

PAULA BEER

JANNIS NIEWÖHNER



WHAT WOULD YOU  
HAVE DONE?

# STELLA

A L I F E

BASED ON TRUE EVENTS

SHPG letterbox SevenPictures REAL FILM WAWA DOR FILM LAGO FILM KEYSTONE FILM blue+ medienboard MOIN FFF Bayern PLS bfg ORF FILM FUNDUS TIEN FISA GLOBAL SCREEN

STELLA. A LIFE.



presents a production of

**letterbox**  
FILMPRODUKTION

# STELLA. A LIFE.

In the title role

**Paula Beer**

with

**Jannis Niewöhner, Katja Riemann,  
Lukas Miko, Joel Basman, Damian Hardung, Bekim Latifi, Gerdy Zint  
and many more.**

Director

**Kilian Riedhof**

Writers

**Marc Blöbaum, Jan Braren & Kilian Riedhof**

Produced by

**Letterbox Filmproduktion GmbH**

**Michael Lehmann**

**Katrin Goetter**

**Ira Wysocki**

**PRESS KIT**

# STELLA. A LIFE.

## Cast

Stella Goldschlag  
Rolf Isaakson  
Toni Goldschlag  
Gerd Goldschlag  
Peter  
Manfred Kübler  
Aaron Salomon  
Dobberke

Paula Beer  
Jannis Niewöhner  
Katja Riemann  
Lukas Miko  
Joel Basman  
Damian Hartung  
Bekim Latifi  
Gerdy Zint

## Crew

Director  
Writers

Kilian Riedhof  
Marc Blöbaum, Jan Braren & Kilian Riedhof

Producers

Michael Lehmann, Katrin Goetter & Ira  
Wysocki (Letterbox Filmproduktion GmbH)

Co-producers

Stefan Gärtner (Seven Pictures)  
Felix von Poser (Amalia Film)  
Henning Kamm (Real Film Berlin)  
Danny Krausz (Dor Film)  
Marco Mehlitz (Lago Film)  
Annegret Weitkämper-Krug (Gretchenfilm  
Filmproduktion)

Dario Suter (DCM)  
Ivan Madeo, Stefan Eichberger & Urs Frey  
(Contrast Film)  
Patrick Gantner & Malte Probst (Blue  
Entertainment)

Cinematography  
Editing  
Production design  
Costume design  
Make-up  
Sound  
Music  
Casting

Benedict Neuenfels  
Andrea Mertens  
Albrecht Konrad  
Thomas Oláh  
Kerstin Gaecklein & Heiko Schmidt  
Frank Heidbrink  
Peter Hinderthür  
Nina Haun

## Technical data

Length: 115:46 min.

Format: Scope

PG: Suitable for viewers  
aged 16 and over

Sound: 5.1 Mix

# STELLA. A LIFE.

## Synopsis

STELLA. A LIFE. tells the story of a young woman, who dreams of a glittering career as a swing singer on Broadway and yearns for happiness and recognition. But Stella is Jewish and lives in Nazi-run Berlin. After she is forced to go into hiding, she joins a group of forgers, to ensure her own survival and that of her parents. When she is arrested by the Gestapo, her life changes from being one of a victim to one of a persecutor.

## Brief overview

Berlin, August 1940. 18-year-old Stella Goldschlag lives for jazz. She dreams of a career as a singer in New York. The city that is home to the music of Cole Porter and Louis Prima. She longs to escape the war and dangers that surround her in Germany. However, as the daughter of Jewish parents, this is a dream that has little chance of ever coming true.

Three years later, all hope, and all her parents' efforts to arrange the family's safe passage to the USA have given way to a frantic battle for survival. Stella and her mother are forced laborers in the armaments industry. They barely escape a new wave of deportations but are forced to watch on powerlessly as Stella's husband, among others, is arrested. The family goes into hiding. During an attempt to get her hands on food stamps, Stella meets the Jewish passport forger, Rolf and falls in love. Together they become a savvy duo on the Berlin black market, exploiting the plight of the Jews in hiding. Until they are betrayed and arrested by the Gestapo. Stella does manage to escape but when she returns to her parents, all three are arrested. To save herself and her parents, Stella starts to work for the Gestapo. Together with Rolf, she hunts for Jews in hiding. Stella is now both victim and perpetrator. And she will remain that forever ...

## Press release

Inspired by true events, STELLA. A LIFE. tells the breathtaking and shocking story of a young woman in the brutal clutches of a criminal state who can find no other way to survive but to betray others and thus also herself. She is both victim and perpetrator. The title role is played by the exceptional actress Paula Beer, who impresses once again with her multifaceted talent and her courageous interpretation of the character. The exciting script, based on many years of research, was written by Jan Braren and Marc Blöbaum together with multi-award-winning director Kilian Riedhof, who has both BAFTA and German Film Award nominations to his name, and who has succeeded in creating a moving, highly emotive film. In addition to Paula Beer, the top-quality cast also includes Katja Riemann and Jannis Niewöhner. The ensemble is completed by Joel Basman, Lukas Miko, Damian Hardung, Bekim Latifi, Gerdy Zint and many more.

# STELLA. A LIFE.

German Film Award winner Benedict Neuenfels ("I'm Your Man") takes the lead on cinematography, while internationally acclaimed set designer Albrecht Konrad and costume designer Thomas Oláh round out the team.

STELLA. A LIFE. was produced by Letterbox Filmproduktion (producers Michael Lehmann, Katrin Goetter, Ira Wysocki) in co-production with SevenPictures, Real Film Berlin, Amalia Film, Dor Film, Lago Film, Gretchenfilm Filmproduktion, DCM, Contrast Film Zürich and Blue Entertainment.

National release on 2 November 2023.

