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OH, THIS UNSPEAKABLE VOID

SENTA BERGER
BRUNO ALEXANDER
MICHAEL WITTENBORN
LAURA TONKE
DEVID STRIESOW
KATHARINA STARK
TOM SCHILLING
JOHANN VON BÜLOW
MORITZ TREUENFELS
VICTORIA TRAUTTMANSDORFF
ANNE RATTE-POLLE
FRIEDRICH VON THUN
and
KAROLINE HERFURTH

Directed by SIMON VERHOEVEN
Based on the novel of the same name by JOACHIM MEYERHOFF

WORLD SALES
Beta Cinema // beta@betacinema.com // Phone: +49 | 89 | 673469 – 828
www.betacinema.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MAIN CAST AND CREW	3
SYNOPSIS	4
ABOUT THE PRODUCTION	7
Oh, this wonderful creative team	7
Oh, that comedy that tips over into tragedy and vice versa	9
Oh, this magnificent ensemble	10
Oh, this familiar world	13
Oh, this wonderful setting, this wonderful shoot, this wonderful film	14
ABOUT THE CAST	17
Bruno Alexander, <i>Joachim</i>	17
Senta Berger, <i>Inge</i>	18
Michael Wittenborn, <i>Hermann</i>	18
Anne Ratte-Polle, <i>Gretchen Kinski</i>	18
Tom Schilling, <i>Hagen</i>	20
Karoline Herfurth, <i>Gisela Marder</i>	20
Laura Tonke, <i>Joachim's mother Iris</i>	22
Devid Striesow, <i>Joachim's father Richard</i>	23
BEHIND THE CAMERA	25
Simon Verhoeven, <i>director and writer</i>	25
Joachim Meyerhoff, <i>author</i>	26
Janine Jackowski, <i>producer</i>	26

MAIN CAST

Inge

Joachim

Hermann

Joachim's mother Iris

Joachim's father Richard

Sabrina

Hagen

Falckenberg School Principal

Wolf

Irmgard Köster

Gretchen Kinski

Erich Maier-Mannhart

Gisela Marder

SENTA BERGER

BRUNO ALEXANDER

MICHAEL WITTENBORN

LAURA TONKE

DEVID STRIESOW

KATHARINA STARK

TOM SCHILLING

JOHANN VON BÜLOW

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VICTORIA VON TRAUTTMANSDORFF

ANNE RATTE-POLLE

FRIEDRICH VON THUN

KAROLINE HERFURTH

MAIN CREW

Directed by

Based on the novel of the same name by

Published by

Screenplay

Director of Photography

Editing

Music

Casting

Production design

Costume design

Hair & Makeup Design

Original Sound

Sound Design

Supervising Sound Editor & Mixing

Line Producer

Production Manager

Producer

Co-Producers

Producers

German distributor

World Sales

SIMON VERHOEVEN

JOACHIM MEYERHOFF

KIWI VERLAG

SIMON VERHOEVEN

JO HEIM

DENIS BACHTER (BFS), FELIX

SCHMERBECK

SEGUN AKINOLA

NINA HAUN

TOMMY STARK

SILKE FABER

CHRISTINA BAIER, MAIKE HEINLEIN

ECKHARD KUCHENBECKER

DOMINIK SCHLEIER

NICO KREBS

DANIEL MATTIG

JÖRG TRENTMANN

TATIANA MERIZALDE DOBLES

STEFFEN SCHIER, MAGDALENA

PROSTEDER, JULIA HAYUNGS,

CHRISTOPHER DOLL

JANINE JACKOWSKI, JONAS

DORNBACH, MAREN ADE

WARNER BROS. GERMANY

BETA CINEMA

SHORT SYNOPSIS

At the age of 20, Joachim is unexpectedly accepted into the renowned acting school in Munich and moves into the villa with his grandparents, Inge and Hermann. Between the bizarre challenges of acting school and the eccentric, mostly alcohol-fueled rituals of his grandparents, Joachim tries to find his place in the world — without knowing what role he actually plays in it.

From the producers of *Toni Erdmann* and based on a bestselling novel comes a bittersweet true story about a young man caught between two worlds: the punishing chaos of drama school and the strange comfort of his eccentric grandparents' home.

