

A man with short, light-colored hair is seated at a desk in a wood-paneled room. He is wearing a brown three-piece suit with a white shirt and a patterned tie. He holds a lit cigarette in his right hand, which is resting on the desk. His left hand is also on the desk, near a typewriter. The background consists of vertical wood paneling. The lighting is warm and focused on the man.

Vincent

A Blind Hero –
The Love Of Otto Weidt



A Blind Hero – The Love Of Otto Weidt

PREFACES

Civil courage – of all people, it was Otto von Bismarck who introduced this French expression to Germany when he commented that it was “not rare to find rather respectable people who lack civil courage.” Journalists and historians have been grappling for decades with the question of how many “respectable people” in the Third Reich lacked sufficient civil courage to resist the state-imposed inhumanity. This makes it even more important to remember those people who had the courage to help and take action. They operated in secrecy and provided help in a number of ways. They were not always successful, but this does not diminish the courage and the humanity of these helpers.

At second glance, the story of Otto Weidt, the blind brush and broom

manufacturer in Berlin, is not a story typical of Berlin. The same or similar events could have happened anywhere. This is why we and our colleagues from rbb, hr and WDR – Germany’s public television stations – decided to film it. This was possible with the support of Otto Weidt’s only living employee, the journalist Inge Deutschkron, who suddenly became famous throughout Germany on 30 January 2013 with her very personal speech at the German Parliament in memory of the victims of National Socialism.

Inge Deutschkron gave a moving account of what it meant to be stigmatised for being Jewish between 1933 and 1945. For years, it has been important to her to make the story of Otto Weidt known beyond the borders of Berlin. The obvious thing to do was to

ask her to tell her story for television. She was very glad to oblige.

The result is neither a TV drama nor a documentary. There are hardly any images of Otto Weidt’s workshop for the blind and there is only one contemporary witness – Inge Deutschkron. We had to take the risk of re-enacting her memories. The real events and people in the docudrama have been historically accredited as far as possible – but the result is also a very personal view of the sequence of events. It is an incredible love story. It gets under your skin. And is intended to give people courage.

Lutz Marmor

ARD Chairman and
NDR Director



“Bürgermut”, the German expression for civil courage, literally means “citizens’ courage”. In the life of Otto Weidt, the brush and broom manufacturer from Berlin, citizens’ courage has a very personal culmination which is referred to in the title of the film. Because Otto Weidt is “a blind hero”. A man who is “disabled”, as we would say today, but still has the courage and the strength to protect and hide visually impaired Jewish fellow citizens from persecution by the Nazi regime. Someone who is unable to see the events unfolding around him but has a better grasp of what is happening and of his duty than anyone else. An outsider who feels solidarity with the outcasts. Blind Otto Weidt knew very well what it meant to have one’s life suddenly considered “unworthy” and stigmatised, as they did under the inhuman racial ideology of the Nazis.

A blind man does something while others turn away and remain silent. “Everyone could see what was going on,” says Inge Deutschkron, the impressive contemporary witness and narrator of the film. But the people who could see did not want to see. They turned a blind eye to what was happening in broad daylight right before their eyes: the humiliation and deportation of Jews, in the open, on the street. The blind man is the one whose eyes are open. The metaphoric level of the film coincides with historical reality, making the story even more haunting and credible. This story has been “clamouring” to become a film.

With Edgar Selge, the lead, the producers of the film managed to acquire an actor with experience in playing the role of a disabled person. He had played an individual with only one arm, Detective Tauber in the “Polizei-

ruf” TV crime series, for many years. But it takes far more to play a blind person. How does a blind person move his eyes? How do you act eyes that cannot see, but still need to convey thoughts and emotions? How does an actor with perfect eyesight control his glance so that it has the vague quality of blind eyes? Edgar Selge has found such a convincing solution to this that the intensity of his performance is further increased. Otto Weidt’s life story is almost unbelievable – and yet it happened just like in the film that dramatizes it. Life sometimes writes the best screenplays. The story of Otto Weidt had to be filmed so that today’s television viewers could see and understand it.

Volker Herres

Programme Director
Erstes Deutsches Fernsehen



STORYLINE



In the 1940s, Berlin brush and broom manufacturer Otto Weidt uses cunning and payoffs to shield his staff, most of them Jewish and most of them blind, from the clutches of the Gestapo. When his secretary Alice Licht is deported to Auschwitz, Weidt, nearly blind himself, sets out to free her. He succeeds, but his love for her remains unrequited.

