



A **Stan.** ORIGINAL SERIES
The TATTOOIST
of AUSCHWITZ

For more information, contact stan.publicity@stan.com.au

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INTRODUCTION

The Tattooist of Auschwitz is the story of one man, Lali (Hauer-King), a Slovakian Jew, who, in 1942, is deported to Auschwitz, the concentration camp where over a million Jews were murdered during the Holocaust.

Shortly after arrival, Lali is made one of the Tätowierer (tattooists), charged to ink identification numbers onto fellow prisoners' arms. One day, he meets Gita (Próchniak) when tattooing her prisoner number on her arm, leading to a love that defies the horrors around them. So begins a courageous and unforgettable story. Under constant guard from a volatile Nazi SS officer Stefan Baretzki (Jonas Nay), Lali and Gita become determined to keep each other alive.

Around 60 years later, Lali (Keitel) now in his 80s, meets aspiring writer Heather Morris (Lynskey). Recently widowed, Lali finds the courage to tell the world his story. In recounting his past to Heather, Lali finally confronts the traumatic ghosts of his youth and relives his memories of falling in love in the darkest of places.



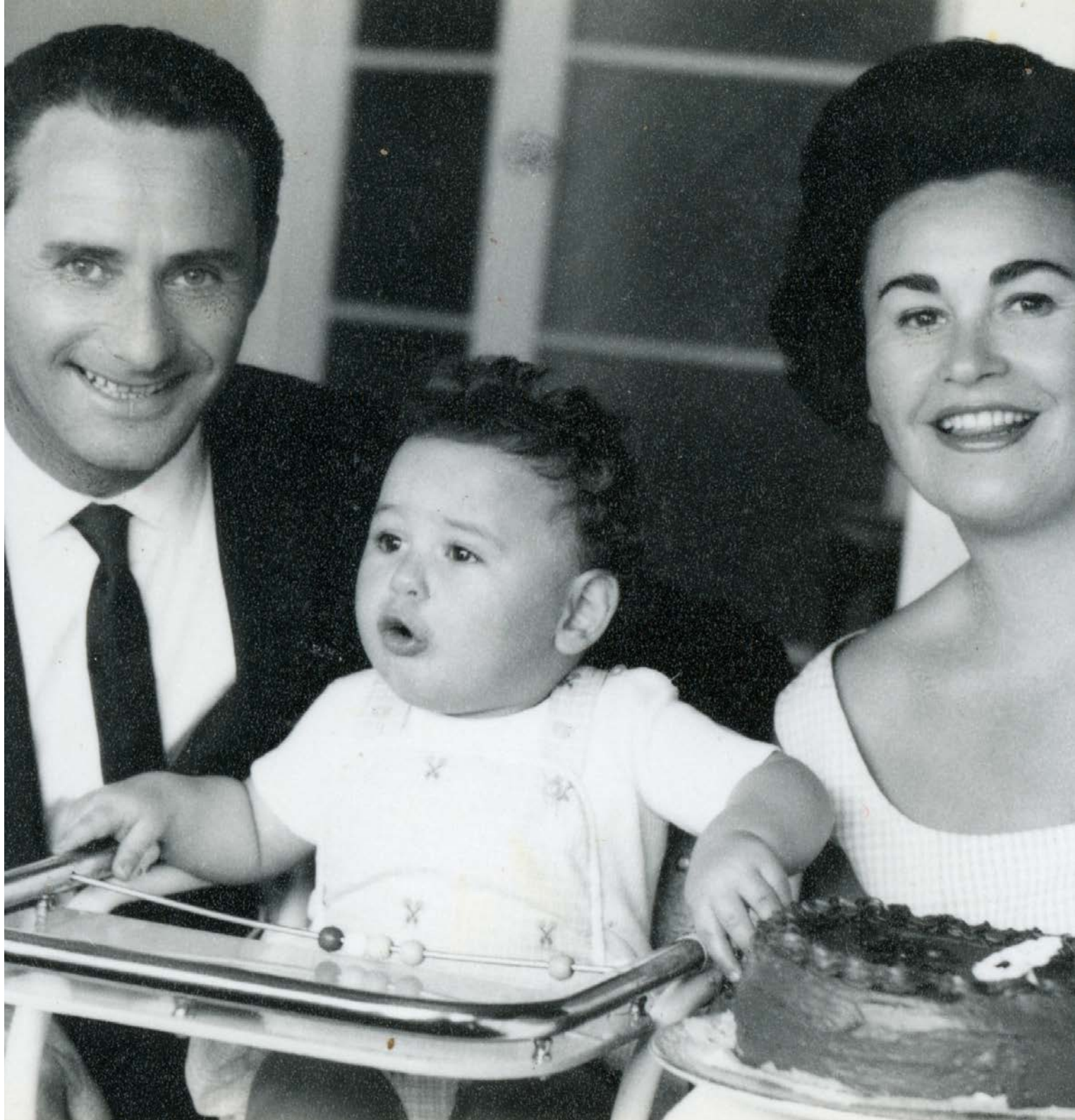
FOREWORD: A CONVERSATION WITH GARY SOKOLOV, SON OF LALI AND GITA SOKOLOV

What was your initial response when you found out that *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* was going to become a TV series?

I experienced many emotions. I always believed in my heart this was a story that needed to be told and a book or a film can only go so far – a miniseries has more time to explore the story in depth. Mum and Dad's story has everything: romance, love, survival, and hope, all set against a backdrop of some of the worst of conditions that have existed.

You have watched all six episodes: what did it then feel like to watch your parents' story unfold?

I don't have the words. The respect that was given to my father and my mother and their story was beyond anything I could have imagined. I really hope the world feels the same way. It's what I wanted for my parents: for the world to know their story. So, yes, it's fantastic. Am I allowed to cry? →



“Mum and Dad’s story has everything: romance, love, survival, and hope, all set against a backdrop of some of the worst of conditions that have existed.”

Many relatives of Holocaust survivors say their family members never spoke about their experiences; how do you feel about the fact that Lali told Heather [Morris] your story?

