

THE KLEZMER PROJECT

NEVADA CINE & NABIS FILMGROUP PRESENT A FILM BY LEANDRO KOCH & PALOMA SCHACHMANN CINEMATOGRAPHY LEANDRO KOCH & ROMAN KASSEROLLER
EDITING LEANDRO KOCH & JAVIER FAVOT SOUND DESIGN NAHUEL PALENQUE RESEARCH & MUSICAL PRODUCTION PALOMA SCHACHMANN EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ANDREW SALA, LUKAS RINNER,
Yael SVOBODA & SEBASTIAN MURO PRODUCERS LEANDRO KOCH, SEBASTIAN MURO, LUKAS RINNER, ANDREW SALA & PALOMA SCHACHMANN
WORLD SALES FILMS BOUTIQUE WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY LEANDRO KOCH & PALOMA SCHACHMANN



THE KLEZMER PROJECT

A Film by
LEANDRO KOCH & PALOMA SCHACHMANN

2023 - Austria/Argentina
Docu-Fiction/Musical Road movie
1.85 - 115 min

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CREW

Written & Directed by Leandro Koch & Paloma Schachmann

Producers Andrew Sala, Lukas Rinner, Sebastián Muro,
Leandro Koch, Paloma Schachmann

TECHNICAL CREW

Cinematography Leandro Koch & Roman Kasseroller

Editing Leandro Koch & Javier Favot

Sound Design Nahuel Palenque

Research and
Musical Production Paloma Schachmann

Executive Producers Andrew Sala, Lukas Rinner,
Yael Svoboda, Sebastián Muro

CAST

Leandro Koch, Paloma Schachmann, Perla Sneh, Rebeca Ianover,
César Lerner, Marcelo Moguevsky, Lukas Rinner, Vanya Lemen,
Ivan Popovych, Simkhe Nemet, Vasile Rus, Bob Cohen, Victor Covaci,
Dumitru Covaci, Nicolae Covaci, Gheorghe Covaci



SYNOPSIS

Argentinian cameraman Leandro makes a living from filming Jewish weddings. At one of his jobs, he falls in love with Paloma, the clarinetist of the Klezmer band. To seduce her he pretends to be shooting a documentary film about traditional Yiddish folk music. What Leandro does not know is that his “fake” film project will take him on an unscripted journey throughout Eastern Europe in search of the last remaining Klezmer melodies.



DIRECTORS' NOTE

Both of us, the directors of the film, are grandchildren of Jewish immigrants. We grew up hearing stories from our grandparents that spoke of a Judaism that was nothing like the one we knew. At first, it seemed to us that those stories were simply a romanticization of the past. But when we began the research for this documentary about klezmer music, we discovered that there was something more.

Vanishing Cultures

Klezmer music was born within the Yiddish culture, a culture that disappeared firstly due to the Holocaust and secondly because the new "Jewish identity" that was sought with the creation of the State of Israel did not have a place for that culture.

Although 75% of the Jewish population that founded the State of Israel was Yiddish-speaking, Hebrew was decided to be adopted as the official language of the nascent country. Along with this decision, a persecution and attempted banning of the Yiddish language and all the culture that was generated in that language began: theater, literature, poetry, journalism and music.



The first question that arose during the investigation was: why would the Jewish people, which is characterized by promoting historical memory and preserving its own history, decide to forget such a large part of its own identity?

In an excerpt from his 1978 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Singer says: "...the Yiddish language and the behavior of those who speak it are the same thing. Yiddish is a language of exile, without land, without borders, without the support of any government; a language that lacks words for weapons, ammunition, military exercises, war tactics. A language that was despised by both Gentiles and emancipated Jews. (...)"

With the rejection of the Yiddish language, the rejection of the idiosyncrasy of the culture that cradled it was actually installed. The Judaism of the Yiddish culture did not need a territory in which to develop, but almost to the contrary, it boasted that its language represented the territory. That way of conceiving belonging had to be forgotten in order to install the need for the Jewish territory.

The pandemic and the shooting

After many years developing and then funding this project, in April 2020 we finally were able to start shooting the film in Eastern Europe. Not a week had gone by when the news



of the border closures due to the drastic stalking of covid became omnipresent. We had to suspend everything and literally rush to get back to our homes as the borders closed behind us. The known world situation led us to postpone filming for another year and a half. During that time, we also lost some of the musicians we intended to film. However, when we were finally able to make the trip again, we did not know that we were on the verge of another event that was brewing and that would determine another historical change in that territory that we achieved to film.

Territories

We knew from the first moment that we had to film in Ukraine, because historically it is a territory that was inhabited by Jews, where they developed their culture and traditions for years. In Ukraine, two of the greatest movements in Jewish history took place: the Enlightenment and Hasidism, both movements that were reflected in their music. There, as in the entire territory known as Yiddishland, there was a Judaism that mixed with its surroundings and coexisted peacefully with the cultures that surrounded it, mutually influencing their traditions between each other.

Although during the research trip we covered a large part of the Ukrainian territory, we finally decided to shoot in the border region with Romania and Moldova, which is what



was known as the Bessarabia region, a region where Jews, gypsies, the Ruthenians, Hungarians and Ukrainians coexisted.

