



MAIN STREET

F I L M S



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MAIN DETAILS

English Title	WEST
Original Title	WESTEN
Genre	Fiction
Directed by	Christian Schwochow
Based on	An original novel, "Lagerfeuer" by Julia Franck
Screenplay by	Heide Schwochow
DOP	Frank Lamm
Edited by	Jens Klüber bfs
Music	Lorenz Dangel
Produced by	Karin Schlösser, Ö Filmproduktion; Thomas Kufus, zero one film; Christoph Friedel, terz Filmproduktion
Co-Produced by	Helge Sasse, Senator Film Produktion; Barbara Buhl, WDR; Stefanie Groß, SWR; Cooky Ziesche, rbb; Georg Steinert, ARTE
With Backing From	Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, FFA, DFFF, Media
German Distributor	Senator Film Verleih

TECHNICAL INFORMATION:

Format	DCP
Running Time	102'00"
Screen Ratio	1:2,35
Frames / second	24
Sound Format	DOLBY DIGITAL
Original Version	GERMAN, ENGLISH, RUSSIAN, POLISH
Subtitled Version	ENGLISH

MAIN DETAILS

TITLE:

WEST

TAGLINE:

She Can See Her Future
But Can't Escape Her Past

SYNOPSIS:

East Germany. Summer, late 70's. Three years after her boyfriend Wassilij's apparent death, Nelly Senff decides to escape from behind the Berlin wall with her son Alexej, leaving her traumatic memories and past behind. Pretending to marry a West German, she crosses the border to start a new life in the West. But soon her past starts to haunt her as the Allied Secret Service begin to question Wassilij's mysterious disappearance. Is he still alive? Was he a spy? Plagued by her past and fraught with paranoia, Nelly is forced to choose between discovering the truth about her former lover and her hopes for a better tomorrow.

FESTIVALS & PRIZES

MONTRÉAL WORLD FILM FESTIVAL

Best Actress Award for Jördis Triebel, FIPRESCI-Prize

ARRAS FILM FESTIVAL

French Critic's Prize

GERMAN FILM PRIZE

Best Actress, Jördis Triebel

NOTE TO THE PRESS



CHRISTIAN SCHWOCHOW, DIRECTOR

Between the years 1949 and 1990 roughly four million people left the GDR for West Germany. The emotional movie "WEST" by Christian Schwochow tells the story of a young mother, who together with her son leaves the GDR to try for a new beginning in the West. The film shows the interrogations conducted by the Allied secret services, which turn the Emergency Refugee Centre to a cold war location, proving once more that one cannot leave without taking along one's past.

After his sensational debut with the movie "NOVEMBER CHILD" (numerous national and international awards), his sensitive psycho drama "CRACKS IN THE SHELL" (numerous awards and festival participations) and the great success with the TV movie "THE TOWER" (six Grimme awards, a Bambi, the Golden Camera and the Bavarian TV award) director Christian Schwochow has created another powerful drama. With great personal and political power, "WEST" shows the difficulties of daring to start a new life.

DIRECTOR'S BIO

CHRISTIAN SCHWOCHOW

Christian Schwochow was born in 1978 in Bergen on the isle of Rügen (GDR). He worked as author, reporter and video journalist for German television and radio before studying at the renowned Film Academy Baden-Württemberg. In 2007, he graduated with the movie "NOVEMBER CHILD," which was a big success in cinemas and won a dozen awards. In 2011, his second long feature film "CRACKS IN THE SHELL" followed. He wrote the screenplay for both films with Heide Schwochow. In 2012, he directed the adaptation of the best-selling novel "THE TOWER" for German TV, which made him one of Germany's leading directors.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

SCRIPTWRITER

- 2011 Die Unsichtbare
Feature film
- 2008 Novemberkind
Feature film
- 2007 Terra X - Expedition ins
Unbekannte
TV Series documentary, 1 episode
- 2006 Marta und der fliegende Großvater
Feature film
- 2005 Tantalus
Short

DIRECTOR

- 2014 Bornholmer Straße
TV movie, post-production
- 2013 West
Completed
- 2012 Der Turm
TV movie
- 2008 Novemberkind
Feature film
- 2007 Terra X - Expedition ins
Unbekannte
TV Series documentary, 1 episode
- 2006 Marta und der fliegende Großvater
Feature film
- 2005 Tantalus
Short

PRINCIPAL CAST:

