

The Righteous

History of the Ulma Family



WANDA SIEMASZKOWA THEATRE IN RZESZÓW

SEASON 2018/2019

Director JAN NOWARA





The Righteous
History of the Ulma Family

written, directed and music design by

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lighting design and video display

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Comprehensive support was provided to us by The Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II located in Markowa, thanks to the kindness and involvement of Director Anna Stróż-Pawłowska, PhD, and the museum personnel.

The historical studies used in preparing the play most importantly included publications by Mateusz Szpytma, PhD, dedicated to the history of the Ulma family.

We would also like to express our gratitude to Konrad Żygadło for the access to his study related to wartime memories of residents of the village of Markowa.

The materials used in the play include fragments of documents and accounts of Markowa residents, in the holdings of the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II located in Markowa as well as original photographs by Józef Ulma.



MUZEUM POLAKÓW
RATUJĄCYCH ŻYDÓW
POD CZAS II WOJNY ŚWIATOWEJ
IM. RODZINY ULMÓW
W MARKOWEJ

The Righteous

History of the Ulma Family

cast:

JUSTYNA KRÓL

MAŁGORZATA PRUCHNIK-CHOŁKA

WALDEMAR CZYSZAK

PAWEŁ GŁADYŚ

ROBERT ŻUREK

stage manager, prompter

EWA CZESŁAWA BAZANIAK

director's assistant

JUSTYNA KRÓL

lighting technician

KRZYSZTOF NOWACKI

sound engineering

PAWEŁ LENIART

P R E M I E R E

12 October 2018

SZAJNA GALLERY



KINDNESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Telling the history of the Ulma family poses numerous difficulties at many levels. In order to confront this subject matter, it is necessary to stand face to face with the unimaginable atrocities which took place in Poland a few decades ago. Yet, this is also a story of the amazing heroism of Józef and Wiktoria, a heroism which is not easy to talk about without striking grandiose tones. The task which we defined for ourselves was to get a closer look at the daily life of these people. Respect for facts was the first and most important goal which accompanied us during the production of the play. We were able to rather faithfully reconstruct of the events and the atmosphere predominant in Markowa during World War II, owing to historians' findings, accounts acquired from residents of the village as well as the activities initiated by the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II located in Markowa.

The tale of the Ulma family comprises a panorama of events and attitudes common in those times. By researching the subject matter we were able to reconstruct Polish-Jewish relations in a pre-war village, to get access to information on anthropological studies conducted by Germans in the allegedly "ancient German settlement", to find accounts related to heroism of Poles risking their lives in order to save their Jewish compatriots, as well as reports of neighbours' denunciations and collaboration with the Nazis. This is also a tale of Markowa which was an amazing place during the interwar period; it talks about the model-like organisation of the community, the beginnings of ru-

ral movements, and local printed media (including the revolutionary *Kobieta Wiejska* /Rural Woman/ magazine published in Markowa), and about the complexity of ethnic, religious and political relations occurring here during the interwar period.

Commemoration of the Ulma family is an obligation of sorts. This is a duty in respect to not only the living witnesses of those events but also the successive generations. The attitude shown by Wiktorina and Józef can perhaps be named humaneness, kindness and fearlessness more easily than with the (slightly abstract) term righteousness. If it could be guessed what guided them when they were sheltering their Jewish neighbours, I would think it was friendship, compassion and care for those dear to them. The measure of righteousness is more related to the future. It becomes applicable only when in the more and more complex and tense contemporary times, the Ulma family can again become a point of reference for us.

Beniamin M. Bukowski
author of the script, director,
author of musical setting



TIMELINE OF THE EVENTS

2 March 1900

Józef Ulma is born in Markowa

10 Dec. 1912

Wiktoria Ulma (née Niemczak) is born in Markowa

1921

Józef Ulma starts his military service

18 July 1936

birth date of the couple's first child, Stanisława Ulma

6 Oct. 1937

Barbara Ulma is born

5 Dec. 1938

birth of Władysław Ulma, the couple's first son

1 Sept. 1939

World War II starts

9 Sept. 1939

German troops enter Markowa

3 April 1940

Franciszek Ulma is born

6 June 1941

birth of Antoni Ulma

16 Sept. 1942

the couple's sixth child, Marysia, is born

1942

extermination of the Jewish population begins. It is assumed that in the latter half of the year Józef and Wiktoria give shelter to eight Jews: Saul Goldman and his sons as well as Golda Grünfeld and Lea Didner with her little daughter



23 March 1944

execution of the Ulma family and the harboured Jews is ordered at the Gendarmerie post in Łańcut

24 March 1944

homicide in Markowa. The punitive expedition is led by Eilert Dieken, commander of the German Gendarmerie in Łańcut. In the group of the accompanying soldiers Josef Kokott shows particular cruelty. Apparently after the execution he shouted: "Watch how they die, the Polish swine harbouring Jews!"