LONG SYNOPSIS

An acting class at the Otto Falckenberg School in Munich. The teacher has arranged them like a machine, an engine. Everyone has a task, everyone has a sound. Only Joachim (Bruno Alexander) feels left out and has to be encouraged by the teacher to find his place and his sound. Joachim still feels uncomfortable. Silly. And he has to think about his brother Philipp and how he would feel about all this. This situation. And anyway, that he moved from the far north to Munich, wants to become an actor – of all things! – and moved in with his grandparents in their magnificent villa in the Nymphenburg district. What else could he do? Philipp is dead, died senselessly in a senseless car accident on a completely normal, senseless day. And he left a hole in Joachim's life that he simply cannot fill, does not want to fill. That's how it was back then, on the day of Philipp's funeral. “Memory is the only paradise from which you cannot be expelled.” Grandmother Inge (Senta Berger) presses this quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer into the hands of the grieving Joachim, which his grandfather Hermann (Michael Wittenborn) wrote down for him as a message. And she adds a pack of pills, Valium, so he can sleep at night. He's not to tell his parents about it. She doesn't need to worry: Joachim retreats deeper and deeper into himself, loses himself, weeks, months. And finally makes the decision he tells his parents (Devid Striesow, Laura Tonke) at the family dinner table: he wants to move to Munich and attend acting school. Acting is the opposite, says his brother Patrick (Max Kruk). That's exactly what he wants, replies Joachim. The opposite. Of everything. His mother notes with concern that out of a thousand applicants, only ten are accepted each year. Joachim looks confidently out of the window as he approaches the Bavarian capital by train. He thinks of his grandparents, whom the family visited every year during the holidays and whose wonderfully quirky idiosyncrasies he has grown to love: Grandfather Hermann, a former philosophy professor, and Grandmother Inge, once a celebrated actress. Gargling together every morning without spitting out. The hint of his grandfather's daily gymnastics. His grandmother's shame that one of her legs is shorter than the other. The

hint of Shalimar that Inge always sprays herself with. Her habit of always calling the children "Lieberling" (darling). And now Joachim will experience it every day. Closer than he could ever have dreamed. Their first conversation in the living room is like an interrogation, but the most loving interrogation ever. Before they start drinking and listening to music ("Peer Gynt") like they do every evening, at a certain point and alcohol level while lying down, they emphasize how difficult it is to be accepted into the Otto Falckenberg School. And acting? A cruel profession! Joachim can't sleep at night. A hundred thousand thoughts race through his head, memories of summers with his grandparents (aimless hikes during which Inge would sing the song "Froh zu sein, bedarf es wenig" ("It takes little to be happy")), the excitement before the audition. Each candidate is supposed to have prepared and recite three texts. Joachim only has one, "Danton's Death," but even then, he forgets the text, his thoughts wandering to his brother. And during a subsequent improvisation with Sabrina (Katharina Stark), one of the best students, says an examiner, he remains passive, speechless... and is overwhelmed by how stunningly talented the young woman is. He completely failed. He is convinced of that afterwards. And then he was extremely surprised when he found his name on the list of those who passed. The new class is welcomed by the director (Johann von Bülow) and codirector (Rudolf Krause), who immediately offer a word of warning: the new students will be observed for six months, and at the end of this trial period, they will be screened once again. They hand them over to their mentor Gretchen Kinski (Anne Ratte-Polle), who immediately takes charge of the class. In their first exercise, they are all supposed to look intensely into each other's eyes, an exercise that quickly overwhelms Joachim. His insecurity is so great that he feels as if everyone is laughing at him. Later, his fellow students sit down with him at the table in the cafeteria and prove to be open-minded and nice. Now he's ready to get started. The hyperactive teacher Gisela Marder (Karoline Herfurth) wants them to feel like spaghetti being thrown into boiling water. Joachim is supposed to smile with his nipples. Joachim also fails to shine in Irmgard Köster's (Victoria Trauttmansdorff) singing class. However, he really likes Nikolaus Huber's (Martin Gruber) aikido class. The first week flies by. Over the weekend, the students are given the task of playing the role of a specific animal: the first time the newcomers present themselves to the rest of the school on stage. It's great fun. For everyone who isn't allowed on stage. Joachim is supposed to recite his lines as if he were a hippopotamus. He does it very, very slowly. He is reprimanded by the teacher in front of everyone else. Furious, Joachim storms outside. And can't believe his luck when the gorgeous Sabrina encourages him. He tries his luck, but gets rejected: she has a boyfriend. It's better at home with his grandparents, familiar, when he can lie down with them while they listen to music. No one said it would be easy. Joachim is constantly confronted with himself, his inner doubts, and a pent-up anger he didn't know he had. His teachers are visibly dissatisfied with him. During a phone call with his mother, he learns that his parents have separated and his father has a new lover. His grandmother confronts him, saying that she has read some of his texts and is outraged at how her

grandson describes her strange habits in them. Then her gaze softens: the texts are very good, she says, and show excellent observation skills. During a hike, his grandfather Hermann talks about Goethe's "The Sorrows of Young Werther": "Oh, this void, this unspeakable void that I feel here in my breast!" It is about the great longing, the pain that all people carry, "the void between us and everything we want," says Hermann. It goes on and on. As Joachim begins to find his feet at school and develop, he has to watch his grandparents grow older and weaker at home. And in between, he has to find his way, between school and family, so that the gap, this terrible gap, the great pain in his chest, can perhaps finally become smaller.

