



presents



JULIA JENTSCH

A FILM BY ANNE ZOHRA BERRACHED

BJARNE MÄDEL

# 24 WEEKS

BETA CINEMA presents ZERO ONE FILM production CO PRODUCTION ZDF / DAS KLEINE FERNSEHSPIEL AND FILM AKADEMIE BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG JULIA JENTSCH BJARNE MÄDEL JOHANNA GASTDORF EMILIA PIECKE MARIA DRABUS KATRINA PLUCHETTA SABINE WOLF  
CONTRIBUTOR NINA HAHN KATHARINA KRISCHKE HANNAH WESENBERG MUSIC ANNETTE KAMONT COSTUME DESIGN BETTINA WERNER DIRECTOR ANNA SCHIMMEL BAUER FABIAN REBEK EDITOR ALJOSCHA HÄUPT PROPS DESIGN MARC FRANSTEIN PROPS DESIGN JASMIN REUTER STYLING DENIS DARAHAN  
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY FRIDJE GLAUSZ PROPS DESIGN VON DER HEYDE PRODUCED BY TOBIAS BÜHLER AND THOMAS KUFUS WRITTEN BY CARL GERBER AND ANNE ZOHRA BERRACHED DIRECTED BY ANNE ZOHRA BERRACHED

zeroone film

Das kleine  
Fernsehspiel

FILM AKADEMIE  
BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG

MDR

MAMZ

FESTIVAL DE CANNES

german films

BETA CINEMA



# 24 WEEKS

Written and directed by  
**Anne Zohra Berrached**

Starring  
**Julia Jentsch, Bjarne Maedel, Johanna Gastdorf,  
Emilia Pieske**

Produced by  
**zero one film in co-production with ZDF / Das kleine Fernsehspiel and  
Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg**

Producer  
**Thomas Kufus, Melanie Berke and Tobias Buechner**

Supported by  
**MDM Mitteldeutsche Medienförderung and Caligari Preis 2014**



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For further information:

Beta Cinema Press, Dorothee Stoewahse, Tel: + 49 89 67 34 69 15, Mobile: + 49 170 63 84 627

[press@betafilm.com](mailto:press@betafilm.com), [www.betacinema.com](http://www.betacinema.com).

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## CAST

Julia Jentsch  
Bjarne Maedel  
Johanna Gastdorf  
Emilia Pieske

Astrid  
Markus  
Astrid's mother  
Daughter

## CREW

Directed by  
Screenplay  
Producer  
Director of Photography  
Casting  
Executive Producer  
Production Manager  
Edited by  
Music  
Sound  
Set Design  
Costumes

Anne Zohra Berrached  
Carl Gerber and Anne Zohra Berrached  
Melanie Berke, Tobias Buechner, Thomas Kufus  
Friede Clausz  
Nina Haun, Katharina Krischker  
Johannes Jancke, Tobias Ebner  
Soeren von der Heyde  
Denys Darahan  
Jasmin Reuter  
Marc Fragstein  
Janina Schimmelbauer and Fabian Reber  
Bettina Werner

## TECHNICAL DATA

Germany 2016  
Running Time: 102'  
Format: DCP  
Screen ratio: 1:2.39 (Cinemascope)  
Frames / second: 24  
Sound Format Dolby Surround 5.1

## LOGLINE

Cabaret performer Astrid is six months pregnant when she learns that her unborn child will be severely disabled. She and her husband have little time to take a decision of enormous significance.

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## SYNOPSIS

24 WEEKS tells the story of cabaret performer Astrid (Julia Jentsch), who six months pregnant learns that her unborn child will be severely disabled. She and her husband Marcus (Bjarne Maedel) have a choice, but little time... A strong nature with a witty answer to everything, Astrid now feels lost, on her own, impossible to continue her comedy routine. Ultimately only she who is bearing the child can take this weighty decision. What will she do? Who decides whether the child will have a life worth living?

## LONG SYNOPSIS

On the stage and in the spotlight, Astrid lives and loves her job as a stand-up comedian, devoting herself completely to her work, while Markus, her husband and manager, calmly and ably supports her. However, when the couple is expecting their second child, their otherwise so regular and well-ordered life is thrown off course after a routine exam reveals trisomy 21. At first neither of them knows how to cope, but they eventually decide together in favor of a life with Down's Syndrome. Drawing on the same strength that helped them take control of their daily life working with the public, the future parents start preparing for life with a disabled child. They are unfazed when their friends and relatives react with bewilderment and helplessness. Soon the diagnosis is no longer frightening, and they start looking forward again to the birth of their child.

