

## **The Life & Death Orchestra presents... This Way For The Gas, Ladies & Gentlemen**

(please note the length of this treatment exceeds 5 pages, due to poems and excerpts of songs being included).

### Treatment

The film starts with Joan a black African woman in Auschwitz today and then at the site of a new mass grave in Africa which is covered in flowers. She is reciting a poem in memory of the millions who've died by genocide, culminating in the line: "Rage will kindle at a poet's word." The screen goes black and you hear an ominous voice

The world is ruled by neither justice or morality  
Crime is not punished nor virtue rewarded  
One is forgotten as quickly as the other  
The world is ruled by power..... (the voice is Tadeusz Borowski).

We are then introduced to the three main characters of the film in short scenes as two are arrested and sent to concentration camps – the poet Borowski and the artist Daghani - while the third – the photographer Joan - is seen in a refugee camp. Borowski is on a trolley bus in Warsaw in 1942, tanks are in the streets and he is obviously looking for someone. He gets off the bus, goes upstairs in an old block of flats and knocks on a door, which is answered by four men with revolvers who drag him into the flat. We then switch to an African refugee camp in 2009 where an African woman, camera on her shoulder, is looking for a missing relative, her husband Gial. Then we are in Romania in 1942 where a woman is watching police and Nazi soldiers evicting people from their homes. Back in 2009 again in a TV studio, where Joan Lekwerekwere is on Late Review being interviewed by Kirsty Wark or similar about her photographic book *Under The Trees* which contrasts peaceful pictures of her childhood under the noor trees with terrible stories of rape and murder told under the noor trees of the refugee camp at Djabal in Darfur. Then we are back in Rumania in 1942 as the Jewish artist Arnold Daghani and his wife are being removed to a labour camp by police and nazi soldiers. The guard orders them to take Arnold's paintings, which Arnold refuses to do – "we're being sent to our deaths and you expect me to take paints" - but Nanino reluctantly does.

The screen then flashes up "The Borowski Story" and we move into his story. We see Borowski in 1946 in his shared flat in Munich telling the story of his early life to his flatmate who is also his publisher and is publishing a book written mainly by Borowski about Auschwitz. We learn that his parents were arrested and exiled by the communists to Murmansk and Siberia and Borowski was brought up without parents but was clever and after leaving school joined the underground university where we see him entertaining his fellow students, particularly Maria with his translation of one of Shakespeare's Fool songs. We then see him courting Maria before the camera pans across Warsaw to scenes of Nazis brutally snatching people off the buses and streets and driving them off in columns. Over these scenes Borowski voices some of his noir writing. He again tries to persuade Maria to be his girlfriend but she refuses unless Tadeusz joins her in the communist resistance but as his parents were arrested by the communists he understandably doesn't want to join. So he goes home, a self pitying teenager in love - unrequited - and plays the song "To die of love" over and over again and then reads and acts out melodramatically a Raymond Chandlersque pulp novel – the only blonde in the world - about how when you fall in love that's exactly what you do, FALL! You don't ascend into heaven you fall into hell. He then points what seems to be a toy gun at his face in the mirror but the mirror explodes into fragments. We then switch to The Essentialists Club – a club for bohemian youth in Warsaw in 1941 - established by Borowski and we see him drinking with his student friends – two of whom try to persuade him to join the communist resistance but he argues against Stalinism – "in Russia does everyone own

everything, or does everyone own nothing ?”

Maria joins him and they continue flirting. She eventually agrees to be his girlfriend if he joins the resistance. He is so in love he agrees! “I will” he says followed by “Be careful” as she goes off on a dangerous mission in the dark Nazi patrolled streets. During these scenes we’ve seen a succession of performers – Eva reciting poetry, Olga singing Piaf like a Franco- Russian song and then everyone singing the Borowski anthem The Essentialists Hymn..

In our studies and cabarets  
On top of women we do lay  
We are the essentialists  
Ooh! Ooh! Ooh!

We then see Tadeusz and Maria in love – dancing in their room, walking in the street. Then one month later we see him standing by the printer which spins out his new poetry book which Maria takes with some other more secret papers from the printer as she goes off on a mission. Tadeusz grows increasingly anxious as she doesn’t return home, Finally at dawn he goes looking for her and in a repeat of the first scene of the film we see him arrested - his arrestors tell him they’ve got the soviet spy Maria Rundo and he is going to join her in Auschwitz. In his case “it’s not what you’ve done, it’s what you are”. They laugh at the book he is carrying – Brave New World!

