

## THE GERMAN SOCIETY'S

### ***Friday Film Fest Series***



## **Die Weiße Rose - 1982**

### **Summary:**

The story of the German university students in Munich during the Second World War who opposed the Nazi regime with leaflets and painted slogans is by now widely known, certainly by every German and by many elsewhere. Many monuments and commemorations have been established in their honor, including the main square outside of the University of Munich called Geschwister-Scholl-Platz and there is a special exhibit commemorating the White Rose at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.

The story is a simple one and its great resonance today owes much to the simplicity and purity of the conspirator's idealism. They were not connected to any existing ideological movement, political party or power structure. They followed only the dictates of their conscience, had nothing to gain from their actions and everything to lose. They were not communists, capitalists, socialists, army officers, career diplomats or members of any of the other institutions that fostered resistance to the Nazi regime. They were young intellectual perhaps naive dissidents and, as they were in the end utterly crushed, martyrs.

### ***Genesis of Resistance – Brian Conboy***

Hans and Sophie Scholl, the most famous members of the White Rose, were the second and fourth of the five children of Robert Scholl. The genesis of their resistance really began with their father, who was politically quite liberal and contemptuous of the Nazi movement and of Hitler from the beginning. The Scholl children were politicized at a young age by Hitler's momentous ascension to power in 1933. Hans was fifteen and Sophie was twelve. Surprisingly at least to us their initial response to Nazism was quite positive. Both joined the Hitler Youth and both had a powerful attraction for the sense of community, belonging and patriotic enthusiasm they found there. As teenagers they reveled in its numerous hiking and cycling trips, meetings, folk singing, literature readings and other arts and crafts activities. Robert Scholl did not approve of their membership but did not forbid it. Within his family he openly detested Hitler and called him the Pied Piper of Hamelin. His disapproval of their participation caused considerable conflict between him and Hans.

The young Scholls' enthusiasm for Nazism did not last. Their father's contempt eventually converged with his children's consternation over the many bans and prohibitions which the Hitler Youth placed on intellectual and cultural pursuits such as those on many books and foreign music. A breaking point came after Hans'

participation in the 1935 Nuremberg Party rallies. Hans returned home completely dejected over the constant and pointless military drilling, the endless angry hateful speeches and the constant demand in the Hitler Youth for loyalty and conformity. Shortly thereafter he quit the group and joined another youth organization. After graduating high school Hans entered the University of Munich as a medical student and in 1937 was drafted into the army as a medic. He participated in the 1940 Battle of France and spent the next years of his life transferring back and forth from Munich, where he continued his medical studies, to full-time active duty which later included service on the Russian front. It was in the University of Munich and in his medical company that he met other people with the same contempt for the Nazis. These included Christoph Probst, Alexander Schmorell, Willi Graf and others who later formed the White Rose group. Kurt Huber, the philosophy professor at the University of Munich, also became involved with the group.

Sophie Scholl did not graduate from high school until 1939 and, much to her displeasure, was drafted into the state labor service and had to work as a munitions-worker in labor camps for more than a year. She finally entered the University of Munich where Hans was already attending in 1942 to study philosophy and biology. Our film begins with Sophie's arrival in Munich in May 1942.

### **Meaning of the White Rose**

We are left with divining meaning and the importance of the White Rose movement, both as it was happening and in our memory. Undoubtedly it had not the slightest effect on the course of the war or the Nazi's hold on power. And its effect on German public opinion was at best dubious. The movement was just too small, too short-lived and its connection to the real centers of power and influence in society almost non-existent. Nonetheless the emotional effect of the film is overwhelming. Our identification and empathy with the innocent and utterly courageous young students, informed only by the highest notions of idealism and unspoiled by any notions of real-politik, are intense

and automatic. Out of the story of the White Rose leaps the question of German resistance and of German public opinion. What do the actions of these young idealists tell us about prevailing German attitudes during that time? Does the movement indicate broad-based discontent with the Nazis in the German population and the presence of real moral misgivings with Nazi oppression and brutality? Here we enter the murky and still bitterly contested battleground of the history and memory of the Third Reich. Many have said that German resistance means nothing, had no moral underpinning or intention and merely sought to save Germany from catastrophe. Certainly we can dispense with the old stereotype of the demonic robotic German and also the notion that Germans were uniformly fanatical Nazis. While that debate rages, on the White Rose bursts out of the mine field like the simple and pure entity that it is: A story of idealists, moral heroes and martyrs.

### **Michael Verhoeven**

Born in Berlin in 1938, Michael Verhoeven was the son of German actor and director Paul Verhoeven (not the famous Dutch/Hollywood director) and German actress Doris Kiesow. He was exposed to film and theater from an early age and acted in both as a youth and young adult in the 1950s. After high school he attended medical school and in 1966 passed the state medical examination to become a doctor. He subsequently abandoned that career and in 1967 directed his first feature film, *Paarungen*, an adoption of Strindberg's *Totentanz*. Since then he has worked continually as a writer and director in film, television and theater and has won great praise and many awards for such films as *Das schreckliche Mädchen*, *My Mother's Courage*, *Killing Cars* and many others. His films have often been at the forefront of German controversy. *Das schreckliche Mädchen* is a scathing critique of post-war Germany's denial and avoidance of the subject of Nazi persecution of the Jews. His film *O.K* about Vietnam caused a huge controversy at the 1970 Berlin film festival. *Killing Cars* was a thriller with a strong environmental message that came a little ahead of its time. His most recent film is *Enthüllung einer Ehe* (2000).