

“I want to contribute to the creation of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum”

Charles B. Wessler, American producer of, among others “Green Book” – a comedy drama directed by Peter Farrelly, which was awarded three Oscars and three Golden Globes, supports the creation of a permanent exhibition of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum. Especially for us, he answered a few questions.

In 1994, Wessler jumped in at the deep end of production in Hollywood with the comedy “Dumb and Dumber” by Peter and Bobby Farrelly, with whom he established a long-term cooperation. It was with the Farrelly Brothers that he produced “There’s Something About Mary” with Cameron Diaz, “Me, Myself & Irene” with Jim Carrey, “Shallow Hal” with Gwyneth Paltrow, “Stuck on You” with Matt Damon, “The Heartbreak Kid” with Ben Stiller, and “Hall Pass” with Owen Wilson. His latest production, “Green Book” with Viggo Mortensen and Mahershala Ali, brought him critical acclaim and the reputation of the Oscar producer. This movie is set in the realities of the American South – apart from the scenes taking place in New York – in the early 1960s, focuses on the relationship of a black pianist and his white chauffeur, a former club bouncer. The movie is against stereotypical thinking and intolerance, and for acceptance of one’s roots.

Charles B. Wessler family’s roots go back to eastern and western Europe. His grandparents from the mother’s and father’s side came to the United States in the years 1908 to 1918. “One grandmother comes from Belarus, the second one from Germany. Grandfather Jack came from Poland and the second grandfather from Austria,” says the producer. “Unfortunately, my grandparents wanted to forget about their past as soon as possible and did not share their memories with me before they passed away. They talked to each other in Yiddish, Russian, or German, and when I entered the room, they would quickly switch to English. Today, I regret that they did not tell me anything, but anyway they were wonderful people. Thanks to them, I am now who I am.”

Comedies help us confront difficult topics. But can all topics be treated and should be treated

comedy wise in the cinema?... “I believe that there are no prohibited topics,” Charles B. Wessler says. “The comedy relaxes, and sometimes it can also have a cathartic effect, so if only you are not cruel or vile to any group of people, if the creator does not have a laugh at someone’s expense, then I say: go ahead! A great documentary movie was made, the authors of which sought the answer to the question of whether the Holocaust can be fun. I believe that it can. However, one must be aware of the existence of a border line, the crossing of which may harm someone’s feelings. I suggest you watch Sarah Silverman performances about the Holocaust and decide for yourself if this kind of humor suits us or not.”

Charles B. Wessler has got involved in promoting the Warsaw Ghetto Museum in the United States. Is it important today, when revived and intensified anti-Semitism, racism, intolerance – also in America – to get involved in popularizing the next Holocaust museum?... “I came to the office of the Warsaw Ghetto Museum by accident. This is a really crazy story,” the producer says. “I went up to the sixth story of the building, expecting to find a museum there. It turned out, however, that it had not been created, yet. When David (Berman – the Museum’s scientific specialist) and Albert (Stankowski – the Museum’s Director) told me, with many details that I had not known before, about the Warsaw ghetto, I thought that I would like to become part of this Museum endeavor. I want the world to know about it. I believe that my participation in this project may be of importance to it. I was impressed by the commitment with which the entire team of employees strives to make it happen and I thought... that I wanted to contribute to it.”

Anna Kilian