1945

exhumation of the Ulma family; burial at the parish cemetery

1947

exhumation of the Jews; burial in Jagiełła – Niechciałki

1957

arrest of Josef Kokott, the only person sentenced for his involvement in the homicide in Markowa

1980

Josef Kokott dies in the prison in Rzeszów

13 Sept. 1995

medal of the Righteous Among the Nations is awarded to the Ulma family

2004

a memorial is unveiled in Markowa

17 March 2016

opening of the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II located in Markowa

2017

the Ulma family's beatification process initiated by the Catholic Church



MARKOWA

The village of Markowa, near Łańcut, was established during the reign of King Casimir the Great, by German settlers brought by him.

During the interwar period the village had a population of about 4,500, including a community of about 120 Jews. At that time Markowa was recognised as a model self-governing village. Its residents organised a health-care cooperative; local papers were published, and the first Polish folk university opened in the nearby village of Gać.

WAR

The war came to Markowa on 9 September 1939. The village was incorporated into the General Governorate. The village head was responsible for the administration of Markowa, and had to collaborate with the local German authorities. The residents were subjected to repressions introduced in the occupied areas. Most public institutions were closed, obligatory works for the occupant were introduced, food rations were limited, Polish farmers were forced to provide accommodation for German soldiers stationed in Markowa. They faced death penalty even for small offences.

Polonised, original German names of the first settlers, can even today be encountered in the village (e.g. Ulma, Lonc, Cwynar, Bar). During the war German anthropologists tried to prove that the local residents represented the ancient Aryan race, yet the latter considered themselves Poles.

JEWIS BEFORE THE WAR

Before the war one hundred and twenty Jews living in Markowa had relatively good relations with the Polish population. There were minor anti-Semitic incidents, for example effigies of Judas were hung by young people in front of Jewish houses before Easter; according to residents' accounts such acts were condemned by adults. The local Jews thought it a scandal when a few members of their community turned to Christianity.

Since there was no synagogue in Markowa, prayer meetings were held in private homes. Wealthy Jews were merchants, and the poorer ones were farmers, often with no land of their own and renting their plots from Poles.

HOLOCAUST

Out of the 120 Jews living in Markowa before the war, varied historical sources report between 17 and 21 survivors. The Jewish residents of the village who lived in hiding accounted for 21% of the population; 68% of these survived the war. These are some of the highest statistics related to this issue throughout Poland occupied by Germans. In Markowa, besides the cases where Jews were provided with shelter, there were also some situations when those in hiding as well as the Polish people providing shelter were denounced.



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and finance*

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*managing director's proxy,
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*Photos from the holdings
of the Ulma Family Museum
of Poles Saving Jews in World
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THIS IS OUR THEATER



Wanda Siemaszkowa Theatre for over 70 years has been the only professional drama theatre, the largest and the oldest in the Podkarpackie. It has presented nearly 600 premieres. In Rzeszów we bring to life an idea of artistic, team-based theatre, which combines creative pursuits with social and educational mission. Yet we do not want to create a theatre based on school reading lists. Encounter with classical texts, also the forgotten ones and those "covered with dust", is based on new interpretations which guarantee a dialogue with the contemporary realities, without journalistic literalism. As the managing director of the Theatre I believe in masterpieces of literature. Because of this the repertoire of "Siemaszkowa" has featured Ibsen, Różewicz, Słowacki, Witkacy, Dostoevsky, Mickiewicz, and Chekhov. But we pull these amazing texts from the shelf in order to remove the dust, to read and understand them today. And then we put them to stage and we seek to reach out to wide audiences with the message. In my opinion a theatre operating in a medium-sized city should play a role of a multidisciplinary intellectual and cultural centre, which does not only present plays on stage but also "transmits" ideas and worldviews, while integrating various communities and elites of the city and the region around artistic events.

On the one hand one must go back to masterpieces, to read them anew; on the other hand one must stay close to the pulse of the world, today found in shopping malls, and in the Web. Because theatre, in accordance with its basic rules, is happening here and now. Although it is fascinating to wander in imagination and move into a completely different reality, I believe that theatre should react to the world and to human beings as they are today.

Director