But when during the six month of pregnancy, another exam reveals the full extent of the disability, this news hits the parents much harder, and their courage and optimism comes very close to folding like a house of cards.

Here again, Astrid and Markus want to take every decision together, and again they want to find a way to make things work. But the prognosis is now much more complicated. They suddenly find themselves faced with a moral conflict, having to decide between bringing a severely handicapped child into the world and ending the pregnancy in the sixth month. Racing from one diagnosis and one piece of advice to another, their opinions now diverge. Who can know whether the child is really going to suffer, and whether its life will be worth living? While they are searching for the right answer, everything is called into question – their relationship, their desire for a child, and a life according to plan. With medical professionals, statistics, and prognoses around her on every side, Astrid realizes that since she is bearing the child, she is ultimately the only one who can make the decision.

## DIRECTORS NOTE by Anne Zohra Berrached

In form and content like a collage with its own rules, a collage between fiction and reality assembled out of research and statistics, facts and prognoses, desires and realities – this is how I would characterize our film 24 WEEKS.

In 24 WEEKS I describe the conflict of a woman confronted with an extreme situation: she must choose between life and death for her unborn child. The film is neither for or against abortion, but

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portrays a situation where taking a strong stand is the only option left. In the film I permit reality and fiction to merge with one another. Cabaret performer ASTRID, played by Julia Jentsch, is a fictional personality. But her fate, and the system she has to work her way through, are not.

In Germany it is possible to abort a sick or handicapped child shortly before childbirth. I read this about three years ago in a magazine article and then started researching.

When their child has been diagnosed with an abnormality, over 90% of German women abort after the 12th week. Is it right that parents are able to decide against a life that they aren't up to facing – out of lack of time, money, or energy – or does this amount to legal murder? Our continually advancing technical progress makes it possible to monitor the fetus before birth with ever greater precision. The moment prenatal diagnosis reveals an abnormality in the unborn child; a medical indication can be given for abortion, provided the mother feels she is physically and mentally unable to carry the pregnancy to term. Practically speaking, it looks like this: a prenatal diagnostician asks the mother whether she can picture herself having the child or not. The parents must decide whether their embryo's life is worth living. "Fate" becomes a legal, ethical, and philosophical question. They have the choice – between life and death. What they don't have is the choice to escape from this decision. Starting with around the 24th week of pregnancy, the child is capable of surviving outside the womb. In order to not have the child at this late stage of pregnancy, it has to be killed before it is born with a potassium chloride shot.

The woman carries the child in her womb. This means that legally speaking, she is the only one who can decide in favor of an abortion, but it also means that the "guilt" that comes along with this decision is clearly her affair as well. She is the only one who can answer this moral question for herself. Many generations of women before us fought hard to obtain the right to abortion, to self-determination with regard to their own bodies. It is an integral part of our definition of women as independent, enjoying equal rights, and able to freely shape their own lives. However, equal rights do not help us in a moral dilemma. I am interested in moral conflict as the consequence of our modern medical world. We need to assure ourselves again and again and continually defend what we have attained. We need to insist that what is happening is not just what is technically possible, but what we actually want. 24 WEEKS confronts viewers with a question that each one of us can only answer for ourselves.

After I spent several hours interviewing a couple that made the decision to abort in the 26th week, it seemed to me that working on a purely fictional basis would be too trivial. I set out with a tape recorder and visited doctors, midwives, and various establishments. Astrid's and Markus' story was then created together with author Carl Gerber out of the recorded interviews. Dialogues and even entire scenes reported to me were transferred from the reality of the tape recordings to the fiction of my interpretation while writing the script.

