

# ***Casablanca***

*Of the Good Times During the Bad Times*



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## *Casablanca*

### *Of the Good Times During the Bad Times*

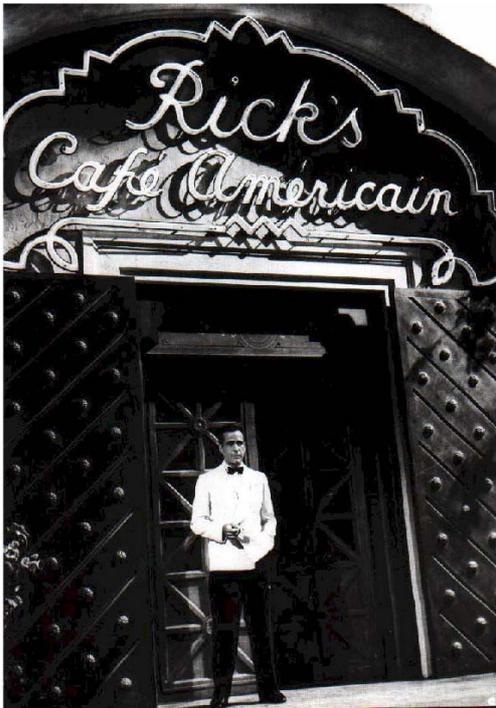
#### **EVERYBODY COMES TO RICKS?**

*Fritz: It was... if we hadn't had that many troubles...*

*Kurt: Yes, if we hadn't had the troubles...*

*Fritz: ...it would have been a good time, a good experience for us.*

*Kurt: Indeed it was a very, very good experience.*



**Still from the Hollywood movie Casablanca**

CASABLANCA – the Hollywood Classic from 1942 is one of the most famous works in film history and thus on account of the many characters visiting "Rick's Café".

The atmospheric and dense depiction of the refugees' situation during the Second World War is still today considered as one of the great merits of this film.

In fact, the artwork for the films' script, the play "Everybody comes to Ricks" found its point of origin in the escape of the Jews of Nazi-Germany.

The American author Murray Burnett also visited Vienna on his honeymoon trip through Europe and heard from the relatives of his wife about the adventurous route of escape that led across the Mediterranean Sea, through Casablanca, turning at Lisbon and ending in the USA.

The Documentary film "*CASABLANCA – Of the Good Times During the Bad Times*" also starts out in Vienna to find three former refugees, who - as described in the Hollywood film - were washed ashore in Casablanca during the horrible times of the Second World War where they found familial asylum and friendship.

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#### **OF THE GOOD TIMES DURING THE BAD TIMES**



**Reunion at Hinterbruehl; 2003**

*Sophie: I remember the Couscous.*

*Flor: Oh, the Couscous?*

*Sophie: Yes, the Couscous of your mother, that one was extraordinary good. All my life I have to think back to the Couscous at the Coriat house.*

*Raph: These were the good times, during the bad times!*

#### ***Synopsis***

"*This is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.*" That is one of the most famous sentences in the end of the Hollywood classic "Casablanca".

The documentary film "*Casablanca – Of the Good Times During the Bad Times*" tells the story of three people who are stranded in Casablanca, French Morocco, on the escape from Nazi Germany and forge a friendship, which gives them hope and human warmth during these hard times.

First we meet Sophie Freud, Sigmund Freud's granddaughter. She and her mother had to separate from the rest of the family. She describes her time in Casablanca as a rather joyful one.

Then we meet Kurt Grossmann, a falsifier. He was imprisoned at various labour camps and eventually worked as kitchen chef, since his greatest fear was to starve.

Next we meet Fritz Koenig, the soccer-fanatic concentration camp-prisoner. He made his living in Casablanca as a black marketer, spy and quasi-pimp.

At last there is Flor Coriat. Her family gave refuge to many immigrants in Casablanca just like Kurt and Sophie. They were given a new home for a while and deep friendships evolved.

Today, 60 years later, they meet again and have – perhaps for the last time a meal of "Couscous" together, just like they used to have more than half a century ago at the house of the Coriat family.

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#### **FAR AWAY FROM CASABLANCA**

*Sophie: Now, Casablanca is a colorful pleasant memory. But today, life is far away from Casablanca.*

The Hollywood classic "Casablanca" was a pure studio production during the 1940s. As well as the author of the play "Everybody comes to Ricks", none of the crew members set foot onto Moroccan ground or even did research on site.

Casablanca became rather a mystic place, a place where many destinies met, where love and friendship found their roots despite the difficult times, and where even an incurable cynic like Rick Blaine, embodied by Humphrey Bogart, was empowered to heroism.



