



# The Optimists

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**The Story of the Rescue of the Bulgarian Jews from the Holocaust - A film by Jacky and Lisa Comforty**

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**What can ordinary people do in a time of crisis?**

**The Story of the Rescue of the Bulgarian Jews from the Holocaust**

A film by

Jacky and Lisa Comforty

**How can individuals make a difference?**

*The Optimists* tells the story of how individuals successfully resisted a pro-Nazi regime in Bulgaria.

How were 50,000 Bulgarian Jews saved from the Holocaust despite the efforts of their government to deport them?

*The Optimists* tells the dramatic story of Christians and Muslims who, at the eleventh hour, secured the safety of their Jewish neighbors.

The documentary, by independent filmmaker Jacky Comforty, is the result of 12 years of research and production. The film was screened at numerous film festivals around the world and is winner of the Peace Prize in the Berlin International Film Festival 2001; First Prize Winner in the category of 'Documenting the Jewish Experience,' Jerusalem International Film Festival 2000; Winner of CINE Golden Eagle, 2001; and Best Documentary at the Hope and Dreams Film Festival, 2001.

*The Optimists* tells the virtually unknown story of how the fifty-thousand Jews living in Bulgaria survived the Holocaust despite intensive efforts by the Bulgarian Government to deport them to the death camps. Their rescue happened during the same time period that the Nazis and their Bulgarian allies had successfully deported the 11,500 Jews of Bulgarian-occupied Thrace and Macedonia. And yet, after waiting several hours at deportation centers, the first targeted Bulgarian

Jews were simply told to go home. Fifty-thousand people didn't die because Bulgarian Christians and Muslims found ways to protect Jews from their would-be murderers.

Individuals and organizations made a difference. Ordinary people stood up for their Jewish friends and neighbors. The church, Bulgarian Parliament members, trade unions, professional guilds, and the Jewish community itself all helped defeat the Nazis' orders for mass deportations and the Bulgarian government's attempts to comply with those orders.

By telling their unique and little-known story, *The Optimists* offers insights into how people can build bridges between communities and how they can mobilize to protect human and civil rights. The film also provides many examples of ordinary people who became real-life heroes. These people are role models and their stories are invaluable for people living today: students, educators, community leaders, activists and clergy.

This powerful documentary informs and inspires audiences of all ages and backgrounds with its blend of personal and historical narrative, and its abiding optimism about the human spirit.

More information, including frequently asked questions, reviews, audience evaluation, pictures and video excerpts are available on the web site [www.theoptimists.com](http://www.theoptimists.com).

**“Everyone is entitled to his own faith.**

No one should violate the intimate, spiritual life of another.

That’s how I think now, that’s how I have thought in the past,

and if I live any longer, that’s how I’ll think then.”

Bishop Boris Kharalampiev, the Bulgarian orthodox priest who helped stop the deportation of the Jewish citizens of his city in 1943.

### **Comments and Reviews:**

“This is a film that celebrates the human spirit. It offers hope that people of different races and religions can learn to live together in peace.”

- Leora Eren Frucht, Jerusalem Post -

“*The Optimists*” is a wonderful film. The title refers not only to a Bulgarian jazz band, but to how the audience feels after watching such a moving testament to human decency.”

- Annette Insdorf, Author of “Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust.” -

“This film teaches how commitment to justice and respect for others can triumph over oppression. A must-see for anyone learning or teaching about the Holocaust.”

- Dr. Shani Beth-Halachmy, Associate Professor, Educational Psychology, National Louis University -

“...this spellbinding documentary offers a message of inspiration and hope. *'The Optimists'* illuminates an almost forgotten chapter of history: the survival of the Sephardic Jewish population of Bulgaria thanks to the courageous opposition to SS orders to transport them to death camps. Years of exhaustive research and hundreds interviews are evident in the rich texture of this film.”

- Bruce Ingram of Pioneer Press -

'The Optimists,' as the name so aptly implies, is a celebration of the human spirit. It is a story not only about the 50,000 Jews who were slated for extermination and ultimately saved but also of the Bulgarian (non Jewish) citizens and politicians who stood in the face of Nazism to prevent what was certain deportation and death of their friends.”

- George O. Singleton of [www.reelmoviecritic.com](http://www.reelmoviecritic.com) -

“Any suspicion that Holocaust documentaries have been thoroughly exhausted is contradicted by the miraculous, sharp movie *'The Optimists.'* .... Comforty draws on haunting, evocative photographs, newsreel footage, contemporary interviews and family history in granting this astonishing story weight and resonance.”

- Patrick Z. McGavin of the Chicago Tribune -

*The Optimists* is a presentation of

Comforty Media Concepts and The Chambon Foundation

Directed by Jacky Comforty

Produced and written by Jacky and Lisa Comforty,

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Co-produced by Gail Sonnefeld and Stefan Sonnefeld

Produced and distributed by Comforty Media Concepts

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And by the generosity of many individuals.

Have the filmmaker come to your organization to present his film, answer questions and speak. To schedule screenings please call: (847) 475-0791 or write [comforty\(at\)comforty.com](mailto:comforty(at)comforty.com)

For more information visit: [www.theoptimists.com](http://www.theoptimists.com)