ABOUT PRODUCTION

OH, THIS WONDERFUL CREATIVE TEAM

“Oh, This Unspeakable Void” is a film that spans generations, dealing with both the big and small issues and questions of life with profound emotion. At the same time, it is a coming-of-age film in which a young man must find his place in the world, a painfully beautiful tale of gradually awakening from great sadness and the long search for a new wholeness in life. It is about the tragicomic nature of human existence or, as Grandfather Hermann says in the film: “About the great longing, the pain we all carry in our hearts, the gap between us and everything we want. Including what we want to be.” The quote in the title, borrowed from Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which Grandfather Hermann also quotes in the film (“Ah, this gap, this terrible gap that I feel here in my breast!”), is the nucleus for the big question of life that the story poses, not only through the loss of loved ones, but also in the search for one’s own self-image and in the pursuit of a moment of inner unity — in an attempt to fill a void in one’s understanding of oneself. The film adaptation of the same title is based on the work of bestselling author Joachim Meyerhoff. “Oh, This Unspeakable Void” is part three of his so-called “Alle Toten fliegen hoch” (“All the Dead Fly High”) series, auto fictional novels in which he recalls events from his past. Volume three covers his “Munich years.” Born in Schleswig-Holstein, he spent them as a drama student at the Otto Falckenberg School with his grandparents, who play a central role in this declaration of love for their upper-class, sophisticated world, marked by theatrical rituals. For filmmaker Simon Verhoeven, “Oh, This Unspeakable Void” is a project close to his heart. “There are many different personal reasons why this film is so special to me. First and foremost, of course, because I love the novel. I read and devoured the novel and laughed so much, but I also cried. The wonderful thing about the story is that it captures life in all its facets, so funny and so tragic and so serious and so silly and so sweet and so bitter—just as it is. I always dreamed that one day I would be able to make a film adaptation of the novel.” The film rights to the novel “Ach, diese Lücke, diese entsetzliche Lücke” (Oh This Unspeakable Void), published in 2015 by Kiepenheuer & Witsch, were secured by the Berlin-based production company Komplizen Film, as they had previously done with Meyerhoff’s “Wann wird es endlich wieder so, wie es nie war” (When Will It Finally Be the Way It Never Was), which producers Janine Jackowski, Jonas Dornbach, and Maren Ade realized with Sonja Heiss, with Warner Bros. also acting as production and distribution partner. Producer Janine Jackowski says of the very special quality of “Oh, This Unspeakable Void”: “It is perhaps the most iconic part of the ‘Alle Toten fliegen hoch’ series, and it is also the novel that made me laugh the loudest. Joachim leaves his parents’ house, begins his acting training in Munich, and moves in with his grandparents, who are not ordinary grandparents, but rather intimidating, brilliant, and very peculiar — a constellation full of great humor, deep melancholy, and the search for oneself. The novel tells of growing up, searching for identity, and letting go — and it does so with a lightness and precision that I had never read before.” *Oh, This Unspeakable Void* is a film

that spans generations, dealing with both the big and small issues and questions of life with profound emotion. At the same time, it is a coming-of-age film in which a young man must find his place in the world, a painfully beautiful tale of gradually awakening from great sadness and the long search for a new wholeness in life. It is about the tragicomic nature of human existence or, as Grandfather Hermann says in the film: “About the great longing, the pain we all carry in our hearts, the gap between us and everything we want. Including what we want to be.” The quote in the title, borrowed from Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which Grandfather Hermann also quotes in the film (“Oh, this void, this unspeakable void that I feel here in my breast!”), is the nucleus for the big question of life that the story poses, not only through the loss of loved ones, but also in the search for one’s own self-image and in the pursuit of a moment of inner unity—in an attempt to fill a void in one’s understanding of oneself. The film adaptation of the same title is based on the work of bestselling author Joachim Meyerhoff. *Oh, This Unspeakable Void* is part three of his so-called *Alle Toten fliegen hoch (All the Dead Fly High)* series, autofictional novels in which he recalls events from his past. Volume three covers his “Munich years.” Born in Schleswig-Holstein, he spent them as a drama student at the Otto Falckenberg School with his grandparents, who play a central role in this declaration of love for their upper-class, sophisticated world, marked by theatrical rituals. For filmmaker Simon Verhoeven, *Oh, This Unspeakable Void* is a project close to his heart. “There are many different personal reasons why this film is so special to me. First and foremost, of course, because I love the novel. I read and devoured the novel and laughed so much, but I also cried. The wonderful thing about the story is that it captures life in all its facets, so funny and so tragic and so serious and so silly and so sweet and so bitter—just as it is. I always dreamed that one day I would be able to make a film adaptation of the novel.” The film rights to the novel *Ach, diese Lücke, diese entsetzliche Lücke (Oh, This Unspeakable Void)*, published in 2015 by Kiepenheuer & Witsch, were secured by the Berlin-based production company Komplizen Film, as they had previously done with Meyerhoff’s *Wann wird es endlich wieder so, wie es nie war (When Will It Be Again Like It Never Was Before)*, which producers Janine Jackowski, Jonas Dornbach, and Maren Ade realized with Sonja Heiss, with Warner Bros. also acting as production and distribution partner. Producer Janine Jackowski says of the very special quality of *Oh, This Unspeakable Void*: “It is perhaps the most iconic part of the *Alle Toten fliegen hoch* series, and it is also the novel that made me laugh the loudest. Joachim leaves his parents’ house, begins his acting training in Munich, and moves in with his grandparents, who are not ordinary grandparents, but rather intimidating, brilliant, and very peculiar—a constellation full of great humor, deep melancholy, and the search for oneself. The novel tells of growing up, searching for identity, and letting go—and it does so with a lightness and precision that I had never read before.” Komplizen Film brought Doll Filmproduktion on board as a co-production partner. The lightness and precision are thanks to Joachim Meyerhoff’s very own language. “Meyerhoff’s language is funny, sharp, poetic, and deeply human. He combines humor