Berlin, 1941. The workshop of the brush and broom manufacturer Otto Weidt has a reputation for being a great place among Berlin Jews, who serve as forced labour in factories considered “important for the war effort”. Weidt’s confusingly close contact to the Gestapo and his regular payoffs

give him the means to protect his employees from everyday humiliations, at least on the workshop premises. Everyone calls him Papa Weidt. Alice Licht, a pretty young woman from a well-to-do family, is one of his few sighted employees. With humour, charm and her organisational skills, she soon becomes Otto’s right hand. But they are linked by more than just a work relationship.

Otto is married, not Jewish, in his late fifties and almost blind; Alice, Jewish, is about 40 years younger and full of plans for her own life. The two are made of the same stuff. Alice quickly grasps Otto’s complex system of legal business, wheeling and dealing as well as his favours, and

proves to be hardly less resourceful than Otto. She admires him. For Otto, Alice represents the promise of a life he would have loved to live. However, the Gestapo is closing in on the factory. Despite the regular “visits” by the Gestapo, everything seems fine. But one day, almost all the Jewish employees are taken away. For one last time, Otto Weidt manages to rescue his blind workers from the nearby Gestapo assembly camp.

While Alice and the others still rely on Papa Weidt’s continued protection, it begins to dawn on him that the most difficult times are yet to come. In utter secrecy, he begins to prepare hideouts at friends’ places, but also on the workshop premises.



By the time the mass deportations start, almost all of his employees have gone underground. But life in a hideout is hard to bear for a long time. In a single moment, blinded by trust, all of the hideouts are revealed to a Gestapo helper. Through his Gestapo contacts, Weidt has Alice and her parents taken to less rigorous Theresienstadt, where he is able to support them by sending food parcels. A few months later, a postcard with the postmark of a town in Upper Silesia, not far from the Auschwitz concentration camp, arrives from Alice. In coded language, she tells him that she has been transferred to the Birkenau camp. Weidt acts quickly: as the sales representative of his own brush and broom work-

shop, he embarks on his mission to rescue Alice.

Upon arriving in Auschwitz, he learns that Alice – without her parents – has once again been transferred to a camp near Christianstadt in Lower Lusatia, part of a huge ammunition factory. Weidt follows her, rents a room, deposits clothes, money and a message that reaches Alice via a middleman. In January 1945, during the chaos accompanying the clearing of the camp, Alice manages to escape. She travels back to Berlin via Christianstadt. During the last weeks of the lost war and the initial months after the war, Otto and his wife Else give her a home. Then everything falls apart. Weidt still nurtures the hope of a

mutual future. But Alice cannot and will not stay. After losing her parents and her terrible ordeal, Germany is no longer her home. She is finally granted an entry permit for the US and leaves Berlin. Otto stays behind, alone. He dies two years later. All that is left today to remind us of his life and his achievements is the Museum Otto Weidt's Workshop for the Blind in Berlin-Mitte and his recognition as "Righteous Among the Nations" by Israel.