Dad finally found someone he trusted enough to tell his story. He needed to tell it. I can’t imagine, knowing Heather, that he could have told it to anyone else. The world needs to know this story, especially now, where hope is really important. My Dad was always about PMA – positive mental attitude. When all else

fails, you’ve got to find a way to laugh. If you possibly can. It’s what kept my parents alive in the camp.

What was it like to see Harvey Keitel portraying your father?

There were moments when I couldn’t tell the difference between my father and Harvey Keitel. He was my father on every single level. If he wasn’t, I wouldn’t have spent so much time in tears. The way he portrayed Dad was beyond anything I could ever have expected. There is a saying in Jewish culture, kavod – which is the ultimate level of respect – and he gave that to my Dad. Just talking about it makes me cry! When Heather sent me a photo, I had to do a double take. I looked at it. Looked away. Looked again. I wasn’t sure if it was my father or Harvey Keitel. When I watched the series, I was in tears within the first ten seconds of the trailer because Harvey looked and sounded like my father. He had that little bit of hardness in his eyes that my father had. His eyes were my father’s eyes – when he spoke about my mother he was tearing up, which is what my dad did. I didn’t feel as though I was watching Harvey in the series, I thought I was watching my father.

Are there any particular moments in the series that are particularly memorable?

Where do I start? After watching the show, I couldn’t stop thinking about Harvey Keitel playing my Dad. Or the innocent love that Anna [Próchniak] has in her eyes. I thought about what Jonah [Hauer-King] must have learned about my father and about survival. How, when he looked at Anna, you just knew it was a love that would last forever. I don’t envy Jonas [Nay] playing Baretzki – it wouldn’t have been easy for him. I fully understand why he rang Heather before they started filming and said, ‘I don’t know how to do this’. The way he did it was phenomenal.

Melanie [Lynskey] did a phenomenal job. I didn’t understand until I watched the show what Heather herself had been through, hearing my Dad’s stories and then going home to her family. Heather filled a hole for my Dad when my mother passed away. I remember Heather saying to me that whatever happens, I’ll always take care of your Dad. I don’t think anyone else could have done the job that Heather did with my Dad. She gave my Dad so much respect.

