



Alfred Schreyer and Tadeusz Serwatka

Alfred and Ludmila Schreyer, 1950

Alfred Schreyer

SYNOPSIS

The Last Jew from Drohobych is the story of Alfred Schreyer - in his own words - the only surviving pre-WWII Jewish resident in this Western Ukraine town. In the 1930s, Schreyer was a student of the eminent Polish writer, Bruno Schulz. During the Nazi occupation he survived forced labor and concentration camps. He returned home – after the war – alone. Schreyer became a singer and violinist in a local Cinema Lobby Orchestra, which was – until 1963 – a truly unique Soviet tradition in cinema culture. Today, Alfred Schreyer is living history; his life story chronicles a century in Drohobych caught between tragedy and resilience.

ALFRED SCHREYER

Alfred Schreyer was born on May 8th, 1922 in Drohobych, which was then in Poland, now Western Ukraine. His mother, Leontina, was a pharmacist. His father, Benno, had a doctorate from the University of Zurich and was a chief chemist at an oil refinery. Both were very musical and Alfred learned to play the cello. Later, in high school, he was a student of the now world famous writer and painter, Bruno Schulz. Schreyer graduated from high school in 1940, during the first Soviet occupation. He earned his first 80 rubles in a vocal quartet that was part of the Soviet culture brigades.

After the entry of the German Army (June 1941), five forced labour camps were established in Drohobych. Alfred Schreyer worked as an assistant in the carpentry workshop in the village of Herafka. The family had to leave

their home and move into the ghetto. In the first "action", 320 Jews were assembled and then shot in the Broniza Woods. More actions followed and on August 5, 1942, the largest action began, in which 5,000 Jews from Drohobych were deported to Belzec and gassed. Among them was Schreyer's father, an uncle, a grandmother and an aunt.

In 1943, three forced labor camps were liquidated all on one day. Eleven thousand Jews from Drohobych and its surroundings were shot in the Broniza Woods. Schreyer's mother was among them. Because he was young and strong, Schreyer was forced to work in the camp Ceramic Workshop and then, after its closure, at the Carpathian Oil Corporation, the last forced labor camp in Drohobych. On April 13, 1944, all forced laborers, due to the advance of the Soviets forces, were evacuated to the concentration camp Plaszow near Krakow. Alfred Schreyer was moved to Groß-Rosen, Buchenwald, and finally Taucha near Leipzig, where suddenly one day the prisoners were told: March. March without a goal. This was the so-called death march. Schreyer survived by his wits and good luck. He was in Freiberg, Sachsen, when the war ended, and on May 7 (one day before Schreyer's birthday) at 7 am the first Soviet tank drove into town.

Alfred Schreyer had the opportunity to emigrate to Argentina, because an aunt and an uncle emigrated there in 1937. But when he saw the barracks of the Red Cross in Berlin, where he would have had to stay for another two or three months, he decided spontaneously to return to Drohobych.

Nothing was left of Schreyer's former life in Drohobych, but he found a home in the local Cinema Lobby Or-



Alfred Schreyer in the Choral (Great) Synagogue of Drohobych

The market in the center of Drohobych

chestra. When he sung the Soviet classic, *In the City Park*, by Matvey Blanter, a woman named Ludmila asked him for the lyrics. They married on January 5, 1949. Work in the Cinema Lobby Orchestra lasted for 16 years. But on January 10, 1963, Khrushchev cut funding to the Cinema Lobby Orchestras, and they were abolished throughout the Soviet Union. Alfred Schreyer worked for 42 years as a music teacher in the Music School of the city of Drohobych.

Today Alfred Schreyer is a local phenomenon, whose story reveals what it means to survive the 20th century's worst atrocities, and still not lose one's optimism. *The Last Jew from Drohobych* is the portrait of an exceptional person, whose experiences – both good and bad – tell a rare story of returning to a destroyed homeland and rebuilding one's life.

THE CITY OF DROHOBYCH

Drohobych was founded about 900 years ago, due to the salt found in the region. Today Drohobych is a city of about 80,000 people, approximately 90 kilometers southwest of Lviv, and mostly inhabited by Ukrainians. According to Alfred Schreyer, there are only about 1,250 Poles and 65 Jews left in Drohobych. Schreyer is the last surviving pre-WWII Jewish resident. Between the two wars, Drohobych counted about 42,000 inhabitants: one third Poles; one third Ukrainians; and a third Jews. The Second World War brought huge turmoil. Five thousand Jews were transported to Belcez and gassed, another 11,000 were shot in the Broniza Woods. The Poles escaped or were chased away and Ukrainians from

nearby villages settled in the town.