with existential depth, without pathos, but with warmth and precision. This balance of tragedy and comedy, self-irony, and empathy makes his books unique. You connect with Joachim Meyerhoff's characters and go with them every detour they have to take," says the producer. The uniqueness of the language, but equally the world described in the book, also fascinated Simon Verhoeven: "The world created by Joachim Meyerhoff with his grandparents, the acting diva Inge and the philosophy professor Hermann, is a very special one. It is very idiosyncratic and detailed, and yet many people recognize themselves in it, including me. It vaguely resembles the world I grew up in. Joachim Meyerhoff has such wonderful language, such unique language. I wouldn't presume to say that it is very similar to mine. But I feel very close to his view of people and his view of life."

OH, THIS STRANGE BALANCE BETWEEN COMEDY AND TRAGEDY

Oh, This Unspeakable Void plays on the whole spectrum of life. "The big themes are, of course, death and loss. Losing a loved one, even early in life, and somehow having to cope with it," says Simon Verhoeven. The filmmaker was also drawn to the coming-of-age aspect, how Joachim, as a young man in his early 20s, tries to find his way after the tragic accidental death of his favorite brother Philipp, who leaves a gaping hole in his life. "He has to ask himself: What do I do now? How do I deal with this void in my life, with this pain?" Joachim decides to take a radical step, namely to go to acting school in Munich, away from his home in Schleswig. "He moves to Munich to live with his very unique and strange grandparents, wonderfully observed characters, wonderful people," emphasizes the filmmaker. Although the story is based on real-life memories, it is shaped by literature and spiced with a generous dash of imagination. "That gave us freedom," says Janine Jackowski. "We're not concerned with exact reproduction, but with preserving the emotional truth, while treating the material with the utmost care and love in every detail. We wanted to treat the characters with affection and the utmost respect, and Simon Verhoeven was predestined for this. In addition, his own biography reflects some of the autobiographical cornerstones, which meant he always struck the right note." The story is also a tribute to the art of acting. Much of the film is set in Joachim's training center, the renowned Otto Falckenberg School in Munich, where he was accepted even though he had only rehearsed one audition role instead of three and made things anything but easy for the teachers there. "We celebrate actresses and actors, their lonely struggles, their often desperate hours. This profession, so often associated with glamour, also involves a great deal of loneliness, setbacks, and disappointments," says Simon Verhoeven. **Oh, This Unspeakable Void** shows how hard the path of an actor is and how the decision to pursue this profession is a decision for life. Joachim Meyerhoff closely accompanied the development of the project. "He was in lively exchange with us and Simon Verhoeven from the very beginning," recalls Janine Jackowski. Meyerhoff supported the creative process, read script versions, and provided input on tone and authenticity. "But he also gave us the freedom we needed for

a cinematic adaptation, and I am very grateful to him for this collaboration,” the producer continued. Janine Jackowski couldn’t have imagined a better creative partner than Simon Verhoeven for the adaptation and direction. “Simon has the rare ability to tell deeply emotional stories with ease, humor, and a great sense of rhythm. He knows how to stage characters with empathy and tempo. His familiarity with the theater milieu, his love for the characters, and his experience as a director and actor make him the ideal screenwriter and director for this novel. In our collaboration, he is very precise, open, and structured—someone who takes characters seriously psychologically and still manages to create great entertainment value.” The particular challenge during development was to translate the novel into a cinematic structure. “The novel is told in an anecdotal style and jumps wildly back and forth between different time periods. You don’t really notice this when you read the book, but that’s how it is,” says the producer. A screenplay follows different rules, but at the same time it was important to preserve the core of Meyerhoff’s story. “That was a balancing act for us, but of course especially for Simon,” Jackowski continues. The novel plays between the world of theater, family history, and inner journey—capturing this complexity cinematically without losing lightness was the team’s biggest task. “It was about maintaining the tone: funny, melancholic, and emotionally authentic at the same time,” the producer sums it up. Joachim Meyerhoff has fond memories of the script development process: “There was a constant and lively exchange, and my wife and I were also allowed to participate in this process, and any suggestions were always gladly accepted.” As a writer, he describes entrusting his own story to others, in which he himself is the focus, as “a great gift and at the same time a great strangeness: I have every authentic detail in front of my eyes. But it’s also a joy to see how your own life first becomes a book, then a reading, then an audiobook, and then a film. These are amazing metamorphoses, and each one reveals a different layer of my story.”