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## STELLA GOLDSCHLAG - CHRONICLE

10 July 1922	Stella Goldschlag is born in Berlin-Charlottenburg to journalist, director and composer Gerhard Goldschlag and his wife Toni, a professional singer.
1926	At the age of four, Stella Goldschlag features in the film "Rosen aus dem Süden" (Director: Carl Froelich).
1 September 1929	Enrols in the 3rd Volksschule Berlin-Halensee.
1 September 1933	Stella moves to the Hohenzollern-Oberlyzeum in Berlin-Wilmersdorf.
1935	Gerd Goldschlag, editor-in-chief of the <i>Kino-Weltwoche</i> magazine, loses his position because he is a Jew. He goes on to make a living as a composer and piano teacher.
10 September 1935	Stella is forced to leave her school because of her Jewish heritage, and switches to the Jewish private school of Dr. Leonore Goldschmidt in Roseneck, Grunewald.
10 November 1938	The Night of Broken Glass comes as a shock to Stella. Her father goes into hiding temporarily in fear of being arbitrarily arrested. Meanwhile, her parents set about trying to get an exit visa, in vain.
1939	At 17, Stella sings in a Jewish jazz band, attends the higher commercial school and then enrolls in a two-year course as a fashion designer in a private Jewish art school on Falkenstraße in Berlin.
1940	Performances at Jewish family celebrations. The dream of a career in the USA.
1 September 1941	The Goldschlag family is put to forced labor. Stella works first at the company Siemens & Schuckert in Fürstenbrunn, then – like her parents – for Ehrich & Graetz in Berlin-Treptow.
23 October 1941	Stella marries the Jewish musician Manfred Kübler.
27 February 1943	Thousands of Jewish forced laborers – historical sources list around 7,000 – are arrested in the Berlin armaments companies as part of the "Fabrikaktion" (Factory Action) and deported to Auschwitz. These include Stella's husband, Manfred. He is murdered in Auschwitz on 3 March.  Stella and her parents escape, are able to hide with friends and spend several months underground in Berlin.
June 1943	Stella meets Jewish counterfeiter Rolf Isaaksohn, who also works as a background actor at the opera. The two become a couple.

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2 July 1943	Stella and Rolf are arrested in the Café Bollenmüller by the Gestapo. Previously, Stella's school friend, Ingeborg Lustig had identified them both as Jews in hiding. At the Gestapo headquarters in Berlin, Stella is tortured. They want her to tell them where she got her falsified papers.
10 July 1943	During a dental treatment, she makes her escape. But on that very day, her 21st birthday, she is arrested again, with her parents, at a hotel.
24 August 1943	Following a bombing, Stella succeeds in escaping from the women's prison in Bessemerstraße, Tempelhof. Penniless, without prospects she goes to the Jewish detention camp on Großen Hamburger Straße in Berlin-Mitte, where her parents are also being held.
August 1943	To protect herself and her parents from being transported to Auschwitz, she agrees to help with the manhunt for the Jewish passport forger, Samson "Cioma" Schönhaus. Her search, in the company of other Jewish searchers, remains unsuccessful.
September 1943	To delay the constant threat of deportation, she tells the camp commander, Walter Dobberke, that she is prepared to work permanently for the Jewish investigative service. She receives a permit and is tasked with hunting down Jews in hiding throughout Berlin.
November 1943	She asks her former lover and accomplice Rolf Isaaksohn to work with her. They work well together and are even granted a shared room in the camp.
23 February 1944	Stella's parents are deported to Theresienstadt.
21 April 1944	Stella "boasts" to Ida Nöckler that her 100th arrest was a 70-year-old man. By this time, she has been working for the SS for just under eight months.
1 October 1944	Stella's parents are deported to Auschwitz and murdered.
23 October 1944	Stella marries Rolf Isaaksohn at the instigation of camp commander Dobberke.
17 April 1945	Rolf Isaaksohn goes on the run with 40,000 Reichsmark and leaves Berlin.
30 April 1945	With the assistance of her Jewish lover and fellow prisoner Heino Meissl, Stella succeeds in getting away to Liebenwalde.
7 October 1945	Stella's daughter Yvonne is born. Heino Meissl is presumed to be the father.
December 1945	Stella is arrested in Liebenwalde.
31 May 1946	Stella is convicted by a Russian military tribunal and sentenced to ten years in prison.
28 June 1946	Incarcerated in Torgau prison.

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17 July 1948	Transferred to the former concentration camp in Sachsenhausen.
3 February 1950	Continued imprisonment in Hoheneck Prison and Waldheim Prison.
23 January 1956	After 10 years, Stella is released. She moves to West-Berlin, to establish contact with her daughter. At the instigation of the Jewish community, there is a new trial.
19 April 1956	She is imprisoned on remand until 2 November 1956. She is released on health grounds. She is not considered a flight risk.
29 June 1957	Sentenced to 10 years by the District Court of Berlin. The sentence already handed down by the Russian military tribunal is taken into account. Stella is released.
2 November 1957	Marries Werner Friedhelm Schellenberg.
1971/1972	Marries Karl Gärtner.
9 October 1972	Another trial, this time before a jury: the 1957 verdict is confirmed.
1980	Stella moves to Freiburg and lives there under the name Ingrid Gärtner.
1984	Stella throws herself from a window, but the suicide attempt fails. She is then treated in the psychiatric department of University Hospital Freiburg.
26 October 1994	Stella dies at the age of 72 by drowning in the Moosweiher in Freiburg-Landwasser.

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## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR KILIAN RIEDHOF

### **Why did you, as a German director, want to tell the story from Germany of a Jewish "catcher" in the Nazi era?**

For me, this is an important part of German history. This happened in the land of my forefathers. The fate of the Jews in Germany is part of my history, for which I feel a responsibility. A responsibility that grows the older I get.