After the partition of Poland in 1772, the city was part of the Austrian Crown land, Galicia. From 1918 to 1939 it belonged again to Poland. In the fall of 1939, the Nazis came but withdrew, in compliance with the Hitler/Stalin Pact (August 1939), and were replaced by the Soviets. They stayed until June 1941, but then withdrew against the Nazi aggression, which led to the destruction of the Jews in Drohobych. In August 1944 the Soviet powers took over again and stayed until 1991. Since then Drohobych is part of independent Ukraine, founded in 1991.

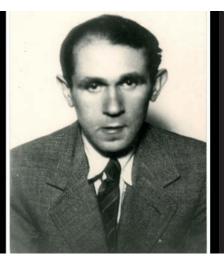
In the middle of the 19th century substantial oil reserves were found in neighboring Borislav, resulting in an oil boom that brought capitalists from around the world. Oil was drilled in Borislav, and refineries were built in Drohobych, which prospered considerably, along with the neighboring spa resort town of Truskawez. Bruno Schulz, the Polish writer of Jewish descent, put Drohobych on the map of world literature with his beloved books, *The Street of Crocodiles* and *The Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*.

BRUNO SCHULZ, 1892 - 1942

Like Alfred Schreyer, Bruno Schulz lived most of his life in Drohobych. He wrote two small, humble books – *The Street of Crocodiles* and *The Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* – that today are canons of world literature and translated into countless languages. To make a living he worked as a drawing and carpentry teacher in the high school of Drohobych, where he also graduated







The Choral (Great) Synagogue in Drohobych

Bruno Schulz

in 1910. His third book, *The Messiahs*, was never completed. The manuscript, until today, is lost. Bruno Schulz was also an accomplished painter. He did not survive the Second World War. During a Nazi Action in 1942 he was shot in the streets of Drohobych.

CINEMA LOBBY ORCHESTRAS

According to Alfred Schreyer, the Soviet Union is the only place that had a tradition of Cinema Lobby Orchestras. It is unclear when exactly this unique piece of cinema culture was founded. The tradition ended - at least in Drohobych – when Alfred Schreyer played his last concert in a cinema lobby on January 10, 1963. Alfred Schreyer's orchestra had a singer and eleven instrumentalists – three saxophones, two trumpets and trombone, piano, drums, accordion, violin and bass. They played various overtures, Soviet songs, waltzes and created special arrangements when a music film was in the schedule.

The orchestras would play in the cinema lobby, which had a stage and curtain in Soviet times, for 30 to 40 minutes before screening time. Each week the music program was changed.

Alfred Schreyer remembers how people loved the music. And I must say, it happened, from time to time various people bought the ticket, listened to the music concert and left, just to hear a bit of music. It was very, very often like this. Drohobych had two Cinema Lobby Orchestras, according to Alfred Schreyer. In Lviv there were four.

THE BRONIZA WOODS

There are many forests in Eastern Europe where Jews were shot, but this hell on earth is especially remembered in the Broniza Woods. This is thanks to the mass grave plates that Wilhelm Tepper from Israel erected, after the downfall of the Soviet Union.

INTERVIEW WITH PAUL ROSDY

How did you meet Alfred Schreyer?

Originally I wanted to make a very different movie, but when I met Alfred Schreyer, during my research in Drohobych, I knew that I must make this movie. He showed me his photos and began to tell his remarkable story. Other then the concentration camps and post-war time, he had spent his whole life in Drohobych, but he experienced everything that life has to offer, in the bad as well as in the good. I was deeply moved.

He was a student of Bruno Schulz.

When one, like me, spends a lot of time in Drohobych and knows his humble, small but so important works of writing, it becomes clear; *The Street of Crocodiles* and *The Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* are felt and seen on every street corner in Drohobych. Just like Alfred Schreyer, Bruno Schulz spent most of his life in Drohobych. His great pieces of world literature owe so much to this wonderful, but neglected, city in Western Ukraine.



The orchestra of the Komsomolez Cinema in Drohobych

What is the evil, in the context of Alfred Schreyer's life? The evil for him is, of course, the Nazis, the forced labor camps, and the inconceivable story of what happened in Drohobych. In the Broniza Woods, where you can find these mass graves plates, hell has a face. And I find this to be very important. From the beginning it was clear, the film must end here. And when Alfred told me that the only music composition he ever wrote was the song, Broniza Woods, well, as a film author, there was nothing else to ask for.

And the good?

The fact that Alfred has not lost his optimism is somehow reflected in this truly unique tradition of the Cinema Lobby Orchestra culture of the Soviet Union. I admire his resilience. Here was this young man who lost everything one can lose, but his life. He survived due to luck and in part to the songs he sang in the dark hours in the concentration camps. Spontaneously, he decided to return where there was no one and nothing left for him. If he would have stayed two or three months longer in the barracks of the Red Cross in Berlin, he most likely would have ended up in Buenos Aires and his life would have taken a very different route. Everyone of us has made decisions that shaped the rest of our lives. Usually one realizes this much later. But one must reconcile that and move forward. Alfred Schreyer moved his life forward in a wonderful way. He tells and leads us in the present time - from hell in his hometown to a world of music and endurance.

