

BABI YAR

A FILM BY

SERGEI LOZNITSA

Все жидаы города Києва и его окрестностей должны явиться в понедельник 29 сентября 1941 года к 8 часам утра на угол Мельниковой и Доктеривской улиц (возле кладбищ).

Взять с собой документы, деньги и ценные вещи, а также теплую одежду, белье и пр.

Кто из жидов не выполнит этого распоряжения и будет найден в другом месте, будет расстрелян.

Кто из граждан проникнет в оставленные жидами квартиры и присвоит себе вещи, будет расстрелян.

Наказується всім жидам міста Києва і околиць зібратися в понеділок дня 29 вересня 1941 року до год. 8 ранку при вул. Мельника — Доктерівській (коло кладовища).

Всі повинні забрати з собою документи, гроші, білизну та інше.

Хто не підпорядкується цьому розпорядженню буде розстріляний.

Хто займе жидівське мешкання або розграбує предмети з тих мешкань, буде розстріляний.

Sämtliche Juden der Stadt Kiew und Umgebung haben sich am Montag, dem 29. September 1941 bis 8 Uhr i Ecke der Melnik- und Dokterivski-Strasse (an den Friedhöfen) einzufinden.

Mitnehmen sind Dokumente, Geld und Wertsachen, sowie warme Bekleidung, Wäsche usw.

Wer dieser Aufforderung nicht nachkommt und anderweitig angetroffen wird, wird erschossen.

Wer in verlassene Wohnungen von Juden eindringt oder sich Gegenstände daraus aneignet, wird erschossen.

BABI YAR by Sergei Loznitsa is a radical act of transforming the language of cinema. In order to recreate on screen the humanitarian tragedy which has become one of the symbols of the XX century, director Sergei Loznitsa breaks up traditional narrative and abandons the concept of a «main hero».

In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, poet Joseph Brodsky noted: "For in a real tragedy, it is not the hero who perishes; it is the chorus". The subject of the film is a tragedy of the «chorus». It is the tragedy of millions of Europeans, who found themselves enslaved by grand delusions and who were eventually destroyed by them. A pandemic disaster known to us today as "Holocaust" started with individual acts of barbarity and localized killings. The

film traces the origins of the catastrophe and sheds light on the initial events of the drama, which ultimately led to the point of no return.



SYNOPSIS:

On September, 29th and 30th, 1941 Sonderkommando 4a led by SS-Standartenführer Paul Blobel, assisted by Wehrmacht units and the Ukrainian auxiliary police force, and without any resistance from the local population, shot dead in Babi Yar ravine almost the entire remaining Jewish population of the city of Kiev - 33 771 people.

Summer 1941. Western Ukraine. The beginning of the German invasion of the USSR. Two Red Army platoons clash in a ravine, not far from the front line: soldiers, who have already been under enemy fire and who don't want to sacrifice their lives for the Soviet power, are running away from the front and trying to persuade a platoon of fresh recruits to follow their example. A communist commissar, eager to force his comrades onto the battlefield, tries to boost the morale by shooting one of the deserters, but the soldiers tear him apart on the spot.

In the meantime, in the city of Kiev the war propaganda campaign reaches a state of paranoia: in a dark street during curfew hours vigilant citizens capture a drunk man, who tries to switch his pocket torch on, to find his way home. The drunkard is taken to a police station, questioned and sentenced to death as a traitor. While the Kievans are storming the river port desperate to board last boats taking evacuees out of the city, a meeting of workers and peasants is organized in the Opera Theatre. The speakers solemnly proclaim that their city will never succumb to the enemy. In Kiev prisons, political prisoners are executed without trial, in Kiev shops, people are fighting for scarce remaining provisions, and in the NKVD and Army headquarters the generals get ready for retreat. They mastermind a sabotage campaign by planting explosives all over the city centre.

The German army rapidly progresses eastwards. Ukrainian peasants, who cautiously welcome the Germans, witness first mass shootings of the Jews. In Bila Tserkva, a small town 80 km from Kiev, Lieutenant Colonel Groscurth enters into a dispute with an SD Hauptmann attempting to determine the fate of several dozen Jewish children. Hauptmann's personnel shot dead the entire adult Jewish population of the town, but refused to shoot the children, and locked them up in a house, guarded by a Ukrainian policeman. The children's crying and howling disturb the sleep of Wehrmacht soldiers quartered nearby... The SD Hauptmann insists that the children should be executed as soon as possible, but the Lieutenant Colonel of Wehrmacht tries to delay the killing.