### **How did you come across the story of Stella Goldschlag? How did the idea come about to make a film?**

More than 20 years ago, I saw a photograph of her in the newspaper. It showed a laughing young woman on the Ku'damm. It was a surprisingly modern image, part of an article titled "The Blonde Specter". The story of Stella Goldschlag, who wandered along the Ku'damm and betrayed her fellow Jews. Friends. Acquaintances.

The case shocked and impressed me in its ambivalence, its inherent contradiction: on the one hand, you have the number of her victims, the horrific betrayal of friends, acquaintances and strangers. On the other, you had the suffering that Stella and her family had to endure simply because they were Jewish: ostracism, forced labor, life in hiding, imprisonment, torture and deportation up to and including the murder of the parents.

It was difficult then to pass judgment. And of course, the story of Stella Goldschlag begs the question: What would I have done in her place? Would I have been capable of this betrayal? How far would I go to survive? Would I really have said No?

### **How did you approach the topic?**

For my co-authors Marc Blöbaum, Jan Braren and myself, research is indispensable, particularly in a case like this one. It is critical to achieving any level of authority. This story – and this was very clear to us from the outset – had to be told with the greatest possible historical accuracy. What you see in this film is therefore historically verified, to the greatest extent possible.

We studied all the trial documents from 1957, which contained dozens of witness statements. We read all the interrogation records of the Russian military command from 1946, the books written by Peter Wyden and Doris Tausendfreund. We worked intensively with our consultants, particularly Professor Andreas Nachama, but also with Barbara Schiep and Martina Voigt from the Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand (*German Resistance Memorial Center*), and with Akim Jah, who in his work "Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin" (*"The Deportation of the Jews from Berlin"*) goes into the Große Hamburger Straße Detention Center in great detail.

Our interviews with contemporary witnesses like Margot Friedländer and Walter Frankenstein, both Jews who spent time in hiding in Berlin, were particularly valuable. Walter Frankenstein said to us: "You (*so we*) are the present. You are responsible for ensuring that our democracy remains a democracy. And that democracy has a future. That is my every hope. If that does not come to pass, then I have lived for nothing."

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**Who was Stella Goldschlag? What kind of woman was she? How does Stella Goldschlag develop in your film? What change do you describe?**

In 1940, at the start of the story, Stella is a young, talented woman who dreams of a career as a jazz singer on Broadway. A young person full of a hunger for life, full of yearning to participate in that life. Her stigmatization as a Jew by the Nazis is a deep affront to her. She feels ostracized from life, made to feel like a second-class citizen. Instead of resigning herself to the increasingly dreadful fate of her fellow Jews, Stella creates a new "Aryan" identity, which helps her to survive within the Nazi dictatorship, but ultimately leads to mass betrayals.

Stella Goldschlag was a German Jew. A "German citizen of Jewish faith", as many Berlin Jews considered themselves. However, (just like her parents) she thought of herself as German and not as Jewish. She did not identify with Judaism but was defined as a Jew by the Nazis. Her story takes place within the context of this tension.

Stella's story is the story of a perversion. We tell the story of a young woman, who was turned into a stooge and in this context into a criminal by a criminal system.

**Did you have any doubts during the making of the film? Were there colleagues, friends or acquaintances who advised you against making it?**

Yes, there were. Mostly people who knew nothing of the detail of our film, but instead who had general doubts about telling an ambiguous, divisive story about one Jewish fate in the Third Reich. We didn't allow it to put us off, instead it sharpened our senses, made us even more aware of the challenge and of our responsibility. And it made us aware that we had to be clear that it was the Nazi system of the Germans that forced Stella into this treachery. This is where the cause of her crime lay.

In winter 2019, we realized after two and a half years of developing the book that we had come to an impasse. We had written the story of Stella from the perspective of a fictitious best friend. But it did not feel authentic. We realized that we had subconsciously distanced ourselves from the monstrosity of what she had done, we had avoided the horrible closeness of this character to us. When we decided to allow Stella to be the main character and thus the person that the audience would identify with, we allowed her story in, in all of its savagery – a savagery that was both her fault and the fault of third parties. When we allowed ourselves to feel her betrayal – in that moment, this film became for us an extraordinary encounter, a constantly recurring confrontation with a highly controversial character.

**Were you in contact with the Jewish community in advance or have they already seen the film?**

It was hugely important to my producer Michael Lehmann and myself that we would establish a dialog with the Jewish community in Germany from the very outset for this project. Not just with Professor Andreas Nachama, who advised us, but also with the Central Council of Jews in Germany and with rabbis like Mrs Elisa Klapheck. They were also the first people that we showed the film to. The discussion within the Jewish community was lively and varied, in terms of the assessment of the person of Stella Goldschlag. While many considered her to be a criminal pure and simple, others did acknowledge her dilemma – at least in part. Of course, there were also doubts about the legitimacy of such a film in the current context in Germany. At the same time, it was argued that it was better to film an ambivalent, nuanced film like ours than one that paints everything as black and white, or to forget the era entirely.

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To put it briefly: The responses were as we expected. Because our story poses questions that everyone must answer for themselves. That is unusual and challenging for our modern viewing habits, but I think it's important for this story, to allow this very thing ... and also to endure it.

## **Why do you think that this film should be released now? Given the current political situation: what makes this film current?**

Our film tells the story of the perversion of a (admittedly ethically unstable) young person by the criminal Nazi system. The horrors of Nazism in all its facets should never be forgotten. These days there are voices getting ever louder, saying that we should finally be done with stories like this and thus with the memory of such stories, and I find that shocking and wrong.

