

# GOOD BYE, LENIN!

Directed by Wolfgang Becker



## A Sony Pictures Classics Release

Winner, Best European Film – Berlin Film Festival

Winner, Best Film, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Supporting Actor – 53<sup>rd</sup> German Film Awards

Winner, Best Film, Best Actor, Best Screenwriter, Best Director, Best Actress – 16<sup>th</sup> European Film Awards

2004 Sundance Film Festival – Official Selection

2004 Palm Springs International Film Festival – Official Selection

2004 Miami International Film Festival – Official Selection

2004 Portland International Film Festival – Official Selection

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### East Coast Publicity:

Falco Ink.

Shannon Treusch

Janice Roland

850 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue #1005

New York, NY 10019

212-445-7100

fax 212-445-0623

### West Coast Publicity:

Block Korenbrot PR

Mark Roper

8271 Melrose Ave

Suite 200

Los Angeles, CA 90046

323-655-0593

fax 323-655-7302

### Distributor:

Sony Pictures Classics

Carmelo Pirrone

Angela Gresham

550 Madison Avenue, 8<sup>th</sup> fl.

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212-833-8833

fax 212-833-8844

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## *Cast*

Alex	Daniel Brühl
Alex's Mother (Christiane Kerner)	Katrin Sass
Lara	Chulpan Khamatova
Ariane	Maria Simon
Denis	Florian Lukas
Rainer	Alexander Beyer
Alex's Father (Robert Kerner)	Burghart Klaussner
Mrs. Schäfer	Franziska Troegner
Principal Dr. Klapprath	Michael Gwisdek

## *Crew*

Director	Wolfgang Becker
Screenplay	Bernd Lichtenberg
Co-Writer	Wolfgang Becker
Producer	Stefan Arndt
Commissioning Editor	Katja De Bock, WDR
Commissioning Editor	Andreas Schreitmüller
Director of Photography	Martin Kukula
Assistant to DP	Mattias Ganghoffer
Original Sound	Wolfgang Schukrafft
Set Design	Lothar Hollar
Make-up Artists	Lena Lazzorotto, Björn Rehbein
Costume Design	Aenne Plaumann
Original Music	Yann Tiersen

## *Synopsis*

October, 1989 was a bad time to fall into a coma if you lived in East Germany – and this is precisely what happens to Alex’s proudly socialist mother. Alex has a big problem on his hands when she suddenly awakens eight months later. Her heart is so weak that any shock might kill her. And what could be more shocking than the fall of the Berlin Wall and the triumph of capitalism in her beloved East Germany? To save his mother, Alex transforms the family apartment into an island of the past, a kind of socialist-era museum where his mother is lovingly duped into believing that nothing has changed. What begins as a little white lie turns into a major scam as Alex’s sister and selected neighbors are recruited to maintain the elaborate ruse – and keep her believing that Lenin really did win after all!

Five years after his award-winning *Das Leben ist Eine Baustelle (Life is All You Get)*, filmmaker Wolfgang Becker presents GOOD BYE, LENIN! Fast and funny, intriguing and touching, Becker tells a story that is as unique as it irresistible, an alternative history to that of the recent German past: a human story of the reunification not only of an entire nation, but of a family living in East Berlin. Cast as the two leads are performers who have each won the German Film Award, Daniel Brühl (*Das Weisse Rauchen [The White Noise]*, *Schule [No More School]*) and Katrin Sass (*Heidi M.*). They are wonderfully supported by Russian actress Chulpan Khamatova (*Luna Papa, Tuvalu*), newcomer Maria Simon, Alexander Beyer (*Sonneallee [Sun Alley]*) and Florian Lukas (*Absolute Giganten [Gigantic]*). GOOD BYE, LENIN! also features original music by the French composer Yann Tiersen (*Amelie, The Dreamlife of Angels*).

## *Comments From the Director – Wolfgang Becker*

### *AN IMPORTANT CHAPTER OF GERMAN HISTORY*

I was fascinated by the idea of a son trying to save his mother's life, trying to keep death at bay with a lie and getting more and more entangled in his lie about an East Germany that no longer exists, and that he wants to make his mother continue to believe in. This is something that's universal and could be totally separated from this specific past, this whole East German story and the fall of the Wall and reunification. I was excited by the idea of combining both aspects and relating an important chapter of German history as well, or least having it as a background. That's what's so wonderful about this topic. It's a slice of German history, but it's told incidentally and not placed in the forefront of the story.