A sign then comes up, The Young Artists and Scholars Club 1946 – Warsaw, and we can see it is The Essentialists Club renamed. Half of the tables are empty with candles on them. The song “ Auschwitz “ is sung – the focus is only on the white face of the singer - and we see footage of tourists walking around Auschwitz in old newsreel clips from 1946. Borowski then comes on stage – a small band is already there – and sings the epic song This Way for The Gas Ladies and Gentlemen, which tells the story of an ordinary day in the camp and at the gas chambers of Auschwitz, in Raymond Chandler pulp noir style as if it was an ordinary day at the office.

Some excerpts

And what if there are no more cremos I say  
They’ll run out of people one of these days  
“ Stop talking nonsense “ Henri replies  
We’d all starve to death if there’s noone left to die ...

....

Pick up your child another SS man roars  
But she so wants to live, it’s not mine she cries  
Big Andrewi from Sebastapol grabs hold of her  
You bloody Jewess would you run from your own child

Above the teeming crowd a girl appears  
Soft blond hair she turns and stares at me  
Listen tell me where are they taking us  
I say nothing, I know she says

Meanwhile in the shit and dirt of the train  
We find naked little bodies with bloated skins  
Looking like monsters with enormous heads  
We carry them like chickens several in each hand

I’m not a good person, I say to Marie  
Damn all these people I feel no pity  
It’s natural , Henri says, it’s healthy c’est logique  
Everyone relieves their hate by turning on the weak

For days the whole camp lives off the loot  
We say the Strasbourg transport was a good rich train  
Great columns of smoke rise in the sky  
The black river flows over Birkenau

Borowski finishes the performance by relaying stories from Auschwitz, why a man was carrying a parcel on the way to the gas chamber – because it's like holding someone's hand, and more terribly the best way to burn children – start with the hair. He then reads his great love poem about Maria.

The shine of the moon will unite us tonight, my love  
Nothing but death can be mightier than this

His voiceover tells us of his reunion with Maria in Auschwitz which we see in flashback. As he says "luckily I was sent to pick up infant corpses." We then see Maria and Borowski on the roof of the Birkenau block where all the hair from the gassed people is stored – she sees a pigtail and sings the song "Pigtail".

This hair is not shot through with light  
Is not parted by the breeze  
This hair is not touched by any hand  
Or rain or lips

Then he tells of how he was taken from Auschwitz to Germany – to Dachau and reads his love poetry about Maria – (known all over Poland and Europe but not in the insular UK!)

Finally he walks around the audience telling us what happened to the young people, the lost generation of Polish intellectuals whose tables are now empty and we see flashbacks of Eva, Andre and Waczek at The Essentialists Club, then see them being shot. He tells us of letters from his mother but no letter from who he wanted one most from – MARIA. The audience is left wondering if she is alive or dead. She is obviously not there.

The screen then flashes up The Daghani Story and we see people cramped in bunks in a hut getting up. Nanino Daghani asks why did we walk like meek sheep to this slaughterhouse and answers her own question – "because we had faith in humanity." Daghani jokes "fuck me, they don't like artists." We then switch to the work gang working on the road in extreme cold in few clothes and Daghani and a small gypsy band rap the song "Death Fugue" with the chorus

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening  
We drink it at midday and morning, we drink it at night  
And we drink and we drink and we drink and we drink...

During this song Nanino is beaten by a guard for chewing a morsel of bread. Another guard arrives and asks who is the painter? We then see Daghani painting a sign - "It is strictly forbidden to enter the camp for Jews without permission." The governor of the camp comes in and looks approvingly at the sign and Daghani is offered some bread as a reward. We are then back in the hut where Daghani is painting – a guard enters and Daghani happily tells him that tomorrow he and Nanino leave the camp to paint the company headquarters in Gaissin. When the guard leaves, Daghani shows Nanino pictures he's done of the camp in all its graphic horror – "I am going to record all this for the world to see." He then sings the song "Five Men" about an execution of 5 men, over which we see his pictures of the camp and then footage of 5 men talking, playing cards etc, the night before their deaths and real footage of 5 men being executed in Bosnia.

We're then in Daghani's flat in Palmeira Square in Brighton, where every bit of wall is covered in

his pictures (there is a very early South Bank Show like arts documentary made by Granada TV which we can mix in here to show the real flat) In this flat Daghani in documentary style tells the story of his escape from Gaissin and how all 500 people in the camp were killed, and sings the song Roll Call in commemoration of the 500 and shows many of his famous paintings, while telling the story of how there was even a hierarchy among extermination camps “ my little camp couldn’t compete with aristocratic Auschwitz ” – “ too few atrocities! ”

The screen flashes up The Joan Lekwerekwere Story. In an office in the UK a bureaucrat is telling Joan that her appeal for refugee status has been refused and she must go back to Sudan and if she doesn’t she will be evicted from her accommodation.