CAST / CREW

OTTO WEIDT / EDGAR SELGE

ALICE LICHT / HENRIETTE CONFURIUS

INGE DEUTSCHKRON / JULIA GOLDBERG

ELSE WEIDT / HEIKE HANOLD-LYNCH

ROSA KATZ / KATRIN POLLITT

CHAIM HORN / FABIAN BUSCH

WERNER BASCH / RAINER FRANK

FRANZ-WILHELM HEINTZE / UWE BOHM

LAND LADY / ISABELLE BARTH

ELECTRICIAN / AXEL GOTTSCHICK

AND MANY OTHERS

DIRECTION / KAI CHRISTIANSEN

SCREENPLAY / HEIKE BRÜCKNER VON GRUMBKOW / JOCHEN VON GRUMBKOW

INTERVIEW WITH INGE DEUTSCHKRON / SANDRA MAISCHBERGER

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY / JAN KERHART

SOUND / CORINNA ZINK / ROBERT F. KELLNER

LIGHTING / MARCO MINWEGEN / RENÉ ZANDER / FLORIAN HOFF

PRODUCTION DESIGN / HARALD TURZER

PROPMASTER / VERENA POPP

STANDBY PROPS / HARALD VOSS

COSTUME DESIGNER / GUDRUN LEYENDECKER

MAKE-UP ARTIST / YVONNE OPPERMANN





FILM EDITOR / BARBARA TOENNIESHEN

MUSIC / HANS P. STRÖER

SOUND / STEFFEN KEINKE

SET MANAGER / MATTHIAS MOST / ANDREA GIESEL /

MELANIE HEILIG

LINE PRODUCER / PETER EFFENBERG

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER / MATTHIAS MARTENS

PRODUCTION MANAGER NDR / EVA MARIA WITTKE

EDITORIAL TEAM / ALEXANDER VON SALLWITZ (NDR) /

ROLF BERGMANN (RBB) / ESTHER SCHAPIRA (HR) /

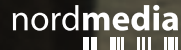
BEATE SCHLANSTEIN (WDR)

ARCHIVES / ARCHIV KARL HÖFFKES / LA CAMERA

STYLO / FILMKONTOR DR. JOACHIM CASTAN /

DEUTSCHE WOCHENSCHAU

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“RESISTANCE TO VIOLENCE AND TERROR”

BY INGE DEUTSCHKRON, CONTEMPORARY WITNESS AND NARRATOR OF THE FILM

“Otto Weidt”, a friend told me in confidence, “is known throughout the city as one of the few employers who treat their Jewish staff well”. Reluctantly, I heeded the advice to go and see this Weidt, the owner of the workshop for the blind bearing his name. Since April 1941, a law forcing Jews, men and women alike, to serve as forced labour in factories “important for the war effort”, had been in force. In the side wing of the house in Rosenthaler Strasse 39, I climbed a rickety wooden staircase and entered a sparsely furnished office. Inside I saw Weidt, slender to the point of gauntness. Above his furrowed face, straight, colourless hair. His blue eyes were pale. Otto Weidt was almost blind. He offered me a seat and asked me questions about my family, particularly about my father’s political activities directed against the Nazis. Finally, he told me, “Come to the labour exchange for Jews. Let’s see what we can do.”

In this specific case, the director was not inclined to send Jewish workers to Weidt. To punish us for daring to ask Weidt for work, he sent us to IG Farben, a corporation with close Nazi ties. At the factory, they treated us as badly as I had feared they would.

During our breaks, we Jewish women only talked about one topic: “How are we going to get out of here?” I hurt my own knee on purpose and was indeed released as being unfit to stand at a machine for 10 hours. Weidt beamed when he heard this. This was right up his alley. He suggested trying once again to secure my employment at his workshop. With a package under his arm, whose significance I was to understand only later, Weidt saw the director. This time he gave us a friendly welcome and did not object to me working at the Workshop for the Blind. When we left the employment office, the package under Weidt’s arm had disappeared. No, he hadn’t accidentally left it behind. He obviously had chosen the right perfume for the director’s spouse - that was what the package contained. Weidt received orders from the Wehrmacht for brooms and brushes. They allocated him raw materials to make them. Occasionally he completed these orders, but usually only upon the Wehrmacht’s insistence. He used the raw materials assigned to him for “other” business. Brooms and brushes were popular objects for bartering. There was hardly any large department



store in Berlin that did not do business with Weidt: horse hair brooms in trade for perfume, sweaters, cognac or silk stockings. All goods that Weidt used for bribing Gestapo officials. To his 30 blind Jewish workers, he provided food that was otherwise allocated to them in very limited quantities.

The Gestapo had the right to regularly inspect workshops and factories employing Jews. They seemed to enjoy visiting Weidt, knowing very well that they would not leave empty-handed. Weidt treated them like pals. When the eastward deportation of Jews began in October 1941, he managed to save several of his blind workers. At Gestapo headquarters, he expressed his outrage at the fact that his workers were being taken away -- he was being financially ruined. The Gestapo, who understood the reference to their "good relationship", subsequently released his workers. But Weidt, who was convinced that the Nazis wanted to purge Berlin of the Jews, decided to prepare hideouts. When the mass deportations started, Weidt took a gamble for his Jews and got the ones who were caught sent to the barracks of Theresienstadt rather than to the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

Weidt sent them food parcels there. He managed to rescue his former secretary, Alice Licht, from the concentration camps. Thanks to Weidt's help and that of other friends, my mother and I survived. In England, we were reunited with our father. My efforts to catch up on my school education and vocational training failed. I returned to Germany. In the provisional capital, I found out to my horror that the leading Nazis, who still held the same anti-democratic views they had held during the Third Reich, had been entrusted with leading positions in Bonn. This prompted me to emigrate to Israel. I only returned to Berlin when students there encouraged me to tell them about my fight for survival in Nazi Germany. Their interest was and is so great, that I have made this my life's mission. I am convinced that the film will have a similar impact -- that is, give the younger generation the empathy and strength to resist violence and terror in their country.

