

## THE GERMAN SOCIETY'S

### Friday Film Fest Series



## Jakob, der Lügner

### Credits:

Director:	Frank Beyer
Screenplay:	Jurek Becker (based on his novel " <i>Jakob der Lügner</i> ", 1968)
Cast & Role:	Vlastimil Brodsky ( <i>Jakob</i> ), Erwin Geschonneck ( <i>Kowalski</i> ), Manuela Simon ( <i>Lina</i> ), Blanche Kommorell ( <i>Rosa</i> ), Henry Hübchen ( <i>Mischa</i> ), Armin Mueller-Stahl ( <i>Professor Kirschbaum</i> )
Awards:	1977 - nominated for Best Foreign Film at the Academy (as the only film in the history of DEFA, East German Film) Actor Vlastimil Brodsky was awarded the "Silver Bear" at the Berlin Film Festival, 1975 Chosen as one of the 100 Most Important German Films
Length:	96 Minutes

### Précis – Karl Moehlmann

The story takes place in a Jewish ghetto in a Polish town in 1944. **Jakob Heym** lives in the ghetto and takes care of the little girl **Lina** whose parents have been taken to a concentration camp. One evening Jakob is being stopped by the police because he allegedly did not keep to the curfew. He is summoned to the ghetto's district police station in order to be punished. On the radio at the police station, he hears that the Red Army has advanced to Bezanika. Jakob knows that this place is not too far from the ghetto and that the news of a Russian advance and possible liberation in the near future could give the people in the ghetto hope and courage to carry on. Through a lucky circumstance, he manages to leave the station unharmed. The next day, he retells the news report to a despondent friend who is about to commit suicide. The sentence: "*The Russians are twenty kilometers from Bezanika*"- saves the life of his friend. But in order to increase the credibility of his information Jacob claims that he has a radio, which is strictly forbidden in the ghetto.

Because of this lie (**Notlüge**), Jakob finds himself in a position where he has to invent new information continuously. His web of lies leads to tragically comic situations and the **radio** becomes the **symbol of hope and danger**. On the one hand, the people in the ghetto gain hope for the future, they start to make plans for life after the war, the suicide rate drops; on the other hand, some fear that the discovery of the radio by the Germans could endanger everybody.

Jakob faces his critics by telling the truth but his confession is not being accepted. He turns to his friend **Kowalski** who first seems indifferent but commits suicide overnight. Jakob realizes that he needs to continue to feed the people with news about the coming liberation, but the next day already the inhabitants of the ghetto are being transported to the concentration camp. The film ends with a scene in the train when Jakob and Lina talk about the clouds and their meaning recalling a fairy tale

that Jakob had told her with the help of his fictional radio.

### **Optimistic Tragedy**

This is not a story about resistance but a story of heroism of a different kind, of humanism and hope in a horrible and tragic situation. The fact that hope for the inhabitants of the ghetto comes as the result of a lie demonstrates even more clearly the horror and madness of the situation in German occupied Poland. But it also shows if only for a short time how hope is the essential ingredient for a human life.

The optimism that starts to permeate ghetto life is the result of this hope for the future, a future without oppression and threat of death. The information about a possible near end of the Nazi occupation is like the cure for the ill princess in Jakob's fairy tale. The ill princess promises to get better if someone gets her a cloud but no one is able to do that. The cure is found when the gardener asks the princess what the cloud is made of that she had asked for. "*Every child knows that clouds are made of cotton wool*", answers the princess. So when the boy brings her a cotton ball the size of her cushion she gets better. This fairy tale comes up again at the end of the movie when the inhabitants of the ghetto are being transported by train to their near certain death in a concentration camp. Lina sees some clouds through an opening in the wagon wall and asks Jakob if he remembers the fairy tale of the ill princess and if it's true that you can get better if you get a piece of cotton wool. Jakob answers that she wanted a cloud only she thought that clouds were made of cotton wool. Then Lina asks: "*Aber sind denn Wolken nicht aus Watte? But aren't clouds made of cotton wool?*" It is the very subjective form of hope that makes life worth living and that has meaning far beyond this particular moment of history.

### **Director:**

**Frank Beyer** was born in 1932 in Nobitz, Thüringen, Germany. From 1952-1957, he studied at the FAMU film school in Prague. From 1958-1966, he was the director

at the DEFA Studio in Babelsberg, but was forced to leave following his film "The Trace of Stones" (*Spur der Steine*, 1966), which was considered a critical affront by the government of the German Democratic Republic and Beyer was forbidden to work in Berlin and Potsdam. He was the director of the State Theatre in Dresden from 1967-1969 and began making TV films for East German Television in 1970. He started making features for DEFA again in 1974. After the banning of his film "*Geschlossene Gesellschaft*", he was permitted to make films in West-Germany.

His films include: *Five Cartridges* (Fünf Patronenhülsen, 1960), *Invincible Love* (Königskinder, 1962), *Naked among Wolves* (Nackt unter Wölfen, 1963), *Carbide and Sorrel* (Karbid und Sauerampfer, 1964), *Trace of Stones* (Spur der Steine, 1966), *Jacob, the Liar* (Jakob, der Lügner, 1974), *The Hiding Place* (Das Versteck, 1978), *The Turning Point* (Der Aufenthalt, 1983), *Bockshorn* (1984), *Der Bruch* (1989) and *Nikolaikirche* (TV, 1995).

### **Author:**

**Jurek Becker** (1937 - 1997) was born in Lodz, Polen as son of a Jewish employee. He grew up in the ghetto in Lodz and was later incarcerated in the concentration camps Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen. In 1945 he moved to East Berlin, where he learned German. In 1960, he is expelled from the University for political reasons. He then studied at the Filmhochschule Babelsberg and worked as DEFA Screenplay Writer and then as independent writer in East Berlin from 1962 until 1977. In 1968, he published his first novel "Jakob der Lügner" for which he received the Heinrich Mann Prize in 1971. He was allowed to leave East Germany in 1977 on an extended visa. He died in 1997 after a long battle with cancer. Other works: *Der Boxer* (1976), *Schlaflose Tage* (1978), *Nach der ersten Zukunft* (1980), *Aller Welt Freund* (1983), *Bronsteins Kinder* (1986), *Amanda herzlos* (1992).