

Everyone has a couch.  
Not everyone has a couch  
with a story like this.

# DIVAN

a film by  
Pearl Gluck

דייווין

**"ADVENTUROUS!  
ABSOLUTELY CHARMING!"**

-Los Angeles, NEW YORK POST

**"A WITTY  
AND PLAYFUL  
JOURNEY!"**

*Slyly ironic...a glimpse  
into the richness  
of Yiddish folklore."*

-Renee Schick, VARETY

**"SMART AND  
TOUCHING!"**

*Gluck's journey takes her  
to many strange places...  
She's looking for far  
more than furniture.  
And she finds it-  
in her own  
ingenious  
way."*

-Charles Pines,  
PALM BEACH POST





FALKA PICTURES and ZEITGEIST FILMS present DIVAN a film by PEARL GLUCK. Editor ZELMA GREENSTEIN  
Director of Photography WILLIAM TYLER SMITH. Music by BRANKO JONSON. Hair by RUSLAN KORNIA. Second Camera SERGIY DUK  
Assistant Producer ANEVA SIBIRANYI. Assistant Editors JENNE ALLEN and ADRIENNE HASPEL. Produced and Directed by PEARL GLUCK. ©ZEITGEIST FILMS 2006

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A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

# Divan

a film by Pearl Gluck

As a teenager, filmmaker Pearl Gluck left her Orthodox Jewish clan in Brooklyn for secular life in Manhattan. Many years later, Pearl's father has one wish: that she marry and return to the community. Pearl, however, takes a more creative approach to mend the breach. She travels to Hungary to retrieve a turn-of-the-century family heirloom: a couch upon which esteemed rabbis once slept. En route for the ancestral divan, Pearl encounters a colorful cast of characters who provide guidance and inspiration, including a couch exporter, her ex-communist cousin in Budapest, a pair of Hungarian-American matchmakers and a renegade group of formerly ultra-Orthodox Jews. Nimble and intensely illuminating, DIVAN is a visual parable that offers the possibility of personal reinvention and cultural re-upholstery.

USA/HUNGARY/UKRAINE/ISRAEL · 2003  
In Hungarian, Yiddish, and English, with English subtitles  
Running Time: 77 minutes

# Synopsis

DIVAN breaks the mold of Hasidic storytelling and takes an unorthodox approach to a religious icon, an ancestral divan in Hungary that illuminates both the conflict and necessity of repairing the fractured trajectory of personal history and identity. Divan is a visual parable that crosses family heritage with the possibility of culturally re-upholstering a couch.

As a renegade approach to healing a breach between herself and her father, Pearl travels from the Hasidic Jewish community of Brooklyn where she was raised to her roots in Hungary, to retrieve a turn-of-the-century family heirloom, her great-grandfather's couch upon which revered rebbes once slept. This, she hopes, will take the place of what her father really wants her to do: get married and return to the Hasidic world.

En route toward the ancestral divan, Pearl encounters a colorful cast of characters who provide guidance and inspiration, including her great aunt Malke in Boro Park, Joli the ex-communist in Budapest, Billy Bacsí the Yiddish guide to the Ukraine, Meshulem Rottenberg, the descendent of the Kossonye rebbe who slept on the couch, and the Hungarian-American matchmakers who try to connect Pearl with her soul mate.

The entire tale is framed by a chorus of men and women who sit on the couch, formerly Orthodox Jews who are actively reclaiming Jewish culture.

The five-year project was inspired on a Fulbright grant in Hungary, encouraged by the Sundance Institute, and finished on a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, and in-kind support from the Minneapolis Film and TV Board.

# Director's Statement

It was my father who gave me my first video camera in 1996 as a gift for my trip to Hungary on a Fulbright grant. Five years later we end up in an editing room together viewing footage for *Divan*, a film he does not approve of and does not want to participate in. And yet, *Divan* is at its heart a father/daughter tale – he, the unwilling protagonist, which makes me the unwilling antagonist.

