw material which can form independent narrative strands in an unprocessed form, sometimes employed in associative fashion.

Like Marko Feingold, it is our opinion that horrific scenes from the Holocaust, even with all their gruesome details, must continue to be shown as long as there are people who deny the extent of what happened, attempt to minimize its significance or question whether it took place at all!

MARKO FEINGOLD ON

The day after the Anschluss

Groups of men in SS uniforms went round the Karmelitermarkt and rounded up a few Jews. And then five more were brought in from the other side of the square, and five more from somewhere else. And when they had a group of about 30 Jews they told them to kneel down and clean the sidewalk with toothbrushes. That was a pretty awful thing in itself, but then people gathered to watch them kneeling there, working away with the toothbrushes; the passers-by stopped and spat at them, pulled faces or laughed. And you see, nobody had expected that viciousness, nobody had thought Austrians would behave that way to their own neighbors. No one had expected that. That was the good Viennese heart.

Forgetting and Denying

Saying you know nothing is best. So they all kept quiet, and they managed for a long time just by keeping silent. Until suddenly people were saying: let's put all this behind us at last. That's still what they say. No, history must not be buried like that. Historians today have to uncover all the things that were buried by silence. And Austria is one of the perpetrators of that silence.

Making Amends

So many liars. Every school class I speak to, I have to ask them what they've heard, because every class has heard something different. Every teacher has told them a different story about the end of the war, and what it was like when the Germans marched in. Very few have told the truth. The truth was that Dr. Karl Renner proclaimed for a long time beforehand: "I'm in favor of the Anschluss!" A senior Socialist politician who jumped onto the Nazi bandwagon. And later he didn't want to let any Jews or any concentration camp inmates back into Austria. That's a shameful chapter in history that nobody talks about. They made much more fuss about Waldheim than about Renner. Although the good Renner said straight away in 1945: "We are not going to give anything back! We're not going to allow any Jews back, so you can all rest easy in your apartments." It hasn't changed to this day. You fight for 72 years. I don't own a famous painting, otherwise I'd still be fighting 72 years later to get the painting back. But what about all the people who lost their apartments, all their possessions? The soldiers who came back from the war, and the SS men, were welcomed with flowers. We were undesirables.

Photos and Film Footage from the Concentration Camps

Yes, yes. The Americans photographed everything and took down plenty of statements. We had to fill in forms. Name, former address, profession, where you had worked. Why you were locked up. Which of the guards had behaved with particular brutality; you still had their names in your head. You could still remember and describe everything exactly.

Today there are people who think the horrific pictures from the concentration camps shouldn't be shown any longer. Especially not in schools. But it's the young people above all who have to be shown those images. I am in favor of showing what can become of people when they are tortured the way thousands and thousands of people were tortured then. What really happened has been established today without any doubt at all. People who dispute it should be prosecuted. It happened, those are the facts, and facts have to be accepted and communicated to others. That's the only way of ensuring crimes like that never happen again.

The pictures, the films, the powerful statements made by the people involved have to be presented to the new generation today. Because unfortunately we all have a tendency to push things away, to forget them. That's why those two words are so crucial: never forget!

The Camps

The SS men were all morons: they couldn't count up to two. If we prisoners hadn't organized the camps, nothing at all would have worked. But when it came to beating people, they were good at that.

His Talks

I don't think I would have been able to carry on living if I hadn't had the opportunity to describe my experiences in my talks – thousands of them up to today. I think I would have died. Probably the anger has kept me alive. And I only reached this great age because I haven't completely finished describing everything I experienced.

Hitler

He was an actor; it was all an act. We have lots of people like him who stand on stage and make speeches. They don't all have to be criminal; I don't consider every actor a criminal. But Hitler was one. The act he put on was at the root of everything.

It's interesting when people describe Hitler that a lot of women raved about him. So he must have been attractive for them. And all that shouting. People used to think the shouting meant he was conveying a human truth that came from deep inside.

Surviving

I survived those concentration camps, but I must admit something; to this day I'm amazed that such things could happen and I could get through it alive. I just can't explain it. Because everywhere, in all those camps, the principal was: work until death. There must have been some almighty power, I sometimes think. Because I was only able to survive through an incredible series of miracles.