### *ACTOR DANIEL BRÜHL*

I wanted people to believe in Daniel Brühl's character, and to believe that he does this without having analyzed everything beforehand. And Daniel portrays this fantastically, because he is simply a very emotional actor. Not for one second do I have any doubts about him, or why he does all of this for his mother. He makes it seem totally compelling that at the very moment in which he could actually be taking concrete steps toward the future - he's just fallen in love, has so many options to choose from, it's a wonderful summer of change - he suddenly moves in a different direction, namely backwards, to rebuild what everyone else is merrily leaving behind. Daniel brings just the right warmth and emotional component to the role, which makes you immediately forget why he goes through this for his mother.

### *ACTRESS KATRIN SASS*

When I think of Katrin Sass, I immediately think of her naturalness and the naturalness of her speech; of the way she has of relying on few means and never even coming close to overacting. To me, film is also always a cinema of the eyes, and her eyes are just perfect, which is something you don't encounter too often.

### *ON THE CHARACTER OF THE MOTHER*

I would definitely not call her a hard-line socialist. I would describe her rather as a woman with a classical helper's syndrome, a type that exists in other social systems as well. There is nothing typically former East German-like here. She's a woman who takes great enjoyment in helping others, and even feels a certain obligation to do so. She's a woman who lives in a country without alternatives. She just can't go anywhere else.

### *THE NARRATIVE QUALITY OF PROPS*

Certain details are important to me, for example, the narrative quality of props, the idea that certain props have to be just right and that you just can't deal arbitrarily with certain chronological developments determined by events such as the monetary union and the fall of the Wall.

### *A WEST GERMAN TAKING ON AN EAST GERMAN TOPIC*

I grew up in the West but I've been living in Berlin for a long time now. I knew East Germany and East Berlin, but naturally I've never personally - with my senses - experienced what it was like to grow up in that country, to have spent my childhood or youth there, to have lived through the fall of the Wall and to have finally tasted this feeling of being free, of freedom in the sense of freedom to travel or of civil rights.

We met many people who were around 20 at the time of the fall of the Wall. We had them tell us what they experienced back then. These stories were all very different, sometimes even conflicting. We didn't incorporate this into the script or the film, neither through a dialogue or a scene, but it did give both of us a sense of security while we were writing the screenplay, and to me while directing. It gave us the feeling that the story we're telling is solid and consistent.

### *USE OF EXISTING ARCHIVAL NEWS MATERIAL*

What's interesting here is that we didn't even shoot one single new frame for this. All we had to do was take the existing archival material and put it in a different context. You can see how quickly you can fake things with pictures and a slightly altered commentary -- which makes you doubt whether the pictures were already completely truthful in their original context, and how much truth is to be found in pictures to begin with.

### *ON COMEDY*

I didn't want GOOD BYE, LENIN! to be farcical. Everyone feels differently about how far comedy - in the best sense of the word - can go, and about the point when it tips over into slapstick and foolishness. I feel that you have real comedy when the characters that make us laugh don't feel at all like laughing themselves -- the last thing we'd want is to switch lives with them. We're quite happy that they're the ones who are going through all this, and that we can just sit back and watch and be glad we're not the ones to have to experience it. A good comedy always has a very serious basis.

### *TRAGICOMIC ELEMENT*

I am still always moved by the scene in which Ariane tells her brother in the bathroom that she saw their father, that she recognized his voice - and we see the scene simultaneously in the form of a little flashback. When her brother asks her, "What did you say to him?" and she replies: "Enjoy your meal and thank you for choosing Burger King" - there's something profoundly tragicomic about this.

### *BAD LUCK ON THE SET*

The cottage that the family hadn't been to in ten years obviously had to look overgrown with weeds. But you can't find a cottage that's both photogenic and that's been covered with weeds for ten years. So you start two months earlier by having a landscape gardener plant weeds found somewhere else. In our first attempt to shoot there, it rained - but we

needed a beautiful late summer day. The second time we had the problem that a horde of wild boars had rampaged in the garden the night before and trampled down everything we had planted. Something like this happened every day.

And this is what's terrifying for a director: you can't give up. You've reached a certain level of quality every day, at a certain time of the day, and you owe this to the wonderful actors and team. You just can't say, "We've had so much bad luck and so many misfortunes, let's just give up taking all this so seriously." The film would suffer a loss of quality at precisely this moment of the production. You have to be very persistent and steadfast, and to insist on maintaining this level of quality.

### *X FILME*

There's a great feeling of partnership here. We're not on two sides of the table, where the producer fights with the director and the director fights with the producer: we're all in the same boat. Obviously, there are still differences of opinion, even considerable ones. But I feel that this virulence, this need of always having to fight, of always having to define oneself anew and reinvent oneself, is the reason why X Filme has been in business for so long. I feel that the variety among the directors who work there - the founding directors - as well as these eternal processes of change and reinvention, is what keeps the shop running.

