

Angel Films præsenterer

# Skaknovelle



**Premiere:** 14. oktober 2021

**Længde:** 110 minutter

**Censur:** 11 år

**Instruktør:** Philipp Stölzl

**Premierebiografer:**

Grand Teatret, Øst for Paradis, Cafe Biografen Odense, Nordisk Film Biografer Dagmar, Trøjborg, Næstved, Randers, Hillerød, Lyngby, Køge, Nykøbing Falster, Aalborg Kennedy, Esbjerg, Waves, Vester Vov Vov, Havnar Bio, Parkteatret Frederikssund, Biffen Aalborg, Klovborg Kino, Valby Kino, Gilleleje Bio, Trommen Bio, Allerød Bio, Hvalsø Bio m.fl.

## Synopsis:

SKAKNOVELLE er baseret på Stefan Zweigs bestseller af samme navn. Et storslået psykologisk drama med nervepirrende spænding og tårnhøj produktionsværdi.

Wien, 1938: Østrig besættes af Nazisterne og advokaten Bartok arresteres og fængsles på Hotel Metropol – Gestapos nyetablerede hovedkvarter. Nazisterne ved, at Bartok har adgangskoderne til vigtige bankkonti indeholdende enorme formuer. Da Bartok nægter at udlevere koderne, placeres han i isolationsfængsel. Her gør nazisterne, alt hvad de kan for at knække Bartoks vilje. Men hvad de ikke ved er, at Bartok har smuglet en helt særlig bog med ind på sit værelse. En bog om skak. Det bliver starten på et dødsensfarligt spil mellem Bartok og nazisterne, hvor hvert træk har et modtræk.

Trailer og pressemateriale kan hentes på: <https://www.angelfilms.dk/skaknovelle>

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# THE ROYAL GAME

Directed by Philipp Stölzl

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## CAST/CREW/TECHNICAL DATA

### CAST

Dr Josef Bartok  
Franz-Josef Böhm / Mirko Czentovic  
Anna Bartok  
Owen McConnor  
Johann Prantl  
Alfred Koller  
Gustav Sailer  
Willem (barkeeper)  
Dr Fink  
Klara (maid)  
Fridl  
Erich (policeman)

Oliver Masucci  
Albrecht Schuch  
Birgit Minichmayr  
Rolf Lassgård  
Andreas Lust  
Samuel Finzi  
Lukas Miko  
Joel Basmann  
Johannes Zeiler  
Maresi Riegner  
Luisa-Céline Gaffron  
Moritz von Treuenfels

### CREW

Director, Screenplay Co-writer, Executive Producer  
Producers

Co-producers

Screenplay by  
Director of Photography  
Production Designer  
Editor  
Costume Designer  
Makeup & Hair Design  
Sound Engineer  
Music by  
Casting by  
Line Producer

Re-Recording Mixer  
Editors

Philipp Stölzl  
Philipp Worm  
Tobias Walker  
Danny Krausz (DOR Film)  
Kalle Friz (Studio Canal)  
Sandrine Mattes (Studio Canal)  
Isabel Hund (Studio Canal)  
Christine Strobl (ARD Degeto)  
Eldar Grigorian  
Thomas W. Kiennast  
Matthias Müsse  
Sven Budelmann  
Tanja Hausner  
Daniela Skala  
Gunnar Voigt  
Ingo Ludwig Frenzel  
Simone Bär  
Jakob Neuhäusser  
Florian Krügel  
Martin Steyer  
Claudia Grässel (ARD Degeto)  
Sebastian Lückel (ARD Degeto)  
Carlos Gerstenhauer (BR)  
Tobias Schultze (BR)  
Klaus Lintschinger (ORF)  
Bernhard Natschläger (ORF)

### TECHNICAL DATA

Running time: 1 hr 51 min.  
FSK: 12

## CONTENTS IN BRIEF

Vienna, 1938: Austria is occupied by the Nazis. Just as lawyer Bartok is about to flee to America with his wife Anna, he is arrested and taken to the Hotel Metropol, the Gestapo headquarters. As an asset manager to the aristocracy he is to help the local Gestapo leader Böhm gain access to bank accounts. Since Bartok refuses to cooperate, he is put in solitary confinement. Bartok remains steadfast for weeks, for months, until he happens upon a chess book.

## PRESS RELEASE

Director Philipp Stölzl (*I've Never Been to New York*, *The Physician*, *North Face*) managed to put together an impressive cast for *THE ROYAL GAME*. The outstanding ensemble includes, in addition to leading actor Oliver Masucci (*When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, *Never Look Away*, *"Dark"*, *Look Who's Back*), Albrecht Schuch (*Berlin Alexanderplatz*, *System Crasher*, *"Bad Banks"*), Birgit Minichmayr (*3 Days in Quiberon*, *The Goldfish*, *Everyone Else*) and Rolf Lassgård (*A Man Called Ove*).

*THE ROYAL GAME* was produced by Walker + Worm Film (Philipp Worm and Tobias Walker) in coproduction with the Austrian DOR Film (Danny Krausz) and STUDIOCANAL Film (Kalle Friz, Isabel Hund, Sandrine Mattes) and ARD Degeto (co-producer Christine Strobl, editors Claudia Grässel, Sebastian Lückel), BR (editors: Carlos Gerstenhauer, Tobias Schultze) and in cooperation with ORF (Film/Fernseh-Abkommen, editors: Klaus Lintschinger, Bernhard Natschläger). The film was sponsored by FilmFernsehFonds Bayern, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, Filmförderungsanstalt, Deutscher Filmförderfonds, FISA – Filmstandort Austria, Österreichisches Filminstitut and Filmfonds Wien, and was financed by Bayerischer Bankenfonds.

## STATEMENT BY DIRECTOR PHILIPP STÖLZL

I encountered “THE ROYAL GAME” at a very early age. Zweig’s mysterious and impressive story etched itself into my memory and is one of those stories that have accompanied me in one way or another through my entire life. When Philipp Worm and Tobias Walker told me about their plans to make a new film version, I was delighted, read the screenplay with interest - and loved it.

Our aim was to make a sensuous, intense feature film that would appeal to a wider audience with a brilliant cast, tight production and powerful visuals that really fill the whole screen. The contrast between claustrophobic imprisonment and the expanse of the ship that pounds across the Atlantic to America through the endless mist creates a field of tension in which Zweig’s literary metaphor can be told as a “big” story.

The nice thing about the very courageous approach of screenwriter Eldar Grigorian to THE ROYAL GAME is that it represents a kind of condensation of the surreal secret that the novella already contains. The Kafkaesque pitch Zweig has chosen for his narrative becomes a decisive inspiration on the journey of the material to the big screen.

On the one hand there is the intense, restrictive chamber play about the duel between Bartok and Gestapo man Böhm, who interrogates him and has him tortured. Then there is the – seeming – voyage to America and on board the game against the silent and enigmatic world chess champion. The persistent mist gives the journey something surreal, as if the giant ship were a barge of the dead, and the passengers mere ghosts. For this reason, the fact that this all turns out to be a dream in Bartok’s head is not a denouement or a surprise in the traditional sense, but more the final chord of a gloomily poetic tale. And finally, the prisoner’s battle against his own insanity in the solitary confinement cell, which he tries to escape from with his “mental chess” and at the same time achieves the opposite, sliding further in instead. Here, the film is an intense trip, because we are very close to our protagonist and accompany him down into the abyss and mental confusion.

All these narrative levels are interwoven and initially “make sense”. But the longer Bartok is in solitary confinement and loses touch with reality, the more mysterious things become on the ship, the more the audience also become lost in a labyrinth that resembles an oppressive daydream. To this extent I would say that in this film, Zweig’s more distanced experimental design becomes a cathartic, intense and emotional vexatious game that will hopefully enchain and grip the audience.

Zweig’s story did not end the way the film does. The bleak, dismal ending of his novella expresses the fear of impending Nazi world rule. We, however, know that it turned out differently, that it became light again after a dark night. And we want the audience to leave the cinema with this meaningful and encouraging certainty.

The backdrop to all this is the true story about Nazi Germany’s annexation of Austria. This political level of THE ROYAL GAME makes the film timelessly relevant because it shows how incredibly quickly a seemingly firmly anchored free world can tip over into a dictatorship. It tells of how thin the layer of skin of a civilisation is and how close to the surface barbarism lies. And it tells us in this way to be alert.

*Philipp Stölzl, 19 October 2020*

## STEFAN ZWEIG AND HIS FINAL WORK

A text by Prof. Klemens Renoldner

### Prehistory

In February 1934, a year after Hitler's seizure of power in Germany, Stefan Zweig left Austria. The reason was the massive support for National Socialism and anti-Semitism in Austria. He lived in England for six and a half years. He lived in Brazil from summer 1940 until the beginning of January 1941 and then in the US until August 1941. Here, he mainly worked on his autobiography "The World of Yesterday", whose first version he wrote in July 1941.

### Origins of "THE ROYAL GAME"

On 15 August 1941 Stefan Zweig and his second wife Lotte leave New York by ship. This is also the sea route described in "THE ROYAL GAME": New York-Buenos Aires. But the Zweigs only travel as far as Rio de Janeiro. They stay in Rio for three weeks and then move to Petrópolis, 70 km north, in the middle of September. This last place of his exile is where Stefan Zweig writes "THE ROYAL GAME" between September 1941 and February 1942.

