

PRESS NOTES

# THE NEW JEWS



OFFICIAL  
SELECTION

INTERNATIONAL  
FILM FESTIVAL  
ROTTERDAM  
2025



THE GLASS PRINCE PRESENTED BY AMIR OVADIA STEKLOV FILM "THE NEW JEWS" STARRING  
INES MOLDAVSKY AMIR OVADIA STEKLOV MICHAL HENIG UDI RAZ  
CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER JURGEN BRUNING SOUND DESIGN ZOHAR BONNIE SOUND MIX JOCHAN VOERSTE ORIGINAL MUSIC BY AVNER COHEN, RICHARD MILES, MARC HOENNINGER  
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# The New Jews

A film by Amir Ovadia Steklov

## Technical specifications

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Country of production: Germany

Duration: 80'

Year of production: 2025

Color: Color + B&W

Format: DCP 4K

FPS: 25

Aspect ratio: 1.85:1

Sound format: Surround 5.1

Subtitles: English

# Contacts

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## Logline

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In a city haunted by its past, a group of non-Zionist Israeli Jews seek refuge in Berlin—only to find themselves caught in a surreal tangle of political hypocrisy, Holocaust guilt, and the fetishization of their Jewish bodies, where history, sex, and exile collide in disturbing and darkly absurd ways.

## Short synopsis

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A decade in the making, *The New Jews* is a bold and provocative documentary following a group of non-Zionist Israeli Jews in Berlin. Through a collage of interviews, dating apps, and sex calls, it explores how their search for belonging, intimacy, and excitement in a city shaped by its complex history pulls them into a whirlpool of frustration—political, social, and deeply personal. In this seemingly open metropolis, the world they tried to escape reappears in new and unsettling forms, shaped by the lingering shadow of Nazism, Holocaust guilt, and a disturbing fetishization of Jewish identity.

# Long synopsis

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A decade in the making, *The New Jews* is a bold and provocative documentary following a group of non-Zionist Israeli Jews who flee the rise of right-wing nationalism and relentless violence. Seeking refuge in Berlin, they become entangled in the city's layered history, only to find that their search for belonging leads them into a web of sexual, social, and political contradictions, complicated by the fetishization of Jews.

Visually witty and partially animated, the film centers around filmmakers Amir and Inés on a hunt for intimacy and sexual adventure in their new home. In a darkly humorous twist, their encounters—through dating apps and sex calls—expose the lingering shadow of Nazism, Holocaust guilt, and a disturbing objectification of their Jewish bodies.

Other participants are interrogated in a dimly lit room, confessing their conflicted relationships with Israel and the bittersweet experience of making Berlin their new home. Their testimonies reveal that

the violence that once shaped their rebellious Jewish identity in Israel continues to haunt them, now appearing in a different guise in multicultural Berlin. In a country eager to love its Jews—but only the 'right' kind—the film unfolds as both an ironic reminder of the world the participants sought to escape and a wake-up call to the one they now face.

# Director's statement

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When I moved to Berlin, I didn't expect my Jewish identity to define me as much as it does here. I left Israel in opposition to the occupation of Palestine, hoping to escape the nationalism and conflict that shaped my homeland. Instead, I found myself caught in a different kind of entanglement—one where my national identity is inescapable, and my Jewishness is both fetishized and scrutinized. In Israel, left-wing views like mine mark you as a traitor; in Germany, they make you an anti-Semitic. In many ways, I've come to feel like an asylum seeker, suspended between two worlds.

*The New Jews* is a deeply personal exploration of this exile. Through my own experiences and those of fellow Israeli expats, the film unpacks the contradictions of being a Jewish outsider in Berlin—a city haunted by its past yet eager to embrace its Jews, as long as they fit a specific mold. Germans display an obsessive interest in Israel and Jewishness, often treating us with a reverence that can feel suffocating. Yet beneath this politeness lies an unresolved tension—latent racism, historical guilt, and rigid ideas of what being Jewish should mean. This dynamic shapes not only political discourse but also personal relationships, seeping into everything from casual interactions to dating culture, where

Holocaust guilt and fantasies about Jews take on unsettlingly erotic forms.

To capture this fluid, often surreal experience, the film blends stark interviews with rotoscope animation, mirroring the fragmented identities we navigate. The animation reflects our detachment, our constant reinvention, and the performative nature of identity in today's digital world—where Jewishness, too, is curated, projected, and misunderstood. Much of our film unfolds in online spaces—social media, dating apps, late-night phone calls—where connection and alienation exist side by side, blurring the line between authenticity and performance.