In some ways, it should come as no surprise that I took up film to tell stories. The camera was always a presence in my family history, my father behind the super 8, a silent witness to both dissolution of a family and also its ultimate realignment. But, where I come from, it's not part of the norm to watch movies, let alone create them, because it is considered a diversion from a life of piety, devotion, and modesty. Hence, the paradox of my cinematic project: on the one hand, film has informed my entire life, on the other hand, it was entirely forbidden.

Indeed it was in Hungary while conducting oral histories that my Hasidic past began to haunt me. The ruptured trajectory of my own family kept returning. In awe of the ruins of the Hungarian Jewish landscape, I was forced to confront my act of leaving the Hasidic community of my youth. Ever an ethnographer, I turned the camera inward. When I finally got to my great great grandfather's house and saw the famous couch upon which the Kossony rebbe slept, I saw the medium for understanding my own complex relationship with my Hasidic legacy. The couch became a magical homage to the rebbes, a sacred memory object, and a concrete tool for a personal and communal cultural archeology. It gave me the possibility of yearning, contemplating, and reflecting on the world I left behind.

While grappling with this loaded legacy, I met other people who also left the Hasidic and ultra-Orthodox world. Their voices form a chorus, that takes this film out of the realm of the strictly autobiographical and into a larger communal narrative. By interweaving the elements of my personal story with the chorus as well as the physicality of the couch itself, I sought to create a three-layered tapestry of a post-modern Hasidic tale, embracing the elements of mystery, devotion, and joy. After a long journey across the Atlantic, the *divan* emerges from its crate, and posits no easy resolution. Instead, I see it offering the possibility of culturally re-upholstering the framework of "home vs. exile" with the richly textured fabric of engagement.

# Abbreviated Cast of Characters

My Father, Brothers and their Families	Anonymous
Museum Appraiser	Hungarian Applied Arts Museum
Kosso nye Rebbe's Grandchild	Reb Meshulem Rottenberg
Budapest Baker	Frohlich Basci with his son, the rabbi
Budapest Wigmaker	Katalin Sommer, Prof. Wig Kft.
Budapest Kosher Butcher	Deszo Kovari
Upholsterer	Leon Breuer
Lonely Planet Guidebook Writer	Steve Fallon
Hasidim in Debrecen Synagogue	Gross Brothers
Jewish Guide in the Ukraine	"Billy Basci" - Zev Goldinger
Meet-A-Mate Ladies	Eva and Sherry Singer
Men on Pilgrimage in the Ukraine	Anonymous

# Selected bios of couch chorus members

## **Amichai Lau Lavie**

Founder and creator of Storahtelling, sacred ritual theater

## **Basya Schechter**

Leads her internationally acclaimed band, Pharaoh's Daughter, a mix between Sephardic, Ashkenazic, and altogether different rhythms

## **Mark Joseph Altman**

Mark is the founder and only known practitioner of Talmudic Universalism. He is a Yiddish director and actor, and the Associate Art Director at the Folksbienne Yiddish Theater.

## **Michelle Miller**

Sings with the Stonewall Chorale & the Oratorio Society of New York and has appeared on the stages of Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center.

## **Pessy Sloan**

Dr. Pessy Sloan broke out of the Boro Park mold to journey "from GED to Ph.D." and earned her doctorate in clinical and school psychology.

## **Rosalie M. Osian**

Rosalie is studying to be a chaplain. Her father's rebbe was (mostly) Wiznitz. Her own mix of rebbes includes Abraham Joshua Heschel and Reb Joseph Soleveitchik as she works to merge the physical and spiritual to levels of great holiness.

## **Yermiyahu Ahron Taub**

Yermiyahu Ahron Taub is an English and Yiddish language poet, a Yiddish translator, and a librarian.

# About the filmmakers

**Pearl Gluck** | DIRECTOR / WRITER / PRODUCER

Ten years after leaving her native Borough Park, Brooklyn, Pearl Gluck received a Fulbright grant to collect oral histories from Yiddish speakers in areas of Hungary once home to thriving Hasidic communities. At heart, she is a zamler, Yiddish for collector, an ethnographer.