In fact, the thing that really struck me overall was that each and every person on the show gave my parents’ story respect.

What did you think of Hans Zimmer’s score?

It lingers. It’s in the background, but it certainly sets the tone. The emotion that came with the music was a perfect fit for each and every scene. It reflected the harshness of the environment, but at the same time the melody had something uplifting about it.

What do you hope audiences will take away from the series?

I hope they will believe that bad times do end. You have got to stay positive as much as you possibly can. I hope that whatever people are going through, the show will give them a sense that there is a future. I know my parents’ story can help affect change; I get letters from people saying that they are taking their child to Auschwitz to educate them. I think one of the most important lines in the series is when dad asked mum, ‘Where’s God?’ They decided that God might not be there, but they could make things better for themselves. That’s an amazing legacy to leave people – there is always hope. ◆



IN CONVERSATION WITH CLAIRE MUNDELL, THE MAKING OF *THE TATTOOIST OF AUSCHWITZ*

Back in 2018, award-winning executive producer Claire Mundell (*The Cry*, *Mayflies*) and Creative Director of production company Synchronicity Films, couldn't help but notice that everywhere she went, people were reading the same book – *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*. She was intrigued. The book, which has now sold over 13 million copies worldwide, tells the remarkable story of Lali Sokolov, a young Slovakian Jew taken to Auschwitz, the Nazi's biggest concentration camp, in April 1942. Partly due to his proficiency in languages, the young Sokolov was forced to become one of the titular tattooists, or the 'Tätowierer'.

In July 1942, Sokolov tattooed the arm of a young Slovakian woman, Gita, and the two fell profoundly in love. He used his privileges as a tattooist to supply Gita and others with his rations and was determined to survive and spend the rest of his life with Gita. Defying all odds, the couple married after the war and moved to Australia, where they had a son – Gary Sokolov.

Mundell recalls reading the book written by first-time New Zealand born author Heather Morris and discovering that it was informed by a real-life story, "As a producer, I'm drawn to stories based on real life. It was clearly a very moving, emotional and epic story. And the idea of a love story set in Auschwitz was incredible; how could two people fall in love in one of the most notorious concentration camps?"

Lali's story spoke to me about our innate capacity for hope and survival. I hadn't seen such a story portrayed on screen before, certainly not for a mainstream global audience."

After speaking with Morris about adapting the story into a long-form scripted series, Mundell thought carefully about the responsibility and challenge of telling a story set in Auschwitz. "Until I started developing and producing *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, I hadn't fully appreciated the terrifying reality of the Holocaust denier and so became increasingly aware of the responsibility of adapting such a book. Although Lali and Gita's story was utterly compelling, we had to consider what justified bringing it to the screen. Earlier in 2018 I had seen several articles citing a Holocaust Awareness survey which claimed to show that 41% of Americans and 66% of American millennials, at that time, did not know what Auschwitz was. I found it inconceivable that ignorance of the Holocaust could be so extensive and was therefore curious why *The Tattooist* was selling millions of copies at a time when Holocaust awareness seemed to be in decline. But the book's success soon became clear – Lali and Gita's story of love and survival was truly inspiring. It offered hope in the bleakest of worlds, a sentiment all audiences can all identify with.

Although the book is set predominantly between 1942 and 1945, the issues that it explores – antisemitism, →

“In circumstances that are incredibly bleak, as they were in Auschwitz-Birkenau, any glimmer of light or hope is magnified. Acts of kindness and love become hugely important. They enable people to survive.”

intolerance and hatred – unfortunately remain relevant today. “Our purpose in adapting the book became one of honouring Lali and Gita’s love story in the hope that we could leave viewers with a changed perspective on antisemitism and intolerance.

“I therefore set about attaining the rights to this emerging bestseller and once secured began the process of development.”