*The New Jews* was conceived and researched in 2015 and the majority of it was shot in 2018 and 2020, long before the October 7th, 2023, Hamas attack and the devastating war that followed in Gaza. Even then, as Jewish filmmakers critical of Zionism, we faced accusations of being provocative, even anti-Semitic—from both Jewish and non-Jewish critics in Israel and Germany. These pressures kept the film unfinished—until now. In a time when dissenting Jewish voices are increasingly silenced, this film is more urgent than ever. *The New Jews* is not just a search for a new identity—it is a challenge to the narratives that seek to define us.





# About Amir Ovadia Steklov

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**Amir Ovadia Steklov** has emerged as a bold and daring filmmaker-animator, blending sharp humor with visually striking narratives that explore migration, LGBTQ+ themes, Jewish identity, and racism within a sex-positive framework. Graduated from Sam Spiegel Film and Television School in 2013 (Jerusalem), he is now Based in Berlin, a 2024 Berlinale Talent alumnus and member of the European Film Academy. Steklov's films have earned international recognition, with highlights including *Bi The Way* (2022), a festival favorite that won Best Short Film at CINHOMO, Best Comedy at OutReel Cincinnati and QueerX. His film *Don't Be a DICK!* (2020), won Best Animation at SPLICE Film Festival and his documentary *Between Two Walls* (2019) won Best animation at Berlin Independent Film Festival. His new works, *Invisible Countdown* (2024), *The New Jews* (2025), and *Kotti Express* (TBA) continue to showcase his signature storytelling and style.



Through his post-production studio, The Glass Prince, Steklov crafts animations, VFX, and edits for clients while pursuing his passion for filmmaking. His style challenges boundaries and explores identity in deeply personal ways, solidifying his place as a distinctive voice in contemporary cinema.

## Filmography

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**The New Jews** (2025) - 80' - Documentary

World Premiere: International Film Festival Rotterdam 2025

**Invisible Countdown** (2024) - 14' - Documentary, Experimental

World Premiere: Interfilm Berlin 2024 (in competition)

**Bi The Way** (2022) - 16' - Documentary, Animation

World Premiere: Frameline Queer Film Festival 2022

Best Comedy award at: OutReel Cincinnati 2022

Best Comedy award at: QueerX 2022

2x Best Documentary award at: CinHomo 2023 (Official Jury & Young Jury)

**Jewish Fetish** (2021) - 1' - Fiction, Animation

**Don't Be a DICK!** (2020) - 10' - Documentary, Animation

Best Animation award at: SPLICE FilmFest 2021

**Charging Up** (2020) - 2' - Live-Action, Fiction

**Between Two Walls** (2019) - 30' - Documentary, Animation

Best Animation award at: Berlin Independent FilmFest (2020)

**Hamudi** (2015) - 5' - Live-Action, Fiction

**In The Next Lifetime** (2014) - 5' - Live-Action, Fiction

**TESLA** (2014) - infinite loop - Video Art Installation for 3 screens

**Fireworks** (2007) - 3' - Fiction, Animation

# Facts about the film

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- Research began in 2015, filming started in 2018, and post-production concluded in 2025.
- The film wasn't released earlier because many film professionals, friends, and peers warned the filmmakers that it would be "career suicide" and labeled it "antisemitic."
- All chats and phone calls featured in the film are real. The filmmakers never sought to know the participants' identities, names, or face pictures. Maintaining online anonymity was essential to exposing underlying racism and fetishism.
- No real online profiles or face pictures are shown in the film. Voices have also been distorted to protect the anonymity and privacy of those involved.
- The gynecologist scene was filmed in a fetish club in Berlin, not in a real clinic.
- Udi Raz, one of the interviewees, is now a board member of Jewish Voice for Just Peace in the Middle East and is considered one of the leading figures in the global anti-Zionist Jewish movement. At the time of filming, she was not as well-known as she is today.

- The filmmakers identify as “non-Zionist,” which is distinct from “anti-Zionist.” **Do not use the term “anti-Zionist” to describe the film or the filmmakers.**
- Although the film does not discuss the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack or the war in Gaza, the filmmakers felt that these events have made the international audience more receptive to the film's themes. This is why they decided to release it in 2025.
- The filmmakers are not in any way associated with the BDS movement.
- The film is 100% independent. No public funding or private investment from individuals was used in its production. The entire budget came from the filmmakers' pockets.
- The animated parts of the film are handmade using a frame-by-frame rotoscope technique with Corel Painter software. The animation process took nearly a year to complete.
- The film is the director's documentary debut after a long career as an editor, animator, and short film director.