In that region we managed to film the last Yiddish speaker, and the last living musician of the Tecsoi band, a band that dedicated itself to the repertoire of folklore from all the cultures that lived in that place. We managed to record the border crossing between Ukraine and Romania where the closeness between both cultures in that region is geographically reflected, a closeness that is also manifested in the handling of both languages that the people of the area have.

During shooting, the Ukrainian landscapes and villages were quiet and stark. The war that broke out in Ukraine two months after our return gave us the certainty that everything we had managed to film would also cease to exist. The border town where we stayed became a transit center for all the people desperately trying to leave the country. The houses where we slept in and the ones, we visited became places to house refugees who had to flee their towns or cities.

Without knowing it, during that part of the shooting we were in front of a Ukraine that was about to disappear and transform drastically, again, because of a war.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

What is klezmer music?

Klezmer music is the instrumental music of the Yiddish culture, that was mainly used in Jewish weddings in Eastern Europe. Although it comes from a specific culture marked by religion, klezmer is the pagan music of this culture; therefore, it is never heard in religious situations. The territory of this culture was delimited by its mother tongue, Yiddish, that's why it was called "Yiddish culture". Yiddish culture is synonym of a nomad Judaism which was spread around Europe and which organically coexisted with its surroundings, as the rest of the minorities that inhabited the lands disputed by the great empires. In those times, borders were modified constantly and cultures marked territories more than maps. After the Second World War, the survivors emigrated to America or Israel and stopped transmitting Yiddish to their descents.

Yiddish / Hebrew

Before the Second World War, most of the Jews rejected Zionism. In fact, despite the persecutions at the end of the XIXth century in Western Europe, only three percent of Jews emigrated to Palestine. Zionism proposed a rebirth of the Hebrew language, and the Jews

(spread in different countries) had a common language: Yiddish. A language with vast amounts of literature, music and cultural traditions, which they were not willing to give up. But that Jewish world was erased from the face of the earth by the holocaust. Before the Second World War, there were nine million Jews in Europe, after the war there were only three million left, disperse, and atomized.

It was only then that Zionist ideas were massively accepted.

The death of Yiddish was a consequence of these waves of immigration and the adoption of Hebrew by the only Jewish State.

What happened after the 2nd World War?

Klezmer music was kept silent until the 70's, when a vanguardist movement called *Klezmer Revival* appeared in the United States, decided to "rescue" the klezmer melodies recorded at the beginning of the century and create a new genre. At that moment, klezmer went from being the music of Jewish wedding rituals, to being a music style in itself.

It was then that one of the most essential elements of this culture with vast artistic production resurfaced: its music. Through music, this documentary intends to understand what that Judaism was like, before the generation (whose members are around 90 years old now) that was part of it or that shared territory with it, die.

Coup de Grâce

There are some explanations which come to light as soon as this question is put forth. When they arrived to their new country, Yiddish immigrants were obliged to try to adapt to their new home by any means possible, and the need to learn the local language caused them to leave their mother tongue aside. Nevertheless, the decision of not transmitting the language was also linked to other cultural issues, mainly, the experience of a non-territorial Judaism. Since the creation of the State of Israel, educational establishments that taught Yiddish to their students started to teach Hebrew. The holocaust finished with most Yiddish speakers, however, for political reasons, the survivors decided to put an end to what was left.

Why did the Jews decide to give the *coup de grâce* to their own culture?

What was in it that was not compatible with the new life of the Jews after the creation of their own State? These are some of the questions brought forth in this film.

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DIRECTORS' BIOGRAPHY

Leandro Koch is an argentinean Writer and Director. He studied Film at the Universidad del Cine, and was part of the Film Program at Universidad Di Tella. He wrote and directed two short films, Yet Some Day (2020) and Visible Island (2019).

Paloma Schachmann is an argentinean Musician, Filmmaker and Researcher, specialized in klezmer music. She plays in several bands including Oido Obsoleto, Blau, and in the ceremonies of the Amijai Synagogue. Since 2018 she directs Klezmer Culture, a project for the diffusion of klezmer in Latin America.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION COMPANIES

Nevada Cine is a production company founded by Sebastián Muro and Andrew Sala dedicated to the production of fiction films and documentaries. We have produced the films THE KLEZMER PROJECT (2023, Berlinale Encounters), THE BARBARIANS (2023, Cinélatino), NOTHING BUT THE SUN (2020, IDFA opening film), among others.

Nabis Filmgroup is a production company dedicated to the production of cutting-edge films of directors with a unique voice. With branches in Austria and Argentina we support our partners in Europe, Latin America and beyond. Our projects have been presented in festivals like IFFR, Locarno, Berlinale and Cannes and won numerous international awards. Our recent titles include COCOTE by Nelson Carlo de los Santos Arias (Best Film - Locarno Film Festival Signs of Life, Best Film - Mar del Plata FF, Jury Price - Latin American Competition, Lisboa Film Festival Main Competition), LOS DECENTES by Lukas Valenta Rinner (Grand Prix Diagonale, Best Film Viennale, Grand Prix from Jury IFF Torino, Best Director & Best New Coming Actress IFF Mar del Plata), FAR FROM US by Verena Kuri & Laura Bierbrauer (Berlinale Forum) and is currently co-producing ANIMAL, sophomore feature of Sofia Exarchou (L'Atelier Cannes, Eurimage), LANDSCAPE OF FEAR by Lukas V. Rinner (L'Atelier Cannes) and LA ESCUELA PESADA by Hernana Roselli (Hubert Bals Fund Europa).



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