The idea comes about during the voyage. On 17 September 1941 – his first day in Petrópolis – Zweig reports in a letter that he is "planning" an "esoteric novella". On 28 October 1941 he writes to Berthold Viertel that he has "conceived a curious novella ... with a chess philosophy built into it. But I haven't finished it yet." He informs Viertel on 30 January 1942 that he has written "a modern, longer story".

On 6 February 1942 he asks Ernst Feder, a Berlin journalist who is also in exile in Petrópolis and with whom Zweig occasionally plays chess, to cast a critical eye on the provisional version of "THE ROYAL GAME", also with a view to correcting any possible errors regarding the rules of chess. The manuscript is already returned on 10 February; Feder writes in his diary for this day that "he (Zweig) is enchanted by all the notes."

On the morning of Saturday, 21 February 1942, Stefan Zweig takes three typescripts of "THE ROYAL GAME" to the post office in Petrópolis, for the German, American and Argentinian editions. A fourth typescript is left in Brazil for translation in Rio de Janeiro.

On the evening of Sunday, 22 February 1942, Lotte and Stefan Zweig take an overdose of Veronal. They die that same night. They are laid to rest in Petrópolis City Cemetery on 24 February.

### Background

"THE ROYAL GAME" comes about at the same time as the (unfinished) Austria novel "Clarissa" and the memoirs "The World of Yesterday". During his years of exile, Zweig occupies himself intensively with his years in Vienna and the loss of his home country of Austria. Zweig reacted to the destruction of European democracies by authoritarian governments and fascism with the evocation of old Vienna as a cosmopolitan, cultural metropolis. Memories of his own free way of life in his circles of European friends are also connected to this.

Dr B. – this is the name of the Catholic lawyer in Zweig's text – may not be the author's autobiographical alter ego, but he is a representative of that world from yesterday. Dr B. has a humanist education, his

family story indicates (in Zweig's book) connections to the imperial house and the circle of friends of Franz Schubert. This ideal world of culture and intellectuality is brutally destroyed by the National Socialists in March 1938.

Zweig had already been in connection with many emigrants in England, then New York, then Rio. He knew what had been happening in Germany since 1933 - and in Vienna and Austria since March 1938 - from numerous personal reports and letters. He knew not only about the concentration camps, but also about the "Vienna Gestapo Control Centre", which was accommodated in the former luxury hotel Métropole, now a place of Nazi terror that was feared for its brutal interrogation methods and torture.

Zweig had, of course, obtained literature regarding chess, and he found Savielly G. Tartakower's book "The Hypermodern Game of Chess" (1924) particularly helpful. He had also played chess himself in Vienna since his childhood. Astonishingly, he even played two games with Ernst Feder on the evening before his suicide; he lost them both.

The importance of "THE ROYAL GAME" to Zweig can be seen in the fact that unlike several other manuscripts that remained unfinished he wanted to finish this text. This is why "THE ROYAL GAME", in which many see a legacy of the 60-year-old author, has a special place within the narrative work genre, because Zweig makes direct contemporary history, the crimes of National Socialism, the theme here.

After all the German-language editions of "THE ROYAL GAME" (1942 Buenos Aires, 1943 Stockholm, various editions after the war, Frankfurt am Main) displayed many unconventional alterations to and interference with the text, Reclam was finally able to publish the unadulterated original text, the version that Zweig had taken to the post office in Petrópolis on 21 February 1942, for the first time in 2013.

*Prof. Klemens Renoldner is founding director of the "Stefan Zweig Zentrum" at the University of Salzburg. He led this research institute from 2008 until 2018. He is the editor of the annotated edition of "THE ROYAL GAME" (2013, published by Reclam), the new edition of the narrative work by Stefan Zweig (published by Zsolnay since 2017) and the Stefan Zweig Handbook (published by de Gruyter, 2018).*



## **THE ROYAL GAME: A TIMELESS BESTSELLER**

The 69<sup>th</sup> edition of “THE ROYAL GAME” in German is currently available from the FISCHER publishing house in paperback. It has been adapted as an audio book or audio drama several times. The last version is from 2009, spoken by Christoph Maria Herbst.

The first film adaptation of the literary classic was released in 1960, directed by the German-American filmmaker Gerd Oswald. It starred Curd Jürgens and Mario Adorf. The film premiered in competition for the Golden Lion at the Venice International Film Festival. The story also found its way to the theatre at a later date. In 2004 Austrian author Helmut Peschina created the first stage adaptation, which is used to this day as a template on many German stages. There are also numerous new productions and reinterpretations of Stefan Zweig’s timeless story. Spanish composer Cristóbal Halffter, for instance, wrote an opera based on “THE ROYAL GAME” for the Kiel Opera House in 2012, which premiered in the following year.

“THE ROYAL GAME” has also left its mark in other artistic areas. The German painter and graphic artist Elke Rehder has treated the famous book several times in her works. She has created graphics from coloured woodcuts, which have been published in illustrated books and magazines, and also canvas paintings. And in 2016 London-based French graphic artist Thomas Humeau presented the first graphic novel version of “THE ROYAL GAME”. The author stays very close to Zweig’s original.

There is no unique original of Stefan Zweig’s master story to this day. One day before his death, the author sent three parcels by post. Two went to New York and one to Buenos Aires. They each contained a typescript of the last, completed story. There was a mystery surrounding a possible fourth typescript for a long time. In 2002 this then appeared in Stefan Zweig’s London estate and was gifted to the State University of Fredonia in New York.

## INTERVIEWS

### INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR PHILIPP STÖLZL

***What personal connection do you have to Stefan Zweig's "THE ROYAL GAME"?***

I encountered Zweig's "THE ROYAL GAME" very early on, or rather it encountered me. I must have been about 15 or 16 when I read it. I was fascinated, and also irritated, by the mysterious and dreamlike aspects of it. In any case it stayed with me and found its place between other stories that accompany me through life. At some point I then also saw the film adaptation with Curd Jürgens, but I found this a little alien with its somewhat theatrical sixties tone.

When Tobias Walker, one of the two producers, told me they were planning a new film adaptation, I took to it immediately. "THE ROYAL GAME" is an extraordinary story which could have been made for the big screen. I think you have to be bold when making a film. And so, something like "THE ROYAL GAME", where the plot is set mainly in a hotel room in which a person drifts slowly downwards into a mental abyss, presents a brilliant challenge – it forces the filmmaker to choose unusual cinematic means.

***You have changed Zweig's story for the film adaptation. Why?***

The two producers Tobias Walker and Philipp Worm had already been working with the writer Eldar Grigorian on the project development before I came on board. I immediately loved the trick they had found, i.e. very skilfully interweaving the imprisonment in the hotel and the emigration on board the ship.

Zweig tells the story in a traditional, literary ABA structure, as is frequently the case in literature. There is a framework plot in which the actual core story is embedded in a single, long flashback. This is completely legitimate in literature, of course, but for a film it is a rather tension-free construction. So, in our film, the framework plot and the flashback are much more complexly interwoven than in Zweig's original. At first the audience will think that this is just a traditional montage of two-time levels, but bit by bit the events on the ship become more and more peculiar, something begins to feel wrong as the journey progresses; there is a secret. And right at the end you realise that this entire ship is just an escape fantasy dreamed up by the poor prisoner in his cell. This type of construction is not quite new; twists like this occur relatively frequently in certain genres. But here, in our screen adaptation, this twist seems to fit perfectly because it takes up the Kafkaesque, surreal undertone of the original "THE ROYAL GAME" and turns in into a cinematic coup.

***That sounds like a certain feeling of responsibility towards this Stefan Zweig classic...***

As a director, I have been occupied with the interplay of literature and cinema for a long time; "THE ROYAL GAME" is not the first book adaptation in my filmography.

I find that you shouldn't recreate a book word for word in a film; you can't usually make a good film that way. The delivery form is too different. There is a difference between being gripped at the cinema for two hours and returning to immerse yourself in a story over a longer period of time. You can and should be able to take poetic licence when making an adaptation in order to generate a cinema experience that is as intense as possible.

However, you do have to involve yourself with the narrative core, the spirit of the original. There is always a reason for this novel in particular attracting millions of readers, the magic of this book. And the cinemagoer has to be able to recognise this in the adaptation!

There is something in “THE ROYAL GAME” that stands out from the many literary descriptions of this dark era in Europe. Stefan Zweig manages to combine the terrible aspects of this era, the bestiality and this incredible brutalisation that happened here in one picture. In this sense, “THE ROYAL GAME” is neither a crime story nor a historical drama. It is a very metaphorical book: the interrogation duel between the prisoner and the Nazis, in parallel with the duel between the chess master and the odd stranger on the ship. And Zweig’s own emigration experiences are channelled into it too, of course.

The story always reminds me of a painting by Max Ernst or René Magritte, a puzzle. Zweig turns history into art. He creates an image that is not quite tangible; it permits an incredible number of interpretations of the novella. You get the feeling there is not only one way to read the story. As so often with good art, it ultimately keeps its secret to itself. In my view, that is what makes “THE ROYAL GAME” stand out; that is its magic. And hopefully our audience will find this magic in our film adaptation.