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## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

### **WOLFGANG BECKER / Director, Co-writer**

Wolfgang Becker was born in Hemer in North Rhine, Westphalia In 1954. After graduating from high school, he studied German and American history and literature at the Free University in Berlin. He then studied at the German Film and Television Academy (dffb). He first aroused attention with his graduating film, *Schmetterlinge* (*Butterflies*). The adaptation of a short story by the British author Ian McEwan won the Student Film Award (Oscar for the best student film) in Hollywood, the Golden Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival as well as the Saarland Premier Award at the Max Ophüls Festival in 1988.

Following a widely praised episode of the television series "Tatort" ("Scene of the Crime") in 1991, Becker directed an admired television film, *Kinderspiele* (*Child's Play*), which was later distributed to cinemas. The first film Becker directed for X Filme Creative Pool GmbH, which he co-founded, was the box-office success *Das Leben ist eine Baustelle* (*Life Is All You Get*, 1997) starring Jurgen Vogel and Christiane Paul.

### **STEFAN ARNDT / Producer**

Stefan Arndt was born in Munich in 1961. With Tom Tykwer, Dani Levy and Wolfgang Becker, he is a founder and partner of the X Filme Creative Pool, and has acted as a producer for the cooperative's films. It was in this capacity that he was involved in the development of Dani Levy's *Stille Nacht* (1995), *Meschugge* (*The Giraffe*, 1998) and *Väter* (*Fathers*, 2002); Wolfgang Becker's *Das Leben ist eine Baustelle* (*Life is All You Get*, 1997); Sebastian Schipper's *Absolute Giganten* (*Gigantic*, 1999); Horst J. Sczerba's *Herz* (*Heart*, 2001); and Tom Tykwer's *Winterschläfer* (*Winter Sleepers*, 1997), *Lola Rennt* (*Run Lola Run*, 1998), *Der Krieger und die Kaiserin* (*The Warrior and the Princess*, 2000) and *Heaven* (2002). Stefan Arndt is currently producing *Die Liebe in Gedanken* (*Love in Mind*, directed by Achim von Borries) and *Lautlos* (*Without a Sound*, directed by Mennen Yapó).

In 1984, the self-educated producer was a co-founder of the Sputnik Kino Kollektiv in Berlin, and in 1992, he took on the management of Sputnik Film. That same year, he founded Liebesfilm, a production company, with Tom Tykwer, which produced Tykwer's directorial debut, *Die Tödliche Maria* (*Deadly Maria*), one year later.

### **MARTIN KUKULA / Director of Photography**

MARTIN KUKULA is Wolfgang Becker's long-time cinematographer. He has lensed all of the director's projects so far: *Schmetterlinge* (*Butterflies*, 1987), the television program "Tatort" ("Scene Of The Crime"), *Kinderspiele* (*Child's Play*, 1992) and *Das Leben ist*

*eine Baustelle* (*Life Is All You Get*, 1997). For his work on the each of the last two films, Kukula received the German Camera Award.

Among Kukula's other works are Sabine Eckhard's *Porträt Inge Morath* (*Portrait of Inge Morath*, 1991), Lienhard Wawrzyn's *Der Blaue* (*The Blue One*, 1994), Hermine Huntgeburth's *Das Trio* (*The Trio*, 1997) and M.X. Oberg's *Ein Todsicheres Geschäft* [1999]. Kukula shot several episodes of the series "Stadtindianer" ("City Indians") for ZDF. He was also the cameraman for Uwe Janson's "Lauras Entscheidung" ["Laura's Decision"], "Nur der Sieg zählt" ("Only Victory Counts") and "Der rote Engel" ("The Red Angel"). His most recent works for television are "Babykram ist Mannnersäche" ("Baby Stuff is a Man's Job"), "Halt mich fest" ("Hold Me Tight), "Gnadenlose Braüte" ("Merciless Brides"), "Der Mann von nebenan" ["The Man Next Door"), "Pommery and Putenbrust" ("Pommery and Turkey Breast") and "Die Frau auf dem Baum" ["The Woman in the Tree").

### **PETER R. ADAM / Editor**

Ever since he began his career in 1981 as a sound man for Roland Emmerich's *Das Arche Noah Prinzip* (*The Noah's Ark Principle*), Peter R. Adam has edited both images and sound for countless national and international feature film productions, as well as for music videos, television commercials and film trailers. In 1998, he received the German Film Award for editing Joseph Vilsmayer's *Comedian Harmonists*. Born in 1957 in Pirmasens, he currently lives In Munich.