Mundell sent a copy of *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* to Australian writer Jacquelin Perske, with whom she had collaborated on *The Cry*. Perske’s initial response was similar to Mundell’s, how to honour a story set in a “very dark place in history”? She started by spending a week with Morris and Story Producer Ruth Underwood in Melbourne, discussing the process of writing the book with Ludwig ‘Lali’ Sokolov. “Heather, who had never written anything before, spent a long time talking to Lali. She went to see him several times a week and they became incredibly good friends with a very special bond.”

The team had extensive conversations with Heather Morris about her time with the late Lali Sokolov, and

carefully considered the best approach to convey the story in a long-form TV series. Although Morris details her meetings with 87-year-old Sokolov in a brief Postscript at the end of *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, she isn’t a presence in the novel itself. However, Perske thought it would be interesting to include those meetings in the narrative structure of her script. “I realised it would allow us to deal with history and memory as this is Lali’s deeply personal story of the Holocaust. So, the script switches between old Lali talking to Heather in his apartment in Melbourne and young Lali’s horrendous experiences in Auschwitz.”

Mundell notes that the team set about creating a narrative storytelling style that enables the show to examine the nature of post-trauma and memory. “Through Lali’s developing relationship with Heather Morris, the series shows the purpose that telling his story truly served – the unburdening of years of repressed trauma; his recognition and, ultimately, banishment of the ghosts of his past; and the release from his very complex survivor’s guilt.

As he tells Heather his story, we see Lali’s fragmented memories. The more painful they are, the more difficult to recollect – the darker side of his memory holding him back from fully sharing. People from his past such as Aaron, Baretzki and Tomas come alive to him in his apartment, manifestations of his trauma. Unseen by Heather, they talk to Lali about their experiences giving us insight into the nature of memory and the narratives we construct, showing us that history is more than just one simple truth – it’s made up of multiple threads and every one has meaning and value.”

Perske, who as lead writer worked alongside episode writers Gabbie Asher and Evan Placey, and Story Producer Ruth Underwood, also considered how to balance the darkness of the Holocaust with hope and

humanity. “I think the response to darkness is to find the light. In circumstances that are incredibly bleak, as they were in Auschwitz, any glimmer of light or hope is magnified. Acts of kindness and love become hugely important. They enable people to survive.”

Along with the cast and key crew members, Determined to ensure everyone on the team was clear about the responsibility of telling Lali and Gita’s story, Mundell and her HOD team visited Auschwitz several times and consulted with the museum at various stages Mundell also enlisted Naomi Gryn as the Historical and Jewish Cultural Consultant.

Naomi Gryn was an ideal choice for the challenge of dramatizing Lali’s real-life story on screen. Naomi was the conduit between production and Holocaust research, understanding the objectives of each given her experience both as a filmmaker for projects such as *Chasing Shadows*, the memoirs of her father Rabbi Hugo Gryn, a child survivor of Auschwitz, and as a researcher for works of Holocaust historians including Sir Martin Gilbert and Sir William Shawcross.

A central element of honouring both Lali and Gita’s story and the prisoners of Auschwitz was the recreation of the camp, which production undertook over seven to eight weeks in the middle of a bitter Slovakian winter. “We knew we could not ever recreate what happened in Auschwitz,” explains Mundell. “We could only give audiences a sense of the terrible events that took place. And so the show doesn’t shy away from violence. It’s quite confronting. Tonally – in terms of everything from lighting to music – we had to be clear that we are telling a love story in a place that is evil beyond your wildest imagination and that, I hope, encourages people to spread love instead of hate.” ◆



CASTING THE SERIES

Equally vital was securing two young, emotionally intelligent actors able to take on the enormity of playing young Lali and Gita as part of an experienced international cast and over 5,000 supporting artists across the shoot. Mundell wanted Jonah Hauer-King to play young Lali pretty soon after optioning the book. "He is a complete superstar. He's been our North Star throughout the project. We ended up having a five-hour lunch because he thought he was pitching to me. Jonah himself is Jewish and said at that lunch he'd do anything to be involved because the story meant so much to him." Jonah reciprocated Claire's sentiments, "I had that rare feeling where you feel like you have to be involved and would do anything to be involved."