# Interview with the director

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by Merle Groneweg (April 2025)

## Why are you releasing *The New Jews* now, years after you shot it?

I started developing the film in 2015, meeting Israelis in Berlin who had left Israel for political reasons. Ines, who is also a protagonist in the film, and I already shot part of the material in 2018. In 2019, we released a short version of the film, *Between Two Walls* (29 min), which was screened at a few festivals and won an award for Best Animation at the Berlin Independent Film Festival. However, I felt that the short version didn't allow me to delve deeply into the topics I wanted to explore. I was eager to realize a longer version, and shot more material in 2020. But when I began showing rough cuts of the extended film, I received feedback from both Israeli and non-Israeli filmmakers, telling me that it was too much, even calling it anti-Semitic. People told me releasing it would be career suicide — that it was anti-Semitic, that no one would understand what I was trying to say. Back then, there was no space for this conversation. For example, when I participated in Berlinale Talents in 2024, I felt a shift. Many people were eager to discuss these topics. *NO OTHER LAND* won that year, which gave me further



confidence. I also made another short film, *Invisible Countdown*, which premiered last year at Interfilm. It's an experimental piece about me reconciling my identity as a non-Zionist, Jewish Israeli living in Berlin and all the baggage that comes with it. The positive reception of *Invisible Countdown* encouraged me to move forward with releasing *The New Jews*.

**You describe yourself as non-Zionist rather than anti-Zionist. Why is it important for you to make that distinction?**

Terms like “anti-” can create a black-and-white binary: you're either Zionist or anti-Zionist, with nothing in between. That doesn't reflect how I see myself. I know I'm not a Zionist—I don't live in Zion. I used to live in Jerusalem, literally meaning Zion, and I made the decision to leave. So, identifying as Zionist would be a contradiction for me.

But am I anti-Zionist? If others hold Zionist beliefs or political leanings, that's their right. I don't share them, but I respect that people have different views. Saying I'm anti-Zionist would feel too absolute, too much like a mission to oppose or dismantle something entirely. That's not my position. I simply

don't participate in or align myself with that ideology. Some people in the film do identify as anti-Zionist, and I fully support their right to define themselves that way. But for me, "non-Zionist" leaves space for complexity. So, this is one reason for the usage of this term.

Another reason is that, in German political discourse today, anti-Zionism is often positioned as the opposite of "anti-Deutsch". These two groups sometimes clash, and I don't want my movie or myself to be associated with that conflict. It's not relevant to the film, and I don't personally engage in that fight. I've never had a confrontation with someone from the anti-Deutsche camp. In fact, I'd be open to having a conversation with them. We may not agree, but I'm not "anti" anything.

**In *The New Jews*, you and your four protagonists discuss your experiences, living as Israeli Jews in Germany. Can you give an example of how you explore this in the film?**

Yes, one of the protagonist, Udi, says he feels like he's a kind of spectacle here, and that it took him a while to understand that. Right after he discusses this, there's a paper cut animation: My character goes to a bakery. At first, the baker assumes I'm North African or Middle Eastern and treats me poorly.

But then he finds out I'm Jewish, and suddenly he's warm and friendly. It's this strange shift. People often don't identify me as Jewish just by looking at me. So I experience this kind of racism—like even just this morning, in the supermarket, the cashier was grumpy and cold with me, didn't say “have a nice weekend” like they did to the white customers before me. But once people realize I'm Jewish, everything changes— all of the sudden I'm their best friend, and they want to know everything about me. It's a very creepy experience, which I wanted to convey in this short animation that forms part of the film.

**Your film deals with themes of sexual submission by and fetishization of Jews in Germany, referencing Nazis and the holocaust. How did the idea to include this in the film emerge?**

The idea came from a social experiment I did on a dating website. I created a new profile under the name Jewish Twink, with no photo or description—just to see what kind of reactions I'd get. The algorithm promotes new profiles, so within minutes I was flooded with messages. I selected the ones that were relevant for the film, but very quickly, disturbing content emerged—messages with hardcore Nazi-Jewish fetish references. It was intense and overwhelming. I only recorded about 30

minutes of material—I couldn't take more. I was shocked. Ines, my collaborator, was shocked. We didn't expect that kind of response, especially from Germany. In Israel, dark humor around the Holocaust exists—but in Germany, it's a deep taboo. That suppression might actually feed into the fetishization. The experiment revealed a hidden layer of desire and repression. The chat content you see in the film is 100% real, including the typos.