Things were going to be difficult for Astrid – as difficult as they had been for the women I spoke to. My protagonist has a job she loves, a husband who really wants the child, and a '68 generation mother who wants to protect her daughter. And their first child, nine-year-old daughter Nele, is always in sight – a symbol for what the unborn baby could become. With such a controversial subject, it seemed to me extremely important – more than in other dramas – for the viewers to identify with the protagonist, even if they might choose differently from her, and for them to feel strong empathy and go along with her story. Thanks to her emotional intensity, Julia Jentsch is

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perfect for this role. I combined her acting with the reality of my investigations. The doctors giving her advice in the film are real medical specialists. After I spent over six months searching with my assistants, we managed to find an obstetrician who actually performs late terminations and was also willing to do one in 24 WEEKS. Fearing discrimination, he appeared on the condition that his face not be filmed. Julia Jentsch participates in the German cabaret scene with its actual programs (Ladies Night, 3satfestival, and Nuhr im Ersten) and protagonists (like Dieter Nuhr, Gerburg Jahnke, and Sebastian Pufpaff), and does radio interviews with Thomas Koschwitz on 89.0 RTL.

It was important to me to portray the powerful bond between mother and child using real footage. A fetal surgeon, whose daily life is operating on unborn children in their mothers' womb, provided us with HD endoscopic images of the fetus in a mother's womb. According to our research, these unique images from the operations have never before been shown on a movie screen in HD quality. While filming, my main goal was to allow the professional and amateur acting to become invisible, real, and authentic. For me and my crew, everything else was subordinated to this goal. I didn't do any rehearsing with either the actors or amateurs directly prior to the shooting, since the freshness of the initial moment is often what interests me most. Preparation was a key component in order to allow the actor this kind of freedom. We had preliminary meetings where we discussed and practiced their character's profile, inner processes, views, and mindset. We "tested out" their attitude, demeanor, and physical appearance in scenes outside the film (for example in everyday family situations). During the shooting we followed the script, but also every impulse and every spontaneous idea for improvisation that came to us. It was important to me that the actors never speak the dialogue the way it is written in the script. My idea was for them to talk in their own language, to be themselves. This way of working has an impact on every department. In order to allow the people to move around freely in space, cameraman Friede Clausz and chief lighting technician Annegret Luitjens did 360 degree lighting for the filming locations. Set designers Janina Schimmelbauer and Fabian Reber created a furnished home that the actors could settle into before shooting began. Places they didn't enter before the scenes took place were not entered beforehand. People they never met before were not met prior to the filming. Everything was permitted; resulting in a huge collection of material; Editor Denys Darahan and I puzzled all this together during the editing phase to make something new.

The intention was for 24 WEEKS, with all its intensity and severity, to allow itself to speak openly. I try to tell a story directly, with momentum and meticulous precision, since in the final analysis; this is also part of reality. I saw the script as a sketch, as the starting point for everything, the empty shell that the actors and I would fill during the production. I am interested in those moments that are real and true, where something starts happening with the amateurs and actors, where they become electrified, instinctive, and even primitive. I feed them with surprises the moment things start getting comfortable for them, or when I feel something is bland and unusable for our film.

Finally, our film portrays the field of tension where not just families, but also lawmakers need to take a stand. It confronts the woman's right to self-determination with the unborn child's right to life. Astrid is a strong woman who has an answer for everything. Just like the women I got to know during my investigations, I throw her into a situation where there is no longer any clear answer. I am hoping that in the movie theater, the viewers who have decided to be against abortion will also follow this woman emotionally, who do exactly the thing they perhaps vilify. It is an extreme situation that leads to an extreme decision. In my experience, most women decide differently from the way

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they predicted in advance, before being in the actual situation. This fact interests me because, as midwife Yvonne says to Astrid before the abortion, “We can only make this decision when we have to make it.” Astrid and Markus go from one doctor to the next, from one exam to the next, are caught up in a kind of machinery, a system. They make their way through this apparatus built by the state, and are still alone, since no one can make this difficult decision for them. Astrid sometimes looks us, the audience, in the eyes – she looks at us and asks: What would you do? 24 WEEKS: a collage.

## THEMATIC BACKGROUND

### Abortion in Germany

Termination of pregnancy is illegal in Germany, but not punishable under certain conditions (§ 218 a Abs.1, § 219 StGB). If the woman opts for the so-called consultation arrangement, it is possible to terminate the pregnancy within twelve weeks of conception.