**Flor and Sophie at Albertina Square; 2003**



**Fritz and Kurt watching TV; 2003**

Also in "*Casablanca – Of the Good Times During the Bad Times*" we decided not to make a film about the historic background of Morocco's capital but to trace those subjective meanings that made Casablanca to a pivotal part of the lives of all three protagonists. We didn't want them to be functionalised contemporary witnesses that tell us history like a historian but to show us moreover their "personal Casablanca", this eternal place which especially evolves the deepest authenticity by personal memories.

In doing so, we came across these positive virtues like friendship and solidarity which were the essential experiences from these times for our protagonists.

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## THREE PATHS OUT OF EUROPE

### *Sophie Freud*



*Sophie: Casablanca was... rather an immigrant town with many different sorts of people who were kind of washed onto the shore.*

Born August 6th 1924 in Vienna, she is Sigmund Freud's granddaughter.

After Austria's annexation by Nazi-Germany, her parents separated in May 1938. Whereas her father Martin emigrated to England with her brother Walter, 14-year old Sophie followed her mother Ernestine (Esti) to Paris.

They escaped the German troops in June 1940 by bicycle and got to Castilliers, France, where they received a security passport (Sauf-Conduite) from the local mayor. They stayed one more year in the unoccupied France (Nice), where Sophie even attended school.

In December 1941 Sophie and her mother boarded the ship from Marseille to **Casablanca**.

By mischance their visa for America expired and they were stuck in Casablanca where they waited until their visa was renewed. When Susanne **Coriat**, resident of Casablanca, was informed by the Jewish aid organisation "HIAS" that Sigmund Freud's granddaughter had to sleep on paillasses, she took the 17-year-old girl to her home. Sophie immediately made friends with Ms. Coriat's daughter **Flor** who became like a sister to her.



In October 1942 their visa renewal arrived and so she immigrated together with her mother via Lisbon into the USA.

Today she lives as professor emeritus in a small town near Boston.

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#### ***Kurt Grossmann***



***Kurt:*** *I have never been more welcomed, so many friends that I had there... For me Casablanca was my second home although I don't like to demote it, I would say it was my home!*

Born November 3rd, 1915 in Vienna.

When he received his draft papers for the German army, he deserted in August 1938 to Switzerland. He was arrested by the Swiss authorities and deported to France. To escape extradition to Germany, he had to rely on his personal boldness.

In 1939 by circumventing hundreds of waiting people on the backstairs, he managed to get a training vacancy in Nice which also provided him with a residence permit for France.

As a former Austrian citizen he was put into the prison camp at *Les Milles* in 1940. When the German occupying forces looked for Aryan prisoners in the camps, he quick-wittedly obtained his discharge papers. Thanks to his graphical talent he counterfeited a visa to Curacao and boarded the ship *Mont-Viso* to Martinique in June 1941. Because of the torpedoed sister ship *Wyoming*, the *Mont-Viso* only reaches **Casablanca**.



There Kurt Grossmann receives a warm reception by the **Coriat family**. Because of his missing residence permit, the authorities soon detain him at the work camps of Kasba Tadla, Oued-Zem, as well as Sidi al Ajachi.

After the invasion by the Allied Troops in November 1942, he finally got free.

Today, Kurt Grossmann lives in Hinterbruehl by Vienna.

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#### ***Fritz Koenig***



***Fritz:*** *Everything I experienced shortly after the concentration camp and detention in Nice, I compared with the past, with the concentration camp and detention. So, I was free, I was in French uniform and for me it was the most beautiful city in the world.*

Born February 15th, 1917 in Vienna.

After Austria's annexation in June 1938, he was deported by the SS to the *concentration camp Dachau*. Three months later he was transferred to the *concentration camp Buchenwald*. For eight months he survives the terrible camp until his mother manages to get him a visa for Italy.

In September 1939 he traveled to Milan and volunteered for the French army. After receiving an entrance visa he went to Nice where he was sent to a collective camp. In December 1939 they put him into the prison camp at *Les Milles* for a short time where he met **Kurt Grossmann**.

In May 1940 he eked out a living by black-marketeering of cigarettes to Marseille. He registered at the reception camp for scattered soldiers from where the return to their home towns was being organized. Since **Casablanca** seemed to him a good point of escape, he pretended to be a Czech citizen and resident of Casablanca. In Casablanca he earned his living again by black-marketeering. Additionally he got sustained by a French prostitute.