A HERO MOST HUMANE

INTERVIEW WITH EXECUTIVE PRODUCER MATTHIAS MARTENS
AND DIRECTOR KAI CHRISTIANSEN

Otto Weidt's biography is an almost unbelievable story. A blind man as the helper in others' hour of need – Hollywood could not have dreamt up a better story. And yet it is true. Mr Martens, how come the name Otto Weidt has remained largely unknown in Germany? Indeed, the story of Otto Weidt's life is truly remarkable. A life that is characterised by an unshakable conception of mankind. A truly righteous man. Or in Inge Deutschkron's words: "Otto Weidt was a man who, during a time of inhumanity, remained humane." The story about the postcard is really incredible. Unstamped, only marked with a note that whoever found it should post it since the recipient would pay the penalty fee, it was thrown from a deportation train in Silesia. Someone found and posted it. This postcard, which can still be seen at the Museum Otto Weidt Workshop for the Blind, was what prompted Otto Weidt to set out. Set out for Auschwitz and later, Christianstadt, to rescue Alice Licht. I think even the Hollywood dream factory could not come up with a story like this every day. Why the story is so little known to date, I cannot say. Inge Deutschkron has been telling it for years in her autobiographies and at Berlin schools. Thanks to Inge Deutschkron and everyone else who made this film possible, many people throughout Germany will now know of Otto Weidt and the incredible story of his life.

How did you come across the story? When did the idea to make it into a film emerge? Our cameraman, Jan Kerhart, first brought it to our attention. We considered making a documentary, but after some reading and early conversations with Inge

Deutschkron, we quickly realised that this story would also support a 90-minute film. It had to be told in a "larger" format. We, Sandra Maischberger and I, then set out to persuade representatives of Germany's public television stations and later, film funds.

In the preparatory phase, when you were gathering the material, what sources for reconstructing the life of Otto Weidt were available? Did you run across any unknown or inaccessible material? Were you able to talk to any contemporary witnesses apart from Inge Deutschkron? We have primarily adhered to Inge Deutschkron and her memories. We realised early on that we would have to limit the period of time covered by the story. To describe Weidt's whole life would not have been possible in this form. This is why we focus on the time that Inge Deutschkron remembers as a contemporary witness and that she tells us about. Our approach is from a subjective perspective. We are very fortunate -- we could not have wished for any better narrator than Inge Deutschkron. And in Sandra Maischberger, we also had an empathetic, sensitive interviewer who helped Inge share her sometimes very painful memories with us during the interviews.

Mr Christiansen, you not only directed the film, but you also developed the screenplay together with Heike Brückner von Grumbkow. At what point did you become involved in the work leading to the film? Heike Brückner, partly supported by her husband the historian, wrote the screenplay. I was invol-



ved in the project from the very beginning from the director's perspective. Which story do we want to tell, and what are we able to tell? Heike had already integrated extracts from the interview with Inge Deutschkron into the screenplay, since we had the transcripts. During the editing process, the interview sections changed completely. Inge Deutschkron has a very lively way of telling her story. An exact match between her narrative and the scenes or over several scenes is very difficult to plan ahead. It evolves while editing the film. The length of a scene also depends on what we let Inge describe and when we want the film narrative to take over.

What part of the story caught your attention? As a director, where did you want to place special accents in the story? It is one of the most unusual, moving love stories that I know of. It tells us a lot about the time and the circumstances and it is full of interesting characters, especially Inge Deutschkron. She not only lends the film credibility, but also contributes her own very special sense of humour, which is often liberating – even in the face of the dramatic plot. A particularly interesting aspect for me is the focus on blind people, the tactile aspects of the film. Even though we produce images, on this project I was keen to convey the sensual quality of touching and feeling things in order to understand them. This, I think, makes the story very specific and comprehensible. The Otto – Else – Alice triangle drives the plot. It contains a lot of longing and the unsolvable tragedy of the story. Time and again, the characters think they can hold onto a bit of happiness, only to lose it again.

