



FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES Presents

In Association with TSG ENTERTAINMENT

A DEFENDER and PIKI FILMS Production

JOJO RABBIT

ROMAN GRIFFIN DAVIS
THOMASIN McKENZIE
TAIKA WAITITI
REBEL WILSON
STEPHEN MERCHANT
ALFIE ALLEN
with SAM ROCKWELL
and SCARLETT JOHANSSON

DIRECTED BY.....TAIKA WAITITI
SCREENPLAY BY.....TAIKA WAITITI
BASED UPON THE BOOK CAGING SKIES BY.....CHRISTINE LEUNENS
PRODUCED BY.....CARTHEW NEAL, p.g.a.
.....TAIKA WAITITI, p.g.a.
.....CHELSEA WINSTANLEY
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER.....KEVAN VAN THOMPSON
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY.....MIHAI MALAIMARE JR.
PRODUCTION DESIGNER.....RA VINCENT
FILM EDITOR.....TOM EAGLES
MUSIC COMPOSED BY.....MICHAEL GIACCHINO
COSTUME DESIGNER.....MAYES C. RUBEO
MAKE-UP & HAIR DESIGNER.....DANNELLE SATHERLEY
VISUAL EFFECTS SUPERVISOR.....JASON CHEN
CASTING BY.....DES HAMILTON

JOJO RABBIT

Writer director Taika Waititi (THOR: RAGNAROK, HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE), brings his signature style of humor and pathos to his latest film, *Jojo Rabbit*, a World War II satire that follows a lonely German boy (Roman Griffin Davis as Jojo) whose world view is turned upside down when he discovers his single mother (Scarlett Johansson) is hiding a young Jewish girl (Thomasin McKenzie) in their attic. Aided only by his idiotic imaginary friend, Adolf Hitler (Taika Waititi), Jojo must confront his blind nationalism. *Jojo Rabbit* with a screenplay by and directed by Taika Waititi is based upon the book Caging Skies by Christine Leunens and stars Roman Griffin Davis, Thomasin McKenzie, Taika Waititi, Rebel Wilson, Stephen Merchant, Alfie Allen, with Sam Rockwell and Scarlett Johansson. The producers are Carthew Neal, Waititi and Chelsea Winstanley. The behind-the-scenes team includes director of photography Mihai Malaimare, production designer Ra Vincent, editor Tom Eagles, music composer Michael Giacchino, costume designer Mayes Rubeo, make-up and hair designer Dannelle Satherley and visual effects supervisor Jason Chen.

JOJO RABBIT



“Jojo Betzler, ten and a half years old: today you join the ranks of the Jungvolk... You are in peak mental and physical condition. You have the body of a panther and the mind of... a brainy panther. You are a shiny example of shiny perfection.”

-Jojo Betzler

Jojo Rabbit offers a sharply funny, yet profoundly stirring, child’s-eye view of a society gone mad with intolerance. Drawing on his own Jewish heritage and his experiences growing up surrounded by prejudice, writer-director Taika Waititi (whose mother is Jewish, while his father is Māori) makes a powerful statement against hate with this pitch-black satire of the Nazi culture that gripped the German psyche at the height of WWII. Waititi takes a story almost too appalling to approach with sober solemnity—that of a boy who, like many at that time, has been brainwashed into absolutely gung-ho devotion to Hitler. He then mines from it a dark, mesmerizing comedy that ultimately unravels the toxic ideas of antisemitism and persecution of the other. Balancing on a comedic high-wire, Waititi mixes the fury of satire with an insistent sense of hope that fanaticism and hate can be overcome.

The film follows very much in the footsteps of some of Waititi’s personal filmmaking heroes: Mel Brooks, Charlie Chaplin, Ernst Lubitsch and Stanley Kubrick to name a few. Like those directors, Waititi was in search of a fresh way to re-visit the most unsettling of topics through the paradoxically moral force of out-and-out parody. Waititi echoes Brooks in particular, as a Jewish actor disrupting the enduring power of Hitler’s image with a zany, ridiculing portrait. But much as the film owes to its bold forbearers, *Jojo Rabbit* feels very much of our times, with its deeply human characters whose blinded foibles might amuse but whose inner predicaments are deadly real and pointedly relevant right now.

Based on Christine Leunens’ acclaimed novel [Caging Skies](#), first published in 2004, the story begins in fictional Falkenheim. In this quaint town under Nazi rule, the end of the war is rapidly approaching. However, in 10-year-old Jojo Betzler’s bedroom, anticipation is mounting. For today, he finally has the chance he’s been waiting all his 10 years for: to join the Jungvolk, aka The Hitler Youth. To Jojo, so credulously gullible and

susceptible to the pervasive propaganda that surrounds him, it feels like his first opportunity to do something big and important, to help protect the single mother he loves beyond anything, and maybe even to feel like he belongs.