The Buchenwald Song

Naturally the concentration camps were in touch with each other. And the commandant of Buchenwald, Koch, heard that his opposite number in Dachau had a special Dachau Concentration Camp song. So Koch wanted one too. There was an announcement: anyone who writes a song will get a loaf of bread, 10 marks, various things. But the song mustn't have anything to do with Jews, and neither the person who writes the lyrics nor the person who writes the melody can be a Jew. So various people were approached in the camp. Nobody was prepared to write a song and walk over to the gate to give it to the Commandant. Finally they found someone. But he hadn't written the song. He just had the courage to act as though he'd written it. The Commandant read the text. "Yes, you know, this is basically pretty good. But there's one line I'd like you to change. Here's a pencil, sit down and do it." So the man sat there for half an hour, maybe an hour. He couldn't think of anything. Obviously. So he apologized. A way out occurred to him. "Herr Commandant, I can't concentrate properly here. I have to go back to my block." – "All right, off you go." – "Thanks, I'll be back in a couple of hours." So the man went back and got the corrections made. They went back and forth like that a couple of times. And then the lyrics and the melody were accepted. So in the end the lyrics were written by a Jew, and the melody was written by Herrmann Leopoldi, another Jew.

Antisemitism

90% of the people in Austria are anti-Semitic. The Catholic Church did outstanding work over 2000 years to establish those prejudices. You can't get them out of people's heads overnight.

Politics

Today in particular we have to fear fascism again. That's why young people must be taught about democracy, proper democracy, with honesty. Because then no dictator can establish himself. If we have real democracy, there will be no room for him. But the democracy has to prove that it's just, and not permit any corruption or dishonesty among the people in power. Because that's what makes democracy weak and leaves the door open for a dictator. And the electorate have to do their duty and go to the polls and decide what's right and what's wrong. Then it's a real democracy.

THE REFUGEE TRAIL – BACKGROUND

When the war ended many senior Nazis took advantage of the general confusion to flee through Austria to Italy. There they were given forged papers, with the active assistance of the Catholic Church and the Red Cross. A crucial figure here was Bishop Alois Hudal, originally from Graz, who was stationed in Rome. Hundreds of war criminals escape unharmed to South America and the Middle East in that way, along routes which were later known as rat-lines. Among them were Adolf Eichmann, Josef Mengele, Erich Priebke and the Commandant of Treblinka death camp, Franz Stangl.

It is less well known that after the end of the Nazi regime hundreds of thousands of Jews also fled to Italy through Austria – and from there to Palestine.

Holocaust survivors who had been liberated from the concentration camps and Jews who had escaped the post-war pogroms in Poland (Kielce) and Hungary (Kunmadaras) were regarded as undesirables in Western Europe. They wanted to create a new, safe homeland for themselves in Palestine. Completely against the geo-political plans of the mandate power there at the time, Great Britain.

Soldiers of the Jewish Brigades and former concentration camp inmates created a complex network of refugee routes across the entire continent. Salzburg became one of the most important hubs for this mass exodus, and Marko Feingold played a central role in it. He functioned as a point of contact in Austria for Jewish people who had been driven from their homes, and he was one of the organizers of the large-scale escape. He obtained forged papers, organized accommodation and made good use of his charm and negotiating powers in bribing border officials. Between 1945 and 1947 about 100,000 Jews crossed the border illegally to Italy, about 5000 of them over the dangerous mountain paths of the Krimmler Tauern Pass. It is estimated that more than 200,000 Jews were smuggled south through Austria.

The post-war government in Austria turned a blind eye, allowing Feingold and his fellow conspirators to achieve all this. However, this was not due to sympathy for the refugees or humanitarian considerations: the motivation was entirely anti-Semitic, rooted in power politics. The last thing the government wanted was for the liberated Jews to remain in Austria. For a long time all the political parties were vying for the votes of the 524,000 registered members of the Nazi party in Austria. It was feared that if the Jews who had been expelled during the Nazi period were allowed to return, it would provoke anger and discontent – because it would mean the restitution of apartments, buildings and other Jewish property. And that had to be prevented. As early as 1945 Karl Renner cunningly prevented the return of Viennese Jews to their home city. Marko Feingold was also not allowed back to Vienna after being liberated from Buchenwald Concentration Camp.