Mr Martens, apart from Inge Deutschkron's narrative, the film shows historical images. What is the dramaturgic function of the archive material used? The archive images are primarily exemplary, associative. They aim to help the audience understand and visualise the historical context.

The film has been classified as a docudrama. Many features of this "open form" (fragmented narrative, use of multiple perspectives) do not appear in your film. Can this film really be considered a traditional docudrama? What is a docudrama in your opinion? It is actually difficult to answer the question about which genre our Otto Weidt film represents. "Scenic documentary" may be a better description of our film. In any case, with its 70 minutes of enacted scenes, the film was something new and a great challenge for our production company.

Mr Christiansen, a historical film requires very detailed scene preparation to come across as credible. Where did you find your filming locations? Did you reconstruct many sites or were you able to film at the original locations? Do they still exist? Some of the locations still exist; however, none was suitable for filming. The Workshop for the Blind is a museum today and of course the streets of Berlin look quite different now. Our set designer reconstructed the workshop at a former glass factory in Goslar so that all rooms, the staircase, etc. really were adjacent to each other. This means the actors move from room to room, go outside and come in. The outdoor



scenes are filmed on the streets of Potsdam that we redecorated. And the snow is real. It snowed a lot when we shot the film.

I was keen to avoid the use of computer images in this film. I consider them useful in other projects, but in this case, we kept to the principle that the actors should be able to touch as much as possible instead of performing in front of green screens to be filled by computer images at a later stage. For outdoor filming we went to Berliner Strasse in Potsdam-Babelsberg, among other locations. Many historical dramas have been filmed at this site, including “Reichstagsbrand” and “Hotel Adlon”. Unfortunately, George Clooney wanted to film his “Monuments Men” at the site at the same time. Initially we had agreed to use an unused part of the scenery to shoot our film at the same time. However, he ended up requiring more space and we redecorated a street in Potsdam outside the studio. We were not just competing for locations, but also for costumes: they were filming another monumental Hollywood film, Wes Anderson’s “Grand Budapest Hotel”, at the same time. This meant that the haggling for costumes began at the costume hire company, Berliner Kostümfundus.

Mr Martens, Otto Weidt – what kind of character do you think he was? What was his inner motivation? Inge Deutchkron describes him as not just a courageous opponent to the regime, but as a conman. A man of many faces? For me Otto Weidt was primarily a righteous man. Someone who did not turn away and blend into the background when the injustice and arbitrary terror of the Nazis encroached on his daily life. His profoundly human traits and needs make him an even more interesting, likeable person for me.

The film tells two stories: The love story between Otto Weidt and Alice Licht, and the persecution of the Jews in Otto Weidt’s workshop for the blind and his commitment to saving them. How do the empathetic approach to a love story and the historically reflected narrative relate to each other? I think you cannot separate the two. Otto Weidt is the focus of attention. Inge Deutchkron tells about his life and his actions. The authors and the film director have managed to interpret the true love story that connected Otto Weidt and Alice Licht with great empathy and take it beyond what Inge Deutchkron remembers – or where there were no witnesses.

Mr Christiansen, how many days did you have to film all the staged scenes? The enacted scenes were shot in 15 days in Goslar, Dömitz, Potsdam and Berlin. You need to add some travel time to move the complete crew from one location to the other.

How complex and costly is it to re-enact scenes from the period of World War II today? Our colleagues in charge of the set and wardrobe design are very experienced and fastidious. The costumes are much more than what is visible on screen. The majority of them originate from the period and are not just copies. This is why the actresses and actors move differently, which adds a lot to their acting. The workshop for the blind is an unusual, very concrete location for filming. It smells of wood and bristles, there is dust and lots of peculiar instruments with mobile parts there. Irrespective of the specific period the location represents, it is a versatile and rewarding film location. Other scenes were far more of a challenge: making Berlin deep in snow look like a metropolis and making



the danger emanating from Auschwitz perceptible, without showing it explicitly. Only two short archive sequences show the barracks of the camps as they really were, in the dramatization we stick closely to Otto's perspective and how he approaches this terrible place.