OH, THIS WONDERFUL ENSEMBLE

It was important to the producers and Simon Verhoeven to find an ensemble that could express and embody both humor and depth. The director knew early on that Bruno Alexander should play the lead role. Bruno Alexander became famous with the comedy productions of his friends Emil and Oskar Belton and formed a creative unit with them both in front of and behind the camera in formats such as *The Discounters* and *Intimate*. Apart from that, he has earned further recognition, for example with his role as Boris Becker in the TV movie *The Rebell*, for which he was nominated for the Romy and the Blue Panther awards. “My 15-year-old son David brought Bruno to my attention, and I immediately found him very exciting. Bruno has a unique creative power as an actor,” says Verhoeven, describing him as a very intense performer “who really has to feel it. He even hurt himself in some sequences because he couldn’t slow down, he has to experience everything himself and therefore didn’t want to follow any choreography.” At the same time, Bruno Alexander is a pure person, a sensitive person who tries to do

justice to his emotions. “He doesn’t want to be run-of-the-mill, he doesn’t want to offer prefabricated facial expressions. He doesn’t want to just reel off craft and technique, he wants to go deeper as an actor, he wants to really feel it, every day. That can be exhausting, for him, for me. But what comes out of it is great.” Bruno Alexander recalls that at first he wasn’t sure whether Joachim Meyerhoff’s book would appeal to his sense of humor. After reading it, he was quite surprised: “I thought it was crazy how he created humor just with the sentence structure. I laughed out loud several times.” While preparing for the role, he also met Joachim Meyerhoff in person. “I found him very likeable and funny. Whenever I asked him something, it was as if he were writing a new chapter in his book. He was so enthusiastic and fully immersed that I could imagine everything very well. But basically, his books were enough for my research. Because everything he wanted to say about himself, he wrote down. Things he didn’t want to say aren’t in there either.” For producer Janine Jackowski, as for Simon Verhoeven, there could have been no better actor for the role of Joachim: “Bruno is an incredibly great discovery for the big screen.” The Komplizen Film team was equally delighted that Senta Berger agreed to play the grandmother right from the start. “With Bruno Alexander and Senta Berger, we had established the core of the story,” says Janine Jackowski. Simon Verhoeven admits that he developed the film with his mother in mind for the role of Inge Birkmann. “Of course, there could have been other actresses. But it’s great what my mother brought to this role, what happens with her at every moment, what she was able to bring to it personally. She wanted to do justice to the character of Inge Birkmann. She had great respect for that because she is playing a real person.” However, the filmmaker admits that he always told his mother that no one expected her to be a one-to-one version of Inge Birkmann. “Joachim Meyerhoff’s description in the novel is already a form of translation. His language as a writer is, in a sense, his imagination, his creativity. We have translated the world and the characters once again, into film.” As a director, he sees it as his job to alleviate any uncertainties actors may have. “All really good actors have doubts and uncertainties. They question themselves, they examine themselves and the scenes. In this particular case, it was also my job as her son to repeatedly allay my mother’s doubts and concerns so that she could throw herself into her role with full enthusiasm and energy.” Senta Berger says that the novel has always been a favorite book in the family: “We talked a lot about how to discuss literature and films in an artistic household. At the lunch table, in passing. And then something like that takes root. And it actually becomes a little event. And this book was such a little event at our lunch table and has accompanied us, the Verhoeven family, ever since.” The rest of the ensemble was put together step by step with the help of renowned casting director Nina Haun. The role of Inge’s husband Hermann, the philosophy professor, is played by Michael Wittenborn. The decision was made quickly after both Simon Verhoeven and his mother Senta Berger saw the accomplished actor in this role. “Michael is a great stage actor who has all the technical skills you need. But he also has his own unique charm, a charisma that is stunning,” says Simon Verhoeven. “You could call it magic. When the

camera focuses on his face, so much happens. There is so much behind it. A glance from Michael Wittenborn is simply worth a lot.” Michael Wittenborn found working with Senta Berger at his side and Bruno Alexander as his young counterpart very refreshing: “I’ve come to really appreciate Bruno for his impulsive, direct manner. He’s a good complement to us two older actors. I now also let a lot happen in front of the camera, letting things develop directly during filming. But Bruno is even more impulsive and direct. This combination was a wonderful addition to the story.” Joachim Meyerhoff is full of praise for the trio of lead actors, Bruno Alexander, Senta Berger, and Michael Wittenborn. Bruno Alexander’s performance “really got him”: “He’s just plain awesome. It’s a joy to watch him throughout the movie. There’s a scene where he sings a song, even though everyone at acting school always tells him he can’t sing—I don’t want to give too much away—and I cried my eyes out—that’s exactly how I felt back then! He’s funny, serious, believable—in every moment.” Watching the grandparents is also phenomenal, Meyerhoff continues: “Senta Berger is a wonderful and dignified grandmother, embodying both the grandeur and the pain she carried with her. In real life, the grandfather was a much stricter man whom I feared as a child, a highly intellectual, arch-Catholic philosopher. Michael Wittenborn portrays him as more approachable and warm-hearted, which suits me very well. All together, they are a great trio.” The cast of the Meyerhoff family also includes Laura Tonke and Devid Striesow as Joachim’s mother and father. The two renowned actors already played these roles in the first Meyerhoff film adaptation, *When Will It Be Again Like It Never Was Before*, directed by Sonja Heiss. Tonke is very familiar with Meyerhoff’s books and was already familiar with *Oh, This Unspeakable Void*. “The world at his grandparents’ house is wonderfully told. How Joachim lives there, becomes part of their rituals and at the same time finds his own way as an actor is enchanting. The dense atmosphere is unique.” His colleague Devid Striesow only read the novel in preparation for the shoot. “The original, with its whimsicality, funny situations, and deep tragedy, is very beautiful. But I think Simon has done a wonderful job with the adaptation. He has really done a great job.” What fascinates him about Joachim Meyerhoff, with whom he once even shared the stage in Hamburg, is that his life holds so much potential for emotional stories. The rest of the cast of *Oh, This Unspeakable Void* was chosen with a keen eye for consistency, right down to the smallest roles, and consists of both top-class actors and new talents. Other big names include Tom Schilling, Karoline Herfurth, and Anne Ratte-Polle. “The casting of acting students in particular offered the opportunity to discover many new faces and bring fresh energy to the ensemble. The mix of established actors and young talents created an exciting ensemble that carries the film,” emphasizes producer Janine Jackowski. The result was a group of young performers who had only recently graduated from acting school. Among them are Dana Herfurth, who can currently be seen in *Call My Agent Berlin* and in Hille Norden’s *Smalltown Girl*, Momo Beier, Maeve Metelka, Max Wolter, Frida Lang, Benedikt Kalcher, and Mouataz Alshaltouh. “I am very proud of our