An abortion after the 12th week of pregnancy is only legal when there is a medical (medico-social) or criminological indication. Under these conditions, the pregnancy can be terminated up to the moment of birth. A medical indication is possible when the pregnant woman's life might be endangered, or when she runs the risk of a serious impairment of her bodily or emotional health (Source: German Federal Ministry for Family, Senior Citizens, Women, and Young People). It is assumed that if the child will be born with abnormalities, this could have such an impact on the expectant mother's life. It is thus possible to legally terminate the pregnancy in these cases. In the laws only “the pregnant woman” is mentioned; she is the one carrying the child, and she is the only one who can make the decision.

A late-term abortion is generally spoken of when the pregnancy is terminated after the 22nd week.

### In Practice

The number of late-term abortions in Germany has been rising annually (between 2007 and 2014, there has been an increase of 255%. Source: German Federal Statistical Office). This is partly due to scientific progress: continually improving diagnostic procedures provide parents with apparent security. Such invasive methods as amniocentesis are increasingly being replaced by less risky tests, for example first semester screening (an ultrasound examination) or the Harmony Prenatal Test. (Source: Die Welt).

### Compared to other countries

Medical progress combined with abortion laws confront everyone concerned with an ethical and moral balancing act. As to the questions that arise – like “Beginning with when is a human a human?” – lawmakers are also unable to give any definitive answers, and simply attempt to establish guidelines. In most European countries (for example France and Poland), abortion is possible up until about the 22nd week, regardless of the reason. But some countries have regulations similar to Germany's (like Austria, Italy, and Belgium. Source: Termination of Pregnancy in Europe: An Overview by Lyn Thomas).

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## CAST

### **Julia Jentsch**

Julia Jentsch was born in 1978 in Berlin, and attended the renowned Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts. She began her theater career at the Munich Kammerspiele, where she was a permanent member of the ensemble from 2001-2006. She made her breakthrough as a film actor in 2004 when she featured in Hans Weingartner's motion picture THE EDUKATORS. In 2005 Julia Jentsch appeared as Sophie Scholl in Marc Rothemund's film of the same name. This role won her the *Silver Bear* and *German Film Award*, and she was also named *Best European Film Actor*. In addition, she was nominated for the 2006 Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film with SOPHIE SCHOLL - THE FINAL DAYS. Since the nomination, Julia Jentsch has become a sought-after artist not only in Germany, but also internationally. Over the last years her work has included collaborations with Hermine Huntgeburth (EFFI BRIEST), Margarethe von Trotta (HANNAH ARENDT), and Antonin Sloboda (THE STRANGE CASE OF WILHELM REICH). Most recently she featured in Florian Hoffmeister's THE HAVE-NOTS in autumn 2015. Julia Jentsch lives with her husband and daughter near Zürich.

### **Bjarne Maedel**

Bjarne Maedel was born in Hamburg in 1968. He studied acting from 1992 to 1996 at the Film University Babelsberg Konrad Wolf. From 1996 to 1999 his stage appearances included the Volkstheater Rostock and the Vienna Festival. From 2000 to 2005, Bjarne Maedel was an ensemble member at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg. He became known to a wider television audience from 2004 to 2012 as Berthold "Ernie" Heisterkamp in the series 'Stromberg' (directed by Arne Feldhusen), which won awards including the *Grimme Award* 2006 and the *German TV Award* 2007. He had various cinema roles including LUMBER KINGS (2006, directed by Mathias Keilich) and TIMM THALER (2015, directed by Andreas Dresen).

From 2008 to 2014, Bjarne Maedel had a leading role in one of the most successful ARD - series 'Homicide Hills' (directed by Arne Feldhusen, Lars Jessen, Christoph Schnee and others).

His current series 'Crime Scene Cleaner' about a unique crime scene cleaner, has received multiple awards, including the *Grimme Award* in 2012 and 2013 for best series and best leading actor.

## CREW

### **Director: Anne Zohra Berrached**

Anne Zohra Berrached was born in Erfurt, East Germany, in 1982. After she got her degree in social education, with a focus on psychology in Frankfurt, she worked as a drama teacher in London for two years. She spent several months in Madrid, Spain and Yaoundé, Cameroon before she became a director's assistant at the Hansatheater and Ballhaus Ost in Berlin. In 2009, she began to study directing at the Film Academy, Baden-Württemberg. Her second year movie SAINT & WHORE was invited to over 80 film festivals around the globe. In her third year, she completed her first feature

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film TWO MOTHERS. It premiered at the 63rd International Film Festival in Berlin in 2013. The feature was released in five countries on DVD, and has earned the *First Steps No Fear Award* and the *Dialogues en Perspective* of the section Perspective German Cinema at the Berlin Film Festival. 24 WEEKS is her second feature film.