Look at where we are now! We live in a time in which antisemitism, totalitarianism, anti-democratic thinking and barbarity are gaining ground. Authoritarian systems are growing in strength in Eastern Europe, not just in Russia; the rise of far-right tendencies in the USA, which reached its peak (so far) in the storming of the Capitol building; this is all deeply unsettling. Primarily, however, we must consider our own country: far-right, antisemitic, anti-democratic forces once again have a facade of respectability in a fascist party, which according to surveys, would receive 20% (!) of the vote. And these forces have strong networks. According to terrorism experts, Germany is the second most at-risk country in Europe for a potential revolution. We are experiencing a massive assault on democracy worldwide and in this country.

We should be very aware of that. We could once again find ourselves in the position in which Stella Goldschlag found herself, faster than we think. Those who only start to think about these things when they're already under pressure run the risk of losing their own morality. This is about becoming aware of one's own ethical compass in good time, of thinking it through carefully and strengthening it.

## **What is STELLA. A LIFE about? What is the message of this film for you? What do you want to effect with this film?**

For me, films don't have a message, they should be an experience, they should ask questions.

With this film: What would I have done? How far should we go to survive? Should we survive at any cost? Am I capable of listening to my internal voices, of saying NO, when it comes to it? In this film, therefore, we are also constantly meeting ourselves.

At its core, it's about guilt. What is a life worth, what is survival worth, when it is built on guilt? It is worth really confronting these questions, and not just filing them away internally from a historical distance.

The Talmud says: "Whoever saves a single life, saves the world entire". And what about the person who betrays just one single life?

## **You are also a co-author of the script. What was the greatest challenge for you when writing it?**

This is the dramatization of a real story, which requires the greatest possible authenticity. Of course we couldn't include everything, we had to condense it. What could we leave out without distorting Stella

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Goldschlag's story and thus the assessment of her character? We wanted to avoid a simple judgment either way. Is Stella a perpetrator or a victim? We find sound arguments for both sides. The viewers should face her situation full on and ask themselves the question: What would I have done?

## **When you were writing the script, did you already have Paula Beer in mind for the role of Stella? How did she come to be part of the project?**

A character develops in the writing process. And it is not until I have grasped the essence of the character, that I can catch the scent of a possible casting. Paula was the first and only option for Stella Goldschlag. For me, there was no alternative. She is not just an extraordinary actress, she has a high level of artistic integrity, she immerses herself into her roles with meticulous preparation and makes them her own, she defends them to their core. And she has an aura that is difficult to explain but which was absolutely essential for this role.

Thus far, Paula has shone playing warmer characters. With the role of Stella Goldschlag, she has, to my mind, found herself once again. The contradictions in this character, the beguilement which is only a bare millimeter away from the horror – allowing this contradiction, enduring it, realizing it, breathing life into it, this is Paula's great work in our film.

## **How would you describe the cooperation with Paula Beer?**

The basis of our cooperation was that we went through the book in detail. Paula is, as am I, a very meticulous preparer. We spent time finding the hook in every scene, to enable Paula to find the emotional path to Stella.

For the songs in the film she worked for months in advance with a singing teacher and our composer Peter Hinderthür.

In rehearsals, we focused on melding Paula and the others into a band, into a circle of friends, on giving them stories to establish the relationships between each of them, so that we could jump into the life of the characters as soon as filming began. In addition, we honed the dialog tempo together. It was important to me that all the actors speak quickly, babble, interrupt one another, as we do today. I didn't want that "historical" register of voice, which we know from so many films and series, particularly those about the Nazi era. The dialogs should sound modern. Why should the language be so fraught with meaning, just because the time was so full of meaning? The people then were not aware of this, they lived, as we do, in the (albeit far more dramatic) everyday.

Once filming starts, it's all about timing. Where do you pause, where do you speak, when do you go faster or slower. Paula makes it so very easy for you as a director. Much of what she does is golden from the very outset. There are never moments that ring artificial or false. At this level, this is huge and an absolute gift.

I remember the scene where Stella must say goodbye to her parents at the railway station. Paula was supposed to turn to us as the train disappeared and walk along the platform to the exit. A defining and important moment. Stella is feeling both rage and despair at the whole world here. On the first take, Paula turns around, walks along the platform and truly every emotion is there, tangible, palpable. There were more than a few tears from the crew that day.

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## **How were the other roles cast?**

Every great actress depends on her fellow cast members. My casting director Nina Haun and I were very clear that we had to assemble a high-quality ensemble around Paula. In addition to his great acting class, Jannis has a very natural star appeal, which he was able to bring to the iridescent character of Rolf. For decades, Katja Riemann has ranked among this country's greatest actors and yet her transformation into Toni Goldschlag is a complete surprise, the way she plays her – so bitter, so proud – and always with a real regard for the character. Lukas Miko embodies Stella's father, Gerd, with great sensitivity. He succeeds in bringing Gerd's stubborn and fatal adherence to the familiar German existence, without ever betraying the character. Damian Hardung and Joel Basman are part of a line-up of hugely talented, vibrant young actors, whose love of performing was key to the authenticity of the jazz band. I am happy and proud that they were all willing to bring their gifts to this film.

## **What role do you feel the individual film production departments play, so for instance, costume design, cinematography, set design, music etc. in the realization of the story of Stella Goldschlag?**

Stella Goldschlag's story is one of guilt, but it is a blossoming guilt. Because Stella is about more than survival, she is protecting herself against the stigmatizing marginalization, and always yearns to participate in life. In our film therefore, the "Aryan" world is – fatally – more a *place to be* for her, rather than a bleak and threatening backdrop.

In order to bring the audience into Stella's subjective perspective, for example, we decided with the costumes, not to use the Nazi brown in the uniforms but instead to concentrate on the variants in gray and blue. The effect is startling. The Nationalist-Socialist world of the Ku'damm suddenly appears a lot more modern. In production design too, we went against expectations and sought out attractive, light-filled, almost spectacular cafés and homes. We continued that on through the lighting too. Berlin appears as if bathed in warm Tuscan light.

