

ploded at 9:20 p.m., killing 8 and injuring over 60 others. Elser only made one mistake. He tried to get into Switzerland at a regular border crossing instead of making a *Grenzübertritt über die grüne Grenze*. He was arrested at the border crossing and was soon charged with the assassination attempt.

Der Film

This movie is the second serious attempt to elevate the reputation of Elser in the ranks of the German *Widerstandsbewegung* and place him on an equal footing with Stauffenberg. One could actually argue that Elser should be in a special category all by himself. He saw the coming disaster a year before the beginning of the war, unlike Stauffenberg who attempted his plot five years into a war at a point where millions of people had already been killed and the coming German defeat was obvious to everyone.

Elser's foresight and civil courage sets him apart from most other Germans of that time and provides solace to the *Nachgeborenen* that German resistance to Hitler was not a complete oxymoron. But does this film succeed in elevating the reputation of this working class man to the level of Stauffenberg and his colleagues? Despite a great performance by Christian Friedel as Elser the movie spends perhaps too much time on Elser's biography, including his time as a dashing young man at Lake Constance who enjoys the company of women and in particular his love affair with a married woman. More relevant is the treatment of his time in his *Heimatdorf* Königsbrunn where he witnessed the slow Nazi takeover of communal life *auf der Schwäbischen Alb*.

Thus Hirschbiegel strives to establish Elser as a hero through extensive flash backs into his life before his arrest. Whether he finds the right balance between biopic, *Heimatfilm* and political thriller is open to question. The dramatic effect of the movie seems diminished by the lack of focus on the action at the beer hall: Hitler's speech and his reason for leaving early and above all, the explosion of Elser's bomb, which is seen only as a wide angle shot from above and far away. Moreover it seems questionable to spend a minute and forty seconds on the hanging death of Elser's former interrogator, Criminal Police Chief Arthur Nebe, who had joined the Stauffenberg group in 1944 and was killed before his former victim. Nebe's execution was perhaps a case of ironic justice but does little to emotionally compensate the viewer for Elser's execution just weeks before the end of the war.

Elser's courage is epitomized by a poignant interrogatory aphorism: "If not now, when? If not me, who?" This should give everyone pause to consider (historians and movie goers alike) why more people in that time and place did not pose a similar question before it was too late. This query is also incumbent on all subsequent generations, not limited to Germans. Elser should serve as a moral compass for anyone who does ask *when* and *who*. If this movie deserves any praise, it is for helping to perpetuate the memory of a man who asked and responded with his life.

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Friday Film Fest Series



Elser (13 Minuten)

By Oliver Hirschbiegel and Oliver Schündler

April 15th, 2016

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

Non-Members \$15, Members \$12

The German Society of PA

611 Spring Garden St.

215-627-2332

Support provided in part by the
Philadelphia Cultural Fund.

**The Philadelphia
Cultural Fund**

Elser - Er hätte die Welt verändert. (2015)

Director: Oliver Hirschbiegel / Oliver Schündler
Producer: Boris Ausserer / Fred Breinersdorfer
Screenplay: Fred Breinersdorfer
Léonie-Claire Breinersdorfer
Music: David Holmes
Camera: Judith Kaufmann
Editor: Alexander Dittner
Length: 114 Minutes
Cast: **Christian Friedel** as Georg Elser
Katharina Schüttler as Elsa
Burghart Klaußner as Nebe
Johann von Bülow as Heinrich Müller
Felix Eitner as Eberle
David Zimmerscheid as Josef Schurr
Rüdiger Klink as Erich
Simon Licht as SS Obergruppenführer
Cornelia Köndgen as Maria Elser
Martin Maria Abram as Ludwig Elser
Michael Kranz as Franz Xaver Lechner
Commentary: Karl Moehlmann

“Ich bin ein freier Mensch gewesen. Man muss machen, was richtig ist. Wenn der Mensch nicht frei ist, stirbt alles ab.” Georg Elser

The Director

Oliver Hirschbiegel, born in Hamburg in 1957, became a successful TV director with numerous episodes of the *Tatort* and *Kommissar Rex* series. His first Kinofilm was the movie *Das Experiment* in 2001 for which he received several awards. His international breakthrough came in 2004 with the movie *Der Untergang*, which portrayed an increasingly desperate Hitler in the days before the fall of Berlin.