As the extermination frenzy grows, panic stricken, frightened, blinded by rage and despair protagonists of this drama – Ukrainians and Russian, Germans and Jews, city dwellers and country folk, soldiers and security agents, children and adults – all of them unwittingly pave their way to Babi yar. Every new episode of the film, presenting a new group of protagonists, forms a link in a chain of human degradation, leading to the triumph of animalistic instincts. In this dramatic collision individual human faces disappear in a crowd. The crowd takes place of the main hero. "For in a real tragedy, it is not the hero who perishes; it is the chorus". When ideology overpowers reason, and animalistic instincts supersede human willpower, "Babi yar" is inevitable.

Based on historical facts and documentary evidence, the film reconstructs one of the key moments of contemporary European history and readdresses the question: "How could this happen?". The question, which remains as relevant, as it is irresolvable.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES:

When they bury an epoch
The funeral psalms are not sung,
Only garlands of nettles and thistles
Adorn the burial site.

And then it emerges in springtime,
A corpse in the vernal flood,
A Son would not know his Mother,
A Grandson, with grief-stricken heart.

Anna Akhmatova

I remember that day very well. It was March 2002, and I was working at the Documentary film studio in St Petersburg at the time. I was walking along the studio corridor and stopped by the open door of the archive room. The room was dark, and the screen of a TV set displayed images of the besieged Leningrad.

I spent four hours in front of that TV screen. Then I took a long walk around the city. I was in a state of shock. Three years later, in 2005, I made the film «Blockade».

Then the idea came to me to make a feature film in a similar style. I wanted to «recreate» documentary images and to arrange them in a certain mosaic, to present an outline of the events, the memory of which was still lingering in the air around me. The autumn of 1941... I knew precisely which city and what events I wanted to talk about.

On the 29th and 30th of September 1941 more than 33 000 Jews – mostly women, children and elderly – marched from early morning till late afternoon through the streets of Kiev, carrying their most valuable possessions and supplies of food and warm clothing, only to be robbed, tortured and then murdered by Nazis when they arrived at their final destination – the Babi Yar ravine at the western outskirts of the city.

The Jews of Kiev were obeying the order, which had been issued by the Nazi authorities the day before, but they were not physically forced to walk. There were no soldiers or policemen escorting them to their Golgotha. Some families were accompanied by their non-Jewish friends and neighbours, who wanted to walk their loved ones all the way to the «gates». There were some among the Jews who believed that they were going to be relocated; and some of them knew for certain that they would be killed. Yet, all of them obeyed the order and walked to Babi Yar... The streets were lined with Kievans, curious to see the spectacle of the Jews leaving the city for good. Some of the onlookers were shouting abuse. Even German officers and soldiers would stop to watch the never-ending stream of Jewish people heading to Babi Yar...

I was born in 1964. I grew up in Kiev, in the Babi Yar neighbourhood. I took a trolleybus past that place almost every day. I knew very little of what happened there during the war and I knew nothing about the shooting of the Jews. This subject was not talked about. People were afraid of truth; they did not want to know it. I only heard rumours

that some dreadful tragedy took place there during the war, but I did not think much of these "fairy tales".

One more terrifying event happened on the same spot in March 1961. After the war, the authorities decided to build a stadium on the burial site, in order to wipe out remaining traces of Babi Yar. A dam was built and the ravine was filled with concrete. In 1961 the dam burst, and a powerful stream of muddy pulp covered city streets. Hundreds of people were buried alive under the debris. The authorities tried to hide this horrific incident..



When I began working on the script of "Babi Yar" in the summer of 2012, I had at my disposal a few books and archive records concerning the life of Dina Pronicheva, a woman, who managed to escape from Babi Yar. I imagined that Dina had to become the main heroine of my film. In August 2012 I came to Kiev and met with historians Tatyana Evstafieva, the author of the book «Babi Yar: Man, Power, History», and Dmitry Malakov.

The more I talked to the scholars, the more texts I read, the more obvious it became to me, that a film about Babi Yar cannot have a "main hero". Neither can it have a linear narrative and a singular plot, which will reduce this Biblical story to a tale about "bad Germans" and "desperate victims".

I was primarily interested in the causes, and not in the consequences of this man-made hell on earth. I wanted

to understand the chain of events and the reasons each party had – and there were many parties involved – the Soviet regime, the occupation regime (Wehrmacht and Gestapo), the Soviet security forces (NKVD), the Ukrainian nationalists, the civil population, the Jews – for making such decisions and taking such actions, which, in the end, brought all of them to Babi Yar.

The more facts I learned, the more testimonies I read, the more clearly the questions were formulated in my mind, and the more clearly I saw the pivotal points of the plot. I had to distance myself from the traditional “retrospective” representation of the story – when historical events are shown in a linear sequence and perceived as direct results of the actions taken by their participants. I wanted to unfold the story as a multitude of parallel planes – when certain events and certain acts happen almost simultaneously and independently of each other, and yet each of these seemingly unconnected events pre-determines the outcome.