Of Jonah's co-star, Polish-born actress Anna Próchniak, Claire notes that she was an exciting discovery in a mammoth casting process that saw many actors read for the supporting roles. "Anna read for many other smaller parts but we kept bringing her back to read a bigger part after every audition. She stood out. Eventually we realised the part we really wanted her to read for was Gita and when she did we realised immediately that she is the perfect Gita; she has an intensity, strength and resilience to her as well as this inner light." →

“Having these Hollywood actors join the series was ‘a dream come true’ for Mundell.”

Later, Academy Award nominee Harvey Keitel, born in New York to Jewish immigrants, joined the cast as the older Lali along with New Zealander superstar Melanie Lynskey as Heather Morris. Having these Hollywood legends join the series was “a dream come true” for Mundell. However, finding an actor to play Stefan Baretzki, the vicious, sadistic Nazi SS Officer in charge of Lali, was less straightforward. “We had to be careful not to portray Baretzki in a sympathetic way, but equally we didn’t want him to be a caricature or cliché. German-born actor Jonas Nay (star of *Deutschland 83/86/89*) plays him in such a chilling, unHINGED way that is full of depth and unsettling emotion.”

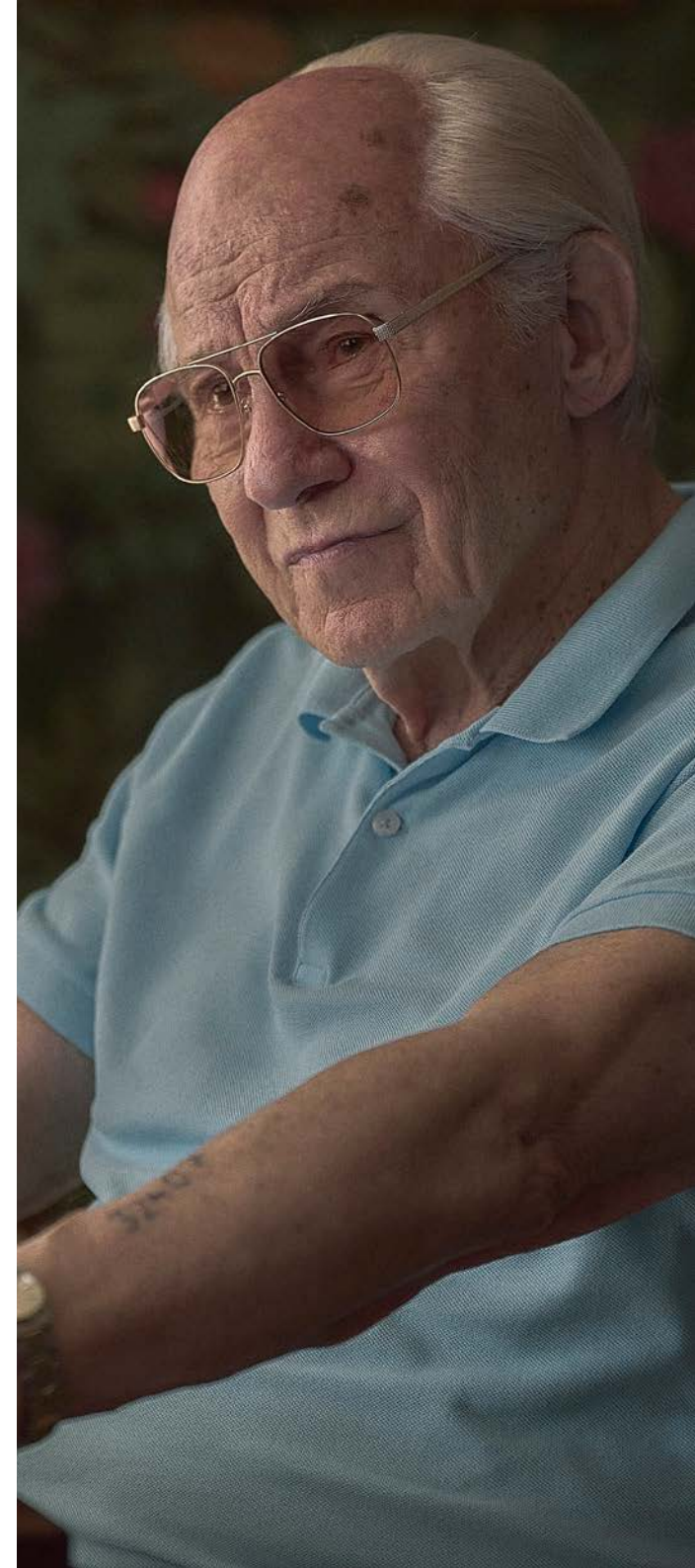
It is unusual for a single director to work across a series, especially one as challenging as *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, but it was important to have both a consistent vision and a fixed point of reference for the cast and crew. Mundell watched the work of Tali Shalom Ezer and was struck by the performances in her work, and specifically the way she explored trauma in her film ‘Princess’. “I thought, given we were telling a story about memory and trauma, that Tali would have a compelling approach and our first conversation about the project confirmed that.” “Tali approached the story with rigor and passion. To have one director across six episodes is a massive achievement, and the way she works with actors is incredible.”

