

KINO LORBER

Presents

THE FORGER



Germany / Luxembourg | 2022 | 116 min | Color | 2.39:1 | In German with English subtitles

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SYNOPSIS

Berlin, 1942. Cioma Schönhaus (Louis Hofmann, star of the hit Netflix series *Dark*) is a young Jewish man who won't let anyone take away his zest for life, especially not the Nazis. Since the best hiding spots are in plain sight, Cioma audaciously adopts the identity of a marine officer to escape being deported like his family before him. Drawing on his art school background, he joins a network of underground rescuers and becomes infamous for his masterfully forged IDs – created with just a brush, some ink, and a steady hand – that save the lives of hundreds of Jews by allowing them to escape the country. Meanwhile, he throws himself into the city's nightlife and even finds a fragile hope for love during the darkest moments of the war. His talent and propensity for boldness puts him in more and more danger, however, until his only chance of survival is one last forged document – with his own name on it. Based on a true story.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Based on a true story of bravery in the face of evil, *The Forger* stars Louis Hofmann (Netflix's *Dark*) as an audacious young man who poses as a marine officer and forges documents to help fellow Jews escape Nazi Germany.

ABOUT 'THE FORGER' BY MAGGIE PEREN

THE FORGER is a dynamic and emotional biopic set in World War II Berlin and revolving around the historical figure Cioma Schönhaus. Cioma is a young man full of curiosity about life and love. His drive is overwhelming, his acumen great, and his boyish charm infectious. But it's 1942 and Cioma is Jewish – but despite the discrimination and scorn he endures, he finds a way to assert himself. We didn't want to make a classic film about the Nazi era, but to tell Cioma's story in an emotional way. Thanks to his lust for life, he doesn't lose heart even in the darkest times, but reduces loyalty to the regime and any stigmatization to absurdity. Cioma does not want to fit into any pigeonhole and shakes us all up. The past must not be repressed, but retold again and again in different narrative perspectives: Through the individual fates of Cioma and his companions, director Maggie Peren has portrayed a Third Reich that eschews familiar images and for this very reason is certain to play a crucial role in today's discourse. We experience the cruelty, the absurdity of this time in miniature. And yet all the characters have facets that make them not simply good or evil. Besides what is overt and conspicuous, hidden racism lurks around every corner, often casually revealed and – without much fuss – shaken to the core. It doesn't require a swastika flag waving in the wind or swanky uniforms marching across familiar squares. Everyday racism builds a bridge to the here and now.

DIRECTORS NOTE

Cioma Schönhaus story is the story of a person who rebels against stigmatization. The regime of terror is present, but we do not offer the Nazis a platform. We see them through Cioma's eyes as we see everything through his eyes.

The most difficult thing for me as a director was to do justice to the lightness of the novel and at the same time tell how people hate Jews as a matter of course, thinking that they are friendly and nice after all. It was important to me to raise awareness that racism doesn't come out of nowhere. The roots go deep into our society, and Cioma's story in its enormous lightness has nevertheless - or just because of it - the power to trace the depth of the roots.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Samson “Cioma” Schönhaus was born in Berlin on September 28, 1922. A few years earlier, his parents Fanja and Boris Schönhaus had immigrated from Minsk, Belarus to build a better life in Berlin. Cioma grew up in what is now Berlin-Mitte. In 1926/27 the family lived for twelve months in an agricultural colony in what was then Palestine, but returned to Berlin because of the adverse circumstances there and because Cioma, who was now five years old, had fallen ill. The father founded a mineral water factory, and for a few years they led a solid middle-class life here. The parents viewed the Nazi regime and anti-Semitism in the country with great concern, but for a long time they trusted in supposed Prussian virtues such as law and order. Like so many Jews, they hoped to be better protected from discrimination in Berlin. Cioma’s artistic talent was evident at an early age, and in 1938/39 he attended the private Hausdorf School of Arts and Crafts. His training as a graphic artist was cut short by compulsory service in construction work and in uniform and weapons production. On June 13, 1942 Cioma was to be deported to the concentration and extermination camp Majdanek together with his parents, but his deportation was postponed thanks to his job in the armament industry. His parents were deported with the 15th transport and murdered in the Sobibór and Majdanek concentration camps. Wherever Cioma could, he evaded the regulations. He sold his parents' household goods even before the Nazis confiscated them, and thus had some money to spare.