How could this happen that within days after the Germans’ triumphant entry into the Ukrainian capital, ordinary Kievans were supplying the new Nazi authorities with the detailed lists of Jewish residents? How could this happen that elderly people and women with newborn babies, too old or too weak to walk to Babi Yar, were being denounced and, in some cases, beaten to death by their watchful non-Jewish neighbours? How could this happen that German soldiers and Ukrainian policemen (some having only recently defected from the Red Army ranks), most of them respectable, law-abiding citizens with high moral convictions and loving families, performed the horrific task of killing fellow human beings with such matter-of-fact attitude and businesslike efficiency?

In the Soviet and post-Soviet society, the history of the Second World War was subjected to such gigantic ideological distortions and falsifications, that, in my opinion, the only way to demystify history is to present the facts stripped of any subjective commentary.

My intention is to create an impression of a “documentary” image. After many years of research, I have collected a large body of archive footage, shot in the German occupied Ukraine, starting from June 1941. I intend to use some of this footage in the film. This year I have

made a montage documentary "Babi Yar. Context", based entirely on this footage, and I'm now convinced that it would be possible to incorporate some of the scenes (for example, the scenes with the Soviet POWs, battle scenes and the episode of the city of Kiev on fire) into the fabric of the fiction film. I would be happy, if at the end of the screening the spectator has to ask himself – among other things – where and how did the director of the film manage to find such rare archival material... In order to intensify the "documentary" and "archival" qualities of the film, I will rely on the means of editing and sound design. Some episodes of the film will look like scraps of archive footage and will be edited in such a way, as if the editor was short of material – with a staggering rhythm and visual gaps and blackouts. In some episodes the sound would "overflow" into black fields, which will separate the scenes, as if the editor runs out of image while the soundtrack continues to run. The sound of the film will also become a key factor in creating the image of the crowd. In many scenes *vox populi* – bits of dialogue, sounds of people talking or screaming – will be heard off-screen, not synchronised with the image. I intend to create an impression of the events unfolding hear and now – in front of the spectators' eyes.

Thus, in the absence of the "main hero", it is the *crowd*, which takes his place, and becomes the protagonist of the film. I want to show masses of people in action and experiencing powerful emotions: anticipation, fear, panic, joy, and rage. In certain episodes, a *Figure of Death* will be seen among the thousands of faces in the crowd...

Sergei Loznitsa



CREW:

Script writer/Director:

Sergei Loznitsa Sergei Loznitsa was born on September 5th 1964. He grew up in Kiev (Ukraine), and in 1987 graduated from the Kiev Polytechnic with a degree in Applied Mathematics. In 1987-1991 Sergei worked as a scientist at the Kiev Institute of Cybernetics, specializing in artificial intelligence research.

In 1997 Loznitsa graduated from the Russian State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow, where he studied feature filmmaking.

Sergei Loznitsa has been making films since 1996, and by now he has directed 22 award-winning documentaries and 4 fiction films.

Loznitsa's feature debut "MY JOY" (2010) premiered in the main competition at the Festival de Cannes, and was followed by the feature film "IN THE FOG" (2012), which was awarded FIPRESCI prize at the 65th Festival de Cannes. In 2017, Sergei Loznitsa presented his third feature "A GENTLE CREATURE" in the competition of the Festival de Cannes. In 2018, Loznitsa received the prize for Best Directing of the

Un Certain Regard section of Festival de Cannes for his fourth feature film, "DONBASS".

In 2013 Sergei Loznitsa founded his own film production company ATOMS & VOID and began producing documentaries independently.

Sergei Loznitsa's feature-length documentary "MAIDAN" (2014), the chronicles of the Ukrainian revolution, had its world premiere at a Séance Special of Festival de Cannes. His subsequent feature length documentaries, "THE EVENT" (2015), "AUSTERLITZ" (2016), "THE TRIAL" (2018) and "STATE FUNERAL" (2019) were presented at the Special Screenings of the Venice Film Festival.

Sergei Loznitsa continues to work both in documentary and feature genres.

Selected filmography: The Train stop (2000), Blockade (2005), My joy (2010), In the fog (2012), Maidan (2014), A Gentle Creature (2017), Donbass (2018), State Funeral (2019)

Director of Photography:

Oleg Mutu was born in Chisinau (Moldova, former USSR), in 1972. In 1993 moved to Romania. Graduated from the Academy of Theatre and Film in Bucharest. Works as cinematographer and film producer. In 2007 together with Cristian Mungiu co-produced the film "4 months, 3 weeks, 2 days" which was awarded Palm D'Or in Cannes.