To sooth his insecurities, Jojo brings along an outsized imaginary friend: a clownish, hare-brained apparition of Hitler, who with all the emotions of a child dispenses advice Jojo might have sought from his absent father. With Adolf in his head, Jojo feels invincible. But in fact, Jojo's troubles are just beginning. Humiliated (and nearly decapitated) in the Jungvolk camp, his frustration only grows deeper.

Then, Jojo makes a discovery that slowly, yet radically, transforms how he sees the world. Chasing what he believes to be some kind of phantasm, he finds instead that his mother has been hiding a Jewish girl in the wall at terrible risk to them all. The shock nearly undoes him—here is the “danger” he’s been warned about living in his own home, under his own nose, mere feet from where he regularly confides in his imaginary friend Hitler. But as Jojo endeavors to keep tabs on the mysterious Elsa, his fear and vigilance grow into something even Adolf cannot seem to fathom. For the more he gets to know Elsa as a person, the more she becomes someone Jojo can’t imagine allowing anyone, including his Nazi idols, to harm.

While *Jojo Rabbit* is very much a comic allegory about the costs of letting bigotry take hold, whether in your bedroom or a nation, Jojo also takes a very real journey as a child coming-of-age. For in finding the courage to open his mind, he discovers the power of love to change your path.

Waititi says his hope for the movie was always pure, unabashed disruption. He wanted to upend his own comfort zone but also any notion that stories about the Nazi era have been played out, especially when the lessons of those times are so urgent right now. With nationalism, antisemitism and other forms of religious and racial intolerance on the rise, the stakes of grabbing people’s attention felt sky-high.

“I knew I didn't want to make a straight-out drama about hatred and prejudice because we’ve become just so used to that style of drama,” Waititi explains. “When something seems a little too easy, I like to bring in chaos. I've always believed comedy is the best way to make an audience more comfortable. So, in *Jojo Rabbit*, I bring the audience in with laughter, and once they’ve dropped their guard, then start delivering these little payloads of drama that have serious weight to them.”

For novelist Leunens, Waititi’s compacted, and more cuttingly humorous, take on her book was a beautiful use of comedy in the service of conveying a story of immense gravity. “In Taika’s films, laughs are never free,” Leunens notes. “There are strings attached. Even if you don’t see them right away, you’ll feel them. It’s after the laugh that the strings start to be felt, drawing one’s consciousness to things that aren’t quite right, aren’t entirely funny, into deeper, more complex emotions—amongst these, the realization of the absurdity of the situation, and the tragedy and pain.”

CREATING JOJO RABBIT

*“Promise me one thing, will you?
When this is all over and the world is normal, try to be a kid again?”
-Rosie Betzler*

Nazis were parodied on screen as early as the 1940s when they were still very much a global threat—with the key being that the last laugh was always on them. As Mel Brooks once said: “If you can reduce Hitler to something laughable, you win.”

The tradition would stretch from Chaplin (THE GREAT DICTATOR), Lubitsch (TO BE OR NOT TO BE) and Brooks (THE PRODUCERS), to John Boorman (HOPE AND GLORY), Roberto Benigni (LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL) and even Quentin Tarantino (INGLORIOUS BASTERDS).

It often sparked controversy. The Jewish comedian Jack Benny’s own father was said to have walked out of the theater at the shock of his son portraying a Gestapo officer in TO BE OR NOT TO BE. But the film also moved generations, and today is considered a masterful example of how the most ferociously irreverent satire can become a springboard to multi-faceted, humanistic storytelling.

Stephen Merchant, who plays a drippingly dark Nazi Captain in *Jojo Rabbit*, notes: “Both during and after the war, Hitler was routinely mocked because it was a way of people dealing with the horror they were seeing. Taika is following in that same tradition, but with his own modern voice.”

Waititi’s refreshingly different voice first came to the fore in a series of offbeat yet poignant comedies with a personal, handmade feel including EAGLE vs. SHARK and BOY. On the heels of acclaim for his vampire mockumentary WHAT WE DO IN THE SHADOWS and the comedy adventure HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE, Marvel tapped him to bring his mad creativity to THOR: RAGNAROK. (He also played Korg in the latter, a role he reprised in AVENGERS: ENDGAME.)

Jojo Rabbit would in many ways become kind of the culmination of his career—mixing the emotionally intimate and eccentrically funny with epic themes that lit a personal fire for him. But the seed of the film actually began with Waititi’s mother – a New Zealand native whose Russian Jewish family immigrated in the early 1900s. It was she who first read Christine Leunens’ Caging Skies and recounted to Waititi the story of a boy whose avid belief in Hitler is turned upside down when he discovers that his family is hiding a Jewish girl behind a false wall in the attic.

"She told him about the book, thinking it could be something for him," notes producer Carthew Neal. "When Taika read it, he realized it was more serious than he'd imagined, but had the heart and gravity required in this kind of story. He was then able to springboard from this, adding his special touches and bring it into his comic and tonal universe."