acting class. In some cases, we also incorporated their experiences into the scenes,” says Simon Verhoeven.

OH, THIS FAMILIAR WORLD

Oh, This Unspeakable Void is set in a world familiar to all creative professionals working in the film industry—especially actors, of course. That is what made the project particularly appealing to the ensemble in front of the camera. Senta Berger says: “The plot is set in an industry I know very well. I grew up in the theater, so to speak, and had my first engagement at the Theater in der Josefstadt in Vienna shortly after my 17th birthday. The profession still fulfills me today, at the age of 84. It’s not so much that the profession accompanies me. I accompany it, rather.” Acting is not something that can be taught, Berger continues. “You can provide inspiration. You can listen, watch, understand, implement. For yourself.” Acting is a very intimate process: “It’s not about running from A to B. It’s about questions like: What are you actually? What do you want? What do you expect? All of that flows into the profession. You have to have the courage to be open, to take everything in, to reflect everything you see, everything that surrounds you.” For Senta Berger, Joachim Meyerhoff is one of the best actors in the German-speaking theater scene. In *Ach, diese Lücke, diese entsetzliche Lücke (Oh, This Unspeakable Void)*, he writes astonishingly openly about himself. “Above all, he writes about this profession with such tenderness because he understands it so well and because he knows so much about failure in this profession,” says Senta Berger. For Bruno Alexander, the actors who are best of all are those who can credibly convey archaic texts on stage. “Performing these great texts authentically is the hardest thing of all. I had to learn that first.” The cork trick, which also plays a role in the film, helped him with theatrical language. “That was one of the exercises my speech coach gave me. I first read sentences aloud with my finger or a cork in my mouth. It helps because you can speak them much more clearly afterwards.”

Tom Schilling, winner of numerous awards including the German Film Award for *Oh Boy*, can be seen in *Oh, This Unspeakable Void* as first assistant director Hagen, one of the hot shots at the Munich Kammerspiele, before whom the acting students stand in awe. Schilling particularly liked how the material was anchored in the acting world while also exaggerating the characteristics of the industry itself. “Hagen is the sum of different types,” says Schilling—someone who kowtows to those above him and kicks those below him. “In any case, he has a pronounced profile neurosis. There are many of those in our industry. The strict hierarchy in film invites transgressive behavior, as Hagen demonstrates.” Because Schilling’s character operates in his own professional world and accompanies a young person on their journey to becoming an actor, he particularly enjoyed participating in the project. “I experienced many of the things shown there myself. I was able to incorporate a lot of personal things into the role.”

Laura Tonke also liked the world of acting school depicted in the film, even though things are not quite as harsh at training institutions these days. “I remember most of my time at

acting school being similar. I know the feeling of not feeling free. It took a while for me, too. It only came later, when I was also doing theater. At some point, I managed to really let myself go. It's a very special moment when you no longer feel ashamed." Karoline Herfurth was likewise attracted to the project by the opportunity to explore the acting profession. The successful actress and filmmaker found it particularly charming to play a character named Gisela Marder. "I immediately had a whole life in front of my eyes. This acting teacher who lives alone and had a rather strict upbringing and therefore doesn't understand much about joie de vivre, zest for life, but also the joy of acting—something she has always sought. As an actress, she was never able to really switch off this way of thinking, this fourth wall, and therefore remained rather reserved, even though she is talented. She now finds fulfillment as a teacher because she sees the talent in her students, in whom she is genuinely interested."

The many somewhat strange acting exercises in the film are not far-fetched. Michael Wittenborn recalls: "One of the first exercises we had to do as young acting students—and one that describes me quite well—was this: we had to stand in line at a post office counter, one behind the other. Then I had the idea of fainting. That got me out of it in one fell swoop, and the others had something to do. I don't think that was bad." Devid Striesow adds that the exercise of falling backwards, as shown in the film, is a classic. "Of course I know many of them; of course we did a lot of similar things. We just had to make sure our nipples didn't smile—but we said: 'The shoulder says yes, the shoulder says no.'" Karoline Herfurth also had many memories of her own time at drama school: "The first day of shooting in particular reminded me a lot of my time at the Ernst Busch Academy. That was nice. The acting class in the film is brilliantly cast; it's fun just to watch them. You want to join in right away. I enjoyed being their teacher."