Selected filmography: "Death of Mr Lasarescu" (2005) by Cristi Puiu, "4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days" (2007) by Cristian Mungiu, "Tales from the Golden Age" (2009) by Cristian Mungiu, "My joy" (2012) by Sergei Loznitsa, "V subbotu" (2011), "My good Hans" (2015), "Parquet" (2020) by Alexander Mindadze, "Beyond the hills" (2012) by Cristian Mungiu, "In the fog" (2012), "United States of love" (2016) by Tomasz Wasilewski, "A gentle creature" (2017), "Donbass" (2018) by Sergei Loznitsa,

Composer:

Christiaan Verbeek was born in Texel (The Netherlands) in 1984. Christiaan is composer and musician, holding a masters degree in Composing for Film from the Conservatory of Amsterdam. Next to his own developing style, which will be

captured on his first own album to be released in 2021, Christiaan Verbeek writes music for film and theatre. In 2014, he won the Dutch National Film award, a Golden Calf, for his music for the film HELIUM, which was followed in 2020 by the BUMA Award for the Best Music Composition for the film BULADO. In 2015, Christiaan was commissioned by Cello8ctet Amsterdam to write a new work for a program dedicated to the 80th birthday of Arvo Pärt.

Selected filmography: "Helium" (2014) by Eche Janga, "Quality Time" (2017) by Daan Bakker, "Boy meets gun" (2019) by Joost van Hezik, "Bulado" (2020) by Eche Janga

Production Designer:

Kirill Shuvalov was born in Perm (Russia, former USSR), in 1969. Graduated from St Petersburg Academy of Arts and Industrial Design. Kirill is based in Serbia, and he works internationally as an artist and production designer. Kirill Shuvalov participated in a number of international exhibitions with his paintings, experimental films and video installations.

Selected filmography: "Shultes" (2008) by Bakur Bakuradze, "My joy" (2010) by Sergei Loznitsa, "Hunter" (2011) by Bakur Bakuradze, "Convoy" by Alexey Mizgirev (2012), "V subbotu" (2011), "My good Hans" (2015), "Parquet" (2020) by Alexander Mindadze "In the fog" (2012), "A gentle creature" (2017), "Donbass" (2018) by Sergei Loznitsa, "Numbers" (2020) by Oleg Sentsov.

Sound Designer:

Vladimir Golovnitski was born in Brest (Belorussia, former USSR) in 1956. Graduated from the Institute of Cinema Engineers in Leningrad (now known as the St Petersburg State University of Film and Television). From 1978 till 1992 Vladimir Golovnitski worked at the Belarusfilm Studios in Minsk. Since 1994 he is based in Vilnius, Lithuania, where he runs his independent sound recording studio, Gutara. Golovnitski has been closely collaborating with Sergei Loznitsa since 2003, and he has designed the sound for such documentaries by Loznitsa as Blockade (2005), Maidan (2013), Austerlitz (2016), The Trial (2018), State Funeral (2019).

Selected filmography: "Koridorius" (1994), "Few of us" (1996), "A casa" (1997), "Freedom" (2000), "Seven invisible men" (2005), "Eurasian" (2010) - all by Sharunas Bartas, "Simple Things" (2007), "How I ended this summer" (2010) by Alexey Popogrebsky. "Landscape" (2003), "Factory" (2004), "Artel" (2006), "Northern light" (2008), "My joy" (2010) by Sergei Loznitsa, "Living" by Vassily Sigarev (2011), "In the fog" (2012), "A gentle creature" (2016), "Donbass" (2018) by Sergei Loznitsa.

Costume Designer:

Dorota Roqueplo was born in Neuilly-sur-Seine (France). Studied costume and fashion design in Paris. One of the most experienced costume designers in Poland, Dorota Roqueplo has collaborated with Krzysztof Zanussi, Krzysztof Krauze, Lech Majewski and her filmography includes more than 40 titles. In 2011 Dorota Roqueplo was awarded the Golden Lion for the best costume design at the Polish National Film Festival.

Selected filmography: "Moj Nikifor" (2004), "Plac Zbawiciela" (2006) by Krzysztof Krauze, "The Mill and the Cross" (2011) by Lech Majewski, "In the fog" (2012), "A gentle creature" (2017), "Donbass" (2018) by Sergei Loznitsa, "Corpus Christi" (2019) by Jan Komasa, "Magnezija" (2020) by Maciej Bochniak.

VFX Designer:

Peter Hjorth was born in Copenhagen in 1970. Started learning the CGI craft as a 15-year-old apprentice and went on to become a VFX guru, whose magic helped to create such masterpieces of Nordic cinema as "Dancer in the Dark", "Dogville", "Melancholia" etc.

Selected filmography: "Dancer in the dark" (2000) by Lars von Trier, "Antichrist" (2009) by Lars von Trier, "Melancholia" (2011) by Lars von Trier, "Love is all you need" (2012) by Susanne Bier, "Nymphomaniac" (2013) by Lars von Trier, "The House that Jack built" (2018) by Lars von Trier, "Border" (2018) by Ali Abbasi, "Lamb" (2021) by Valdimar Johannsson.



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