***“THE ROYAL GAME” has been an international bestseller for the best part of 80 years. Have you got an explanation for why this book continues to be so popular?***

Zweig is a world-class author, so it isn’t that much of a surprise, is it? And “THE ROYAL GAME” is a work of iconic power, the timeless picture that Zweig created very artistically. And if I’m not mistaken it has also been on school curricula for some time. Its brevity helps too here, of course, because it is more attractive to pupils than a 1000-page tome.

There are also the moving personal circumstances under which the work came about. Stefan Zweig migrated to South America and succumbed to depression there because of the conditions in Europe. This is when he wrote “THE ROYAL GAME”, without knowing how it would all turn out. We look at it today with a completely different state of knowledge – but in 1941 it was not inconceivable that the Nazis would win and engulf the whole world in darkness. Stefan Zweig finished the novella, put the manuscript in the post and committed suicide. That is really a crazy story. This anxiety that he must have felt and this hopelessness. I think that enhances the value of this piece of literature further, because it also reflects the author’s world of emotions.

***Do you think the themes covered in “THE ROYAL GAME” are still relevant today?***

We have a culture of remembrance in Germany. This basic idea of never forgetting still applies today. And hopefully people will continue to say in the coming decades: “It is so incredible, so incomprehensible, what happened in what was a very civilised country.” Constant reminders that something like this must never be allowed to happen again are a good thing and should retain their significance. In this respect the film adaptation of “THE ROYAL GAME” has its sense and value. And now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the theme of isolation has also taken on a current aspect.

***How did you prepare for the film implementation?***

I always try to prepare myself as precisely as possible in order to have a solid basis on set from which improvisation and creative freedom can grow. This starts with intensive work on the screenplay, then goes on to a storyboard for the entire film. I sit there for weeks with graphic novel artist Arne Jysch and we imagine the film at the drawing board. The board is also the basis for Matthias Müsse’s production

design, visual effects planning etc. We then have creative unrest coming into the process in the form of Thomas Kiennast, our director of photography. He is an artist that I really appreciate; he will question the board, develop it and maybe even throw some of it overboard. I like this. This constant questioning and reworking is part of the artistic process, as it is with writing the screenplay too. And everything is open again on set, when the rehearsals start, and the actors express their ideas - and you have a few new suggestions yourself. It remains a living process right through to the end - and that is the nice thing about making films.

One special challenge of this film was the montage sequences, in which Bartok is alone in his room for weeks, then months, and gradually loses his sense of time. This is a core element of "THE ROYAL GAME"; this really has to get through. My past experience as a music video and advertising director helped me a little with this; because in those fields you often have to deal with "compressed time". We even edited the storyboard pictures together for these sequences in advance and gave them sound, just to see how long it has to be, what things can and should be repeated, which image compositions work and which do not.

***The shooting must have been a feat of strength for leading actor Oliver Massucci...***

Of course it was. He is in every scene and the film has a lot of intense scenes. The protagonist gets onto this ship as a mental wreck right at the beginning. Then we are in this oblivious elegance of Vienna for a short time before Austria is annexed overnight. Then Dr Bartok is caught in the Gestapo machinery from which he can no longer escape. At the same time, things get more and more nightmarish on the ship. A film like this is a massive job for an actor. Oliver made a huge impression on me as an actor; he has a huge repertoire of expressions, he is meticulous in his work and - if you like to use this term for cinema - emotionally truthful. Apart from that, he is also a special kind of man, of course - masculine, melancholic - and he also always has a dark, aggressive side, which I thought was important for a film in which he is the victim the whole time. I wanted someone who would fight.

***Albrecht Schuch is a very powerful counterpart who is also incredibly convincing. What can you tell us about working with him?***

Albrecht is an incredibly concentrated actor. He comes, goes to make-up and transforms himself. He is then in his role for the whole time he is on set. This is where his great intensity comes from. He does not really leave his part. That makes things incredibly tense. You can't talk to him privately on the day of the shoot. He does his thing. The result speaks for itself.

During the casting, Oliver and Albrecht both acted with other partners, not with each other at all. I edited their conversations together later without them ever having been together at the casting. The result was brilliant. The editing was the rehearsal. We wanted them to meet beforehand but it never worked out, unfortunately. At one point Albrecht said it was probably better that the two characters face each other as strangers in the film. So that's how we did it. And we really only knew that the combination would work on the basis of the edit.

***How did you get the idea of the double role?***

This idea actually comes from Stefan Zweig himself. There are a lot of interpretations of "THE ROYAL GAME". One recurring one is that this Hungarian world chess champion is a reflection of the Nazis because he always wins the battle on this chessboard with great precision. The game is also about shattering the other player's ego. At the same time, he is illiterate and a really coarse farming boy, a dull

barbarian who can only do this one thing, i.e. play chess. And we don't know why. He can only fight and win. So it is, of course, obvious that we suspect Zweig's image of the Nazis here.

I have always looked at the texts Thomas Mann wrote about the Nazis when he was in exile in California. This extremely civil, sensitive, cultural person unloads not only the terrible suffering and worry about what is happening with the world, but also his contempt for those who are breaking ground with all their stupidity and coarseness and terrorising the world. This primitiveness, which is so indicative of what the Nazis are behind the façade of their smart uniforms, can be seen very clearly in what Mann writes. Stefan Zweig most certainly felt it too.

There is no character of an interrogating Nazi Gestapo man with Zweig, however: it is much more Kafkaesque with him, a bit like in "The Trial". Dr Bartok is still constantly dragged to interrogations, but this counterpart who appears in the film does not exist. In "THE ROYAL GAME", the Gestapo is more of a faceless organism.

The new idea in the screenplay that goes beyond Zweig was to tell the dispute between the prisoner and the Gestapo interrogator like a duel on a chessboard. This is how the strong second protagonist, Gestapo man Franz-Josef Böhm, came into being. It is then clear that this character would then be cross-blended with the world chess champion Czentovic.

And it is then superb for the test at the end, of course, when it becomes apparent that this ship and its entire crew only exist in the imaginary world of the prisoner. In reality, this world chess champion, who comes from his delusions, is a form of his tormentor disguised by his psyche.

***There is also a female character, Anna, who is played by Birgit Minichmayr, who does not appear in Stefan Zweig's book at all. How did this come about?***

The female character represents the desire to survive here. And this woman does actually occur in Stefan Zweig's book - but she is only mentioned in a single sentence. That was too little for us: we had the feeling that we as an audience would want a happily married man to survive and get home even more. A metaphor that runs through the entire film is that of Odysseus, who faces the worst possible dangers after the Trojan War to get home to his Penelope. He wanders across the Mediterranean, burdened by a curse. This is a very nice metaphor for this imprisoned man. Because he too, despite not moving an inch, trapped as he is in this hotel room cell, is faced with incredible storms, dangers and terrors. The film has very claustrophobic, mad and gloomy scenes and in this darkness some moments full of humanity are required. I think that if you don't create contrasts your feelings turn cold at the cinema at some point.

On the other hand, our main character is on a dreamed ship, but we only give this away piece by piece as the film progresses. The female character helps us to lead our audience onto a false trail: Bartok meets Anna at the harbour and emigrates to America with her. But at some point Anna disappears from the ship, which seems like a Hitchcock moment at first, but then gradually turns out to be one of the disturbing elements of his dream. He has dreamed up Anna and with her his homecoming from the cell. She gets away from him because he gradually forgets her in his "white torture".

We were able to get a superb character actress in Birgit Minichmayr, who gives her character incredible force in relatively little screen time. When we designed her character we tried to avoid any typical romantic movie clichés: Birgit's Anna is a wife who is on the same level as Bartok; you can tell that they have been together for many years.

***Can you tell me something about the visual concept? What was important to you about the look?***

Visuals in a film amplify the narrative. This for me is what makes the cinema what it is. I love it when cinema is an overall experience and all the departments work together: photography, sets, costume, make-up, script, actors and score. Cinema is an art that is at its best when all these things come together.

If you read the “THE ROYAL GAME” novel or the screenplay, a very powerful visual image forms. It is a very labyrinthine world that is revealed. There is a door, and then another door. And you get the feeling that it never really gets light. Then there is the ship, which is not a real ship at all, but only exists in the mind. This results in very inspiring conclusions. We decided to have this ship travelling through constant mist and in twilight. And the hotel is reminiscent of the Minotaur’s labyrinth, which you wander through somehow and lose yourself in the dark chamber. These are all things that powerfully support the Kafkaesque aspect of the story.

By way of contrast there are a few brighter moments: at the beginning in Vienna, where we meet Dr Bartok and his wife, living in this beautiful Otto Wagner villa. Everything is sunny and colourful. Bartok has a lot of humour and wit. We then slide into the night with the last waltz. This is also a little *film noir*. We are reminded of old detective films that are set in a kind of shade and street lamp world, which charges the atmosphere even more intensely. This is a powerful aspect of the film. This is why we made most of it in the studio. This is the best approach because of the historical ship alone, and it is also the best way when so many scenes are shot in a small hotel room. This gives the whole thing a certain stylised aesthetic. We also looked in this direction a great deal, with films such as “Barton Fink” or David Lynch films, which are also dream films like this. Then there is the brilliant Orson Welles adaptation of “The Trial”, which has very forceful imagery. Here, we examined how he deals with spaces that are in part a little too small. In a film in which at least a third is set in a single hotel room, it is very important how this room looks. You know that it is, for many film minutes, the playing field on which the narrative must be told cinematically and with visual force and originality.