The cinematography and editing are "unreliable narrators", they always keep us off-balance. They tell the story of a fast-paced and high-adrenaline life, that is constantly changing. A life that allows no time for reflection. Nothing is certain. At any moment, everything could turn. The sound design allows us to experience Berlin as a modern, lush metropolis. The score picks up on the idea of a blossoming guilt in its seductive, fateful and harrowing elegance.

With this we succeeded in removing that historical distance from the events, the *comfort zone*, which allows us to judge Stella Goldschlag and the time in which she lived and to internally file her away, instead of really confronting her. Thanks to the huge number of fictional films about this era, we as viewers have created a certain experiential space as to what the Nazi era might really have been like. Regardless of its historical veracity, this space makes it possible for this era to be almost digestible. In order to make our film a radical, modern, ground-level experience, we had to break these "learned" codes, we had to take away certain things.

## **Where do you think the challenges lay in bringing the story to life? Was this film any different to your previous film work? If yes, how?**

The particular challenge lay in the contradictions inherent in the lead character. In balancing the sympathy and horror, that Stella Goldschlag clearly invites. In the horrible closeness, therefore, that had

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to be endured. The story of Stella Goldschlag is highly contaminated. As the making of a film always represents the embodiment of emotional and psychological processes, this contamination becomes part of one's own experience. That is extremely demanding for all involved.

## **Which scenes were the most difficult for you to realize?**

There was a scene in the detention camp, in which the Jewish prisoners in the Große Hamburger Straße camp were being called for transportation to Auschwitz. These poor people were leaving behind straw beds, wearing O-cards (for "Ost" or "East" in English) around their necks, amongst them families with children. What an incredibly harsh fate. You experience this very concretely and physically during filming. In those moments, I found it difficult to recover my connection to the everyday business of filming.

## **You often return to historical subjects. Why is that? What is the particular attraction of tackling these themes? What must a topic have for you to want to make a film of it?**

The ability to travel to another world was, for me, one of the basic impetuses for making films. Filming historical stories is always a journey through time. I immerse myself in a new cosmos. During the research, I absorb every detail so that I can ultimately start to live in this world. This experience is fascinating and actually a real yearning in me.

Because: It *actually* really happened! Dangerous criminals in a pedestrian zone. A leading politician dead in a bathtub. A young woman strolling along the Ku'damm, who betrays people. History is always the stories of people, extraordinary, unsettling, touching. How can people do such a thing? Decoding that, figuring out the truth of the event, learning something about people, better understanding the human condition, that is a key driver for me.

And: Our collective myths are woven into our history. Gladbeck and Barschel are seminal moments of the 1980s, they tell of a country, a nation, that knew little if anything about its own condition and tried to package the underlying horror into superficial tranquility. The story of YOU WILL NOT HAVE MY HATE unfolds amidst a national trauma in France. In STELLA. A LIFE., it is the colossal guilt that dominates the story of the Third Reich. Has more guilt been amassed anywhere than in that 12-year period?

## **Have you already started working on your next project? Can you tell us a little about it?**

We are currently developing three new projects - and surprise! – none of them is historical!

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## INTERVIEW WITH PAULA BEER

### **When was the first time you heard of Stella Goldschlag and how did you come to join the project?**

I heard about Stella Goldschlag for the first time through this project. I was approached by Kilian Riedhof and the production team and asked if I would be interested in this character and the project. As I read the script, it very quickly became clear that I wanted this role.

### **What did you think the first time you read the script?**

Firstly, I was very taken with the story and overwhelmed by its brutality and cruelty. Scripts which manage to portray the scale of the horror of that period from 1933 do not come along every day. Also, the book was very well written. I could dive directly into the emotional journey and immerse myself in the crazily complex character that Stella really is. That in turn really interested me as an actress. And that is perhaps the paradox of acting, that playing the darkest depths of humanity is very exciting.

### **What was the particular attraction of this project for you?**

Above all, it was the many facets of Stella's personality. The young girl, who dreamed of America and sang in a jazz band, who becomes a calculating traitor and later denies everything that she did. Portraying a character who was the victim of this horrendous system but then went on to betray her own people. For me, the question from the very outset was: "How can someone do this?"

### **How would you describe Stella Goldschlag?**

Because Stella Goldschlag was a real person, I would not presume to speak about her as a person. I can only speak about my Stella, the character I play in our film. This Stella has many faces and all of her faces require a lot of attention from outside. She truly hates herself and therefore needs the constant validation and admiration of her fellow human beings. As soon as she feels attacked or threatened, she lashes out. The fear of being alone increases over the course of the story along with her fear for her own life and that of her parents. All of this is bubbling away under an often perfectly functioning facade. Stella has a knack for recognizing what the people around her want from her and she can play these roles perfectly. She is a master of this game but at the same time it makes her increasingly lonely. She is a very unstable personality, who relies heavily on her environment.

### **What, for you, was the greatest challenge of playing such a contradictory and divisive woman?**

It was my own resistance to letting this character in. When you start to prepare a character, you dive ever deeper into the story, and for Stella that meant a full immersion in the era of National Socialism. The things that are shocking facts in history class are suddenly tangible, real situations charged with emotion. Reports of contemporary witnesses, photos of the affected people, real, specific locations. All of that makes these situations real again and that shook me to my core. At the same time, I must

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as an actress access the reality of my character and this balancing act took a lot of time and work.