In the fall of 1942, he began forging identity documents for other Jews living underground, replacing photos and imitating stamps in real passports. In doing so, he cooperated with the circle of helpers led by the lawyer and resistance fighter Franz Kaufmann, who was a member of the Confessing Church in Berlin. Many of the Church’s members donated their identity cards to the offertory box and later reported them lost. For his forgeries, Cioma received ration cards from Kaufmann, with the sale of which he was able to build up a sham legal existence under various names, at least for a short time. But already in August 1943 the circle of helpers was exposed by a denunciation from the population, and Kaufmann was arrested and later murdered in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. At the end of September 1943, disguised as a Wehrmacht soldier on home leave and with papers he had forged himself, Cioma fled on a bicycle via Stuttgart to Switzerland, where he managed to build a new life. He earned a degree as a graphic artist and opened a studio for graphic design and communication, which he ran until 2000. He lived near Basel with his wife and four sons. Cioma died on September 22, 2015, shortly before his 93rd birthday. Two of his sons became musicians and founded the klezmer ensemble "Bait Jaffe" (Hebrew for "beautiful house," in reference to their family name). Of the up to 7000 people in hiding in Berlin, only about 1700 survived the period of persecution.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

The age of the characters refers to the summer of 1943.

Cioma Schönhaus, 21

The son of Russian parents, grew up in Haifa and Berlin. In 1941 he had to leave the School of Arts and Crafts and work in armaments. From 1942 to 1943 Cioma worked illegally as a passport forger for Franz Kaufmann and in return received food stamps and shelter, which he was forced to leave when his good friend Det Kassriel was allegedly denounced by a resident of the house. After that, he moved from one hiding place to another and finally found shelter at Helene Jacobs' home before riding his bicycle across Germany and crossing a stream to reach Switzerland.

Det Kassriel, 22

Just like Cioma, Det was compelled to do forced labor and ended up in a military tailor shop where Cioma's mother also had to work. This is how the two got to know each other. When he was forced to go into hiding, Det first lived with Cioma Schönhaus at Münzstraße 11. In this shared living space, Siegbert, as he was also called, turned out to be a good cook. His good relations with the market women enabled Cioma to sell some items before the neighbor Frau Peters started doing the work for the two young men. Det did not escape the Nazis. He was deported and murdered.

Gerda, 20

We only know about Gerda through Cioma's stories. She was a little younger than him and engaged to a Wehrmacht soldier, in whose apartment she was also allowed to live. In order to survive, she had to "date." Cioma, according to his own accounts, was head over heels in love with her, though quite a few friends warned him about Gerda. She broke up with Cioma because his habit of constantly losing everything put her in too much danger, though she had genuine feelings for him. Like Cioma's friend Det, she was also deported.

Franz Kaufmann, 57, Lawyer

Although baptized and raised as a Protestant, he was classified as a full Jew by the Nazis. However, he was protected from deportation due to his marriage to a non-Jewish woman and their child. As a member of the Confessing Church, he built up a network together with Helene Jacobs that provided Jewish people with shelter and helped them

to escape with forged passports. He was arrested in 1943 and shot in 1944 in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

Frau Peters, 29

War widow and resident of the house at Münzstraße 11, Frau Peters always stuck her nose into everything and no one was safe from her. Since she did not work and her war widow's pension was not exactly lavish, she decided to sell items belonging to the Schönhaus family herself. She sold with advance payment. The accounts were settled in an orderly fashion. She considered herself very righteous. She was intimate with Det. That he was Jewish did not bother her at such moments. Otherwise, she believed in Hitler, the meaning of the war, and the Nazi party.

Ludwig Lichtwitz, 39

Ludwig was a trained book printer and married to the non-Jewish Wally, but she separated from him when she should have been protecting him. In a rented store in Berlin Moabit, he set up a counterfeiting workshop with Cioma Schönhaus in the middle of Berlin. After Franz Kaufmann was arrested, Ludwig was unable to continue hiding in Berlin and was arrested. He succeeded in disabling the electricity and managed to escape. He survived the war and in the end reunited with his wife.

FILMMAKERS BIOGRAPHIES

DIRECTOR – Maggie Peren

Maggie Peren is an award-winning writer and director born in Heidelberg, Germany. After studying literature and psychology in Munich, she started writing her first screenplay (FORGET AMERICA) when she was twenty-four years old. In 2003, she received the German Film Award for BEFORE THE FALL, followed by numerous screenplays for which she won national and international awards. In 2011 she presented her second directorial work, THE COLOR OF THE OCEAN. The refugee drama celebrated its premiere in Toronto and was awarded several prizes worldwide. The thriller short film NOCEBO (2014) won the student Oscar for best foreign film. THE FORGER is her most recent feature film.