## INTERVIEW WITH THE PRODUCERS

### *What is, in your view, the source of the enormous power of the book "THE ROYAL GAME"?*

**Tobias Walker (TW):** Intellectual Europe is standing up against the evil that is trying to take this intellect away from people, to draw them onto its side. And a mental occupation is being used as an attempt to counter it. This is basically a heroic story of the educated against the barbaric. At first glance it appears to be a very simple narrative: this man, who is imprisoned in a hotel room and is playing chess against himself in order to resist. This simple story describes an incredibly vast cosmos. I think that is the great force in this material.

**Philipp Worm (PW):** It is a very thin volume, barely a hundred pages, but it is so masterfully written that it is still relevant today. It is very much about the question of forgetting the Nazi crimes. Is it possible to escape this memory? In Stefan Zweig's book it is not. The realisation is that while it is possible to survive National Socialism, the painful memory will remain. The novella ends with Dr B. having to realise that the torture, despite being over, has caused him irreparable damage.

### *Do you have the feeling that the story is still relevant today?*

**TW:** More than ever, I think, unfortunately. It is the story of a man who is standing up to evil, knocking on the door and not being taken seriously at first. We are currently experiencing this in Germany to a very serious extent, and the ending is still open. But it is also happening all over the world to varying degrees. And the message to stand up to it, not go along with it and even to sacrifice your own spirit is more relevant than ever. I almost have to say that this topic is even more relevant now, unfortunately, than it was when we started developing the material.

### *What approach, or what vision did you have for the film adaptation of "THE ROYAL GAME"?*

**PW:** First of all, we did not want to make a film that simply reproduced the novella. Some people have already tried and failed to give the proper imagery to the insanity into which the protagonist falls. We also needed a very long time when developing the screenplay to find a modern approach to this. For us, the condition was always not only to show moving chess pieces, chess boards and the leading actor's wide-open eyes, but to develop a twist from the story to make this insanity palpable. The audience should be able to feel the suffering Dr B. is going through.

### *When one reads the book, images immediately develop in the mind. How do you transport these into the big screen?*

**TW:** That was also a very difficult thought for us. The image of the protagonist playing chess with himself alone demands the reader's entire imagination, because it is almost unimaginable to be able to trick yourself. That is, of course, incredibly difficult to portray on film. But we did find a cinematic way to make the audience almost physically experience this, as only cinema can. That was, among others, one of the aspects we urgently wanted to have in there. And to be modern without over-modernising it. The story should remain in that era because this era has incredible significance for this material and indeed for the whole world. Nonetheless, we wanted to dust off the whole thing and give the subject timeless legitimisation. A story that applies for ever.

**PW:** We have not pretended that the 80 years since the book appeared did not happen. We know, of course, how history has developed, and we wanted to express that in the ending of the film, unlike the book.

***Were there any hesitant thoughts at the beginning of the project development?***

**PW:** Not really. We went to the Stefan Zweig Centre in Salzburg and presented the screenplay there to hear what they had to say. We were relieved that they liked it. They liked the fact that the core of the story was still there but also understood that passages had to be invented to add to it. Film scripts are very different from novels and novellas. You have to take poetic licence to deal with the material differently. My feeling is that we have got this balance right. We stayed true to the story but made an independent film, nonetheless.

***When did it become clear to you that Philipp Stölzl would be the right director for this film?***

**TW:** We initially started to develop it alone. However, even at this stage I frequently talked to Philipp about the material because I also know him personally. For that reason, he knew the screenplay and absolutely loved it. There is this combination of an intellectual, cultural man who has a profound knowledge of literature and is an incredibly visual director to boot who wants to give people truly great films rather than frequent ones. It was Philipp's greatest wish to make a palpable, impressive and great feature film from this intellectual literary original. His vision was immediately clear to us and convinced us thoroughly.

***A lot was asked of Oliver Masucci during the shooting...***

**PW:** Absolutely. You mustn't forget that Oliver appears in nearly every shot. That is very unusual for an entire shooting period. The focus is very much on him. And keeping the tension going while playing a character who is drifting into insanity at the same time takes a huge effort. Doing all this is also a physical challenge that is really quite a feat.

**TW:** The film is mainly carried by Oliver and Albrecht. There are a considerable number of close-ups that portray every nuance. The shooting locations are also restricted to a very small number of spaces. All this demands a lot of the actors. As do the scenes between Oliver and Albrecht. They duel almost like a chess game, with move and countermove. This is already set up brilliantly in the screenplay and requires extreme acting precision.

***What physical development did Oliver Masucci undergo for the role?***

**TW:** The idea was to go into the film with him as a culturally educated bon vivant from fine Viennese society. A man who has a penchant for enjoyment and is accordingly considerably more corpulent. Philipp Stölzl always said he wanted a tree trunk that he could fell. That was the image of this character. Then we indulged in the luxury of taking a break in shooting, which is unusual for Germany, in order for Oliver to lose weight. We then carried on working with him - considerably thinner and downtrodden - supported, of course, by make-up and costume: he wore a suit that was too big, wore very different make-up and lost his beard. He is a completely different manifestation. That was nearly a double role that Oliver had to play. And it was also the greatest challenge in the casting to play two completely different versions of his character: the Viennese superiority, which is very charming, and at the same time this deep sadness and exhaustion. This was something that really had to be tried out and in the casting, Oliver showed that he can play both brilliantly.



***Albrecht Schuch does take on a double role. What was the idea behind that?***

**TW:** This came from the approach to having the insane level on the ship interwoven with the hotel level in Vienna. This is explained piece by piece in the course of the film. The possibility came about of taking persons and characters from reality across to the world of delusion. And the fact that the Gestapo man Böhm was the antagonist in the hotel and the chess grandmaster Czentovic the one on the ship led to the idea that it would be brilliant if they were one and the same character. It is possible to work out at the end of the film that he had been wearing himself out on the same person all along. Once this idea had been suggested, Albrecht Schuch also found it a very attractive one, playing two characters that were so physically different but had a mutual core, nonetheless.

**PW:** Albrecht played a big part in developing the idea. We initially cast him as Gestapo man Franz-Josef Böhm. Then Philipp Stölzl had the idea of developing a double role. We watched chess videos during the preparation, including one of Russian world chess champion Kasparov. The way he jumped from board to board with his bent posture, very concentrated, had something animalistic about it. This was the starting point for Albrecht's double role. For example, weights were sewn into his costume so that he would automatically assume this bent posture. There was also a kind of dance training. We worked with a body coach to find this posture. How does this grandmaster move? How does he touch the pieces? How does he go from board to board? This was a very intense preparation that was shaped by Albrecht to a considerable extent.

**TW:** Albrecht is incredibly concentrated as an actor and gets into his role almost methodically. I don't think he comes down from it until the work is done. You can tell from the first second, as soon as he enters the set, that he is an extremely well-prepared and very professional actor. It's almost like a choreography.

***THE ROYAL GAME is a very big movie. What was important to you in the production design?***

**PW:** First of all, the ship was very important. It travels from Europe to New York, in other words it was an old, big Atlantic steamer, and to find one today was impossible. Most of the ships have been scrapped or were sunk during the Second World War. It was clear that it had to be a big ship from the outset. The set had to fit in in order to tell the story credibly.

The beginning of the film in Vienna was also very important to us. You have to feel where we are in the story at that time. How seriously was the National Socialists coming to Austria being taken? People in Vienna would often say: "That's just a phantom, it'll be over quickly. Let's just carry on partying and dancing." It was important to convey a sense of this old Austria. That was a big challenge for production design because the ballroom had to be big; the Hotel Metropol was one of the best hotels in Europe at the time. We didn't want to reduce the narrative in any way. You have to see the whole splendour at the beginning of the film in order to get smaller and smaller until there is just one man sitting in a room, playing chess with himself. The depth of this fall is crucial.

**TW:** We have these two worlds: the ship and the hotel. The corridors are similarly constructed, and the room numbers are the same. Philipp was able to design almost everything from his own creativity. We tried to implement it to the letter, to recreate the images he had in his mind precisely. This is brilliant for a director, of course, but also a challenge for the production designers.

***The recreated SA procession is also impressive and at the same time incredibly frightening. How did you manage to implement this?***

**TW:** Technically it was a little difficult, because the scene was shot a few days before Christmas and directly behind Vienna City Hall, about 300 metres away from a Christmas market. It is also complicated in legal terms to show Nazi symbols or sing Nazi songs in public. That had to be approved specially by the City of Vienna chief of police. And what was really frightening was when 180 extras marched along there, singing the songs of the time and shouting "Sieg Heil". It sends a shiver down your spine. On the other hand, of course, it's fantastic for the film because that is exactly what it's about. This horror appears overnight, and it isn't a mere nightmare: it stays real.