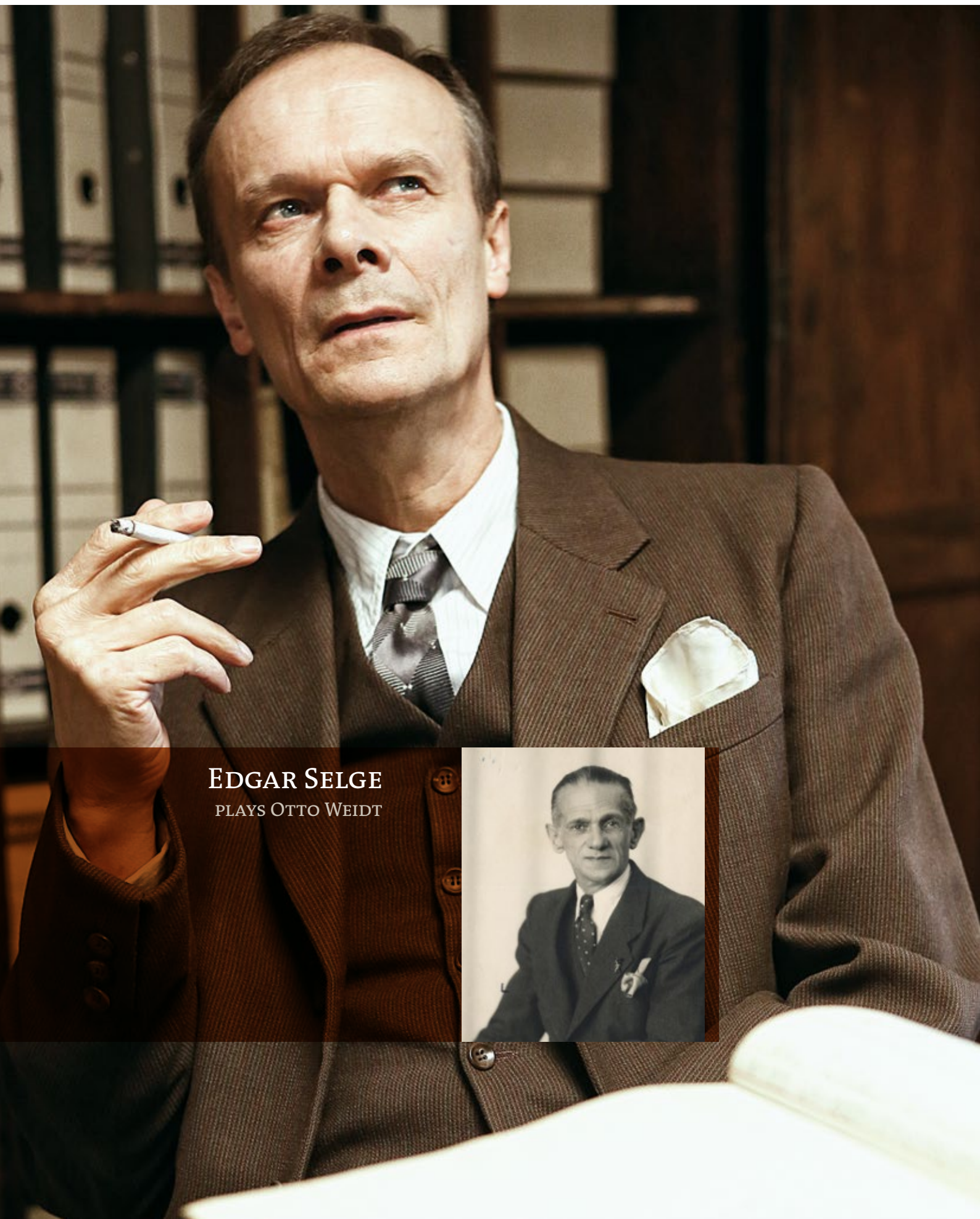
Mr Martens, what was the determining factor in your search for a suitable actor for the lead? Were you thinking of Edgar Selge for the role of Otto Weidt from the start? Edgar Selge – and Henriette Confurius as well – have proven to be fantastic choices for the film. Our ideas and preferences have been more than fulfilled. We were almost entirely successful in putting together our dream cast. Even though this meant postponing the scheduled takes and persistently phoning both the actors and their agencies.