A friend of mine, who researches sexual fetishes during the Nazi era, saw the film and told me the fantasies I show are strikingly similar to her archival findings. During the Nazi period, the circumcised penis was a way to identify Jews, which led to a particular fetishization. And in gay culture, there's often an intense focus on the penis—regardless of background. So, when you add all of these ingredients into one cooking pot, it becomes a very toxic decoction.

***The New Jews* features you naked on screen, quite literally exposed. Was there a logic behind showing your body, as a kind of full exposure, not just emotional but physical as well?**

Yes, that was a very conscious decision—both Ines and I chose to appear naked at the beginning of the

film. She undresses in the clinic, and right after that, I wake up naked. It was a way to set expectations and to signal vulnerability—not just of the body, but of identity and experience. At the same time, my nudity is rotoscoped. There's an animation layer over it. So the question becomes: is this real or not? Just like the people I chat with online—they only see a username, not a real person. We wanted the audience to feel that same uncertainty. Is what you're seeing authentic, or has it been manipulated to provoke a reaction? It mirrors how people project fantasies onto me just because I identify as Jewish.

**You use different techniques to, for example, blur images. How do you describe your visual strategy?**

That ambiguity—what's real and what isn't—runs through the entire film. While, as mentioned above, the chat content is 100% real, the platform shown is a fictional version I created, due to copyright concerns. The profile pictures are stock images. Also, we used the same rotoscoping technique for the dick pics in the chat scenes. We couldn't use the original images for privacy and copyright reasons, and we didn't want to blur them like news media does. At the time, I was experimenting with digital painting and thought: why not use this for animation?

We started with the chat material, then animated my waking-up scene, and eventually used the technique for the interviews as well. That's when the metaphor deepened: the technique became a way of blurring identities, not just visuals.

We filmed the interviews against a green screen to resemble an interrogation room. That setting felt right, because as non-Zionist voices critical of Israel, we often feel silenced in Germany. There's little space for our perspective, and we're frequently attacked—especially by Zionists and anti-Deutsche as well as others who support Israel and don't try to understand where we're coming from.

So, this visual strategy—rotoscoping, the sound design, the interrogation room—became a way to express that feeling of being questioned, misunderstood, or misrepresented. It's about identity as something unstable, blurred, and constantly negotiated.

**In the film, there's a strong sense of Berlin as a cosmopolitan, almost utopian place—a city where people in exile form a kind of community. At the same time, the film also explores disillusionment and darker experiences. Given that the interviews were several years, how do you feel about these**

## more hopeful portrayals of Berlin when you watch them now?

I wanted to portray Berlin as a multi-dimensional place—not purely negative or purely positive. I've been living here for over ten years now, and it's definitely a love-hate relationship. The film begins with people speaking positively about Berlin—their hopes, their sense of freedom, the excitement of starting a new chapter. But as the film progresses, the tone gradually darkens. That mirrors the immigrant experience for many: at first, everything seems better than what you left behind. You have a lot of expectations for your new home. Then, with time, as you learn the language and start to pick up on the nuances of local politics and society, the reality becomes more complex. Where you migrated to is a place like any other place, with its own contradictions.

Before moving here, I worked as a video editor for a news broadcaster in Israel. It was fast-paced and intense, and Berlin offered me a kind of escape—especially because I didn't speak the language yet. For a while, I could tune out and feel free. German politics back then also felt quite boring – Angela Merkel was always going to win. Now it's more turbulent.

Personally, I'm still in a kind of political limbo. I applied for citizenship last year and am still waiting. Until that changes, I don't fully feel like I belong. At the same time, I wonder how that will shift once I do become a citizen—will I engage more deeply with German politics once I have the right to vote? Sometimes I wish for this to happen, but other times, I prefer to stay in this semi-detached position I've had so far—observing from the outside. But making and releasing this film is also a political act. It means I'm not just watching—I'm speaking.



