



# STYX

OPENING FILM for PANORAMA SPECIAL  
at Berlinale 2018

a **Schiwago Film** production  
in co-production with **AMOUR Fou Vienna**  
in collaboration with **WDR & ARTE**

Directed by  
**Wolfgang Fischer**

Starring  
**Susanne Wolff**  
**Gedion Oduor Wekesa**



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# SYNOPSIS

## LOGLINE

The transformation of a strong woman torn from her contented world during a sailing trip.

## SYNOPSIS

Rike - mid-30s, a doctor from Europe - embodies a typically Western model of happiness and success. She is educated, confident, determined and committed. We see Rike's everyday life, as an overworked emergency doctor, before she sets out on a much-needed holiday on Gibraltar. There she fulfils a long-held dream and sails out to sea alone in her sailing boat. Her goal: Ascension Island in the Atlantic Ocean. But her dream holiday is quickly broken off on the high seas, when, after a storm, she finds herself near a stricken refugee boat. Unless she intervenes, around a hundred people will drown – their utterly overloaded boat has sprung a leak. Rike follows maritime law and radios for help - legally, she is not obliged to do any more. But when her calls are left unanswered, and then rejected for spurious reasons, she decides to overcome her fear and try to rescue whoever she can.



# CAST & CREW

<b>Starring</b>	Susanne Wolff Gedion Oduor Weseka
<b>Directed by</b>	Wolfgang Fischer
<b>Written by</b>	Wolfgang Fischer Ika Künzel
<b>Director of Photography</b>	Benedict Neuenfels aac/bvk
<b>Editor</b>	Monika Willi, aea
<b>Music</b>	Dirk von Lowtzow
<b>Sound Recordist</b>	Andreas Turnwald, Bvft
<b>Costume Design</b>	Nicole Fischnaller
<b>Hair &amp; Make Up Design</b>	Elke Hahn
<b>Sound Design</b>	Uwe Dresch Andre Zimmermann
<b>Re-Recording Mixer</b>	Tobias Fleig, Bvft
<b>Post Production Supervisor</b>	Niko Remus
<b>1st Assistant Director</b>	Kai Siggelkow
<b>Unit Production Manager</b>	Dirk Seibert
<b>Line Producer</b>	Charles E. Breitzkreuz
<b>Co-Producer</b>	Alexander Dumreicher-Ivanceanu Bady Minck
<b>Produced by</b>	Marcos Kantis Martin Lehwald Michal Pokorny
<b>Supported by</b>	<b>Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, Eurimages - Council of Europe, Austrian Film Institute, Malta Film Commission, German Federal Film Fund, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, German Federal Film Board, Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media</b>

## TECHNICAL DETAILS

Shooting Locations: Malta & Köln  
Shooting time: October 19th 2016 – December 18th 2016  
Running time: 94min  
Screen Ratio : 1:1.85  
Format: DCP

# BIOGRAPHIES

## DIRECTOR

**Wolfgang Fischer** was born in 1970 in Vienna/Austria. He studied Psychology and Painting at the University of Vienna followed by studies of Film at the Art Academy of Düsseldorf and at the Academy of Media Arts (KHM) in Cologne. Beside various teaching assignments he was working as an assistant for Paul Morrissey and Nan Hoover. He was awarded a scholarship by the Munich Screenplay Program and by Equinoxe Europe. His films include: "In Time" (experimental, 1994), 9h11 (1999), "Remake of the Remake" (documentary, 1999), "Disk – Dusk" (1999), "Schoen 2000" (2000), "Grau" (2001), and "What You Don't See" (2009). He is now in preproduction of the feature films Styx, The Bear and the series The Highway of Tears and Deserted

## ACTRESS

**Susanne Wolff** graduated at the The Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media. From 1998 to 2016 she was ensemble member at Thalia Theater Hamburg and Deutsches Theater Berlin. In 1999, she won the *Boy-Gobert-Price* of Hamburg, 2003 she was honored with the *3Sat innovation award* and in 2006 with the *Rolf Mares-Preis*. In front of the camera Susanne Wolff succeeded as well with several productions such as "The Stranger in Me" for which she was honored with the price for Best Actress at the International Filmfestival Sao Paolo and the *Young German Cinema Award*. In 2013, she won the German Television Award for Best Actress for *Mobbing* and in 2017 she received the Goldene Kamera for the television series "Tomorrow I Quit" and was awarded Best Actress at the Lebanon International Short Films Festival. Susanne Wolff played a leading role in Volker Schlöndorff's feature film "Return to Montauk" which had its international premiere in last year's Berlinale Competition.