#### **DOP: Friede Clausz**

Born in 1986 in Halle (Saale), Germany. For 14 years he played classical violoncello, later on drums, before studying and graduating in Cinematography at the University of Television and Film Munich (HFF) and joining the masterclass Berlinale Talents. He is member as DP in the German Society of Cinematographers (BVK). The short TEARDROP won several prizes for Best Cinematography and was nominated for *The Golden Tadpole* at Plus Camerimage.

His first feature documentary WASTELAND, directed by Anne Kodura, was nominated for the *Crystal Bear* at the 63rd Berlinale Generation and won several prizes. His debut feature LOS ÁNGELES by Damian John Harper was shot in Mexico celebrated its world premiere at the 64th Berlinale Forum and won among others the LA Muse Award at LA Film Fest. The Film was also presented at Plus Camerimage in the European Panorama. 24 WEEKS is the second feature film in association with Anne Zohra Berrached after TWO MOTHERS.

#### **PRODUCTION COMPANY – ZERO ONE FILM**

Zero one film is an independent film production company based in Berlin, producing cinema and TV documentaries as well as art house fiction for the German and international market. Over the past 25 years the company produced more than 100 documentaries, television series and feature films. Many of them won international awards, among these THE PEOPLE VS. FRITZ BAUER by Lars Kraume, MORE THAN HONEY by Markus Imhoof, WEST by Christian Schwochow, THE FLAT by Arnon Goldfinger, GERHARD RICHTER PAINTING by Corinna Belz, BLACKBOX GERMANY by Andres Veiel, or ECHOES OF HOME by Stefan Schwietert.

The collaboration with Alexander Sokurov on films like MOLOCH or FATHER AND SON was highly acclaimed and awarded in Cannes. FRANCOFONIA that premiered at the Venice Film Festival 2015 and will be released in Germany on March 3, 2016 is their latest collaboration.

With 24H BERLIN the team broke new grounds in 2009 for a so far unprecedented 24hours tv documentary. In 2010, 24H BERLIN won the *Bavarian TV Award* as well as the *German TV Award*. With 24H JERUSALEM Volker Heise and Thomas Kufus created a follow-up of the award winning format which was broadcast in April 2014 and which won the *German TV Award*. The production of 24H BAVARIA is about to follow in 2016.

Thomas Kufus is the CEO of zero one film, actively involved in film politics on a national and international level promoting the role of cinema documentaries and the importance of co-production treaties. He is member of the European and the German Film Academy and from November 2009 until early 2015 Thomas Kufus had been its chairman. Volker Heise (Director and Dramatic Adviser) is partner of zero one film since 2008.

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At the Berlinale 2016 zero one film is present with two productions: Besides 24 WEEKS in Official Competition, the section Generation Kplus is showing the German-Polish coproduction ZUD by Marta Minorowicz.

## **WORLD SALES – BETA CINEMA**

World sales and co-financing company Beta Cinema has established itself as a "boutique-operation" for quality feature films that combine commercial viability with artistic integrity. Prime examples are Oscar winners and worldwide B.O. hits like THE LIVES OF OTHERS, IL DIVO, MONGOL and DOWNFALL.

Current highlights include Oliver Hirschbiegel's widely sold thematic follow-up, 13 MINUTES, and the Emma Watson, Daniel Brühl, Mikael Nyqvist thriller COLONIA.

### **CONTACT INTERNATIONAL PRESS:**

Beta Cinema, Dorothee Stoewahse  
Mob: + 49 170 63 84 627, Office: + 49 89 67 34 69 15,  
[Dorothee.Stoewahse@betafilm.com](mailto:Dorothee.Stoewahse@betafilm.com)

### **CONTACT WORLD SALES:**

Beta Cinema, Dirk Schuerhoff / Thorsten Ritter / Tassilo Hallbauer  
Tel: + 49 89 67 34 69 828, Fax: + 49 89 67 34 69 888  
[beta@betacinema.com](mailto:beta@betacinema.com), [www.betacinema.com](http://www.betacinema.com)

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