## **How did you prepare for filming?**

The preparations varied widely as Stella had so many different facets. Firstly, I had dance and singing lessons, rehearsals with my fellow cast mates, my own preparation for the role, which brought with it some time travel into history and thus also changes to the character. Then there were the dress rehearsals, and I also underwent quite an external transformation. I think perhaps the blond hair at the end helped me most to feel like the character; it allowed me to let myself go, let myself become Stella.

## **The various stages in the life of Stella Goldschlag are defined by dictatorship, fear for her own life and fear for the survival of those closest to her. How did you manage to empathize with that?**

The question as to how acting actually works and how it is possible to experience feelings that you've just read about in a scene is one I always ask myself. The great thing about us as humans is that we have empathy. We sometimes forget how to access it and learn to protect ourselves from things that are unpleasant. But, I believe, that we all carry within us an understanding of what certain "archaic" emotions, such as a fear of death, actually mean. It's just not pleasant and not part of our everyday repertoire. As an actress, I have through my character a framework of external circumstances as to why my character feels this way and through this, I can immerse myself in her reality.

## **What was it like working with Jannis Niewöhner?**

Jannis and I worked together for the first time when I was 18. The trust that you have when you've known someone for so long is a massive help when you are dealing with material like STELLA. A LIFE. Jannis called me as soon as he had accepted the role and I felt a great weight lift off my shoulders as I knew that through all this madness I would have a great partner by my side. And that's how it was. Together with Joel Basman, we were a good trio and fortunately, despite all these tough scenes and difficult material, we had a lot of fun.

## **What was it like working with Katja Riemann and Lukas Miko, who play your parents in the film?**

From the very outset, they were both incredibly loving and I really felt as though I had the protection of parents. Sometimes the dynamic of the roles rubs off on the actors. After our rehearsal days were done, I don't think we ever spoke about our characters again, at least that's how I remember it. Playing scenes that deal with deportations and other horrible things naturally takes its toll on you and so our need for harmony and fun was huge.

## **What was it like working with the rest of the cast, did anyone in particular stick with you?**

I would say Joel Basman, Damian Hardung and above all Bekim Latifi. Bekim Latifi and the entire band were euphoric for me during filming, every time. We grew close as a group in that short space of time and for me it was a wonderful change from all those scenes in which I "was alone" with Stella. Bekim

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plays Stella's best friend, and he was also very supportive of me during filming. Aaron is the only person who re-appeared later in Stella's life, and working together on the dynamics and friendship between Stella and Aaron brought me a lot of joy.

**The film starts with a great musical scene, in which you yourself are singing and that lust for life is writ large across your face? How did you prepare for these scenes? Are you a fan of jazz?**

I worked with the wonderful Anna Bauer on my vocal training and she also taught me what jazz and singing are all about. I would not call myself a jazz fan, but I love music, particularly live music. On our filming day, it was particularly the dynamics with the band that brought these scenes to life and made them possible. I had a great deference for these scenes because I am not a singer and this was new territory for me. I enjoyed the singing, however, right from the start and that lessened my fear. Half our band were actors and half were musicians. Consequently, I was nervous before our first rehearsal during the preparation period, because I had only been working with trainers up to that point. But that disappeared immediately once we met, and we really had a lot of fun.

**The film had really striking camera work, which obviously required a lot of takes. It must have been an incredible workload and you were in pretty much every scene. Do you have tricks on how to make it through such a marathon?**

There are no tricks for that. Of course, you can do relaxation exercises or play sport depending on what helps you to switch off and you can prepare as much as possible for filming. But ultimately 14-hour days of filming with multiple takes over a period of two months will always be exhausting.

**Filming must have been very challenging. How do you manage to reconnect with yourself, after the director shouts cut, when the role is this challenging?**

I don't find it difficult to set the role aside in the evenings. Of course, a character like this can take its toll but I have found things that work well for me. I can differentiate well between the character in the take and me as a private person after the working day is done.

**Stella always wears very beautiful clothes and is very fashion-conscious. Did the costumes help you to slip into the role of Stella Goldschlag?**

Yes, costume and make-up helped me enormously. Historical costumes immediately feel different, physically, and Thomas Oláh found a very particular style for Stella, through which I came to understand her in a different way. The blond hair was probably the critical touch in the transformation. Changing the color of your hair not only changes your appearance but also how other people perceive you, particularly when you go blond.

**What do you hope viewers will take with them from this film?**

With all the resistance that I had with respect to Stella, the thing that helped me most was the knowledge that I was playing this role so that other people could see it and understand. Stella helped

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me to understand one thing in particular: Fear is a very powerful thing and can, when it gets out of control, lead to truly cruel acts. It is up to each and every one of us to face our own fears and the demons we carry within us and to deal with them ourselves. Putting that responsibility on "the others", making them the guilty parties, is not an option.

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## IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA

### **PAULA BEER**

#### **as Stella Goldschlag**

Paula Beer, born 1995, is one of the most respected actresses of her generation. For her very first role as 14-year-old Oda in Chris Kraus' highly acclaimed drama THE POLL DIARIES, she was celebrated as the discovery of the year and awarded the prize for "Best Up and Coming actress" at the Bavarian Film Awards. This was followed in 2016 by the Best Young Actor Award at the Venice Film Festival for her role in François Ozon's FRANTZ. She won multiple awards for her portrayal of investment banker Jana Liekam in "Bad Banks", including the German Actors' Award, German Television Award, the Grimme Prize and a Bambi and again in 2020 for her performance in Christian Petzold's UNDINE with the Silver Bear of the Berlinale and the European Film Prize.