In 1942, he is recruited by the "deuxième bureau" (French secret service) to spy on the German Air Force, stationed in Casablanca.

On the arrival of American Allied troops in November 1942, Fritz first became a barman, then head of the bar, and finally manager of the American Club at their military base.

Today he lives in a retirement home in Vienna.

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#### **AN OPEN HOUSE**



*Flor: My parents took in refugees. They used to live in Venezuela where the people are very hospitable. There it was very common to take in people, it's much more liberal there than in France, where all houses were locked up.*

For Menahem and Suzanne CORIAT, who had earned a little fortune in Venezuela, and then had moved to Casablanca, it was self-evident to take in Jewish refugees from Europe. The couple was in close contact with the Jewish help organisation HIAS which in turn had contact to Jewish refugees.



Most of the refugees came only for the meals. The family had a huge table where 10 to 12 persons could be seated.

Some of them, among them Sophie Freud and Kurt Grossmann, in addition found shelter at their home. Sophie was given the bed of one of the daughters who was getting married and Kurt became a camping bed they put up behind the piano.

#### ***Flor Coriat***



A decisive role to form a deep friendship with the young refugees was played by Flor Coriat, born in 1920. It was her who immediately integrated Sophie and Kurt into her circle of friends and by that allowed them a feeling of social integration.

Today Flor lives with her husband Raph Scemama in Paris.

## **REUNION IN HINTERBRUEHL**

***Kurt:** A family like the Coriats you will not find another one in the world! I also introduced them to my wife when I went back to visit them, and they had not forgotten about me. They welcomed me with "In the end you have come home, my son"! These are the things I can never forget about...*



**Sophie Freud**

**Raph Scemama**

**Flor Scemama**

**Kurt Grossmann**

**Fritz Koenig**

When 88year old Kurt Grossmann and 86year old Fritz Koenig meet and talk about a soccer match, when 79year old Sophie Freud and 83year old Flor Coriat arrange to meet at Albertina Square in Vienna to sit together at Burggarten, one will barely believe that 60 years have gone by since their first meeting in Casablanca. Because they show as an affection for one another, still so fresh and powerful.

At the same time one can feel exactly this intense solidarity which has endured over half a century and is still deepening.

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And it was precisely these friendships in which the vital powers, this ironic humour, and positive thinking of our protagonists get most evident and thus fascinate us.



**Flor's Circle of Friends; 1941**



**Beach close to Casablanca; 1941**

We understood that it was these friendships that became the crucially stabilizing element of our documentary film and bring to mind the essential virtues deriving from these times.



**Sophie and Flor at Burggarten; 2003**



**Kurt and Fritz at Hinterbruehl; 2003**

On top of that they prove to us the possible realization of a yearning which we all bear in us: the yearning for a lifelong friendship...

## **CURRICULUM VITAE**

***Director + Writer: Daniel Ritter***



Born 1968 in Vienna

1986 High School Diploma at RG Wenzgasse, 1130 Vienna

1986-1993 Degree in Law, Mag.Jur

1988-1991 Philosophy & Psychology Studies

1994-1995 Apprentice at Court

2000 Doctorate at Law

Student at **Filmacademy Vienna** since 1995, majoring in Screenplay & Dramaturgy

### **WRITER - FILMOGRAPHY:**

Die Wohnung [The Flat] (60 Minutes)

Nächtliches Zwischenspiel [Nightly Interlude] (15 Minutes)

Herzensverbrecher [Heart Thugs] (90 Minutes)

Blow Job (15 Minutes)

Dr.K. in Krähwinkel [Dr. K. in Kraehwinkel] (15 Minutes)

Vanitas (120 Minutes)

Der süße Irrtum [The Sweet Mistake] (90 Minutes)

### **DIRECTOR - FILMOGRAPHY:**

OHNE GELD KA MUSI [No Money - No Nothing] (Short Documentary, 10 Minutes)

NÄCHTLICHES ZWISCHENSPIEL [Nightly Interlude] (Short Feature, 15 Minutes)

AUF IN DEN KAMPF [Go in and win!] (Documentary, 35 Minutes)

BLOW JOB (Short Feature, 10 Minutes)

DER STRANDGUTSAMMLER [The Waifs Collector] (Short Documentary, 8 Minutes)

DAS TELE-SOZIALPROJEKT [The Tele-Social Project] (Interactive School Film, 30 Minutes)

WIR ENTSCHEIDEN GEMEINSAM [We decide it together] (Documentary, 35 Minutes)

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## **CONTACT**

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**Kurt and Fritz at Hinterbruehl; 2003**