

MEDIA RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Re: Documentary film screening in June 2014

Attention: What's on, entertainment, education, social affairs and multicultural media



Deborah Kayser, soprano, during the recording of *The Songs They Sang* soundtrack and documentary. Photo credit: Marcus Thomson



Vilna Ghetto survivor, Frania Bracorskajc, visits the memorial at Ponar forest. Still from *The Songs They Sang* documentary.

The Songs They Sang: A musical narrative of the Vilna Ghetto

Melbourne audiences and secondary school students will have a rare opportunity to view *The Songs They Sang*, an Australian documentary that commemorates music and stories from the Vilna Ghetto in Lithuania during the Holocaust.

The documentary will screen for a strictly limited season from

Wednesday 11th to Saturday 28th June at The Backlot Studios, Southbank.

Directed by Rohan Spong, *The Songs They Sang* tells the true story of musical performances held inside the Jewish Ghetto at Vilna (now Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania) from 1941-1943. It explores the resilience of the people who created and performed the music in the face of systematic persecution and extermination by the Nazis.

The film centres around the stories of Shmerke Kaczerginski and Avrom Sutzkever, who steadfastly continued to compose poems and songs about their experiences of persecution, loss and grief, and organise public performances, despite their horrific circumstances. Their refusal to relinquish their culture brought hope to a people under siege, and offered them brief respite from fear and despair.

Filmed in Israel, France, Lithuania, America and Australia, the documentary features interviews with survivors of the Vilna Ghetto—including Melbourne-based Deborah Zuben—re-enactments of the musical performances by soprano Deborah Kayser and Vilna songs arranged by Joseph Giovinazzo.

It includes harrowing footage of a visit by survivor, Frania Bracorskajc, to Ponar forest, outside Vilna, where her family and friends used to holiday before the war. During the Holocaust, the forest became the site of the massacre of more than 20,000 men, women and children from the Vilna Ghetto.

The special screenings coincide with the launch of an **educational resource for secondary school teachers**, which provides an historical accompaniment to the documentary and its soundtrack. It will be an important resource for Victorian students, who are required to study the Holocaust as part of the history curriculum.

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Profits from the screening will contribute towards the **international concert tour** of *The Songs They Sang*, which begins in **November 2014**. The concert will be performed at the Jerusalem International YMCA (Israel), Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche (Berlin, Germany), the Lele Teatro (Vilnius, Lithuania), Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall (New York City, US) and Schoenberg Hall (Los Angeles, US). The Lele Teatro was the original theatre in the Vilna Ghetto.

SCREENING DETAILS

- Film:** *The Songs They Sang: A musical narrative of the Vilna Ghetto*
- Description:** Australian documentary, English-speaking and foreign-language with subtitles;
94 minutes
- Venue:** **The Backlot Studios**, 65 Haig Street, **Southbank**
- Dates:** **Wednesday 11th June to Saturday 28th June 2014**
- Times:** Weekdays: 10.30am Wednesday 11th - Wednesday 25th June inclusive
Two weekend evening sessions: 7.30pm Saturday 21th and Saturday 28th June
- Ticket prices:** \$16 adult / \$10 student / \$12 concession (health card & seniors). Teachers accompanying students admitted free.
- Ticketing URL:** www.trybooking.com/EHDZ
- Website:** thesongstheysang.com

Ends/ends...

MEDIA PLEASE NOTE:

Interviewees

The following people are available for in-studio, phone and face-to-face interviews, and photo opps:

- Co-producers Anna Monea and Amadeo Marquez-Perez
- Composer Joseph Giovinazzo
- Deborah Zuben, Vilna Ghetto survivor and Melbourne resident (featured in doco).

Media material available

- Review copies of *The Songs They Sang* (DVD)
- MP3s of *The Songs They Sang* soundtrack
- High-resolution B&W images and stills from documentary
- Cast details and crew bios
- Media backgrounder about the documentary and Vilna's history
- *The Songs They Sang* education resource (PDF, 21pp)
- Ticket giveaways and review tickets.

Media contact for interview arrangements and further info:

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