

## THE GERMAN SOCIETY'S

### Friday Film Fest Series



#### **Soweit die FüÙe tragen – As Far As My Feet Will Carry Me**

**Director:** Hardy Martins

**Music:** Edward Artemyev

**Cast & Role:** Bernhard Bettermann (Clemens Forell), Iris Boehm (Clemens's Wife), Michael Mendl ( Dr. Stauffer, German camp doctor), Anatoly Kotenyov (Kamenew, Labor Camp Commander), Andre Hennicke, Irina Pantaeava, Hans-Uwe Bauer, Irina Narbekova

**Length:** 158 Minutes

**Locations:** Belarus, Germany, Uzbekistan

**Language:** German with German Subtitles

**First Screening:** December 2001

**Book:** Josef Martin Bauer (1955)

#### **The Director**

Hardy Martins was born in 1963 in Baisingen/Baden-Württemberg. He attended The International Stunt Association school in Los Angeles for two years and also studied under Jean Claude Zeferini in Paris for a year. He has worked as a stuntman and stunt coordinator on such Productions as *Die Katze* (1986), *Der Sommer des Falken* (1987), *Dr.M* (1990), *Manta – Der Film* (1990), *Go Trabbi Go* (1991), *In weiter ferne, so nah!* (1992) and *Die Sieger* (1993). In 1996, he founded Cascadeur Film Production and took on the role of producer, director, and lead actor for the film *Cascadeur – The Amber Chamber* (1998).

The book by Josef Martin Bauer is based on a true story and was published in 1955. It was an international bestseller with 30 million copies sold. It was first filmed by Fritz Umgelter and was an extremely popular TV-Series on German TV in 1959. In 2001, Hardy Martins decided the story was long overdue for a cinematic reprise.

#### **Precis – Karl Moehlmann**

In August 1944, First Lieutenant Clemens Forell is sent to the Russian front. He leaves behind his pregnant wife and child with the promise to be back by Christmas. He is captured and sentenced to 25 years of forced labor. In the autumn of 1945, he is sent from Moscow to a labor camp in Siberia together with 3000 other German prisoners of war.

Only 1950 survive the 2 month long train ride to Tschita, a town north of Mongolia. 700 more die when the prisoners finish their journey by walking to the final destination, Cap Deshnew, a labor camp in Far-Northeast-Siberia at the Bering Strait more than 2000 miles away. Almost a year has passed since they started out from Moscow. In Cap Deshnew they stay inside a cave which is a lead mine. The living and working conditions are extremely harsh and primitive with no daylight for most of the time and the omnipresent lead poisoning that threatens to be a slow death sentence for all.

Forell's first escape attempt fails in the beginning of 1947. He is nearly beaten to death when he is forced to run the gauntlet formed by his own irate food starved comrades, a tactic that the captors under the command of Lieutenant Kamenew employ to discourage the prisoners from trying to run away. But 2 years later, he gets the support of the German camp

doctor, Dr. Stauffer, who had planned the escape himself but is now near death from cancer. Forell's second attempt begins in October 1949 in extremely cold temperatures. He manages to escape into the empty vastness of northern Siberia.

Thus begins a 3 year odyssey of extreme hardship, danger and adventure taking Forell from the Russian tundra in the north to the border of Persia in the south. He is hunted by wolves and the unrelenting Kamenew who wants to bring him back dead or alive. He receives help from Siberian nomads and other people, including an Armenian Jew who helps him with papers which enables him to cross the border into Persia. Arrested as a Soviet spy, his uncle Baudrexel, who works in Ankara, is able to identify him and secure his release.

In December 1952, 2 days before Christmas, 8 years after he left his family and was sent to fight on the Russian front in a war that was already lost, Clemens Forell is finally reunited with his wife and children. His feet had carried him for nearly 9000 miles, an epic of courage and fortitude beyond the scope of fiction.

### **The Film**

When the former stuntman Hardy Martin decided to produce a new feature film based on the successful novel from the 50's, he had several distinct advantages over the original production of 1959: vastly improved technology, a generous budget (at 15 million considered large for German cinema) and the ability to film on location. The result is a visual gem of beautiful landscapes, fabulous panoramas and authentic local characters that is dramatically compelling throughout its two and a half hour length.

Forell's long odyssey serves as the emotionally gripping background to his tense duel with the relentless commander Kamenew (fascinatingly reminiscent for American audiences of the series "The Fugitive"). In Germany in the 50's, the fate of the POW's was a very emotionally charged topic. Few had returned, and there was a general awareness that most of them perished in prison camps under horrible conditions. Hence the public was

mesmerized with both the book and the original TV series, but were unable to openly talk about Germans (whether soldiers or civilians) as victims. Today, two generations after the war, this should no longer be the case.