For Joachim Meyerhoff, *Oh, This Unspeakable Void* is so special because of the contrast between the acting school the protagonist attends and the world of his grandparents, with whom he lives. "Basically, I wouldn't prefer any of my books over another because they were all special to me when I wrote them. In *Oh, This Unspeakable Void*, it's the clash of two completely different worlds."

OH, THIS WONDERFUL SETTING, THIS WONDERFUL SHOOT, THIS WONDERFUL FILM

The film is historical, set in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In addition to the grandparents' villa, the Otto Falckenberg School of Acting, where Joachim is accepted, is the main setting of the story. "We show the world of acting schools very realistically," says Simon Verhoeven, even if the motif is more beautiful than in real life: "After all, we're making a film that should also offer a great visual experience." His crew, including regular cinematographer Jo Heim, set designer Tommy Stark, and costume designer Silke Faber, created this world with great attention to detail. For producer Janine Jackowski, the setting itself becomes a character: "Munich in the 1990s, the acting school, the grandparents' villa – all of this had to form its own world. Tommy Stark and

his team did a great job with the set design. Of course, I was already really looking forward to the costumes when I was reading the script, as the period is very present for me, and Silke Faber fully met my expectations. Everything was researched in such detail and at the same time very lively.”

The producer is proud of the finished film. “It was definitely a challenge to adapt this novel, which we, and of course a large audience, love so much. *Oh, This Unspeakable Void* tells the story of how to find yourself—through failure, loss, love, and humor. It has become a film about family, art, and growing up that makes the audience laugh but also touches them deeply. In the end, you are left with the feeling that you have to love life—with all its chaos.” Simon Verhoeven agrees. He has particularly fond memories of the acting school scenes from the shoot: “What happens in our acting school is very close to what Joachim Meyerhoff described in the novel and what I myself once experienced as a drama student. Above all, it was a constant feeling of failure.”

Michael Wittenborn appreciates the mutual respect and openness that characterized the work on set. “It was a wonderful time with an incredibly friendly, loving team. I couldn’t have imagined it any better. The exchange with Simon Verhoeven was always cordial, too.” Tom Schilling agrees. He respects the filmmaker above all for making audience-pleasing, clever, large-scale films with a lot of heart and good humor. “I know when I read a script whether I want to work with someone. With Simon’s script, I immediately noticed how special his scenes are, that there is a lot between the lines. When a script captivates you with such precision that it brings the whole vision to life, filming is just like harvesting what was already there.”

Devid Striesow also emphasizes the wonderful atmosphere during filming. “It was really liberating and put everyone in a good mood. And it was very exciting to experience Senta Berger and Simon Verhoeven as mother and son on set and to see how someone who really comes from an artistic background stages this world, which also tells the story of an artistic world.” For Bruno Alexander, working with Simon Verhoeven was likewise a great pleasure: “He has such passion and such a clear eye for all the details. But I could also always approach him with ideas; it was an exchange on equal terms, and every day we tried together to get the most out of the scenes.” The director treated the entire team this way, which the actor praises: “In my opinion, that’s the best way to work: film shouldn’t be about doing your own thing, but always allowing for new ideas. If you think you already know everything, something’s wrong. The best ideas often come from the actors’ input and discussions with others.”

Laura Tonke fondly remembers working with Senta Berger for the first time: “She is a queen. There are people who have an innate status. Senta Berger is one of them. She addresses everyone formally. It’s a little difficult for me to address her formally in return, but of course I do. She is great. I’m fascinated by her career.” The word “queen” also comes to Bruno Alexander’s mind when he thinks of Senta Berger: “When I looked into her eyes during a camera test before filming, I knew: this is a real star! She looks like a

queen! She has that about her: when she says something, plays with you, or talks to you, you notice that she is completely present, and that can be intimidating.”

Karoline Herfurth praises the spirit of the entire production: “You could tell that the film was a project close to Simon Verhoeven’s heart, that it held a very special place in his heart. That came across immediately. We had both wanted to work together for a long time. I’m very happy that it finally worked out here. Simon has created a fine, heartfelt story with a very special spirit.” Joachim Meyerhoff tips his hat to Simon Verhoeven’s achievement: “He is characterized by his wonderful enthusiasm for the source material and his admirable and devoted joy in bringing it to life. Simon has achieved something in the film that I also strive for in my books: the combination of seriousness and comedy. The film is hilarious and heartbreakingly sad!”