Paula Beer's career started in the schoolyard, where she was discovered for THE POLL DIARIES by casting director Britt Beyer. But even before then, she had gathered her first experiences of acting and dance in the Young Ensemble of the Berlin Friedrichstadt Palast, to which she had belonged from the age of four. While still in school she took on other roles, for example, in the historical film LUDWIG II by Peter Sehr and Marie Noelle (2012) as well as in the screen adaptation of THE TASTE OF APPLE SEEDS by Vivian Naefe (2014). Since then, Paula Beer has worked with giants of the screen such as Volker Schlöndorff and Andreas Prochaska, whose film THE DARK VALLEY, with Beer as the female lead, was awarded eight German Film Awards. In Theresa von Eltz's film debut 4 KINGS (2015) about four young people from problem families, who must spend Christmas in an adolescent psychiatry clinic, Beer worked alongside Jella Haase, Jannis Niewöhner and Moritz Leu. She played a key role in Sherry Hormann's political thriller "Deadly Leaks", before drawing huge international attention in François Ozon's drama FRANTZ (2016). In addition to the award for Best Young Actor at the 73rd Venice Film Festival, Paula Beer was also nominated for the César, the Prix Lumière and also the European Film Prize 2017. In 2018, the same year in which the TV series "Bad Banks" by Christian Schwochow was on everyone's lips, the actress also appeared on the big screen in Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's Oscar®-nominated NEVER LOOK AWAY as well as in Christian Petzold's TRANSIT alongside Franz Rogowski. She followed these up in 2019 with the French film THE WOLF'S CALL and the previously mentioned romantic drama UNDINE by Christian Petzold. In 2022, Paula Beer appeared in David Nawrath's six-part series "Your Honor". Most recently, she shone in the role of Nadja in the moving summer film AFIRE by Christian Petzold.

On the stage, Paula Beer appeared in the play "Metamorphosis" in the Basel Theater in 2020.

### **FILMOGRAPHY (selection)**

2023	STELLA. A LIFE.	Director: Kilian Riedhof
2023	AFIRE	Director: Christian Petzold
2020	UNDINE	Director: Christian Petzold
2018	NEVER LOOK AWAY	Director: Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck
2018	TRANSIT	Director: Christian Petzold

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2018-2020	"Bad Banks"	Director: C. Schwochow & C. Zübert
2016	FRANTZ	Director: François Ozon
2015	4 KINGS	Director: Theresa von Eltz
2014	THE DARK VALLEY	Director: Andreas Prochaska
2013	THE TASTE OF APPLE SEEDS	Director: Vivian Naefe
2011	LUDWIG II	Director: P. Sehr & M. Noëlle
2010	THE POLL DIARIES	Director: Chris Kraus

## JANNIS NIEWÖHNER

### as Rolf Isaakson

Jannis Niewöhner was only ten years old the first time he stood in front of the camera. His breakthrough came with 4 KINGS (Theresa von Eltz, 2015), which was awarded a bronze German Film Award, and in the title role in JONATHAN (Piotr Lewandowski), which premiered at the Berlinale in 2016. At the Berlinale in 2015, Jannis Niewöhner was named a *European Shooting Star*. He took on further lead roles, in the TV three-parter "Maximilian and Marie De Bourgogne" (Andreas Prochaska, 2015), in the highly acclaimed Amazon series "Beat" (Marco Kreuzpaintner, 2017, Grimme Prize and Jupiter Award for Best Actor) and in the feature film GODLESS YOUTH (Alain Gsponer, 2018). In 2017, Jannis was awarded the Bavarian Film Award for Best Young Actor for GODLESS YOUTH and JONATHAN.

2019 brought more lead roles in films such as NARCISSUS & GOLDMUND (Stefan Ruzowitzky) and JE SUIS KARL (Christian Schwochow). For the latter, he was nominated in 2021 for a German Film Award in the category Best Lead Actor. In the same year, he starred in CORTEX (Moritz Bleibtreu, 2019), in Barbara Ott's KIDS RUN (which was chosen to open the Berlinale Perspektive Deutsches Kino 2020) as well as in the title role of the ARD 2-parter "Turncoat" (Florian Gallenberger, 2019). He was back on the big screen in 2021 playing Felix Krull in the title role of DIE BEKENNTNISSE DES HOCHSTAPLERS FELIX KRULL (Detlev Buck, 2020) and also featured in the highly acclaimed English-language Netflix film "Munich – the Edge of War".

His next projects include Kilian Riedhof's STELLA. A LIFE. on the big screen and the 6-part series for RTL+ and feature film of the same name "Hagen" (Cyrill Boss, Philipp Stennert, 2022).

### FILMOGRAPHY (selection)

2023	STELLA. A LIFE.	Director: Kilian Riedhof
2021	JE SUIS KARL	Director: Christian Schwochow
2021	DIE BEKENNTNISSE DES HOCHSTAPLERS FELIX KRULL	Director: Detlev Buck
2020	CORTEX	Director: Moritz Bleibtreu
2020	NARCISSUS AND GOLDMUND	Director: Stefan Ruzowitzky
2020	TURNCOAT	Director: Florian Gallenberger
2019	THE COLLINI CASE	Director: Marco Kreuzpaintner
2018	ASPHALTGORILLAS	Director: Detlev Buck
2018	BEAT	Director: Marco Kreuzpaintner
2017	GODLESS YOUTH	Director: Alain Gsponer

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2015	4 KINGS	Director: Theresa von Eltz
2015	THE GIRL KING	Director: Mika Kaurismäki
2014	ALLES IST LIEBE	Director: Markus Goller
2013	RUBY RED	Director: Felix Fuchssteiner

## **KATJA RIEMANN**

### **as Toni Goldschlag**

Katja Riemann is one of the most respected, versatile and established actresses in Germany. She was already entertaining an audience of millions in the great comedy successes of the 1990s, she remains constantly true to the cinema and has received awards too numerous to mention.