## PRODUCERS

**Marcos Kantis** was born in 1968 in Rheinhausen. He studied Business Studies at the Gerhard Mercator University, Duisburg, completing his final thesis in the field of Film Marketing and Distribution. He took a summer class at the UCLA and interned at New Line Cinema, Los Angeles. After working for the Filmstiftung North Rhine-Westphalia as Assitant to the Head of Production, he started working in film production. He worked as a line producer on films, such as "Goodbye, Lenin", "Go for Zucker!", "Lovelife" and "The Mongol" for X Filme before joining Schiwago Film in 2007. Marcos has been responsible for producing more than 10 feature films, such as "Short Cut to Hollywood", "Transfer", "Desaster" and "Krieg". He has given lectures at the DFFB in Film Production and his work on "Oh Boy" has been rewarded with 6 German Film Awards and a European Film

Award for best Debut. Currently he is working with Jan-Ole Gerster on his second feature "Lara" and with Wolfgang Fischer on his upcoming projects.

## **DOP**

**Benedict Neuenfels.** Born 1966 in Bern as the son of actress Elisabeth Trissenaar and director Hans Neuenfels. First encounter with film-industry 1982 as production assistant for the feature "Penthesilea". He worked several years as camera assistant and operator for R.W. Fassbinder's former DP Xaver Schwarzenberger and Wim Wenders close collaborator Robby Mueller. In early years he founded his own low-budget orientated production company GISELAFILMS. Since his study at the German film and television school (dffb) in Berlin, he is responsible for the photography of more than 60 features and documentaries and additional for the lighting design of various stage plays in opera and theater.

He is giving master- camera -classes in major film schools in Germany for more than 20 years.

Benedict Neuenfels is member of the german, austrian and european filmacademy. His work has been awarded numerous times. He received several times both the prestigious *Grimme Award* and the *German Television Award*, the *Bavarian* and the *German Film Award* each, as well as six times the German Camera Award for outstanding cinematography."The Counterfeiters", which he photographed in 2007, won an Academy Award for best foreign feature film the following year. In 2011 he was honored by the German Academy of Arts for outstanding achievement in cinematography. In 2015 he shot the horror thriller "Patient Zero" for Sony-Columbia. Currently he is working together with academy award winning director Stefan Ruzowitzky on the mini drama series "8 Days".

## **COMPANY DESCRIPTION**

Founded in 2000, Berlin-based Schiwago Film GmbH is run by the producers Martin Lehwald, Michal Pokorny and Marcos Kantis. Schiwago Film specializes in the development and production of feature films and TV-movies. Over the years, long-term co-operations have been established with international partners and led to multiple co-productions. Schiwago's movies had been honored with many national and international awards. Schiwago's biggest success OH BOY was winning 6 LOLAs (German national feature film award) in 2013. Schiwago Film launched its sister Schiwago Film Prague in Fall 2017

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

## RESEARCH

Every day at Europe's external borders, people die in their quest for peace as they attempt to save themselves by crossing the sea to our continent.

That these people, according to our research, can still rely on little support from official institutions was confirmed by our discussions with SEA WATCH, MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES, BORDERLINE EUROPE and MOAS, who are among the private aid organizations present.



## GENERAL

Encounters in the middle of the ocean between pleasure boats and overloaded, stricken refugee boats are a nightmare scenario much-discussed among sailors, and such incidents are becoming increasingly common.

What happens if a solo sailor (a yachtswoman alone on a boat) finds herself in this situation?

Inspired by true events, Styx pursues this question in a fictional fashion, illustrating how economic interests compete with humanitarian principles, how excessive demand usurps compassion, and how indifference destroys all hope.

The film deals with individual dreams of paradise, and revolves around central questions of identity: Who are we, who do we want to be, and who do we have to be?

## **CAST**

Our central character is a determined, successful woman with life experience, and is also a passionate water sports enthusiast. Award-winning actress Susanne Wolff – herself a blue-water sailor with an International Certificate of Competence – encapsulates the main character's central qualities.

Leading man Gedion Odour Wekesa is a schoolboy from Kibera/Nairobi. He takes acting classes as part of the ONE FINE DAY organisation's funding programme, and beat 40 other boys to win the role.

## **STYLE**

Styx documents, in a realistic fashion, the hero's journey of its female protagonist. She spends half the film alone on the high seas, on board an 11-metre yacht.

Consequently, for the most part, dialogue plays little role.