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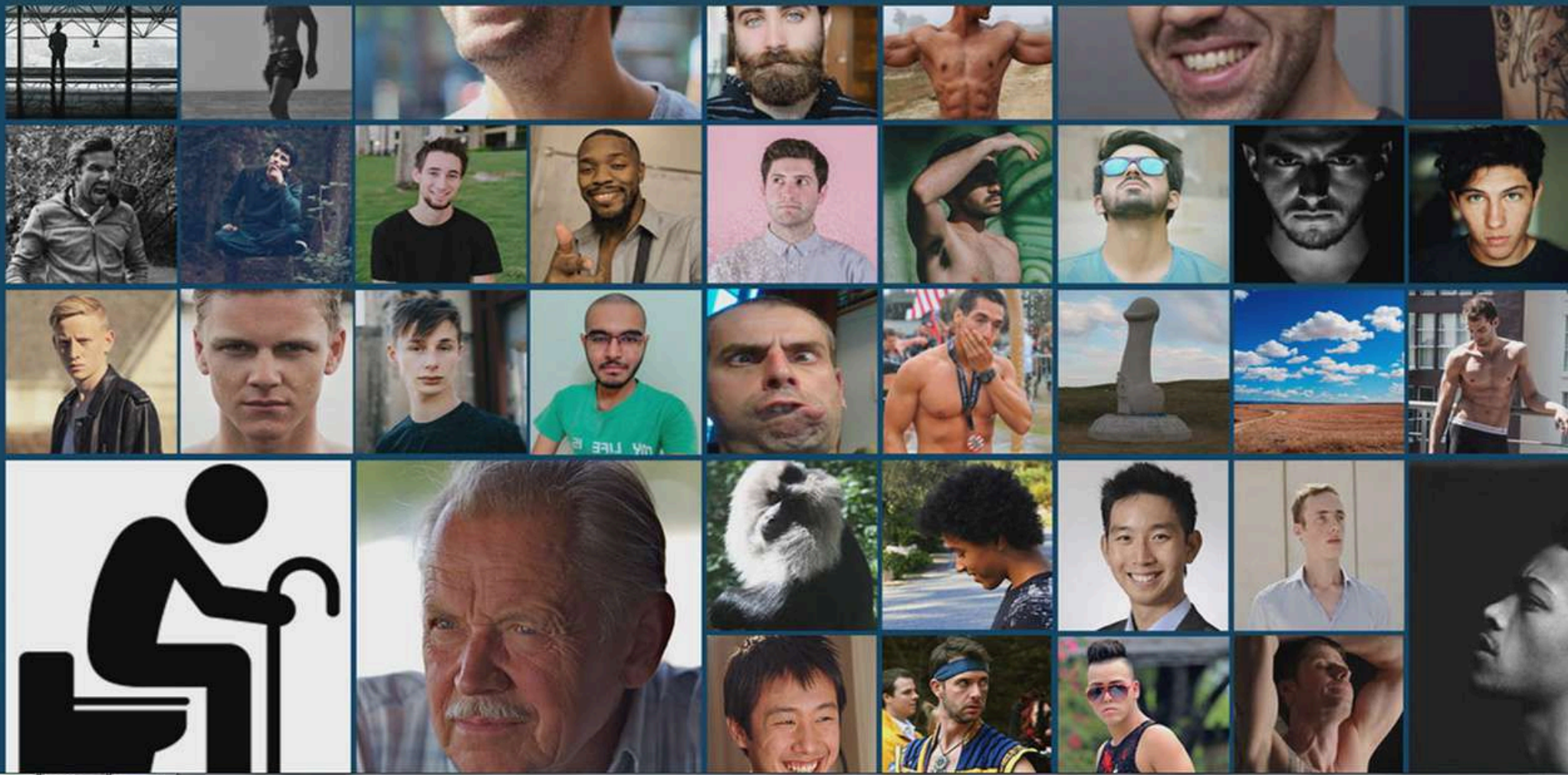
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# Credits

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**Written, Directed and Edited by**

Amir Ovadia Steklov

**Producers**

Amir Ovadia Steklov

Jürgen Brüning

**Director of Photography**

Amir Ovadia Steklov

**CAST**

*Inés*

Inés Moldavsky

*Doctor Müller*

Pina Brutal

*Interviewee 1*

Michal Henig

*Interviewee 2*

Anonymous

*Interviewee 3*

Udi Raz

*Interviewee 4*

Amir Ovadia Steklov

*Juden 4 Give's Presenter*

Udi Raz



**Animation**

Amir Ovadia Steklov

**Sound Restoration &  
Dialogue Editing**

Amir Ovadia Steklov

**Sound Design & foley**

Zohar Bonnie

**Sound Mix**

Jochen Voerste - Concept AV oHG

**Color Grading**

Amir Ovadia Steklov

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Terence Li

**Sound Assistant**

Jacob Lingesleben

**Original Music by**

Hipless - Avner Cohen

**Music Track - "Electric Dulcimer"**

Richard Miles & Marc Hönninger