NELLY SENFF

Jördis Triebel



HANS PISCHKE

Alexander Scheer



ALEXEJ

Tristan Göbel



JOHN BIRD

Jacky Ido



PRINCIPAL CREW

Director	Christian Schwochow
Script	Heide Schwochow
Based on the original novel "Lagerfeuer" by Julia Franck	
Editor	Jens Klüber bfs
Director of Photography	Frank Lamm
Original Sound	Jörg Kidrowski bvft
Original Music	Lorenz Dangel
Sound Design	Rainer Heesch
Production Design	Tim Pannen
Costume Design	Kristin Schuster
Makeup Design	Wolfgang Böge BvM
Casting	Uta Seibicke
Production Manager	Andreas Jupe
Line Producer	Tassilo Aschauer
Producers	Katrin Schlösser, Ö Filmproduktion Thomas Kufus, zero one film Christoph Friedel, Terz Filmproduktion
Co-Producers	Helge Sasse, Senator Film Produktion WDR, Barbara Buhl SWR, Stefanie Groß rbb, Cooky Ziesche ARTE, Georg Steinert

BIOS OF THE KEY CAST

JÖRDIS TRIEBEL

JÖRDIS TRIEBEL was born in Berlin in 1977. She grew up in the borough of Prenzlauer Berg and studied acting at the renowned Academy for Acting "Ernst Busch" in Berlin. She appeared in movies like "EMMA'S BLISS" (2006), "WAITING FOR ANGELINA" (2009), "POPE JOAN" (2009), "DER PERFEKTE MANN" and in "WOLF CHILDREN" (both 2012). She was awarded with the Kurt-Hübner Award, the Advancement Award for German Film and the Undine Award for her achievements on stage and in the movies. She was also nominated twice for the German Film Award.

TRISTAN GÖBEL

TRISTAN GÖBEL was born in 2002. He got his first engagement at the age of only four years at the side of his elder sister in the German cine movie "A MERE FORMALITY" by Rolf Huettnner (2006). Beside his wonderful acting as Nelly's bright son Alexej in the movie "WEST," the young actor has already played several supporting and leading roles in television films and cine movies like "ROOM 205" (2010) and "GOETHE!" (2010).

ALEXANDER SCHEER

ALEXANDER SCHEER was born in 1976 in East Berlin. He was discovered by Leander Haußmann for his film "SONNENALLEE," which became Scheer's national breakthrough. He has been playing roles in countless film and television productions, including "CARLOS THE JACKAL" (Olivier Assayas), "DAS ALTER VON ELLEN" (Pia Marais) or "DREI" (Tom Tykwer). His work as an actor has been distinguished several times, including as 'Actor of the Year,' by the renowned magazine 'Theater Heute,' as well as with the 'Ulrich Wildgruber Prize' in the same category.

JACKY IDO

JACKY IDO was born in 1977, in what today is Burkina Faso. The actor appeared in movies like "THE WHITE MASAI" (2004), "AIDE-TOI ET LE CIEL T'AIDERA" (2007), "INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS" (by Quentin Tarantino) and "CES AMOURS-LÀ" (both 2009), "LOCK OUT" (2010), "RADIOSTARS" and "THE ADVENTURES OF HUCK FINN" (both 2011). In 2013, Ido acted in "SALAUD ON T'AIME" by Claude Lelouch, and he played the male leading role in the 12 part TV series "TAXI: BROOKLYN SOUTH" by Luc Besson.

INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTIAN SCHWOCHOW AND HEIDE SCHWOCHOW

Director Christian Schwochow and script writer Heide Schwochow talk about the fascination with transitory spaces, personal reasons to leave the GDR, the hope for freedom and the challenge to turn a novel into a movie.

How did you come across the novel “Lagerfeuer” by Julia Franck?

CHRISTIAN SCHWOCHOW: I stumbled over it in early 2000, when a number of books by young writers from the East were published, dealing with the times of the GDR and its aftermath. What fascinated me about “Lagerfeuer” was that it featured people who had left one life, yearning for another, yet they were somewhat stuck at a strange, transitory place. I felt this was somewhat connected to my family history.

In what way?

CHRISTIAN SCHWOCHOW: We left in 1989, when the wall had already come down, yet there was still the question if we had to go to a camp like that as well. In the end, we didn't have to, but for a few months, the three of us lived in the small living room of my grandmother's friend.

You gave the book to your mother. How did you like it, Mrs Schwochow?

HEIDE SCHWOCHOW: For me, it worked like an undertow. I also liked the idea of this transitory world. Let me compare the condition to a pregnancy: Somehow, there is a baby inside you, yet it is totally abstract. It was the same with our wish to go to the West: We didn't know what it would be like but the great yearning to go was always there.

What exactly fascinated you about the “Lagerfeuer” story?

CHRISTIAN SCHWOCHOW: This very special place: We knew that those kind of emergency camps had existed, but not what it meant to live there for such a long period of time. To me that was totally new and exciting. Also, I realized: Nobody is aware of this part of German history. Hardly anyone knows that the secret services were in those camps, interrogating people. And that the people had to more or less strip naked, before they were accepted.