Shalom-Ezer explains that she was looking for actors able to express how dehumanising Auschwitz was. “The people imprisoned there were broken. Completely broken. And it’s a challenge for an actor to express this. We also tried to create an ensemble of actors from all over Europe, so that German roles were played by German actors, Hungarian roles by Hungarian actors and so on. It was unique, I think, to have such an incredible mix of nationalities.”

Most of the filming took place in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia and Lali Sokolov’s home country, which Shalom-Ezer had to consider on two fronts. Most of the cast and crew were not only isolated from their families and friends, but “I also wanted to ensure we were mindful of and respectful to the many people on set, from the actors to the local crew, who had a personal connection to the Holocaust story.”

Due to the traumatic subject matter of the series, Mundell decided from the outset to engage Solas Mind, which offers mental health and wellbeing support in the creative industries. One-on-one counselling appointments were available around the clock and in a variety of languages to accommodate the international cast and crew. Mundell explains “In telling a survivor’s story, Lali’s story, we had to confront the environment of Auschwitz and Auschwitz II-Birkenau and create a version of the real place for the screen, using a combination of a practical set build and extensive VFX set extensions. Given the subject matter and the responsibility of depicting Lali’s memories, our team immersed themselves in the world of Auschwitz, each department conducting their own extensive research. This was a heavy environment for people to be working in and therefore emotionally confronting, but the team never wavered from the privilege of telling Lali’s story with as much authenticity as possible. In addition to the usual pressures of a high end shoot, I was conscious that our team would be recreating extremely distressing scenes and events. It was therefore imperative that we supported everyone’s mental health on and off set.”

Of the many highlights for Mundell in the making of the show, the chance to work with composers Hans Zimmer, Kara Talve and Score Producer Russell Emanuel has been hugely significant. “To work with Kara and Academy Award winner Hans’ score has been incredible. Their dedication and respect in creating the musical backdrop to Lali’s story has so inspiring to witness and I can’t wait for audiences to hear their beautiful work.” ◆





THE LOOK OF *THE TATTOOIST OF AUSCHWITZ*

In preparation for *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, hair and make-up [HAMU] designer Frances Hounsom (After Life), delved into first-hand accounts of Auschwitz survivors. She then created a series of watercolour paintings as visual references for the production. “The colours that came to mind were a lot of blues, dark greens and browns. Very earthy tones that also suggest sadness. I worked closely with Stevie Herbert, the production designer, about her colour palette to ensure consistency in the visual style of the series.” It might not necessarily be captured on camera, but the mud is never just mud: it’s grass, it’s dust, it’s blood.”

While her relationship with director Tali Shalom-Ezer was crucial – “she listens to what everyone has to say, which is incredible” – Hounsom also focused on building trust with the actors. She watched them during rehearsals to understand how they moved, which she says is more important to HAMU than people might think. “For example, Anna [Próchniak] is like a dancer when she moves. She has this beautiful glow that I put on her cheeks to suggest a kind of inner peace, despite everything that is going on around her.”

