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Forgotten Transports: To Poland

Pic focuses on the difficult choices made by individuals escaping Nazi ghettos, labor and death camps.

By ALISSA SIMON

The final entry in a monumental quartet of films that meticulously trace the history of Czech Jews deported during the Holocaust, "Forgotten Transports: To Poland" from multihyphenate Lukas Pribyl, focuses on the difficult choices made by individuals escaping Nazi ghettos, labor and death camps in the Lublin district of Poland. Using survivor interviews, rare archival footage, photographs and documents, the gripping pic poignantly illustrates the psyche of people permanently on the run or in hiding, forced to continually fabricate or change identities. This seminal documentation of a little-known piece of WWII history should travel to festivals before segueing to broadcast.

A political scientist and historian by training, helmer Pribyl devoted 10 years of his life to the "Forgotten Transports" series. Unlike typical Holocaust docu, his films don't catalogue Nazi crimes, dwelling on how many people perished where. Instead, his work speaks about universals such as life, death, family, love and betrayal, while documenting distinct modes of survival in places including Latvia, Estonia and Belarus, as well as Poland.

That "To Poland," like the others in the series, makes such a fresh and powerful impression owes much to Pribyl's painstaking methodology. Most of the subjects had never spoken of their wartime experiences before, not even to their own children. Traveling to 20 different countries, the helmer formed relationships with the survivors, sometimes taking up to two years to persuade them to participate.

Out of 14,000 Czech Jews deported to places such as Sawin, Luta, Krychow or Zamosc, only 50 survived the war. Told in their own words, without commentary, these survival stories run the gamut, from a forbidden love affair to a survivor's participation in the Sobibor uprising.

While some endured through luck and their own ingenuity, others were aided by local gentiles. Sadly, as they note, other Jews were not in a position to help escapees and frequently turned them away -- or even turned them in.

Some of the docu's most wrenching moments involve the painful decisions the subjects had to make. Lucie Pollakova-Langford, who had a secret Polish lover, recounts the grim day her mother was selected. The camp commandant asked Lucie if she wanted to accompany her mother, but, knowing her boyfriend had plans for her to escape, she said no, and felt guilty for years.

Several of the interviewees traveled clandestinely to Hungary, where the situation for Jews was much better until 1944. Jan Osers humorously describes his three separate stints in a Hungarian

prison, each time under a different name.

Determined to illustrate their accounts with authentic visual materials, Pribyl traded bottles of vodka for photographs found in Polish village houses, perused albums of former SS men and their lovers, and selected film fragments from more than 900 hours of footage screened in official archives all over the world.

Containing some remarkable color footage of the Lublin ghetto, the docu's broadcast-friendly tech package is pro.

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