HEIDE SCHWOCHOW: Before our emigration, the West was like a phantom for us. We had not looked into how the procedure of immigration actually went forth, never thought about it. Neither did we know one had to say sentences like, “I was politically persecuted.”

How did you imagine leaving and your arrival in the West?

HEIDE SCHWOCHOW: It was somewhat blurry and it was mainly the leaving that played a role in my mind – and not for political reasons only, mind you. Julia Franck managed something extraordinary in her novel: A character, who in her interrogation states that she hadn't left for political reasons, but that she “wanted to get rid of memories.” I was impressed by that. Because in the West there is only the notion that one would leave for political or economic reasons – nothing else occurred to the public mind.

CHRISTIAN SCHWOCHOW: My ideas were far more childlike. I was eleven, when we left. My school was at Falkplatz, at Prenzlauer Berg, right where the wall was. When somebody could get his hands on a

“Bravo” (teen magazine) or we could exchange some stickers for our collection – to me, that was the West. Later I thought: The moment of leaving is comparable to a separation. When you’re in a relationship, which suffocates you, you will eventually think: I want to split up. But that doesn’t necessarily mean there is already an alternative for this relationship. You don’t immediately know what kind of a new relationship you want to engage in – or what kind of life you want to live.

Those who left the GDR, had to begin a completely new life from one day to the next.

CHRISTIAN SCHWOCHOW: This is why the novel, as well as the movie, is a metaphor for many people. Emigration held a lot of hope for many, yet the new beginning turned out to be a lot harder than expected – especially on an emotional level. They entered this transitory space. Some have remained there, until today.

Did you have difficulties, settling in?

CHRISTIAN SCHWOCHOW: First, going away was more of an adventure, the yearning for a different life. I also remember, however, that it took us quite a while until we knew how to behave. For example, in school I was told: “You’ve got to be relieved to have escaped from this shitty country.” That’s when I realized that I felt different about it. Especially those first months were difficult. Sitting alone in the flat, in this small room, knowing that my parents were out of work. Dad roamed the streets like a mad man. And I found it unbearable that we had no money. I had no experience with being poor.

HEIDE SCHWOCHOW: Yet, it was actually quite easy for us, in comparison. Those, who went to the West when the wall was still up were not allowed to see their families for months, for years even. And if they couldn’t settle in there was no way to

go back, to say: It was a mistake. That would have been interpreted as a defeat by the East. That’s what it’s like for Nelly Senff and Hans Pischke in the movie. Going back was hardly an option.

Instead, Nelly tries to make it in the West – also by resisting the questions, the interrogations.

HEIDE SCHWOCHOW: Yes, in the GDR we also tried that strategy and suddenly we were expected to conform to the West. And to be grateful at the same time! But Nelly insists on her skepticism and asks: “Why should I deliver information? I was forced to give information to the Stasi and now that I’m here, I am to deliver information again? I’m not prepared to do that and that’s the end of it.” That is in fact a great attitude.

CHRISTIAN SCHWOCHOW: But it wasn’t easy to communicate this kind of attitude in the West. One day at school I tried to explain that not everybody in the East had a terrible life and the teacher said to me: “Well, why don’t you go back to your damn Honecker then?”

The film also works with overtones and ambivalence. Many questions remain unanswered for quite some time. For example, if Hans Pischke really is a Stasi snitch, or if Nelly Senff is in fact unaware of the fate of Alexejs father, Wassilij Batalow.

CHRISTIAN SCHWOCHOW: Yes, Hans Pischke is a shifty figure. He is unattached, has been living in the camp for two years now. Suddenly, he’s a suspect, Nelly even asks him: “Why are you still here?” It might be, he’s trying to befriend Alexej in order to gather information about Wassilij, yet he might actually be telling the truth. We leave many of those questions unanswered because we believe that this lack of certainty describes the interpersonal relationships of that time pretty precisely.

HEIDE SCHWOCHOW: Nelly can only see: How does this person behave as a human being. In those days, there is no proof. In the script, we worked very hard on getting this point across. Because the most interesting aspect is: Nelly can only make her first step into freedom if she learns to trust again.

Nelly's motivation is to leave things behind. To get rid of the memories.

CHRISTIAN SCHWOCHOW: And this is totally detached from the East/West issue or from other asylum stories. It is something everybody has experienced at some point in his or her life, when the time had come to decide for a completely fresh start. And I

believe that's what makes this story universal.

How long did you work on the script?

HEIDE SCHWOCHOW: All in all, three years.

Did you meet often with Julia Franck, the author of the original novel, in the context of working on the script?

HEIDE SCHWOCHOW: Yes, especially in the beginning we met often and I asked her to simply tell me a lot of stories, which she can do very beautifully and very sensually. Once, we visited the Emergency Refugee Centre in Marienfelde together. Later on I sent her the different drafts, regularly. It was very important to me that she liked the movie.