PERSONAL DESCRIPTION OF MARKO FEINGOLD

Marko Feingold was born in 1913 in Neusohl (Besztercebánya), which was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time and is today in Slovakia. With his three siblings he grew up in a Jewish quarter in the Leopoldstadt suburb of Vienna. After an apprenticeship in business, in 1932 he and his brother Ernst moved to Italy. There the two of them became successful and relatively wealthy as travelling merchants, but they returned to Vienna in 1938 – at a fateful moment. Shortly after the “Anschluss”, the annexation of Austria by Germany, they were arrested by the Nazis for the first time and tortured. When they were released the brothers managed to reach Czechoslovakia. Since their passports were invalid, Marko and Ernst Feingold were deported to Poland, though by employing forged papers they managed to return to Prague shortly afterwards. Here they even found jobs, working for the German occupying forces: it was their task to assess the value of furniture in empty apartments vacated by Jews and other people who had been deported by the Nazis. Assuming that the people who had been forced to leave would later be compensated, Marko Feingold and his brother made their assessments unrealistically high. Soon they were exposed and arrested as saboteurs.

They were sent to a punishment company in Auschwitz Concentration Camp, where they experienced inhuman humiliation and violence. When Marko Feingold learned that his brother was to be transported to the German camp in Neuengamme, he did everything in his power to be transferred there with Ernst, and he succeeded. Finally, sick and weak, Marko Feingold was moved from Neuengamme to Dachau, and later to Buchenwald, where the concentration camp was liberated by US forces on 11 April 1945. However, he and other Jewish concentration camp inmates were not permitted to return to his home city of Vienna, which is how Marko Feingold finally ended up in Salzburg. Only years later did he discover that his brother Ernst had been gassed in Neuengamme.

In 1945 Marko Feingold was appointed head of the Jewish community in Salzburg, and from 1946 to 1947 he was President of the re-established Israeli Cultural Community there. During these years he assisted tens of thousands of Jewish concentration camp inmates who had become refugees, helping them escape illegally from Austria across the Alps to Italy and then on to Palestine. Against resistance from local authorities and certain sections of the general public, Marko Feingold opened a fashion business in Salzburg in 1948 together with his business partner Edi Goldmann. After retiring in 1979 he again became President of the Cultural Community, an honorary role which he occupied until his death.

Marko Feingold dedicated his entire life to the fight against forgetting. Until a very advanced age he gave numerous talks to school classes about Nazi crimes, also criticizing the attitude of Austria to its National Socialist past. Right until the end this made him a target for threats and countless abusive letters which were sent to him personally.

Marko Feingold died on 19 September 2019 at the age of 106.

From the summer semester of 2021 the University of Salzburg has established the Marko Feingold Professorship, in memory of this tireless warrior against totalitarian politics.



FILMMAKER BIOS

FLORIAN WEIGENSAMER

After his studies of Political Science and Communication Science at the University of Vienna Florian gained first journalistic and writing experience at Austria's foremost news magazine „profil“. 1995 he joins the editorial team of Vienna News International where he directed and designed numerous reports and documentaries for European broadcasters. Later on, together with Christian Krönes, he exclusively produced and directed political and social reports and documentaries from Mid/Eastern Europe and Asia for arte. At the same time he worked on film and multimedia content for museums and exhibitions. After collaborating with various artists in different media in San Francisco for more than a year he became founding member, author and director of the Blackbox-Collective in 2006.

ROLAND SCHROTTHOFFER

Theater-, Film- and Media Studies, Psychology and Business Management at the University in Vienna. During his studies he has already developed and worked on several Theater and Film projects. His short film „Grenzgänger“ has been decorated by the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation ORF with the „Shorts on Screen Award“. As production manager Roland was involved in several projects developed and produced by the Blackbox-Collective.