**INTERVIEW WITH LEADING ACTOR OLIVER MASUCCI**

***Please tell us a little about your work with Philipp Stölzl. He is said to be a director who likes being on an equal footing. Was that very inspiring?***

Absolutely. Philipp is a very fine person and a very emphatic director. You feel respected and carried by him. He looks at everything precisely and then makes a concrete plan. On the other hand, he can also be impressed and inspired by new ideas. He is very precise, very open, very warm. And for this film, to be honest, I really needed that. Even at the first casting I was wondering if I really wanted to deal with schizophrenia. Sometimes there are things that you don't really want to get into on a personal level. As an actor I try to live the character I am playing and give the audience the opportunity to experience their feelings and needs. And in this film, I had a great protector in Philipp, whom I also needed. Philipp has a great and precise vision of what he is doing. The whole screenplay had already been written. I received it nine months before the start of the shoot and knew exactly what every shot of the film would look like. I had never had anything like this for a film. But he is still able to move away from it and go in other directions. Some things turned out to be incredibly good and others didn't quite work out. But it was very detailed and precisely worked out.

***The role of Dr Bartok was also developed a little for the film. Were you involved in this?***

I don't usually immerse myself in my roles until the camera starts rolling. I have to protect myself from not getting into it too quickly because it's then difficult to get out again. I call it self-hypnosis. The moment you get into a role you see everything around you from this character's perspective. And this perspective is a pretty intense one in this film, because the man suffers a great deal. It is a path of pain he is walking on. That was something I didn't want to occupy myself with for too long. The four months of shooting really took it out of me. Then there was the losing weight because my character becomes really emaciated. To be honest, I was quite glad when it was over.

***What drives Dr Bartok in the film in your opinion?***

He does not want to give in to it all. It is a game of chess against his tormentors, the Nazis. And it is about winning. And he can only win by drifting into insanity. It all plays out in his head. In the brain of a man who is basically trying to put up some resistance to this system. And not because he is a great revolutionary, not at all. Bartok is a bon vivant in Viennese society. At the start of the film he is also rather unlikeable and arrogant. He thinks Austria will stop the annexation somehow. Then he gets caught in the clutches of something he cannot imagine and tries to stand up against it. It becomes a duel between him and his tormentor. But he doesn't stand up to them because he is a revolutionary; he does it because the Nazis really get on his nerves. He takes this path of pain because he thinks the Nazis are shit and doesn't want to kowtow to them. And now he stands up against his tormentor and flees into insanity. This is also the autobiographical part of Stefan Zweig, that the circumstances drive him insane or make him depressed. When society is such that it can no longer be lived in, the individual splits up. And this character that finds himself in this dichotomy, who fights himself until he becomes schizophrenic, is incredibly suspenseful.

***Which scene did you find the worst to play?***

The recitation of the chess moves, and the situation concealed behind it: this man, all alone with himself

and the realisation of insanity. That is very sorrowful. I was in almost every shot because the whole film is told from my character's perspective. That requires a lot of concentration and keeping this concentration going was very stressful. And then this suffering. How can someone make other people suffer like this? This deprivation of liberty taken so far you no longer know who you are. Until time stops and you can't place anything anymore. This complete alienation from oneself. Yet still this resistance, keeping just a little spark of yourself alight while the ego becomes smaller and smaller. Playing someone who is subjected to so much violence was not easy. And reciting these 20 chess moves. It would probably be easy for a chess player. Oh god - they must be really special people!

***You did not meet Albrecht Schuch, who plays your tormentor in the film, until the shoots started. What was the cooperation like?***

Very good. I like Albrecht a lot. He is a brilliant actor and I was very happy to act with him. It's wonderful to meet someone who has the strength and acting force of Albrecht Schuch. The entire film is a single duel between Albrecht Schuch and Oliver Masucci. That is really fun, of course.

***Why do you think "THE ROYAL GAME" carries so much literary force all over the world to this day?***

The Nazi era is set more in the mind here and not so much in the depiction of terror. It is the terrible in the mind that is perceived. Everyone can remember the novella. It simply addresses a primeval fear: a man is locked in a room in isolation. It is different from merely being in prison. You are alone with yourself and your insanity. Some may be able to cling to the edge of normality and others will fall. It shows how quickly a person can be broken. I don't know anyone who doesn't remember this story. That may also be because it is told so quickly and compactly.

***Do you see any current relevance in the novella?***

Stefan Zweig perished because he thought the Nazis would win the war. This idea is, of course, terrible. There are similar tendencies today. This pressure from the far right that we are currently experiencing is massive. And it is anything but good.

## INTERVIEW WITH LEADING ACTOR ALBRECHT SCHUCH

### ***What makes “THE ROYAL GAME” so forceful in your eyes?***

There is a lot in this story, and also something fairy tale-like. It has something oppressively authentic, almost immediately dramatic, because it immerses itself so deeply in the main character’s psyche and has these nebulous moments. I understand that someone who has a sense of the visual will have a filmic sense too when they read it. And you don’t have to be able to play chess to read the novella. You can get a sense of the fascination for this game and the need of the main character, who clings on to this tempest of numbers and letters.

### ***You play Gestapo man Franz-Josef Böhm. How do you prepare for a role like this? What drives this person on in your opinion?***

The terrifying thing is that he just likes doing his job and has fun arresting and convicting people. The character is based on Franz-Josef Huber, a key figure in Austrian National Socialism. Among other things he was a policeman investigating the attempt on Hitler’s life in Munich. He made a name for himself in a very short space of time and took on the top position in the state police in Vienna. He was a man without morals and any understanding of Christian values who liked celebrating in the evening. He simply had fun doing his work. This is what frightened me the most, the fact that he was a completely “normal” person.

During my acting work for the NSU project I had a sudden insight as far as monstrous roles were concerned. Roles from which I distance myself utterly on a personal level and think: “What kind of horrible people are these? How can someone even start to think in this way, and not only that, but find his purpose in life for years in killing and torturing other people?” This sudden insight was that I do not pass my own judgement on the character but leave that to the audience. This realisation then also lets me see the parallels. They are all people. They might listen to the same music, like going to the theatre, laugh at the same joke, and may even be likeable. But they still have a hollow space inside them that is so big and spreads out across everything else in their souls. This leads to them treating others as this Gestapo man Böhm does. While preparing for my role I took a good look at this Huber. I was in Vienna and rooted through several museums and spoke to a number of people. I then started acting with this background knowledge. And when doing it I found I had to allow for the fact that this person might even be funny, because that’s actually much more authentic than it would be if he was just evil the whole time. He must have managed to convince people of his attitude somehow.

### ***You are playing a double role: that of world chess champion Mirko Czentovic. Can you tell us something about this?***

We thought it would really make sense for the story if Böhm and Czentovic were one and the same person - and played by one and the same actor. I took to this idea of a double role immediately. It made the mental idea of this evil person a little easier because something playful was added to the mix with the character of Czentovic as an antithesis. Someone completely different from Böhm, with a completely different physicality. And then these two characters become one at the end. I liked that.

Czentovic is on a kind of recuperation trip. He earns a little bit of pocket money by playing the super-rich on board and pocketing the winnings relatively easily. That is, until he meets our protagonist and can’t beat him so easily: on the contrary. The interesting thing about this is that this character is not authentic at all as a chess player; he is more like a berserker, a person who thinks very one-dimensionally. And this

person is so good at chess. That's a fantastic combination.

***Can you see any current relevance in the novella?***

Yes, for example, not being in a position to talk about things and keeping things quiet by burying horrible memories and encounters in life in a dark place in some remote corner of yourself. But they stay there and are a part of you. And the whole topic of nightmares. This is where it gets interesting: we have developed the story in the novella, especially in terms of the character of Böhm. This made me aware of the topic of "white torture" in National Socialism. I hadn't really understood this term before. You commit a crime somewhere but still stay "white", i.e. a blank sheet. You pretend you have nothing to do with the matter, but you are actually pulling the strings and are completely responsible for it all.

**INTERVIEW WITH ACTRESS BIRGIT MINICHMAYR**

***Can you tell us something about the shoot in Vienna? At first, we see a depiction of opulent times, and then the Nazis invade...***

I found it completely unsettling. We did the shoot in front of the *Burgtheater*. Nazi flags and uniforms everywhere. I do have to say that I'm not overly fond of shooting in public places at the best of times. I'm always extremely tense and feel a kind of shame. And then to top that all those Nazi uniforms. Terrifying.

***What significance does the female role have in the film?***

She is a kind of projection screen. She symbolises the very happy relationship and Bartok's fulfilled life before his arrest and makes it clear that his experiences of imprisonment take him so far that he does not even recognise the woman he loves any more. I think this is the arc that was planned when my role was developed. It gives everything an added dimension. At the start we have a couple who feel good and full of lightness, who celebrate, love and live life.

***What did you like most about the film adaptation of the story?***

The most exciting thing for me is how Philipp works with director of photography Thomas Kiennast, translating this material into a language of imagery, in which dream and reality blend into each other very closely and Bartok's schizophrenia becomes worse and worse as he occupies himself with the chess game and black and white start to fight within him. The whole levels of insanity, dream and reality blend together.

***Do you have the feeling that the adaptation of this classic fits in well with our times?***

I think "THE ROYAL GAME" is a timeless piece of world cultural heritage. There are some works that never gather dust; at least not yet. Good books always remain significant in their core.