The screen flashes up The Borowski Story Part 2 and Borowski is in a flat in Munich with 3 other guys receiving mail. He yells in happiness - “ She is alive. She is in Sweden.” Then we see Maria working in a hospital in Sweden having strange hallucinations – the patients are dressed like Auschwitz inmates as she sings Be Happy.

Be happy, you the sick who’re being cared for  
And you who care for them  
Be happy, oh how happy  
You who die a death as normal as life  
In hospital beds or in your homes  
Be happy, all of you  
Millions of people envy you

When her friend Sofia wakes her as Maria is screaming we realise the Be Happy previous scene was a nightmare and they discuss the future. Maria wants to live in the centre of the world with Tadeusz – Paris and won’t go back to Poland or Germany. She also tells Sofia she now likes the morality of Christianity and reads a very loving letter from Tadeusz in bed. Then back to Tadeusz’s flat in Munich where he’s writing the book about life and death in Auschwitz and is planning to go to Paris with his friend Krystyn to try and get him and Maria visas to live in Paris. We then see them on the train and Maria is reading his letter written on the train to Paris.

Then we’re in Paris and Borowski is coming out of an official looking building yelling at the concierge – he tells his friend Krystyn “ they won’t give her a visa for Paris ” and in temper he says “ I’ve had enough, I’m going home. I can get work in Warsaw, if I can’t have love, I can have work. ” Krystyn tells him to forget everything and have fun in Paris living the western dream of wine, women and song. To which Borowski says “ you mean tarts and alcoholism !! “ We see them touring Paris, the Eiffel Tower, watching Matisse paint at the Seine, and in a jazz bar with the ubiquitous accordion. Borowski retreats to melancholia again. It’s like a bad trip as his voiceover gets louder and the band quieter. He looks through the skylight and we hear his voiceover

“ I look at the clouds and see above them  
the Auschwitz October sky  
So Maria  
remember I’m alive  
but don’t come back to me.  
My love burned away in the flames of the crematorium.....

Gradually the pub noise returns and Borowski returns from his dreamland as Kristyn who is having fun with 2 girls gives him some cash to get more wine. At the bar Borowski strokes a cat which causes the cat to stick its tongue out..He does it again and the same thing happens. He looks up and sees a redhaired girl who says, “ do you do any more tricks..” We then see them walking back to their hostel with a bottle of wine. We cut to Sweden where Maria is telling Sofia the fantastic news that she’s managed to get Tadeusz a visa to get into Sweden. Back to Borowski’s hostel where Kristyn is waking up with a note stuck to his chest. There are two girls in his bed. On this note is a message from Borowski saying meet us at the station at 2. We then

see Krystyn buying tickets and talking to Borowski while the girl with the red hair is across the complex getting coffees. Borowski tells Krystyn that she is taking them to the Lyon Fair. Krystyn asks him deeply what is he going to do now he seems to have a new girlfriend.

We are then on a train, Borowski and Krystyn are sitting there. No sign of redhaired girl and we see Borowski writing a letter and Maria reading it. From the voiceover we discover the train is the WARSAW train. Borowski is going home and with Krystyn. We see Anatol Girs in America reading a letter from Borowski written on this train saying how “ he came and saw, I am sad in Paris. ” .We then see Maria throwing down his letters in anger. Back to Maria who is saying to Sofia that freedom can replace Tadeusz. “ freedom is more necessary than love ” . Screen flashes up – One Month Later – and Borowski is in his empty Warsaw flat writing a begging letter to Maria not to break off with him. He tells her he feels completely alone .

He is then in The Young Artists & Scholars Club reciting a few of his suicidal and nihilist poems to his friend the theatre director Staczek. Back to Maria who is in bed ill with a fever. In this fever we see her mixing up memories, good and bad, we then hear her yell Tadeusz. The moral is when you're ill you go to the ones you need most. We then see her in bed in Warsaw with Tadeusz looking over her caring for her. It is obvious she has come home. There is then a collage of scenes of them being happy together over great 1940s swing music - getting married, him writing, doing up their flat, his books published, her going to work as a journalist and in love TOGETHER. Then we're at the club where Borowski introduces Tadeusz Rozewicz who says ironically how it is still possible to write happy poems about the moon after Auschwitz and then t with Borowski they sing “ The Survivor. ”

I am 24  
Led to slaughter  
I survived

I seek a teacher and a master  
May he restore my sight  
May he name objects and ideas  
May he separate darkness from light