Mr Christiansen, with such a serious and sensitive topic that requires particular empathy on part of the actors, not just for their roles but also the period depicted – what was work on the set like? To give you just two examples, a central issue is the portrayal of blind people. Edgar Selge had a trainer or, rather, mentor, who went blind at the same age as Otto Weidt and whose way of walking and operating had a significant influence on Edgar. Some of the extras in the workshop are genuinely blind, which had a huge influence on the atmosphere and the filming process. For the dramatization, we had to give very clear instructions to make sure that the blind cast members were positioned at the right spot during a take – and also for re-takes, to make sure that they seamlessly linked to previous scenes. It was good for the actors and actresses, because they were required to be very attentive – even though they may not

have been performing the role of a blind person. I think this is reflected in all of the scenes: everyone interacts naturally and the performance became realistic and credible. And all this in a truly unusual story.

What mark, what lasting impression would you, Mr Martens, like the film to leave on its audience? That it is important to tell stories about positive heroes. To encourage people to remain true to their ideals. That it is worth fighting for your goals and that it is important to resist injustice.

Mr Christiansen, what can the filmed memories of lives such as Otto Weidt's mean for us today? To me he is a hero – not a superman, but a righteous man. Someone whose empathy and respect stand out in the crowd. At the same time, his love for Alice is understandable but shows his weakness and that he is a human being, like everyone else. He is an extraordinarily courageous, yet desperate, man who has to cope with many limitations and who has to chase happiness since he's been provided with so little. I have seen the film many times, more often than anyone else, and each time the story moves me, because Otto Weidt's individual destiny represents a general truth.



EDGAR SELGE
PLAYS OTTO WEIDT



“THIS BOLD OUTLINE OF A LIFE FASCINATED ME”

INTERVIEW WITH THE LEAD EDGAR SELGE

Performing the role of Otto Weidt must have been a dual challenge for you – playing both a historical figure and a blind person. How did you prepare for the task? The best preparation for exploring Otto Weidt is, of course, Inge Deutschkron’s autobiographical report “I Wore the Yellow Star”. Her narrative is so graphic and rich in detail – and told from the perspective of a child growing up – that it feels as familiar as your own family memories. Children always make observations in a very comprehensible way. From my balcony, I can see the first flat from whose windows six-year old Inge is watching the entrance to an infamous Nazi bar. In my imagination, I have followed the author from that place to all the districts of Berlin. The people she meets and describes seemed like distant relatives to me. I had the same experience with Otto Weidt, to whom she erects a moving, yet unsentimental monument in this and her later book, “Papa Weidt”. Whether the character is historical or an imagined does not make a huge difference for an actor: the character must seem familiar, and that was easy after reading these texts.

What did you specifically experience on the set, performing the role of a blind person? With just 15 days for filming there would not have been a lot of time for experimentation. Did “appearing to be blind” enhance and inspire your performance or did it “disable” your performance? Portraying people with disabilities, or to put it more correct, people with particular challenges, is always inspiring for me, no matter if it is someone who has lost an arm, is partially paralyzed or has a speech impediment or impaired vision. This is what I consider the “sporty” aspect of my job. And when you manage to portray someone with a specific physical condition, you have achieved a lot and you can focus your performance on your co-actors and the individual situation. Before filming began, I visited Jürgen Bünthe, a very active member of an association for the blind and partially

sighted in Berlin. When he opened the door and used his blind eyes to try to meet my gaze, he narrowly missed it. I understood a striking, personally important detail: the particular way that blind people seek to focus on the person opposite them.

How would you describe Otto Weidt? What fascinated you about the role? And what was particularly important for you while performing this role? Otto Weidt was a seeker all his life. He came from a modest background, was trained as a decorator, but he was actually more interested in literature and he was active in the anarchist workers’ movement. He felt close to, even part of, the people who were excluded from society and stigmatised and, without being asked, he increasingly assumed responsibility for them. His approach was that of an adventurer, who sets out on a journey into the unknown: full of curiosity, joie de vivre, humour - and always fully committed. It is this bold and adventurous outlook on life that has fascinated me most.

What personal experience have you gained from filming and performing the role of the blind brush and broom manufacturer? Whenever I make a film like this, I feel encouraged to be true to myself. I enjoy life once again and feel that I am not nothing. I am not just a cog in the works. I am not just part of an anonymous crowd; I do matter. Every individual matters. And this is what gives you the sense of life being worthwhile.