During a scene where Lali is brutally beaten up, Hounsom applied a bleeding prosthetic eye on top of Jonah Hauer-King’s actual eye. Jonas Nay underwent a complete character transformation simply because

the actor, is “an utter ball of sunshine, fun, colour and life”, unlike his character, the Nazi SS officer Stefan Baretzki. “Baretzki uses amphetamine, so his eyes are constantly red, he’s always a bit sweaty, a bit on edge. Most of the SS officers are immaculately groomed, but we did a lot of research and his hair was fluffy at times, his uniform unbuttoned.”

Prisoners of Auschwitz were defined by tattoos indicating their camp numbers and roughly shaved heads. Hounsom says it was important to draw the tattoos, which were transfers applied with water by hand. “I drew over 1,200 tattoos. They were originally done by a needle dotting ink onto the skin; I worked with Naomi [Gryn, the Historical and Jewish Cultural Consultant] to create all the different numbers. We wanted to protect the identity of former or deceased prisoners, and any surviving relatives, so we opted to use fictional tattoo numbers and only used the real numbers for Lali and Gita who, whose numbers we knew were historically accurate. I made the fresh tattoos look bloody and sore and the older ones a bit more worn, a bit softer.”

Hounsom also consulted with the cast members who played prisoners about shaving their heads. “We could have offered bald caps, but aesthetically these don’t look as authentic. The prisoners at Auschwitz had their heads roughly shaved upon arrival, which was →

intentionally dehumanising, so I used a pair of clippers to recreate the patchy shave. We donated long hair to the Little Princess Trust, to make wigs for children with leukaemia who have sadly lost their hair.”

To transform Melanie Lynskey into Heather Morris, Hounsom designed a blonde wig (“this is the first time Melanie has been blonde on-screen”) that suited the actor’s skin tone. She worked with an American prosthetics designer on ears, teeth and a hairpiece for Harvey Keitel, who plays the older Lali.

Costume designer Ján Kocman, who a decade ago worked on *The Prisoners of Auschwitz*, worked closely with Hounsom, Shalom-Ezer and Gryn. He ordered original fabric made of wool mixed with cotton and dyed it to create the prisoners’ uniforms – “there were more than 5,000 supporting artists across the entire shoot, so it was a big task” – and around 140 pairs of shoes were made and then aged. Actors wore thermals beneath the uniforms, which had to look not only “dirty and destroyed” but also had to look loose as the prisoners become malnourished. The prison guards, meanwhile, had cotton uniforms in summer and wool in winter. “Keeping the actors warm was key; they were often half naked and barefoot in the snow.”

Kocman also had to consider the fact that the timeline jumps from the 1940s to the ‘60s to the 2000s. “The colour palette in the ‘60s is obviously very different to the one in the concentration camp. Detail is important: older Lali has a yellow kitchen in his Melbourne apartment and his mother wore a yellow apron at the start of the story. Lali sold fabric as part of his job, so he would look elegant before and after his time in Auschwitz.” ◆



MAIN CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES



LALI IN HIS YOUNGER YEARS draws on his natural ingenuity and sharp wits, his resourcefulness and his carefully calculated courage, to survive the most horrendous concentration camp of modern times. His survival instinct is married with kindness, though it disappoints him that he is not as altruistic as others. He helps as many as he can but is haunted by the certain knowledge, he can't help everyone. As the series develops, so does his realisation of the injustice of his own survival over others – where no individual deserves it more than any other.



GITA is very different from Lali. She doesn't cling to or battle with any sense of self-worth, won't talk about who she was before, and won't even reveal her full name, because she recognises its irrelevance. She'll never be that person again. But she knows that she can give love, and that's what sustains her and the people she meets in Auschwitz – her willingness not just to give, but to go on believing in love. She is a pragmatist to Lali's optimist – but crucially, through loving him, buys into his hope and supports his wild schemes, often coming up with some of her own. This is the foundation of a relationship that will stand the test of time.