He found his luck, despite everything, in the fantastic Cinema Lobby Orchestra tradition. For me, the Cinema Lobby Orchestra is like a dream that I was never able to dream, because, for example in Vienna, we only had rather tacky fashion shows before the movies. I remember in my youth that everything from the Soviet Union was rejected. But the Soviets had romance in the Cinema Lobby, when the orchestra played, which would have been great to experience. Many older people in the former Soviet Union still dream about these orchestras, and now I do as well. I am very grateful to Alfred Schreyer for this.

You made this film almost completely alone, not taking into consideration the camera work.

Yes, thanks to fantastic technical developments, we shot this film with a photo camera. Considering this, the quality of the images is breathtaking. In the beginning I had very little money, but I knew we had to shoot this film as soon as possible. So I asked Peter Roehsler if he would come with me to Drohobych and shoot it. Being aware of Drohobych, he said yes right away. I am grateful to him, because he took a risk with me, since the financing was not yet secured. I then got some good microphones and we shot the movie in a week in September 2010, and then two more days in May 2011. But, aside from Peter and me, I must mention our driver Vasyl Levtschyk, because we had some difficulties getting access to locations. Vasyl did not speak German or English and we did not speak Ukrainian or Russian, but he always understood right away. He always knew what the problem was and solved it with a chicken and a bottle of Vodka. So he was not only our driver but also an intelligent line producer for us. Thank you, Vasyl.



Drohobych: Abandoned Jewish property in the street after deportation

In front of the Choral (Great) Synagogue in Drohobych

And the editing, how did that go?

Well, that was hard work, but nice. There were two things that I discovered. In the beginning I used archival film footage for two segments. But then I was thinking, wouldn't it be interesting if I can do without it? Archival film footage was not, as in most of my previous films, a leading element for this story. So, while shooting, I said to Peter that I need shots from the car driving through town. I didn't know why yet, but I wanted to have them, just in case. Well, in the editing it worked quite well. I used some of these shots from the driving car through town whenever Alfred Schreyer spoke about the war, deportation and mass murder. And I think it works very well, because I only used these shots in the context of war, deportation and mass murder, so there was a clear connection.

The second thing that I discovered has to do with the archival photos and postcards. In the current 16:9 format it is impossible to show these photos and postcards in their entirety. You either have to lose something on top and bottom or you put black space left and right. I did not like that. Then I heard all kinds of 3D discussions on current documentary films, but I knew, this has nothing to do with this story. And then I tried to simply show the archival photos and postcards completely, and at the same time use a detail of the same picture to underline it. I think that works also very well. I am very happy with it.

BIOGRAPHY AND FILMOGRAPHY

Born and raised in Vienna, Paul Rosdy worked in the tourism industry and travelled the world, in the 1980s, for American Express. When he had enough he moved to Vancouver, Canada, were he completed a film curriculum. His first film was called You Don't Look For Street Signs When You're In A Jungle (1991), followed by Release Day (1992). In New York he worked with Joan Grossman on several short films and then they released The Port of Last Resort - Zuflucht in Shanghai in 1998, about the 20,000 Jewish refugees who escaped the Nazis for Shanghai. Then he turned to Central South East Europe to film New World (2005), a trip through Central Europe, from the old world to the new, and also wrote the screenplay Emir & Merima, a contemporary interpretation of a tale in an oral ballad from Bosnia & Herzegovina. In 2009, Rosdy wrote and directed Cernobílá Barevná, a Czech production about the change in time and space in the northern bohemian brown coal fields. In 2011 The Last Jew from Drohobych is being released. Paul Rosdy lives with his wife Ivanna and his stepdaughter Victoria in Drohobych and Vienna.



Ceramic Workshop Broniza Woods

FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTION)

2011 The Last Jew from Drohobych 2009 Cernobílá Barevná (short) 2005 New World 1998 The Port of Last Resort 1992 Release Day (short)

The Last Jew from Drohobych
Austria 2011, 94 minutes,
HD Cam, Color, 16:9, Stereo/Dolby 5.1

Languages: German, Yiddish, Ukrainian, Russian Subtitles: German as well as English

Writer, director, editor and producer
Paul Rosdy
Cinematography
Peter Roehsler
Sound Recordist
Paul Rosdy

Paul Rosdy Dramaturgist Reinhard Jud

Production assistant, Translator

Ivanna Rosdy

Driver

Vasyl Levtschyk

Sound Design and Mix

Eckart Goebel Karl Atteln

Post production
Christian Leiss

with

Alfred Schreyer
Tadeusz Serwatka
Lev Lobanov
Alexander Krasulja
Stepan Protz

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