DIVAN is a Hasidic tale five years in the making and is her debut feature documentary, developed with the assistance of the Sundance Institute. Although she broke from her past, Gluck continues to draw from her rich Hasidic heritage and through her current work seeks to provide both a bridge to the past and a form of cross-communal dialogue through the arts. She was the first to receive a Yiddish Fulbright to Hungary and her work was created with the support of foundations such as New York State Council on the Arts, Eva Eastman Fund, and the National Foundation for Jewish Culture.

Gluck's video art includes Trance with sound artist Basya Schechter for the Eldridge Street Project in NYC, opening April 30, 2003, and a multimedia installation in Weimar, Germany for backup.loungelab 2002.

She co-directed the award-winning short, Great Balls of Fire (6 mins; 2001) which is a homeless man's response to September 11. The short continues to screen worldwide at venues such as Transmediale, Oberhausen, Walker Center for the Arts, New York Video Festival, and in competition at the Globalica 10th International Media Art Biennale in Wroclaw, Poland.

Gluck has spearheaded community arts programs, curated literary and film events from Hungary to Israel to New York City, and has just returned from a February artist residency at the Paideia Institute in Stockholm. As part of her ongoing commitment to educational outreach, she has appeared on numerous college and university campuses, and acted as writer/mentor at the MacArthur-granted program, The Harlem Writers Crew.

Her first involvement with documentary film was in A Life Apart: Hasidism in America (1998; Oren Rudavsky and Menachem Daum). Her appearance in the film has encouraged grass-roots organization for an ex-Orthodox creative alliance. As one reviewer of The Boston Globe wrote, "Gluck deserves a documentary of her own."

**Zelda Greenstein | EDITOR**

Zelda Greenstein has been nominated for a Cable Ace for writing and editing on *Before You Go* (HBO, 1995). In addition to working on *Divan*, she edited *90 Miles* (directed/produced by Juan Carlos Zaldivar) *Women of the Wall* (directed/produced by Faye Lederman). Her work includes *Enemy of the People* (1998; Director/Producer; Zareh Tueknavorian), *An American Love Story* (1999; Director/Producer, Jennifer Fox) and *The Quiet Revolution in Honduras* (1992). Her early work included assistant editing on *Partisans of Vilna* (1987). Greenstein is currently editing the ITVS supported documentary by Oren Rudafsky and Menachem Daum.

**William T. Smith | DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

A graduate of the UCLA School of Cinema, Smith's first feature documentary, *The Third Mind*, on The Door's keyboardist Ray Manzarek and beat poet Michael McClure, had its international premiere at the 1996 Venice Film Festival in Italy, its US Premiere at the L.A. County Museum of Art, and was broadcast on the Sundance Channel in November, 1997. In addition to directing the photography of *Divan*, Smith is currently producing and directing a documentary on the progressive Summerhill School in the U.K., founded by A.S. Neill in 1921. Under the tutelage of award-winning Hungarian director, Gyula Gazdag, Smith was camera operator on the documentary about Allen Ginsberg, *A Poet on the Lower East Side*. Smith is a UCLA graduate from the filmmaking program on a Lew Wasserman Fellowship and a Jack Sauter Award for excellence in video journalism. He received the Motion Picture Arts & Sciences Award for filmmaking achievement and was an Eastman Kodak scholarship finalist. He currently teaches at the New York Film Academy.

**Susan Korda | CO-WRITER**

Susan Korda has worked as a writer, director and editor on documentary and narrative films, including *The Sweetest Sound* (2002), *Trembling Before G-d* (2001), *One of Us* (1999), *Vienna is Different* (1989) and the Academy Award nominated *For All Mankind* (1989). She was born in New York and raised in New York and Vienna, Austria. Between 1979 and 1984 she studied at the City College of New York/Picker Film Institute. She made her first film, *Filial Dreams*, in 1983. Since then she has been working as a director and editor and been teaching at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and the International Filmschule, Cologne.