CHRISTIAN KRÖNES

During his film and directing studies he was able to accompany and work alongside the legendary DOPs, Vittorio Storaro und Sven Nykvist. In 1985 he joined the Austrian Television and directed a variety of TV formats. In 1990, Christian Krönes started his work for major German broadcasting companies as well as setting up a media agency in Vienna. His work as a consultant and freelance producer allowed him to engage with renowned film production companies. Work on a film project with Sir Peter Ustinov, soon developed into a deep friendship and resulted in years of artistic collaboration for TV and stage productions. Sir Peter Ustinov's wish for Christian Krönes to work for the Ustinov Foundation was soon accepted and so he became the personal advisor and manager for Sir Peter Ustinov up until his death in 2004. In 2006, Christian Krönes formed Blackbox Film and with over 30 years of experience in the film branch is now active as managing director and producer.

CHRISTIAN KERMER

Studies of Information Design in Graz focusing on moving images. He gained invaluable experience at the renowned Motion Design Studio shotshotshot in Graz. Further studies of Multi-MediaArt specializing in film culminated in a Masters degree graduation at FH Salzburg 2014. He quickly established a remarkable reputation as freelance cutter and DOP, working for well-established Film Production Companies and popular TV-programmes. Since 2014 Christian is as DOP and editor member of the Blackbox-Collective.

Q&A WITH THE DIRECTORS

In 2016 you released A GERMAN LIFE, featuring conversations you recorded with the 105-year-old Brunhilde Pomsel. Your protagonist in A JEWISH LIFE, Marko Feingold, was the same age when you filmed him. How did it come about that you have created a small series with A GERMAN LIFE, A JEWISH LIFE and the project A BOY'S LIFE?

CHRISTIAN KRÖNES: In the back of our minds we were always aiming for a series of films featuring the last contemporary witnesses, but when the protagonists are so elderly naturally it is a race against time. There was broad support from the very start for A JEWISH LIFE, but it was completely different with the development of A GERMAN LIFE. Many funding partners were scared by the idea of a film portrait of Brunhilde Pomsel, Joseph Goebbels' former secretary. Which made it all the more pleasing to experience the success of the film, with numerous festival invitations, selection for the European Film Award, Oscar qualification and cinematic releases in 13 countries.

FLORIAN WEIGENSAMER: The idea of making films from different perspectives also appeals to us. In Brunhilde Pomsel we had a classic collaborator, a protagonist who profited from the situation. Marko Feingold is a victim of National Socialism. He was arrested as early as 1939, and he spent virtually the whole period in concentration camps, until his liberation in 1945. At the moment we're working on a third film, A BOY'S LIFE, with a protagonist who was sent to a concentration camp at the age of 8, so we can also shed light on this period from the perspective of a child. To get an overall picture it would also be interesting to feature a resistance fighter and a perpetrator. We haven't found anybody yet for those projects: the last contemporary witnesses are disappearing.

Marko Feingold says himself: "The memories are the meaning of my life today." He seems to have become a real memory worker who never tired of describing his experiences. In contrast, Brunhilde Pomsel spoke about her experiences in public for the first time in your film. In what way did the conversations with Marko Feingold place different demands on you?

FLORIAN WEIGENSAMER: He was a memory worker, that's completely right. Day and night. During the shoot we had planned a few days when he could rest. But he arranged to give talks in schools on those dates. Telling his story was the whole purpose of his life, and perhaps that's also what helped him reach such a great age. The difficulty that arises when somebody constantly repeats his story, and has to answer very similar questions, is that certain formulations are repeated. Breaking through that in the long interview we conducted, in an attempt to get deeper and escape from certain narrative patterns, was quite a challenge. He knew exactly which things he wanted to communicate, and of course his personal aims were in the foreground for him. But there were also moments where we were interested in something else. Getting those answers wasn't always easy: he could be as stubborn as a mule.

CHRISTIAN KRÖNES: I can also imagine that those narrative patterns gave him the distance necessary for him to be able to speak about what he'd experienced in the first place. Questioning him further, in an attempt to get deeper, can of course be very painful. Being able to describe certain things again and again probably entails establishing a certain distance for yourself.

