

The story

This film is a musical drama that tells 3 overlapping stories. The amazing real life story of the Polish poet and Auschwitz writer, Tadeusz Borowski and his girlfriend and later wife Maria Rondo. The story of how art saved the life of the great Jewish artist, Arnold Daghani and his wife Nanino Daghani in a small concentration camp and the fictional story of Joan Lekwerekwere, a photographer from Darfur caught up in the genocide there and then a refugee and an asylum seeker in England.

The film is mainly shot in a bohemian club in Warsaw – although in reality we will film in the Brighton Musicbar formerly the Eastern European designed Joobleberry Playhouse – which in 1941 was The Essentialists Club and in 1946 The Young Artists and Scholars Club. In 2009 it acts as the Musicbar for the climax of the film when all the stories come together.

The stories are all about genocide, but I believe it is a musical which does not deal with genocide as a boring history lesson but as something happening now. Why does the world still look on and look away as the west did at Auschwitz? Borowski says, “ I stand among you like a spectre and ask about the source of evil.”

The story tracks in a parallel way the lives of the main characters and their different responses to evil and genocide. Borowski was always a nihilist, brought up without parents as they were imprisoned by communists. In Poland it was the communists who led the resistance so Borowski was unwilling to join Maria who was a leading figure in the resistance. He only joins because that is the only way she will be his girlfriend. The Nazis hated Borowski because, as a Polish intellectual “it’s not what you’ve done it’s what you are ” they tell him when he is arrested after he goes looking for Maria who also has been arrested in a trap. They both end up in Auschwitz and their love story is told in songs and poems in flashback principally at The Young Scholars And Artists Club in Warsaw and the hospital in Sweden where Maria ends up after Auschwitz.

Later in Munich and Paris, Borowski saw what the west could offer but found in Maria’s words only “luxury behind window displays, hunger

and prostitution in the streets and despair in the heart.” His journey leads him to believe all political systems are like concentration camps and to the brink of suicide, despite Maria coming back to him and telling him, “You are a good man, love conquers everything” but he says “I can’t forgive myself, death conquers everything.”

Joan loses her husband in the Darfur genocide and is torn from her two children. She walks a hundred miles to escape and when she finally makes it to the UK she is treated like a criminal and told to return home. She also is on the brink of suicide at Beachy Head, a few miles from Brighton.

In the middle of these stories we get the inspiring story of Daghani the artist who manages to escape from Mikhailowka because just before the camp was liquidated and everyone shot in the cherry orchard he was sent to paint the HQ building in the nearby town of Gaissin from where Daghani and his wife Nanino escaped. His paintings and especially his graphic book *The Grave Is In The Cherry Orchard* provide a record of this camp which Daghani says doesn’t get the attention it deserves, “people are only interested in aristocratic Auschwitz not my little camp.”

All the stories come together at Beachy Head over the suicide song *Gloomy Sunday* where Nanino Daghani successfully talks Joan Lekwerekwere away from the cliff edge. In another time and place over the same music, Borowski puts his head in a gas oven due to his survivor’s guilt, although he has always been more than a good man!. His wife meanwhile over the same music gives birth to their child Malgorzata.

The final scene takes place at a benefit concert in the same club as most of the film has been shot. Joan’s photography book about her peaceful childhood and then her violent adult life in Darfur *Under The Trees* has made her famous and she leads the singing as all the actors from the film come together to do something about genocide.