HENRIETTE CONFURIUS

PLAYS ALICE LICHT

"Alice Licht came from a well-to-do family, went to college and knew that the entire world was her oyster. Under the Nazi regime, her sole focus was on surviving. She was a Jew and Otto Weidt was her hero and rescuer. Her trust in him and her love were unconditional. He saved her life and when the world was open to her once again, she chose her own way. To portray and explore this life was a very enriching experience for me."





JULIA GOLDBERG
PLAYS INGE DEUTSCHKRON

"I was in great awe of portraying Inge Deutschkron, since a performance like this is a different responsibility from enacting fictitious characters. I was concerned that I might not fulfil her expectations, and my respect grew the more I explored her life in preparation for the role. Against her incredible background, the view of an individual's life became clearer."

OTTO WEIDT AND THE MUSEUM OTTO WEIDT WORKSHOP FOR THE BLIND IN BERLIN

BY PROF. DR. JOHANNES TUCHEL
DIRECTOR OF THE GERMAN RESISTANCE MEMORIAL CENTRE

Otto Weidt was born on 2 May 1883 in Rostock, to the decorator Max Weidt and Auguste Weidt, née Grell. The family has a modest lifestyle. Otto Weidt attends basic primary and secondary school and learns his father's trade. The family moves to Berlin. In his youth, he is active in anarchist circles in Berlin and is one of their leaders at times. Since he is a strict anti-militarist and rejects disempowerment and exclusion by the state, he is subject to police observation in the German empire for many years. As his visual impairment increases, Otto Weidt trains in brush and broom making and opens a workshop for the blind in 1936 in a basement flat in Grossbeerenstrasse 92 in Berlin-Kreuzberg – very near to his flat in Hallesches Ufer 58. In 1940, he moves his workshop to a building in Rosenthaler Strasse 39. The workshop covers the entire first floor of the side wing. In the workshop at times, up to 30 blind and deaf workers make brooms and brushes to Wehrmacht orders. The place is there-

fore considered "important for the war effort". By paying off Gestapo officials, Otto Weidt manages to protect his workers from deportation for some time. The workshop for the blind operates until shortly before the end of the war; with a smaller workforce after the deportations of 1943. After the war, the business continues under the management of Otto Weidt and, after his death in December 1947, his wife. The Office for Economics of the East Berlin government closes the workshop for the blind in 1952.

Otto Weidt always tried hard to protect his Jewish workers from persecution and deportation. Impressively and powerfully, the film shows how determined, incorruptible and courageous his actions were. In 1946, Otto Weidt is recognized as a "Victim of Fascism". After his death, Else Weidt is divested of this status as surviving dependant in 1950. The new regulations rule "the



recognition must not be upheld on the grounds of aiding Jews". At the initiative of Joachim Lipschitz, Senator of the Interior in Berlin, 738 Berlin citizens are honoured for selflessly supporting persecuted Jews in 1956 - 1963. Among them is Else Weidt, who, as a needy citizen, receives a monthly pension of 50 Deutschmarks from 1958 onwards. She dies on 8 June 1974, at the age of 72. Yad Vashem recognises Otto Weidt posthumously as a "Righteous Man of the Nations" in 1971. The journalist Inge Deutschkron fought tirelessly for the remembrance of all helpers. With Inge Deutschkron's significant contribution, the Museum Otto Weidt's Workshop for the Blind in Rosenthaler Strasse in Berlin-Mitte evolved from a student project at the HTW University of Applied Sciences Berlin and the "Blindes Vertrauen" (Blind Trust) exhibition. Upon the initiative of Michael Naumann, then Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, the German Government assumed responsibility for

the museum in 1999. From then on, there were numerous initiatives, including by then Federal President Johannes Rau, to place greater emphasis on the remembrance of helpers and the people who were "living in hiding" in Berlin. The first step in 2005 led to the German Resistance Memorial Centre assuming responsibility for the museum and to a complete overhaul of the permanent exhibition. In a second step in 2008, the Silent Heroes Memorial Centre was opened at the address of the museum. In a third step, the European perspective will be added to the memorial over the next years. The remembrance of Otto Weidt and his courageous actions has become an integral part of Berlin.

Further information:
<http://www.museum-blindenwerkstatt.de>



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