Marko Feingold spent six years of his life in concentration camps. He describes his childhood and younger years in detail but talks less about his experiences in the camps. How far did you dictate the direction of the conversations, and how far did you let yourself be led by him? Was it also important for you to focus on the period before the Nazis seized power? On the way people underestimated what was looming on the horizon?

FLORIAN WEIGENSAMER: At times Herr Feingold definitely guided us. Whether a conversation began to flow depended on his mood as well. The most important thing was to take enough time. We studied his biography closely beforehand, and we had a rough guideline for the subject areas. Of course that also involved exploring the creeping social changes before the Nazis seized power. After all, Marko Feingold and his brother lived in Italy after 1932 and were successful businessmen there; they certainly underestimated the political changes.

CHRISTIAN KRÖNES: I was particularly moved by all the fateful moments he experienced, by the way particular decisions, or wrong decisions, could have fatal results. When he came back to Austria from Italy in 1938 with his brother it was more or less by chance: their passports had expired and had to be extended. It was a crucial period, just before the Anschluss, when Germany annexed Austria – which he experienced as an eyewitness on 12 March. He used to say he wouldn't have been able to contradict the later Austrian version of history – which claimed that Germany had invaded Austria – if he hadn't been standing with the welcoming crowds in Heldenplatz. He experienced at first hand the way Vienna transformed itself overnight. Just a few days later he and his brother were arrested for the first time. When they were released they fled to Czechoslovakia using invalid documents, they were deported to Poland, and then they returned to Prague as the noose tightened around their necks. For a long period they just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, until they were arrested again and finally sent to Auschwitz Concentration Camp.

FLORIAN WEIGENSAMER: It seems to me that the question of how things could have got to that stage is crucial, with the previous history in Vienna and the dormant anti-Semitism that was always present. Another vital point is the political indifference of the general population; Feingold addresses that issue and doesn't exempt himself from this charge. He also stumbled into that trap, which is an important point that can teach us a lot today. Political indifference can very quickly lead people in a direction that nobody wants to go.

CHRISTIAN KRÖNES: Alongside all the blows of fate, Marko Feingold also had incredible fortune to survive that period. It's possible that the crucial factor in his good fortune during the disastrous time was that he grew up in the Prater area of Vienna. Being socialised in the typical underworld surrounding the Prater funfair at that time, having to assert himself as a child and learning tricks and strategies, must have helped him evaluate people more accurately. Probably the "school" of the Prater gave him the tools he needed to survive his years in concentration camps.

What was the significance of his life after the war in your conversations with Marko Feingold?

FLORIAN WEIGENSAMER: He was an incredible fighter: if anybody attacked him, he would always launch a counter-attack. He simply refused to be put down. The period immediately after the war was an important part of his life. He ran an aid centre in Salzburg for people who had been liberated from the concentration camps. It became the point of contact for a huge number of refugees. In 1945/46 he helped about 100,000 Jews from all over Europe travel illegally across the Alps to Italy and on to Palestine. His diplomatic skills were extremely helpful there. He organised a huge refugee operation, and he was rightly very proud of that. Today, when you can be arrested for helping people who are drowning in the Mediterranean, he would be locked up for it. In those days he was a hero, and he still is today.

CHRISTIAN KRÖNES: I think we have to be extremely grateful to him and all the others who stayed after the war. I'm also thinking of Simon Wiesenthal. They both had plenty of opportunities to emigrate to Israel. But they made a very conscious decision to stay in Austria, to keep memories alive and to raise their voices against denial and the attempt to gloss over what happened.

FLORIAN WEIGENSAMER: Marko Feingold regarded it as his right to stay here. He felt he was an Austrian. He refused to be intimidated, and wouldn't allow anyone to silence him, which was extremely uncomfortable for a lot of people over many decades.

Was it clear from the beginning that you would use the same approach to camera aesthetics as in A GERMAN LIFE?