## **BERND LICHTENBERG / Screenplay**

Bernd Lichtenberg was born in Leverkusen in 1966 and grew up in Bergisch Gladbach. In school, he gathered journalistic experience, writing features and reports for WDR radio. After graduating from high school, he studied philosophy and theology, first in Cologne and Bonn, then in Berlin. He had an engagement at the Theater in Mühlheim an der Ruhr. He came to film via an internship at the TV and radio station Sender Freies Berlin and, in 1991 and 1992, participated in the Screenwriting Workshop in Munich. Bernd Lichtenberg completed his film studies from 1992 to 1995 at the Art Academy for Media in Cologne and, in 1995, won the North Rhine Westphalia Culture Ministry Screenwriting Award. He has been working as a freelance screenwriter ever since.

In 1997, he himself directed a short film he wrote: *Déjà vu* is a chamber piece with Katrin Sell and Wolfgang Winkler. Bernd Lichtenberg lives in Cologne and Berlin.

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## ABOUT THE CAST

### **DANIEL BRÜHL / Alex**

Without a doubt, Daniel Brühl is a rising star among German actors. For his extraordinary performances in *Nichts Bereuen (No Regrets)*, *Vaya con Dios*, and *Das weiße Rauschen (The White Noise)*, he was awarded the 2001 German Film Award as Best Actor. Brühl found fame with *Schule (No More School, 2000)*. He also acted in Züli Aladag's boxing drama *Elefantenherz (2002)*. He's most recently acted in the X Filme production *Die Liebe in Gedanken*, directed by Achim von Borries.

Daniel Brühl's first appeared in 1995 in *Der Pakt (The Agreement)*; later roles include *Blutiger Ernst (Bloody Serious, 1997)*, *Schlaraffenland (1998)*, Vanessa Jopp's *Honolulu* and Shed Elwood's *Deeply (1999)*.

### **KATRIN SASS / Alex's mother (Christiane Kerner)**

Honored with the German Film Award for Best Actress for her amazing performance in the X Filme production *Heidi M. (2001)*, Katrin Sass has been celebrating a marvelous comeback. Born in Schwerin in 1958, she was one of the most popular actresses in East Germany, having performed in some of the most significant DEFA films. With her debut in the marital drama *Bis dass der tod euch Scheidet (1979)*, she immediately became one of the nation's most sought after character actresses.

Sass then appeared in such films such as *Die Verlobte (1980)*, *Bürgerschaft für ein Jahr (1981, Silver Bear Award at Berlinale)*, *Das Haus am Fluss (1984)*, and *Heute Sterben immer nur die Anderen (1989)*. Along with her roles in film and television, she also enjoyed steady engagements at theaters in Frankfurt/Oder, Halle and Leipzig.

Following reunification, she could primarily be seen in ARD and ZDF television productions, as well as in television films such as "Sperling and der brennende Arm" ("Sperling and the Burning Arm"), for which, along with "Ein Mann stürzt ab" ["A Man Fails"], she won a German Television Award for Best Supporting Actress. She was also part of the ensemble in the 13-part television series "Klemperer: A Life in Germany." In Janek Rieke's feature *Härtetest (The Hardship Test, 1997)*, Katrin Sass, after a long absence, was finally able to display her broad range in a feature film once again.

### **CHULPAN KHAMATOVA / Lara**

The breakthrough for Russian actress CHULPAN KHAMATOVA came with her role in Bakhijr Khudoinasarov's *Luna Papa (1998)*, co-starring Moritz Bleibtreu. For her remarkable performance, she was named Best Actress at the Festival du Cinema Russo à Honfleur in 2000. She then won the same award the following year for her role in *Tuvalu (1999)*. Chulpan Khamatova has since taken on roles in Achim von Borrie's *England! (2000)* and in the comedy *Viktor Vogel -Commercial Man (Advertising Rules!, 2001)*. She has played in such Russian films as *Der Tanz der Zeit (1996)*, *Die Tür (1996)*, *Land*

*of the Deaf* (1997), *Das Alte Lied* (1997), as well as, more recently, Andrei Fetning's *Weihnachts-abenteuer* (1999) and *Operation of the Condemned* (2001), directed by Alexander Muratov. In the theater, Khamatova has appeared at the Sovremnik Theater in Moscow and has worked with directors such as Galina Wolcek and Aleksei Borodin.

