

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

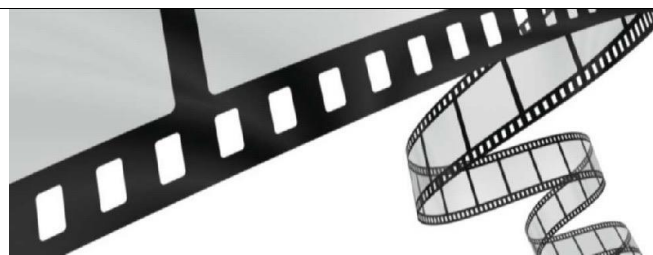
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Wednesday 12 March 2025 **THE COMMANDANT'S SHADOW**

Dir. Daniela Volkar Germany/USA 2024 103 mins

Jurgen Hoss, 'Hans-Jurgen', one of the sons of the Auschwitz death camp 'director' or commandant Rudolph Hoss, is the ostensible subject of this documentary, focusing on his boyhood life in the villa adjacent to the camp. We saw this re-created in our last film, Jonathan Glazer's *The Zone of Interest*. We also see Rudolph's grandson Kai, coping with his heritage with 'scripture, God's grace and his ministry in Stuttgart'.

Also in the film are Maya Lasker-Wallfisch and her mother Anita. Anita, celebrating her 98th birthday in the film, survived the camp due to being able to play the cello; she was needed for the camp's orchestra. Her parents were murdered there.

What Hannah Arendt called "the banality of evil", after witnessing and writing about the Eichmann trial in 1961, has preoccupied many writers and social scientists. Essentially the State apparatus ordering, allowing, its citizens, otherwise decent, hardworking folk, to turn on their neighbours and slaughter them. Post-2nd World War, we saw it in the Balkans as Yugoslavia broke up and in Rwanda. 'Ethnic cleansing', some would even say 'genocide', still continues. The international lawyer Phillipe Sands has explored the post-Nazi legacy in his books, notably "East West Street" and "The Ratline". In the latter he grippingly narrates the story of 'the one that got away', Otto von Wechter, governor of Krakov in 1939 and Galicia in 1944, who died in mysterious circumstances in Rome, sheltered by a cardinal, while awaiting passage to South America via the 'ratline'.

QUATRAINS

I
What did they talk about on picnic trips,
The concentrations camp's senior staff?
To whom did they post their happy photos,
'Lots of love from all of us at Auschwitz'?

II
They put up a Christmas tree in Auschwitz
And stacked as presents underneath the tree
Bodies of prisoners who had died that day.
Then the assembled ranks sang 'Silent Night'.

III
The deadly smoke belching night and day
And screams from the tortured and dying
Meant that birds stopped singing at Auschwitz.
Sanity was remembering their names.

Michael Longley (d. 2024) from his collection 'The Slain Birds' (2022)

There is an opportunity to remain behind at the end of this film to discuss our programme so far. Our next screening: **Io Capitano** is on Wednesday 26 March.