## CAST BIOGRAPHIES

### Oliver Masucci (Dr Josef Bartok)

German actor Oliver Masucci grew up in Bonn. He studied Drama at the Berlin University of the Arts and then started a successful theatre career: from Basel (1995) via *Schauspielhaus Hamburg* (1996–2002), *Münchener Kammerspiele* (2001), *Schauspiel Hannover* (2000–2005), *Schauspielhaus Bochum* (2003–2005), *Schauspielhaus Zürich* (2005–2009) and the Salzburg Festival (1999 and 2007), he arrived at the Vienna *Burgtheater*. Masucci was a permanent member of the ensemble there from 2009 until 2015.

The charismatic actor made his film breakthrough in 2015, playing a satirical role as Adolf Hitler in the bestseller adaptation *Look Who's Back* von David Wnendt. The comedy was not only a box-office hit; the film was also praised by critics and Oliver Masucci received a German Film Award nomination.

Masucci can currently be seen at German cinemas in Oskar Roehler's new film "Enfant Terrible", as Fassbinder. The year before, he was in Caroline Link's successful youth book adaptation *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (2019). And before that he appeared alongside Tom Schilling, Paula Beer and Sebastian Koch in Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's Oscar-nominated drama *Never Look Away* (2018). At the same time, he also appeared in the Timon Modersohn film *Playmaker* (2018), starring Frederick Lau and Antje Traue, and in Oskar Roehler's *Outmastered* (2018), for which he also received a German Film Award nomination.

In 2016, Masucci took on the television role of Ugly Joey in Phillip Stölzl's lavish three-part remake of "Winnetou – Der Mythos lebt" and also appeared in Sherry Hormann's two-part political thriller "Deadly Leaks". He also appeared in the award-winning German TV series "4 Blocks" (2017-) in 2017 and 2018. Since 2017, Masucci has been thrilling series fans as one of the main characters in Baran bo Odar's "Dark", the first German Netflix series. Later, Masucci appeared in the ZDF three-part miniseries "The Wall" (2019) alongside Nadja Uhl, Barbara Auer and Nicolette Krebitz, the TV film "Play" (2019) by Philip Koch, and took on the main role in an episode of the hit series "Shades of Guilt" (2015–2019) with Moritz Bleibtreu. Masucci was most recently to be seen in the Netflix series "Tribes Of Europa".

### Filmography (selection):

Year	Film title	Directed by
2020	THE ROYAL GAME <i>Enfant Terrible</i>	Phillip Stölzl Oskar Roehler
2019	<i>When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit</i>	Caroline Link
2018	<i>Never Look Away</i> <i>Outmastered</i> <i>Playmaker</i> <i>Down the River</i>	Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck Oskar Röhler Timon Modersohn Rick Ostermann
2015	<i>Look Who's Back</i>	David Wnendt



### **Albrecht Schuch (Franz-Josef Böhm & Mirko Czentovic)**

Albrecht Schuch, born in Jena in 1985, is one of the most successful German actors of his generation. His acting career began in 2001 on several stages in Jena, Leipzig, Vienna and Berlin. At the same time, he attended the Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy University of Music and Theatre in Leipzig from 2006 until 2010. He has been a sought-after television and film actor since 2008.

Albrecht Schuch had his most recent big-screen success in 2020, as the neurotic and extremely devious drug dealer Reinhold in the new adaptation of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (2020) by Burhan Qurbani, based on the famous eponymous novel by Alfred Döblin. The film had its world premiere in competition at the 70<sup>th</sup> Berlin International Film Festival. A year before, he appeared as anti-violence trainer Micha in Nora Fingscheidt's award-winning surprise hit debut *System Crasher*. This highly praised and critically acclaimed drama also began its career in the official competition at the Berlin International Film Festival, at which the director won the Alfred Bauer Silver Bear Award (renamed "Special Award" in 2020). Schuch won German Film Awards for his outstanding acting in both films in 2020: for Best Leading Actor in *System Crasher* and for Best Supporting Actor in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

Additionally, the young actor also appeared in the second season of Oliver Kienle's German hit series "Bad Banks", alongside Paula Beer and Désirée Nosbusch, in 2020. He won the Best Supporting Actor award from the German Academy for Television for his acting performance in the first season. His performance in Kilian Riedhoff's successful hostage drama "54 Hours" (2018-), which received a BAFTA nomination as Best International Series in 2019, was equally convincing. Schuch received the German Actors Award as Best Supporting Actor (2018) and the German Television Award for Best Actor (2019). The latter also applied to his convincing performances in Thomas Stuber's film adaptation of "Kruso" (2018) and in Rainer Kaufmann's "One Man's Happiness" (2018). He also won a Golden Camera for Best Actor in 2019.

In 2012, Albrecht Schuch starred as Alexander von Humboldt in the German Film Award-nominated bestseller adaptation *Measuring the World* by Detlev Buck. Other films he appeared in include Robert Thalheim's *Westwind* (2011); Christian Schwochow's *Paula* (2016), in which he played landscape painter Otto Modersohn and David Nawrath's *Atlas* (2018).

The actor's television career began with several minor parts. He later appeared in more famous formats such as "Tatort", "Polizeiruf 110" and "Der Alte". In 2010 Schuch played Harry Klein in the adaptation of Hermine Huntgeburth's "Neue Vahr Süd" and won the German Comedy Award as a member of the cast in the Best Television Comedy category. He achieved another artistic success as Uwe Mundlos in the award-winning series "NSU: German History X"). He won the Adolf Grimme Award together with the cast in 2017. In the same year he landed his first starring role on television, alongside Hannah Herzsprung in Francis Meletzky's ZDF thriller "Traitors". Another television highlight, in 2016, was the two-part miniseries of the Ken Follet adaptation "A Dangerous Fortune" by Christian Schwochow. In the same year he appeared in Simon Ostermann's graduate film from the University of Babelsberg, *Route B96*, which won the Viewers' Award at the Max Ophüls Film Festival.

**Filmography (selection):**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Film title</b>	<b>Directed by</b>
2020	THE ROYAL GAME <i>Berlin Alexanderplatz</i> <i>Chasing Paper Birds</i>	Phillip Stölzl Burhan Qurbani Mariana Jukica
2019	<i>System Crasher</i>	Nora Fingscheidt
2018	<i>Atlas</i>	David Nawrath
2016	<i>Paula</i>	Christian Schwochow
2012	<i>Measuring the World</i>	Detlev Buck

**Birgit Minichmayr (Anna Bartok)**

The Austrian actress Birgit Minichmayr was born in Linz in 1977. She already had an engagement at Vienna *Burgtheater* (1999) during her training at the *Max Reinhardt Seminar*. A considerable theatre career ensued. After fixed engagements at the Berlin *Volksbühne* (from 2004), the Vienna *Burgtheater* (2007-2011) and the *Residenztheater* in Munich (2011-2013) as well as appearances at the Salzburg Festival (2010/11), the versatile actress has been working independently on the renowned stages of Vienna, Munich, Berlin and Hamburg since 2014. She has been directed by Frank Castorf, Klaus Maria Brandauer, Dimiter Gotscheff, René Pollesch, Stephan Kimmig, Luc Bondy and Martin Kušej, among others.

Birgit Minichmayr has already received numerous awards for her convincing performances. Among others, she has won the Nestroy Theatre Award four times, been named Actress of the Year in 2009 and received the Kurt Meisel Award in 2013. In 2009 she won the Silver Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival for her role in Maren Ade's relationship drama *Everyone Else* alongside Lars Eidinger. Minichmayr has received several German Film Award nominations and in 2018 she won the coveted Lola Trophy in the Best Female Supporting Role category for her role in Emily Atef's drama *3 Days in Quiberon*. At the 2017 Locarno Festival she was a member of the Olivier Assayas-helmed jury for the award of the Golden Leopard.

Her film career began in 2000, playing Barbara Brecht in Jan Schütte's film *The Farewell*. Then she appeared in the theatre adaptation *Taking Sides* by István Szabós, for which she was named one of the European Shooting Stars at the 2001 Berlin International Film Festival. The talented Austrian then appeared in many successful films, such as Oliver Hirschbiegel's *Downfall* (2004), the adaptation of *Perfume* (2006) by Tom Tykwer, Wolfgang Murnberger's *The Bone Man* (2009), *The White Ribbon* (2009), Doris Dörrie's *Cherry Blossoms* (2008) and Matthias Glasner's *Gnade*, which premiered in competition at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2012 and for which Minichmayr received a nomination for the German Film Award in the Best Actress category. In 2015 she appeared in Alexander Mindadze's highly acclaimed Russian war drama *My Good Hans*.

One of Birgit Minichmayr's current cinema projects is the Swiss production *Wanda, mein Wunder* (2020) by Bettina Oberli, which celebrated its world premier at the 2020 Tribeca Film Festival and opened the 16th Zurich Film Festival in September 2020. Other films she has recently appeared in include Alireza Golafshan's tragicomedy *Goldfish* (2019) alongside Tom Schilling and Jella Haase and Doris Dörrie's sequel *Cherry Blossoms and Demons* (2019).

The Austrian actress was last seen on television last year in, amongst others, Lars Kraume's drama series "Bauhaus - A New Era" (2019) alongside August Diehl and Anna Maria Mühe. She has also appeared in the thriller series "Dengler" (2015-) since 2015. Further starring roles include Xaver Schwarzenberger's "A Deal with Adele" (2011) and Urs Egger's "Eine Liebe für den Frieden – Bertha von Suttner and Alfred Nobel" (2015).