### **MARIA SIMON / Ariane**

GOOD BYE, LENIN! is Maria Simon's third feature film. She was previously the lead in Judith Kennel's *Zornige Küsse* (1999) which netted her the award for Best Actress at the Moscow Film Festival; she also won the Moscow Film Festival's First Steps Award in 2002 for her performance in *Erste Ehe*, directed by Isabelle Stever.

Simon, who graduated from the Ernst Busch School of Acting, is primarily known for her work in television. Since the late 1990s, she has appeared in TV movies such as "Auf eigene Gefahr" ("At Your Own Risk"), "Zielfahnder" ("Goal Searcher"), "Mein langsames Leben" ("My Slow Life"), "Love Me Tender," "Jonathans Liebe" ("Jonathan's Love"), and "Die Tränen meiner Mutter" ("My Mother's Tears"), as well as in series such as "Jenny Berlin", "Balko" and "Tatort" ("Scene of the Crime").

### **ALEXANDER BEYER / Rainer**

Born in 1973, Alexander Bayer grew up in a family of violin makers in Thuringia. Even as a child, he appeared in productions of Russian fairy tales in the old opera house in Erfurt. After graduating from high school, he moved to Berlin to study at the Ernst Busch School of Acting. During his second year, he broke away mid-term to concentrate on film. A number of film roles followed his debut in Frank Bayer's *Der Hauptmann von Kopenick* (*The Captain Of Kopenick*). He drew attention with his performance in *Sonnenallee* (*Sun Alley*). Volker Schlöndorff asked Alexander to act in his Red Army Faction drama *Die Stille nach dem Schuss* (*LEGEND OF RITA*), which won several awards at the Berlinale in 2000. He played the lead in *Gregors Grösste Erfindung*, a short film directed by Johannes Kiefer, the only German film to be nominated for an Oscar in 2002.

Television audiences know Alexander Bayer from "Schimanski muss leiden" ("Schimanski Must Suffer"), "Tatort" ("Scene of the Crime"), Bella Block's "Bitterer Verdacht" ("Bitter Suspicion"), the TV epic "Liebesau - Die andere Heimat" ("Liebesau - The Other Homeland"), and the comedy "Die Hunde sind schuld" ("It's the Dogs' Fault").

In August 2002, Alexander Bayer was invited to the Locarno Film Festival with the film *Sophiiiiie!* By then, he'd already finished shooting the feature films *Eierdiebe* (*Egg Thieves*), directed by Robert Schwentke, and *Halbe Miete* (*Half The Rent*), produced by Wim Wenders. He is currently shooting in Salzburg alongside Barbara Sukowa in the melodrama *Hierankl*. Alexander Bayer lives in Zurich and Berlin.

### **FLORIAN LUKAS / Denis**

Besides several television appearances, Florian Lukas began his screen career in films such as the Hypo Award-winner *Ex* (1995), *Härtetest* (*The Hardship Test*, 1996), *Dazlak* (1997). He reached a broader audience for the first time acting alongside Benno Fürmann in Til Schweiger's laconic thriller *Der Eisbar* (1998). Lukas then appeared in Sonke Wortmann's ensemble drama *St. Pauli Nacht* (1998) and Sebastian Schipper's debut *Absolute Giganten* (*Gigantic*, 1999) - both films brought him a Bavarian Film Awards as Best Newcomer; he also won a New Faces Award at the International Film Festival in Sochi. Otto Alexander Jahrreis's *Zoom* (2000) followed, as did a role in Dennis Gansel's comedy hit *Mädchen, Mädchen* (2001). He is currently working with Fabian Busch and director Hendrik Handloegten on *Liegen Lernen*, a film version of the bestseller and another X Films Creative Pool production.

### **MICHAEL GWISDEK / Principal Dr. Klapprath**

Michael Gwisdek is one of the most widely renowned actors and directors currently working in German film. His greatest triumph to date has been his performance as the overworked and crotchety manager in Andreas Dresen's *Nachtgestalten* (*Night Shapes*,

1998), which brought him a Silver Bear for Best Actor at the Berlinale in 1999. He has most recently been seen in *Freunde* (*FRIENDS*, 2000) and *Vaya Con Dios* (2002).

Gwisdek was born in Berlin in 1942. He began his career studying directing via distance learning at the Leipzig Theater Institute. After various engagements at theaters in East Germany, he was first seen on the screen in a supporting role as a cowboy in the DEFA American Indian film *Spur Des Falken* in 1968. Gwisdek was one of the few actors in the 1970s and 80s who also worked with West German directors (among them, Bernhard Wicki and Hark Bohm). In 1988, he debuted as a director with *Treffen In Travers*. The film propelled him to international acclaim, and since then, Michael Gwisdek has been working both in front of and behind the camera.