PRODUCERS – Alexander Fritzemeyer & Martin Kosok (DREIFILM)

Since founding DREIFILM during their studies at the University of Television and Film Munich, Alexander Fritzemeyer and Martin Kosok have developed and produced numerous commercials, TV formats, and feature-length films, among them the feature film DON'T LOOK AT ME THAT WAY (2016, directed by Uisenma Borchu), which won the Bavarian Film Award and Fripresci Award, the tragicomedy LA PALMA (2020, directed by Erec Brehmer), and the short film JUPITER (2019, directed by Benjamin Pfohl), which was screened at numerous national and international festivals. Since November 2018, DREIFILM has been a subsidiary of X Filme Holding. THE FORGER is their third production for the big screen.

DOP – Christian Stangassinger

Christian Stangassinger was born in Munich in 1978 and grew up in Munich and Kiel. Already during his studies at the University of Television and Film in Munich, his films and commercials were shown at renowned festivals and won numerous awards. One of them is the short film SILENT RIVER(2011, directed by Anca Miruna Dunga), which won more than 70 festival awards and for which he was awarded the German Camera Award. For his first feature film THE KING'S SURRENDER (2015, directed by Philipp Leinemann) he won the Bavarian Film Award. Most recently, he was responsible for the image design of the series WILD REPUBLIC (2020, Markus Goller, Lennart Ruff) and BARBARIANS (2019, directors: Barbara Eder, Steve St. Leger).

MAIN CAST BIOGRAPHY

Louis Hofmann

Born in 1997 in Cologne, Louis Hofmann has made a name for himself as an actor in film and television since 2010. For his first leading role in a feature film, TOM SAWYER (2011, directed by Hermine Huntgeburth), he was awarded the New Faces Award Special Prize. This was followed by the feature film drama SANCTUARY (2015, directed by Marc Brummund), for which he received the Bavarian Film Award for Best Young Actor and the Young Actor Award of the German Actors Award. He gained his first international experience with the

Danish-German co-production LAND OF MINE (2015, directed by Martin Zandvliet), among others, followed by roles in other feature films such as CENTRE OF MY WORLD (2016, directed by Jakob M. Erwa), THE WHITE CROW (2018, directed by Ralph Fiennes), PRÉLUDE (2019, directed by Sabrina Sarabi), and the series DARK (2017– 2020, directed by Baran bo Odar). His latest projects include the mini-series RIPLEY (directed by Steven Zaillian) alongside Andrew Scott and Dakota Fanning, as well as LIFE AFTER LIFE (directed by John Crowley). Hofmann can soon be seen in THE FORGER and in Robert Schwentke's black comedy SENECA – On the Creation of Earthquakes alongside John Malkovich.

SHOOTING LOCATIONS

Bavaria Filmstadt - Villa Höppner, Haus Kreitmeier (Munich/GER), Parktheater im Kurhaus Göggingen (Augsburg/GER), Arcelor Mittal Schifflange (LUX), Epicerie (LUX), Café du Viaduc (LUX), Casemates (LUX), By Jaco (LUX) Centre de la Croix Rouge (LUX), Fond de Gras/Minettpark (LUX)

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Original Title: Der Passfälscher

Running Time: 116 min

Aspect Ratio: 2.39:1

Sound Format: XX

Shooting Format: Digital AlexaMiniLF ProRes S35 16:9 3.2K

Language: German with English Subtitles.

CAST

Louis Hofmann – Cioma
Jonathan Berlin – Det Kassriel
Luna Wedler – Gerda
Nina Gummich – Frau Peters
André Jung – Herr Dietrich
Marc Limpach – Franz Kaufmann

CREW

Directed by Maggie Peren
Screenplay by Maggie Peren
Based on the novel “The Forger” by Cioma Schönhaus
Producers Alexander Fritzemeyer, Martin Kosok, Alexander Dumreicher-Ivanceanu,
Bady Minck, Dietrich Kluge, Jutta Lieck-Klenke
Director of photography Christian Stangassinger
Casting by An Dorte Braker, Karimah El-Giamal, Bady Minck
Set designer Eva-Maria Stiebler
Costume designer Diana Dietrich
Make-up Katja Alexis-Reinert
Gaffer Vitalijus Kiselius
Editor Robert Sterna
Original Sound Yves Bémelmans
Music Mario Grigorov
Music supervision Superstrings, Carolin Heiss
Mixeur Loïc Collignon
Production DREIFILM GmbH, AMOUR FOU Luxembourg sàrl
Co-production Network Movie Film- und Fernsehproduktion GmbH & Co. KG