**Filmography (selection):**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Film title</b>	<b>Directed by</b>
2020	THE ROYAL GAME <i>My Wonderful Wanda</i>	Phillip Stölzl Bettina Oberli
2019	<i>Cherry Blossoms and Demons</i> <i>The Goldfish</i>	Doris Dörrie Alireza Golafshan
2018	<i>3 Days in Quiberon</i>	Emily Atef
2017	<i>Only God Can Judge Me</i> <i>Animals</i>	Özgür Yildirim Greg Zglinski
2015	<i>My Good Hans</i> <i>Jack</i>	Alexander Mindadzes Elisabeth Scharang
2012	<i>Gnade</i> <i>The Strange Case of Wilhelm Reich</i>	Matthias Glasner Antonin Svoboda
2009	<i>The White Ribbon</i> <i>Everyone Else</i> <i>The Bone Man</i>	Michael Haneke Maren Ade Wolfgang Murnberger

**Rolf Lassgård (Owen McConnor)**

Rolf Lassgård, who was born in 1955 in Östersund, Sweden, in 1955, is one of Scandinavia's best-known actors. In addition to the theatre, he has been involved in numerous national and international cinema and television productions and has won several awards. Lassgård graduated from the Malmö Theatre Academy. He then went to the *Skånska Teatern* in Landskrona. He made his stage breakthrough playing Puck in Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

The renowned actor is known to German television audiences primarily as Inspector Kurt Wallander, whom he played in the popular television adaptations of Henning Mankell's novels from 1994 until 2007. In 2009, he appeared in Hans-Christian Schmid's drama *Storm*, which premiered in the competition at the 59th Berlin International Film Festival. Rolf Lassgård found international success with the title role in the award-winning Hannes Holm film *A Man Called Ove* (2015), based on the eponymous novel by Fredrik Backman. The Swedish production received, among other things, an Oscar nomination in the Best Foreign Language Film category in 2017 and a year previously the European Film Award in the Comedy category. The convincing lead actor was also nominated at the EFAs. In 2015 the Swede also appeared in the Adolf Grimme Award-nominated German television drama "The Barschel Case" by Kilian Riedhof alongside Alexander Fehling, Fabian Hinrichs and Matthias Matschke.

In recent years, Lassgård appeared in, among others, the movies *The Lion Woman*, (2016), *Downsizing* (2017) by Alexander Payne with Matt Damon and Christoph Waltz, Jens Jonsson's *Spy* (2019) and the TV series "Jäger – Tödliche Gier" (2018-). His current projects are the Swedish film *My Father Marianne* and *Die große Freiheit*, the feature film debut from director Wendla Nölle.

### Andreas Lust (Johann Prantl)

Andreas Lust was born in Vienna in 1967 and graduated in Drama at the Mozarteum University in Salzburg. He then had engagements at the Vienna *Volkstheater*, the Freiburg City Theatre, the Tyrolean State Theatre and the *Vereinigte Bühnen Bozen*.

But not long after, in 1994, he made his film debut in Wolfgang Murnberger's *For God and Country*, and so started his film career. Since this time Lust has been a sought-after film and television actor. He has played a wide range of characters in TV films (Sven Bohse's "Das Geheimnis des Totenwaldes", 2020) and popular TV formats such as "Tatort", "Polizeiruf 110" etc. He has also become known to a wider television audience through the Austrian television series "Fast Forward" (2009-2018), which was broadcast in several European countries, in which he played one of the protagonists. He received three Romy nominations among others for his acting performances.

In 2008, director Götz Spielmann cast him for the award-winning and Oscar-nominated drama *Revanche*. After that he starred as Johann Rettenberger in Benjamin Heisenberg's partly biographical crime drama *The Robber* (2010). The film had its world premiere in competition at the 2010 Berlin International Film Festival and received several awards, including the Austrian Film Award (Romy) in the Best Actor category for Andreas Lust. He then starred in films such as Florian Flicker's *Crossing Boundaries* (2012), Leo Bauer's *Der Blunzenkönig* (2015), and Ronny Trocker's *The Eremites* (2016). Andreas Lust won the Günther Rohrbach Film Award for his acting performance in Nicolas Wackerbarth's *Casting* (2017) and received among others a nomination for the German Film Award as Best Male Actor.

Andreas Lust's most recent appearances include Hermine Huntgeburth's biography adaptation *Lindenberg! Mach dein Ding* (2020) and Julia von Heinz's latest drama *And Tomorrow the Entire World* (2020). He has also been working on the SKY series "Der Pass II" at the same time as working on Philipp Stölzl's THE ROYAL GAME.

Andreas Lust is a member of the German Film Academy and the European Film Academy.

### Samuel Finzi (Alfred Koller)

Samuel Finzi was born in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, and grew up in a family of artists. His parents are actor Itzhak Finzi and pianist Gina Tabakova. Samuel Finzi was already playing his first theatre and cinema roles during his studies at the VITIZ National Academy of Theatre and Cinema Art in Sofia. Here he came into contact with directors who have considerable influence on European theatre and film. Among others, he worked at the theatre with Benno Besson, Dimiter Gotscheff, Frank Castorf, Jürgen Gosch and Robert Wilson. He was introduced to a wider audience through his film work with Michael Glawogger, Oliver Hirschbiegel, Peter Popzlatev, Sönke Wortmann and Til Schweiger.

He has won many awards for his diverse and imaginative performances, including the Gertrud Eysoldt Ring for outstanding acting performances, the Golden Chest Award in the Best Male Actor category at the Plovdiv International Television Festival and the Berlin Theatre Award. In addition to his numerous engagements on all the important German-speaking stages such as the Vienna *Burgtheater*, the *Deutsches Theater* in Berlin, *Schauspielhaus Zürich*, the *Thalia Theater* in Hamburg and the Berlin *Volksbühne*, Samuel Finzi has appeared in many film and television productions in sophisticated TV series such as “Flemming” (2009-2012), viewer hits such as *The Miracle of Bern* (2003) and independent films such as *The Invention of Love* (2013) and *Punk Berlin 1982* (2015).

Television audiences also know him as the Kiel “Tatort” forensic pathologist Dr Stormann (2005-2018). He made his German cinema debut in 2007, in Marc Meyer’s comedy *Family Rules*. He achieved further popularity through the role of Tristan in Til Schweiger’s hit movies *Kokowääh 1 & 2* (2011/ 2013). In 2015, Finzi starred in Franz Müller’s comedy *Worst Case Scenario* and received the German Actors Award in the Best Actor in a Comedy Role category. He then appeared in a number of films, including Gordian Maugg’s *Fritz Lang – The Other in Us* (2016), Karoline Herfurth’s *Text for You* (2016), Robert Schwentke’s multi-award-winning war drama *The Captain* (2017), Torsten Künstler’s *Hot Dog* (2018) and Oskar Roehler’s *Outmastered* (2018). In 2018 he also appeared in Til Schweiger’s comedy *Head Full of Honey*, a new international new adaptation of the hit German movie *Honig im Kopf* (2014). And in 2020 he can also be seen in a Till Schweiger comedy film: *Die Hochzeit*.

Samuel Finzi works as an actor across Europe and lives in Berlin. His acting versatility and his imagination are both acknowledged by the film industry and praised in the culture sections. The specialist magazine “Theater Heute” describes him as “the dancer, the clown, the musician among German actors. The elegant one. The magician.”

## CREW BIOGRAPHIES

### Philipp Stölzl (Director)

Philipp Stölzl was born in Munich in 1967 and began his career as a stage designer. His work as a director began in 1997 with advertising films and music videos for significant international artists including Rammstein, Marius Müller-Westernhagen, Pavarotti, Madonna and Mick Jagger. His passion for the theatre remained; which is why the versatile director works for the cinema and the stage in equal measure.

Stölzl made his cinema debut in 2005 with *Baby*. His second film as a director, *North Face* (2008), was a big box-office hit and in addition to several national and international nominations won the German Film Award for Best Cinematography and the German Critics' Award for Best Screenplay. Further popular and award-winning films ensued, including *Goethe!* (2010) and the international bestseller adaptation *The Physician* (2013), which attracted several million German cinemagoers.

Stölzl's latest hit movie was the star-studded musical adaptation *I've Never Been to New York* in 2019, for which he won the Special Award at the Bavarian Film Awards. In 2016, the director breathed new life into Karl May's literary hero Winnetou with the three-part adventure "Winnetou – Der Mythos lebt". The remake was produced for the RTL channel.

At the same time, Stölzl repeatedly returned to the theatre stage. In the summer of 2019, he thrilled audiences and critics alike with his production of the opera "Rigoletto". Not only because this was the first time Giuseppe Verdi's masterpiece could be experienced on the *Seebühne*, but also because the director also designed the superb stage set. The stage production will be returning to Bregenz in summer 2021.

Stölzl landed a surprise hit back in 2005 with his version of Weber's "Der Freischütz" at the Meiningen Court Theatre. Once again, he was the set designer as well as the director here. This was the creative role model for further opera and play presentations, including the Salzburg Festival ("Benvenuto Cellini", "Cavalleria rusticana / Pagliacci"), the Ruhrtriennale Music Festival ("Rubens"), the Basel Theatre ("Faust", "The Flying Dutchman", "Frankenstein", "Andersens Erzählungen"), *Staatsschauspiel Dresden* ("Der Phantast"), the Stuttgart Opera ("Die Fledermaus"), Deutsche Oper Berlin ("Rienzi", "Parsifal"), the Berlin State Opera ("Orpheus", "Il Trovatore") and other famous stages.