STEFAN BARETZKI is a Nazi SS guard, a weak young man who has suffered a difficult childhood at the hands of a violent father and is now in the dangerous position of wielding disproportionate power. He both torments and idolises Lali; seeking his guidance whilst exacting acts of cruelty; enabling Lali's love affair with Gita one moment and threatening their lives the next. Lali treads a fine line with this mixed-up murderer. Baretzki was tried in Frankfurt in 1960 and sentenced to life imprisonment. He killed himself in prison in 1988.



MODERN-DAY LALI When Heather meets Lali and he tells her his story, he is struggling under the weight of his grief for his wife, Gita, who has recently passed away. Whilst telling his story, it soon becomes clear that he still carries a huge burden of shame: for having survived where others didn't, and for all the things he did to survive. What Heather discovers as she gets to know him is the darker fear he also carries – that he crossed an unthinkable line in accepting the duty of a tattooist, and that he's no better than the SS officers who brutalized him and his fellow prisoners. But in spite of the darkness of his story, we get to know a man of extraordinary positivity. A man who is haunted but not broken by the horrors he's experienced; who is buoyed by his triumph over them. A man who in his very essence instils hope and the belief that anything is possible. It's this that draws him to Heather because she shares the same essence.



HEATHER is a forthright woman, whose pragmatism about the darkness of the world does daily battle with her wonder at it. When we, and Lali, meet her she is in her early 50s and is working at a hospital; her children have now grown and flown the nest. She is dependable, big-hearted, and loyal but has a childlike sense of fun. She enjoys the finer things in life, as does Lali, and neither of them will apologise for it.

OTHER RECURRING CHARACTERS

AARON is also Slovakian. Lali meets him before being transported to Auschwitz. He is only 18, and Lali plays the protective big brother to him. They are blockmates in Birkenau.

TOMAS Tomas loses hope when he learns his pregnant wife has been murdered – and with nothing left to lose, tries to escape, knowing it will be a suicidal mission.

MARTIN is a more forgiving former blockmate of Lali's – he has a live-and-let live attitude.

HANNA and **IVANA** are Gita's closest friends in the camp, both are Slovakian, both arrived in the camp at the same time as her, and the three stick together, living in the same block throughout. They are Gita's confidantes and remain loyal to her even though at times they disagree with the risks she takes for Lali, and the danger Lali puts Gita in. They both work in the Clothing Warehouse and help Gita smuggle items out for the black market.

CILKA is a frightened young Slovakian girl, who is only 16 when she arrives at the camp. She is beautiful and not yet aware of what it will afford her, nor what it will cost her. When she meets Gita in the administration block, she is hardened to her fate. Her fierce will to survive is the equal of Lali's, but fortune will not favour her in the same way it does him.

NADYA is part of a huge contingent of Romany prisoners who arrive in the camp in 1943 and are moved into the block where Lali has been living. Although he treats them with disdain when they first arrive, Lali and Nadya soon form a very close friendship – she reminds him of his sister.



PRODUCTION



With special thanks to our Slovakian crew mates Spectral s.r.o, the Roma community of Zlaté Klasy who performed as extras to comprise the Gypsy camp that Lali stayed in, and Solas Mind, who provided 1:1 counselling appointments for our cast and crew during filming.

The shoot lasted
84 days

The production involved over
5000 supporting artists (based on overall catering figures across the shoot)

The VFX were overseen by Alan Church (VFX Producer) and Simon Giles (VFX Supervisor) using teams from Union VFX and Untold Studios

300 crew were employed, with an average of
191 on set each day.

Stan.

ORIGINALS

**Stan is Australia's leading local streaming service
and unrivalled home of original productions.**

Stan's original production slate includes hit thriller series *BLACK SNOW* starring Travis Fimmel; *TEN POUND POMS* starring Michelle Keegan; the Stan Original Dating series *LOVE TRIANGLE*, a modern take on the struggle for love; *BUMP*, a modern parenthood drama starring Claudia Karvan; *RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE DOWN UNDER*, hosted by RuPaul, Michelle Visage and Rhys Nicholson; *C*A*U*G*H*T*, a satirical comedy series from Kick Gurry and starring Sean Penn and Matthew Fox; *WOLF LIKE ME*, a genre-bending drama series starring Isla Fisher and Josh Gad; and countless other acclaimed original series and films.

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