### **Andras Suranyi | ASSOCIATE PRODUCER**

Andras Suranyi is a board member of MaFilm Studio and teaches film at the Academy of Theater and Film, Budapest, and at ELTE University. He was an associate producing on *Jacob the Liar* (directed by Peter Kassowitz). His award-winning work, *Fenykepek* (Photographs for My Children; 1989) was screened in Jerusalem, New York, Edinburgh, and San Francisco. In 1992 he co-directed *Midon A Ver* (Then the Blood: Blood Libels after the Holocaust) with Sandor Simo, and Edit Koszegi, a controversial film expose on the blood libels/pogroms of 1946 in Hungary. The film showed in Berlin, Jerusalem, and Oberhausen. He is a recipient of the Fulbright Scholarship for Media Research (1991), a grant from the New York Actor's Studio and Visiting Professor at SUNY, New York.

### **Frank London | COMPOSER**

Trumpeter/ keyboardist Frank London is a member of the Klezmatics and the Hasidic New Wave and co-founder of Les Miserables Brass Band and the Klezmer Conservatory Band. His compositions for film, theater and dance include Yoshiko Chuma's *How Loud Could It Be*, Sharon Pollack's *Everything Relative*, Yvonne Rainer's *Murder*, Bruno de Almeida's *The Debt* (prize winner, Cannes Film Festival, 1993), John Sayles's *Hombres Armados* and *The Brother from Another Planet*, Tamar Rogoff's *Ivye Project*, and Chelm, California with Flying Karamozov Brother Paul Magid. London scored the Czech-American Marionette Theater's production of *The Golem*, Great Small Work's *The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln*, and the Public Theater's production of Tony Kushner's *A Dybbuk*. His latest projects are an opera/song cycle *A Night in the Old Marketplace*, and *Davenen*, a commission for the Pilobus Dance Company featuring the Klezmatics. As a trumpeter, he has performed with John Zorn, LL Cool J, Mel Torme, They Might Be Giants, David Byrne, Jane Siberry, Itzhak Perlman, Ben Folds 5, Mark Ribot, and Gal Costa. London has been featured on HBO's *Sex and the City*, the North Sea Jazz Festival and the Lincoln Center Summer Festival and over 100 CDs. His own recordings include *Nigunim* and *Zemiros* with Klezmatics' singer Lorin Sklamberg; Frank London's Klezmer Brass Allstar's *Dishikere Kapelye* (winner of the Deutsche Preis der Schallplattenkritik); *Invocations*; *The Debt*; *Shekhina*; the soundtrack CD for the film *The Shvitz*; as well as five CDs with the Hasidic New Wave and seven with the Klezmatics.

# Credits

WRITER/DIRECTOR/PRODUCER Pearl Gluck  
EDITOR Zelda Greenstein  
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY William Tyler Smith  
SECOND CAMERA Miklos Buk  
CO-WRITER Susan Korda  
COMPOSER Frank London  
HUNGARY ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS Andras Suranyi  
NEW YORK ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS Isaac Stein, Sara Goodman  
ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY Christopher Edwards, John Kirby,  
Pearl Gluck, Matthias Erdely  
POST PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR Eric Mueller  
ONLINE EDITOR Steve Reich  
POST PRODUCTION ONLINE SERVICES Splice Here  
SOUND EDITOR Tom Hambleton  
ASSISTANT SOUND EDITOR Michael Schafer, Jerry Horwath  
POST PRODUCTION SOUND AND MIX Undertone Music  
ASSISTANT EDITORS Adrienne Haspel, Jennie Allen  
POST PRODUCTION ASSISTANT Vivian Kamen  
TITLE DESIGN/ANIMATION Ed Raeker  
GRAPHICS/MAPS Reelworks, Inc.  
LEGAL SERVICES Robert Siegel, Esq.  
INTERNET/TECHNOLOGY Eric Goldhagen, interactivist.net  
Daniel Sieradski, the44.net  
PInk Candy Productions  
HUNGARIAN TRANSLATORS Peter Solymosi, Krisztina Biber  
YIDDISH SUBTITLES EDITOR Yermiyahu Ahron Taub

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