CHRISTIAN KRÖNES: With A GERMAN LIFE we spent an incredible amount of time developing a timeless cinematic form for the film. I think that work paid off. A GERMAN LIFE, A JEWISH LIFE and our third project A BOY'S LIFE are all shaped by the same black & white aesthetic. We always open with close-ups of the faces, which reflect the passing of a century and incredible personal destinies. They are fascinating faces that you can look at for a very long time. At the same time, the intention is to use these contemplative opening passages to get the audience in the mood for a very different time level and the coming narratives.

The interview segments are structured, on the one hand by film extracts and also by quotations from abusive personal letters Marko Feingold received. Was it very depressing for him that right up to the end of his life there were people who denied the Nazi atrocities, and that many of them were very quickly integrated after the war and achieved high positions in society?

FLORIAN WEIGENSAMER: The letters encouraged us in our aim to reveal the anti-Semitism in the present day. We wanted to make people aware that this elderly man received letters (mostly anonymous) right up to the end of his life with threats and abuse, and to convey to audience that the film is not only about the past. No. There are still people who deny the Nazi atrocities. Marko Feingold kept the letters. At first he would take them to the police, but they never did anything. The attitude of Austrian politics and society towards the Holocaust definitely pained him a lot. And he waged war on the Socialist Party, which he left in the end, because those people also accepted or remained silent about lots of things that happened. And after 1945 the same people were in the same positions they had occupied before the war. I do think he felt betrayed by that. He didn't take the letters personally; he rose above them. He regarded those people as idiots who were trying in vain to intimidate him. He refused to be frightened or to get worked up about it.

You have both focused on this theme for a long time, very intensively; where did Marko Feingold open up aspects of the subject and provide you with new perspectives? What is Marko Feingold's legacy for you personally?

FLORIAN WEIGENSAMER: I was fascinated by his character as a fighter. He isn't just a voice of warning and a narrator and a victim. He remained a fighter for the whole of his life, someone who wouldn't submit to anybody, even though he'd had to endure so much. That impressed me a lot.

CHRISTIAN KRÖNES: I think we've been greatly influenced by all our conversations and getting to know our protagonists better. I regard it as our task, especially now that the warning voices of contemporary witnesses are slowly disappearing, to pass on their memories and their stories.

Interview: Karin Schiefer / Austrian Film Commission
July 2021

Translation: Charles Osborne

BLACKBOX FILM & MEDIENPRODUKTION GMBH

The company is internationally active and has brought together a team of inter-disciplinary media companies and filmmakers. The main focus of their production work is on high quality documentaries. The team's years of extensive experience form the basis for the creation of their documentaries and TV productions on historical, cultural and socio-political issues. Blackbox's uncompromising commitment to highest quality standards has enabled them to establish themselves not only as a producer of cinematic productions, but also as a partner for international broadcasting companies. They have set their sights on opening up unusual perspectives for a wide-ranging audience and setting new standards with their innovative productions. Their films have won multiple prestigious International Awards and have been theatrically released worldwide.

FILMOGRAPHIE

A BOY'S LIFE

(Documentary Film, 91min., coming soon)

A JEWISH LIFE

(Documentary Film, 114 min., 2021)

WELCOME TO SODOM

(Documentary Film, 92 min., 2018)

A GERMAN LIFE

(Documentary Film, 113 min., 2016)

„I ALWAYS GOT AWAY WITH IT ...“

(Documentary Film, 30 min., 2014)

TIME JOURNEY

(Documentary Film, 45/30 min., 2011)

GOLA ZAREEN – THE WORLD IN A BALL

(Documentary Film, 82/52 min., 2010)

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PRODUCED BY: Blackbox Film & Medienproduktion GmbH.
Christian Krönes, Susanne Krönes, Florian Weigensamer

FACT SHEET

Genre: Documentary Film
Length: 114 min.
Original Language: German
Original Title: Ein Jüdisches Leben
Subtitles: English
Shooting Format: HD - 16:9
Format: DCP
Frames/sec: 25
Color: Black & White

Country of Production: Austria
Original Locations: Salzburg, Vienna
Production Period: 2019-2021

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A JEWISH LIFE

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