A subsequent stint in Hollywood yielded less success. He was invited to direct a re-prise of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* but the studio was not happy with Hirschbiegel's effort, and the project was eventually shelved. In 2013, he received mostly bad reviews for *Diana*, an account of the princess of Wales's final two years and her romance with the surgeon Hasnat Khan.

Undeterred, Hirschbiegel returned home to make a biopic of Georg Elser. Sony Pictures Classics bought the North American rights on the eve of the Berlin premiere in 2015 and gave the international version the pithy title **13 minutes**. The title refers to the fact that Hitler left the Bürgerbräukeller in München on November 8, 1938 13 minutes before Elser's bomb went off. This bomb would have killed Hitler and much of the Nazi leadership. This is not the first movie about Elser. In 1989, **Klaus Maria Brandauer** made his own Elser film, which he directed and starred in. Brandauer wanted to recognize to the man who, although he came the closest to assassinating Hitler, had been virtually forgotten.



Die Tat und das Motiv

In 1964, the historian Lothar Gruchmann discovered Elser's Gestapo interrogation protocols (*Verhörprotokolle*) in the former ministry of justice. Despite the fact that these statements were extorted by torture over a period of 5 days and dictated by Gestapo officers to serve as propaganda and preparation for an upcoming *Schauprozess*, they nevertheless offer incisive insights into Georg Elser's life and thinking as well as into the preparation and execution of his plan.

“Ich war bereits voriges Jahr (1938) um diese Zeit der Überzeugung, dass es bei dem Münchener Abkommen nicht bleibt, dass Deutschland anderen Ländern gegenüber noch weitere Forderungen stellen und sich andere Länder einverleiben wird und dass deshalb ein Krieg unvermeidlich ist.”



Elser's thinking since the fall of 1938 was dominated by the conviction that Hitler's policies meant an *unvermeidliche Krieg*, a war that would lead to the death of millions of innocent people and the ultimate destruction of Germany. Elser was not influenced by anyone else nor incited by foreign agents. He believed that the situation in Germany could only be changed by the elimination of the present leadership.

“Unter Führung verstand ich die Obersten, ich meine damit Hitler, Göring und Goebbels.” Here was a simple man who had a simple motive: he wanted to avoid war and the terrible consequences such a war meant for Germany and Germany's working class. Elser came to the conclusion that he had to kill Hitler himself. *“Der Gedanke der Beseitigung der Führung ließ mich damals nicht mehr zur Ruhe kommen und bereits im Herbst 1938 – es war dies vor dem November 1938 – hatte ich auf Grund der immer angestellten Betrachtungen den Entschluss gefasst, die Beseitigung der Führung selbst vorzunehmen.”*

In the fall of 1938, Elser found out that the next meeting of the Nazi leadership would take place on November 8 - 9, 1938 in the *Bürgerbräukeller* in Munich. Every year, Hitler commemorated the failed coup attempt of 1923 in Munich. This event was the origin of the *Blutfahne* that served the Hitler movement as a powerful symbol of their early struggle and of their fallen comrades.

Elser visited Munich during this time, inspected the beer hall, and was surprised about the lack of security. Returning to his hometown of Königsbronn in Baden-Württemberg, he began stealing sheets of explosives from the armament factory in Heidenheim where he worked. He visited Munich a second time from April 4 - 12, 1939 and selected and measured a column behind the speaker's podium where he planned to hide his *Höllemaschine*.

During his final extended stay in Munich from August 5th until November 6th, Elser spent over thirty nights in the beer hall, only leaving each morning when the hall was reopened. Elser was not in Munich on November 8, 1939 when the bomb was set to explode, but rather on his way to Switzerland. On that evening, Hitler changed his plans for the return to Berlin because of inclement weather. Consequently he had to take a train instead of a plane and left at 9:07 p.m., 13 minutes before the bomb ex-