Instead, the sounds of extreme nature and of the technical measures employed to confront her, take over.

The majority of the film was shot in real-life conditions on the open sea. The set is confined to the actual unmodified surface area of an 11-metre yacht. Sound and noises are genuine. The camera focusses throughout on the female protagonist. Only at the beginning and end, in which she becomes a vanishing part of a larger whole, is her location contextualized. In the film's second half, a confusion of international languages complements the constant background noise, underlining the proverbial redundancy of language with such subject matter. Only at decisive turning points is there complete silence.

## **STRUCTURE**

The film's narrative is consistently linear, and divided into three main phases.

### **Phase 1**

We begin in Cologne, "on safe ground", where the heroine dominates the situation. Here, she can exercise her full capabilities, relying on the unconditional help of all involved as well as on the smooth running of failsafe systems.

### **Phase 2**

Now, as she sails without firm ground beneath her feet, the heroine remains mistress of the situation. Even in difficult conditions, she keeps her boat fully under control, staying connected via radio to her surrounding world, on whose cooperation she can count at any time. Expertly, she eliminates any smaller impediments alone.

### **Phase 3**

Only in the wake of her encounter with the shipwreck, and the subsequent lack of support from others, does our heroine gradually lose control of the situation.



# THREE QUESTIONS FOR THE DIRECTOR

## **How do you shoot a film at sea?**

Everyone I asked advised us against it. It can't work, it'll be hell, a nightmare. You can't control the sea, it does whatever it wants. And that's truly the way it was. It was dreadful. We filmed near Malta – and it was the worst autumn in a decade. There were nothing but hurricane winds. Then we sailed for sixteen hours between Malta and Sicily in one go and really, truly told the story while we were sailing. This was ultimately the most important decision. The project succeeded because we all subjected ourselves to this world. It was like making a documentary. There were eight people on the boat, and everyone had to hide in order not to show up in the film. The storm scenes were the only part we shot in a tank in Malta – with frightfully loud wave machines and water cannons that hurled 600 liters of water onto the boat.

The idea was for the takes to be as long as possible in order not to manipulate things with editing, and to show this bodily dance accomplished by the main character as a physical feat.

## **What was at the origin of this film, what did you have in mind?**

We were certain that we wanted to make a very physical, bodily film with little dialogue. A person who sets out into a hostile nature that can never be completely controlled, where it is necessary to be an expert. This was the point of departure: someone sets out into this world, confronts these elements, and tries to master the ensuing challenges. Bearing solitude is an important theme: who is capable of this today? She sets out without a cell phone, without internet access in order to be alone on this boat for weeks – and she loves it. This intrigued us. Rike doesn't need anyone else in order to experience joy. But she is a very sensual person. We see her swimming in the open sea, and when she feels the first rays of the sun on her face, or when the wind blows into the sails, we see her smile. Or when she talks about her dream, the paradise she wants to travel to.

**Your film presents a moral dilemma . . . could we all find ourselves in the same situation as the protagonist?**

I absolutely believe we could. To take an everyday example: suppose someone is attacked next to us in the subway. We didn't choose this situation, but we need to act. Looking away is also a form of action. We need to decide. This can happen to every one of us. It is something universal. It changes one's life. As an emergency physician, Rike knows the rule: to first protect your own life. She follows this rule. But of course the question remains whether she made the right decision.



# DOP'S STATEMENT

## STATEMENT BENEDICT NEUENFELS, DOP

STYX is one of the most exceptional projects I have been involved in. Years of preparation were necessary before we had the know-how and courage to shoot a film on the open sea. We developed special equipment in order to maneuver and stabilize the camera – our narrative standpoint –, which was positioned according to the movement of the boat, the ocean waves, the calm sky, or the actors. Each of these decisions brings with it a different perception. In order to avoid a classic smug Mediterranean look and to be able to create different atmospheres to tell the story of Rike's journey, we decided to shoot in autumn, the time when the harsh weather begins. The wind, waves, and ocean swells became our "brothers in mind," and seasickness our common foe. The scenery of the ocean itself is reduced to its essence, does not allow for any distractions, and feels archaic – what a unique stage for telling such a story.



# CONTACT

## **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)

## **CONTACT INTERNATIONAL PRESS**

Filmcontact, Julia Kainz

Kastanienallee 79

10435 Berlin

Tel.: +49 30 27 90 87 00. Fax: +49 30 27 90 87 95, [info@filmcontact.de](mailto:info@filmcontact.de)  
[www.filmcontact.de](http://www.filmcontact.de)