**Philipp Worm and Tobias Walker (Producers)**

Walker+Worm Film was founded by Tobias Walker and Philipp Worm in 2008, on the basis of long-standing cooperation during their mutual student times at the University of Television and Film in Munich. The central focus of every production is the individual style, the striving for authenticity and the desire to implement the directors' personal visions as well as possible. Walker+Worm Film productions are received very well by critics all over the world and have been shown at the most renowned festivals and won numerous awards in recent years.

After *Picco*, Philip Koch's feature film debut, which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2010 and which won many awards, Walker+Worm Film produced the most successful first feature of 2013 with Frauke Finsterwalder's eye-catching film debut *Finsterworld*. The critically acclaimed film received numerous awards and nominations worldwide. The next hit movie followed a year later with Philipp Leinemann's award-winning thriller *The King's Surrender* (2014). Sonja Maria Kröner's *The Garden*, the director's film debut, was released in 2017. The German drama received the Advancement Award for Best Director and Best Production at the Munich International Film Festival and the Bavarian Film Award in the Best Screenplay category. Other noteworthy projects are the opening film at the 2018 Hof International Film Festival, Anca Miruna Lăzărescu's *Happiness Sucks* (2019), and Philipp Leinemann's *Blame Game* (2019), which opened the Max Ophüls Awards Film Festival in 2019.

Alongside the adaptation of the literary classic THE ROYAL GAME other projects are being developed and prepared, such as Frauke Finsterwalder's "Sisi und ich" and Student Oscar winner Alex Schadt's feature film debut "Marmor". Shooting finished on the drama "Zum Tod meiner Mutter" (Directed by Jessica Krummacher) in autumn 2020.

**Danny Krausz / DOR Film (Co-producer)**

Danny Krausz founded DOR FILM with Milan Dor in 1988.

Production encompasses TV films and series as well as movies and documentaries. The Munich subsidiary DOR FILM-WEST, DOR FILM KÖLN and ZAP, the centre for audiovisual postproduction in Vienna, provide an international orientation and technical finishing capacities.

Their most successful films of recent years include Emily Atef's *3 Days in Quiberon* (2018), Chris Krausz' *The Bloom of Yesterday* (2016), Wolf Haas's "Die Brenner" adaptations and Wolfgang Murnberger's *Life Eternal* (2015).

Krausz is a member of the German and European Film Academies, president of EAVE and co-founder of the Austrian Film Academy. He is president of the copyright collecting agency VAM and has been Professor of Production at the Vienna Film Academy (University of Music and Performing Arts), of which he assumed charge in 2019, since 2011.

**Eldar Grigorian (Screenplay)**

Screenwriter Eldar Grigorian was born in Riga in 1982. He studied Documentary and Television Journalism at the University of Television and Film in Munich. The short films he created there were shown at numerous national and international film festivals and won several awards.

He discovered his passion for the fictional as a student and gathered his first experiences as a writer and dramaturge. Participating in the “EKTRAN Masterclass” in the field of story development under the supervision of legendary Polish filmmaker Andrzej Wajda reinforced his desire to write screenplays for films. He lives and works in Munich.

**Thomas W. Kiennast (Cinematography)**

Cinematographer Thomas Kiennast was born in Vienna in 1976. He studied Film at the University of Music and Arts in Vienna and finished his studies with a diploma in Camera Technology. He was already working on successful advertising films for national and international production firms during his studies.

In 2004 he worked for the Austrian television series “4 Frauen and ein Todesfall” (directed by Harald Sicheritz, 2005). Other projects followed, including the film “Mutig in die neuen Zeiten – Im Reich der Reblaus”, also by Harald Sicheritz. Kiennast received the Austrian film and television award, the Romy, in the Best Cinematographer category in 2006 for his work.

Still active in the international advertising industry, Kiennast also filmed a number of television and cinema films, including, since 2011, several episodes of “Tatort”. In 2011 the international Walt Disney production *Lilly the Witch* by Harald Sicheritz and the multi-award-winning TV film by Andreas Prochaska, *A Day for a Miracle* (2011), were also released. The reprised cooperation with director Andreas Prochaska on the award-winning German-Austrian novel adaptation *The Dark Valley* (2014) gave Kiennast a German Film Award in the Best Cinematographer category, among others. The Western drama with Sam Riley, Tobias Moretti and Paula Beer celebrated its world premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival and received numerous awards and nominations, including the Bavarian Film Award in the Best Director category, eight German Film Awards in 2014 and the Austrian Film Award in 2015 and two European Film Awards (Production Design and Costume Design).

In 2018 Kiennast received another German Film Award for his outstanding work on Emily Atef’s film *3 Days in Quiberon* (2018). Presented for the first time in competition at the Berlin International Film Festival, the unforgettable portrait of Romy Schneider was nominated for the coveted Lola in ten categories and won seven of them. One year later, Kiennast filmed Philipp Stölzl’s star-studded German musical film *I’ve Never Been to New York* (2019), a tribute to Udo Jürgens. Moritz Bleibtreu’s directing debut *Cortex* hit the cinemas in October 2020. The thriller had its world premiere at the 2020 Hamburg Film Festival.

### Matthias Müsse (Production design)

Matthias Müsse was born in Düsseldorf in 1966 and has been working as a production designer and film architect for cinema and television since 1992. He quickly made a name for himself as a creative and imaginative artist.

He achieved his first major success with the television film “The Hunt for the Hidden Relic” (2002) by Sebastian Niemann, for which he won the German Television Award with costume designer Janne Birck in 2003. After that he worked on films such as Tobi Baumann’s Edgar Wallace parody *The Trixxer* (2004) and its sequel *The Vexxer* (2007) by Cyrill Boss & Philipp Stennert, Dennis Gansel’s *Napola* (2004), Sebastian Niemann’s *Hui Buh: The Castle Ghost* (2006) and *Jerry Cotton* (2010) by Cyrill Boss & Philipp Stennert. He received a nomination for the German Film Award in 2010 for his detailed production design in Michael Herbig’s *Vicky the Viking* (2009).

In 2013, Matthias Müsse was the production designer for Bora Dagtekin’s hit comedy *Suck Me Shakespeare*, Felix Fuchssteiner’s fantasy adventure *Ruby Red* and Pepe Danquart’s drama *Escape from Warsaw*. The latter brought him another Lola nomination. Shortly afterwards the artist designed the fantastic sets for the children’s adventures *The Pasta Detectives* (2014) by Neele Leana Vollmar and *The Pasta Detectives 2* (2015) by Wolfgang Groos. The production designer received a further nomination for a German Film Award in 2019 for the lavish film adaptation of Michael Ende’s *Jim Button and Luke the Engine Driver* (2018), directed by Dennis Gansel. *Jim Button and the Wild 13*, the sequel to the children’s classic, was released at cinemas in the autumn of 2020. The last movie production in which the designer was able to display his creative talent was in Philipp Stölzl’s colourful musical spectacular *I’ve Never Been to New York* (2019), whose production design was nominated for the 2020 German Film Award.

In addition to films, Matthias Müsse has also designed numerous interesting television productions. He was able to show his design skills to the full in 2006, in the eight fairy tale adaptations in the “ProSieben Märchenstunde” series. The production design in Philipp Kadelbach’s multi-award-winning adaptation “Naked Among Wolves” (2015) is also worthy of mention. A year later, Matthias Müsse won the German Television Award for Marvin Kren’s historical crime drama “Berlin One”. In 2015, the artist created the Western set for Philipp Stölzl’s three-part remake of “Winnetou” and won yet another German Television Award in 2017 in the Best Production Design category.

### Tanja Hausner (Costume design)

Tanja Hausner, born in Austria in 1970, began her film career as a costume designer in the mid-1990s working mainly on the films of her sister, director Jessica Hausner. In 2012 she then worked with filmmaker Ulrich Seidl for his *Paradise* trilogy (2012/ 2013). All three films celebrated their world premiere in competition at the Berlin International Film Festival.

The artist received her first nomination for the Austrian Film Award in 2014 for her work on Antonin Svoboda’s biographical adaptation *The Strange Case of Wilhelm Reich* (2012). Veronika Franz and Severin Fiala’s award-winning thriller *Goodnight Mommy* (2014) was also created in 2014. Tanja Hausner received

another film award nomination in the Best Costume Design category in Jessica Hausner's multi-award-winning drama *Amour Fou* (2014), which celebrated its world premiere in Cannes. In 2019 the costume designer was then finally able to take the coveted Austrian trophy home for her work on Markus Schleinzer's film *Angelo* (2018).

Jessica Hausner's critically acclaimed film *Little Joe* (2019) was released in Germany in January 2020. The drama had its world premiere in competition at the Cannes International Film Festival in 2019 and received ten Austrian Film Award nominations in 2020, including Tanja Hausner for Best Costume Design. Another successful film project the artist was involved in was Andreas Horvath's *Lilian*, a drama that received many nominations - and awards - last year. The shooting for the new Ulrich Seidl film *Böse Spiele* was also completed recently.

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