As early as 1987, when she was a regular ensemble member of the Munich-based theater group Münchener Kammerspiele (MK), she was awarded numerous prizes for her performance in the TV series "Sommer in Lesmona" including the Grimme Prize, the Golden Camera as the discovery of the year 1990, and two years later she received the award for Best Supporting Actress at the Golden Camera.

Her major cinematic successes of the 1990s include in particular, Katja von Garnier's debut film ABGESCHMINKT!, Sönke Wortmann's MAYBE... MAYBE NOT and Rainer Kaufmann's STADTGESPRÄCH. She took on the lead role in the Ingrid Noll film DIE APOTHEKERIN and, with her colleagues, wrote the soundtrack for the cult film BANDITS by Katja von Garnier. During this time, Riemann not only won a Bambi and the Ernst-Lubitsch prize, but also won several German Film Awards and Bavarian Film Awards.

In 2003, Katja Riemann was awarded the Coppa Volpi at the Venice Film Festival for Best Actress in a Leading Role for her performance in Margarethe von Trotta's drama ROSENSTRASSE. She was also nominated for the European Film Awards for this role. Riemann went on to work once again with directing legend, von Trotta on ICH BIN DIE ANDERE, DIE ABHANDENE WELT and FORGET ABOUT NICK. Other renowned directors, with whom Katja Riemann worked on multiple projects, include Oskar Roehler, with whom she made AGNES AND HIS BROTHERS, HERRLICHE ZEITEN and ENFANT TERRIBLE, and Bora Dagtekin, who cast her in the cinema adaptation of TÜRKISCH FÜR ANFÄNGER and his record-breaking SUCK ME SHAKESPEER trilogy.

Riemann has succeeded in walking that almost impossible tightrope between art house films and blockbuster movies, and has also established herself as an author of non-fiction books and a recording artist, with several albums to her name. Her musical expertise was hugely helpful during her wonderful interpretation of the pop star Henriette Boot in Karoline Herfurth's directorial debut TEXT FOR YOU.

Her hugely diverse filmography also includes BIBI BLOCKSBERG and its sequels, Joseph Vilsmaier's COMEDIAN HARMONISTS, the Walser adaptation of RUNAWAY HORSE by Rainer Kaufmann, Wnendt's film adaptation of the best seller LOOK WHO'S BACK, TOO HARD TO HANDLE by Laura Lackmann, and CATWEAZLE with Otto Waalkes.

She has been a UNICEF ambassador since 2000 and also supports Amnesty International, among others. She has been honored multiple times for her consistent commitment to humanitarian causes. In 2010, she was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

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## FILMOGRAPHY (selection)

2023	STELLA. A LIFE.	Director: Kilian Riedhof
2020	ENFANT TERRIBLE	Director: Oskar Roehler
2018	HERRLICHE ZEITEN	Director: Oskar Roehler
2016	TEXT FOR YOU	Director: Karoline Herfurth
2015	LOOK WHO'S BACK	Director: David Wnendt
2015	DIE ABHANDENE WELT	Director: Margarethe von Trotta
2013/2015/2017	SUCK ME SHAKESPEER 1-3	Director: Bora Dagtekin
2007	MY FÜHRER	Director: Dani Levy
2006	ICH BIN DIE ANDERE	Director: Margarethe von Trotta
2004	AGNES AND HIS BROTHERS	Director: Oskar Roehler
2003	ROSENSTRASSE	Director: Margarethe von Trotta
1997	BANDITS	Director: Katja von Garnier
1994	MAYBE... MAYBE NOT	Director: Sönke Wortmann
1993	ABGESCHMINKT!	Director: Katja von Garnier

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## BEHIND THE CAMERA

### **KILIAN RIEDHOF**

#### **(Author & Director)**

Kilian Riedhof is one of Germany's most successful directors and script writers. After studying direction in Hamburg, he won the German TV Awards "Förderpreis" (incentive prize) for his first TV film, the youth drama "Riekes Liebe", in 2002.

After working on numerous TV series such as "Bloch" and "Tatort", Riedhof also gained international acclaim in 2011 with "Homevideo", starring Jonas Nay and Wotan Wilke Möhring in the lead roles. The intense drama garnered multiple accolades including a German TV Award, the Grimme Prize, the TV film award of the German Academy of Performing Arts, the Rose d'Or, the New Faces Award and the Magnolia Award at the Shanghai TV Festival.

Riedhof's first feature film BACK ON TRACK, on which he was also co-writer, proved to be a huge success with the public and earned his leading actor Dieter Hallervorden a German Film Award in 2014.

His subsequent TV two-parter also attracted a lot of attention: "Der Fall Barschel" (2015), a political thriller about the death of Uwe Barschel, for which he won the German Directors Award Metropolis and was honored at the Munich Film Festival, as well as by the Germany Academy for Television.

With "Gladbeck" (2018), based on the true facts of the well-known German hostage drama, he earned not just national, but also international success. The work received three German TV Awards, the Bavarian Television Award, two Golden Bird Prizes at the Seoul Drama Awards and, in 2019, was the only non-English language format to be nominated for a BAFTA TV Award.

In spring 2022, his German-French feature film YOU WILL NOT HAVE MY HATE opened in cinemas, for which Riedhof, together with his fellow script writers Marc Blöbaum and Jan Braren, won the Lola for Best Screenplay. The adaptation of the report of the same name about the series of attacks on 13 November 2015 in Paris was produced by Komplizen Film with Pierre Deladonchamps in the main role.

#### **Filmography (selection):**

2022	YOU WILL NOT HAVE MY HATE	(Co-writer & Director)
2018	GLADBECK	(Director)
2015	DER FALL BARSCHHEL	(Co-writer & Director)
2013	BACK ON TRACK	(Co-writer & Director)
2011	HOMEVIDEO	(Director)
2001	RIEKES LIEBE	(Co-writer & Director)

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