Rozewicz then says to Borowski as they go off stage: “ I heard a ridiculous rumour that you were going to Berlin to work for the new Stalinist government.” Borowski says nothing! Screen says 2009 and we see Joan destitute on the streets and then at Beachy Head singing the same song “ The Survivor.” Then it's back to 1949 and Borowski explaining to his friend Krystyn in an alfresco café how he has become the leading writer in Warsaw but is still not liked by the authorities. He says that he wants to save the people, wants to be useful so he is going to Berlin and we see his mixed up confused state of mind. Then footage of Berlin and the blockade is explained in newsreel. The Soviets didn't allow the western powers access to Berlin by road, so the USA had to fly in food and supplies for nearly 1 year to break the blockade. It was the Cold War. Then we're in Berlin where Borowski and Aleksander Wat are looking out the window, overlooking the city. Wat is accusing Borowski of betraying his friends who won't toe the socialist realist line decreed by the Polish Arts Council. Borowski reveals his ambivalence between communism and capitalism, “luxury behind window displays, hunger and prostitution in the streets, despair in the heart”. He says he tried to embrace communism to inspire his people but picking up Stalin's prayer book, he says he just couldn't. In despair he tells Wat capitalism is the exploitation of one man by another and communism is the opposite. ” Wat tells him Poland needs truthful writers not useful writers but Borowski says he is obsessed by evil.

Evil seems to be everywhere. I stand among you like a spectre and ask about the source.

We're then on another train, Borowski in corridor, Maria in carriage. We see as in a horror movie apparitions rising from graves and coming towards the train in their millions as we hear his voiceover. This is his famous poem about survivors' guilt – A Prayer For Forgetfulness

The dead will come from the ground and the sea  
From mud, camps and shooting ranges  
In their chests – bayonet, bullet, knife  
And in their eyes - despair, hatred and fear.....

We're then back in Warsaw, as they get off the train at the station and get into a taxi. We see tanks in the street and soldiers. It is eerily like before in 1940 except now they are Red Army Soldiers and tanks. In their flat Borowski and Maria have a huge argument about Borowski's guilt complex." You are a good man " – Maria says. " I'm not – I gassed millions. Evil lies in us " he says. " You did what you could " Maria says,  
" you saved me, love conquers everything. " " No ... death conquers everything," he replies. " What about our child " she screams and he breaks down crying " is bringing a child into this world something to celebrate."

3 DAYS LATER flashes on the screen and we see him alone in front of a mirror, reading

Man is evil, I say aloud  
and death looks on with a casual eye and scratches his anus.

Over this poem we see Maria give birth to a baby girl.

Man with his small pink toes  
With his miraculous fingers  
Is not a temple  
But an outhouse

The screen flashes: 2009 England and we are at Beachy Head and Joan is obviously considering jumping. Nanino is there saying " wait, we all get down, you will get through it ." Joan sings the suicide song Gloomy Sunday, while Nanino attempts to persuade her to live. Nanino is almost rapping to the music. Half way through surrealistically we switch to Borowski in his flat in 1951 switching on gas oven and reading again like a rap to Gloomy Sunday music " all love has died on earth " ...  
It is obvious he is going to kill himself. We see Maria holding their baby as she sings the verse in Gloomy Sunday " My heart is telling you how much I wanted you. " Joan is led away from the cliff edge by Nanino crying " I see these visions – my family."  
Back to Maria with her baby in their flat and their song – Us Two - is playing on the gramophone but she dances now with the baby not Tadeusz.. Screen says Tadeusz Borowski died on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1951 by gas poisoning. He never knew his child Malgorzata Borowski.

Screen flashes 2009 and we are back in the TV Studio. Joan is being interviewed by Kirsty Wark on Late Review in a repeat of the scene from the beginning of the movie. We now see more of the TV show and learn that Joan is now famous for her photographic work " Under The Trees" and it seems certain she will be allowed to stay in the UK. Finally we are at a benefit concert in a venue which is obviously The Essentialists Club but now in 2009 where Borowski performed. Stars are now on stage BAND AID style doing a concert for Darfur. They sing the song Never. Joan is one of the stars and when Never finishes she sings a song about rape. She then walks around the venue lighting candles in memory of those we have loved and lost and makes an emotional speech about her own survival. She then sings with the others

If I have to say it  
I will say it  
If I have to say it  
I will say it again  
Remember Auschwitz which you said  
Would never happen  
Again

Finally all the major actors of the film say a few words, the moral of which is as Joan says “ do something .” If the world allows the people of Darfur to be removed forever from their land then genocide will happen again because it will be seen as something that works. We then see Daghani and Nanino dancing to the beautiful waltz. Josef and Sara’s Waltz The credits come up.