ABOUT THE CAST

BRUNO ALEXANDER as *Joachim*

Bruno Alexander is an actor, producer, screenwriter, and director from Hamburg. At the age of twelve, he appeared in the Hamburg-based series *The Peppercorns*. Since then, he has appeared in numerous film and television productions, including *Tatort*, the BBC series *World on Fire*, and the remake of *We Children from Bahnhof Zoo*. He also worked with Simon Verhoeven on *Old White Man*. In addition to his work as an actor, Bruno founded the production company Kleine Brüder in 2020 together with Emil and Oskar Belton, Max Mattis, and Leonard Fuchs. As showrunner, he has produced series such as *The Discounters*, *Intimate*, and *Player of Ibiza*, in which he also appears in front of the camera. These productions have won numerous awards, including the German Television Award, the Grimme Prize, the New Faces Award, and the German Acting Award.

SENTA BERGER as *Inge*

Senta Berger is an Austrian-German actress and film producer. She can look back on a rich career that took her from Germany to Hollywood, France, and Italy in the 1960s, where she starred alongside Charlton Heston, Kirk Douglas, Yul Brynner, Marcello Mastroianni, and Alain Delon, among others. Berger has earned great respect from audiences and her colleagues alike through the many films and series in which she has appeared. In addition to her professional activities, she has always attached great importance to publicizing her political and social commitment. Plan International or ARCHEMED – Doctors for Children in Need are just a few examples of the organizations that Senta Berger supports. Back in 1971, she was one of the prominent women who took part in the media campaign *We Had Abortions!* initiated by Alice Schwarzer, and she is one of the few who has spoken publicly about #MeToo incidents in her career. From 2005 to 2010, she and Günter Rohrbach jointly chaired the newly founded German Film Academy. She appeared in numerous European and German films and was a member of the ensemble at the Thalia Theater in Hamburg, the Schillertheater in Berlin, and the Burgtheater in Vienna. After making a comeback in German cinema in the early 1970s with Volker Schlöndorff's *Die Moral der Ruth Halbfass* (1971) and Wim Wenders' *The Scarlet Letter* (1993), she made television history with her roles as Mona in *Kir Royal*, Gerdi in *Die schnelle Gerdi* by Michael Verhoeven, and Eva Maria Prohacek in *Unter Verdacht*. To this day, she is considered a benchmark for quality, not only in her acting, but also in the projects she chooses to appear in.

From 1966 onwards, she was married to the equally highly regarded filmmaker Michael Verhoeven, who died in 2024. The couple have two sons, Simon and Luca, who continue to run the film production company Sentana, founded by Michael Verhoeven and Senta Berger. Among Sentana's best-known films are *The White Rose* (1982), *The Terrible Girl* (1990), and *Welcome to Germany* (2016) by her son Simon Verhoeven, in which she also appeared in front of the camera. Senta Berger has received numerous awards throughout her career, including the Grimme Prize, several Bambis, the Golden Camera,

two German Television Awards, the Peace Prize of German Cinema, a Platinum Romy, the Honorary Lola of the German Film Award, the Austrian Cross of Honor for Science and Art, First Class, the Bavarian Order of Merit, and the Federal Cross of Merit, First Class. Rainer Kaufmann cast her in 2012 for the lead role in the television thriller **Operation Zucker**. Senta Berger worked with Günther Maria Halmer in the miniseries *Die schnelle Gerdi und die Hauptstadt* (directed by Michael Verhoeven) and in the award-winning chamber play *Die Konferenz* (2004, directed by Niki Stein), as well as playing a married couple in the television films *Bis dass dein Tod uns scheidet* (2002, directed by Manfred Stelzer), *Willkommen auf dem Land* (2013, directed by Tim Trageser), *Die Hochzeit meiner Eltern* (2016, directed by Connie Walter), and in Rainer Kaufmann's *Do You Remember?* (2023). In the TV series *Unter Verdacht*, she played the role of Dr. Eva Maria Prohacek, starred in Hüseyin Tabak's *Oskar's Dress*, based on a screenplay by Florian David Fitz, voiced Madame Hermine in the animated film *The Rabbit School – The Great Egg Theft* (2022), and narrated the animal film *Bambi – A Life Story from the Forest* (2024).

MICHAEL WITTENBORN as *Hermann*

Michael Wittenborn completed his acting training at the Otto Falckenberg School in Munich and then received his first theater engagement in Wuppertal. This was followed by engagements at the Landestheater Tübingen, the Staatstheater Stuttgart, the Theater Basel, the Münchner Kammerspiele, the Burgtheater in Vienna, and the Schauspiel Köln. Since 2013, Michael Wittenborn has been a member of the ensemble at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, as he was previously from 1993 to 2000 under the direction of Frank Baumbauer. In addition to his career at renowned theaters, Wittenborn also appears regularly in film and television. He was awarded the German Acting Prize in 2015 for his role in *We Are the New Ones*. His filmography includes *If Not Us, Who?* (2011) by Andres Veiel, the Oscar®-nominated films *Toni Erdmann* (2016) by Maren Ade and *All Quiet on the Western Front* (2022) by Edward Berger, *Curveball – We Make the Truth* (2020) by Johannes Naber, *Fabian – Going to the Dogs* (2021) by Dominik Graf, the international production *Spirit in the Blood* (2024) by Carly May Borgstrom, *The Story of a Family* (2023) by Karsten Dahlem, and the children's film *Greetings from Mars* (2024) by Sarah Winkenstette, which has won awards at numerous children's film festivals. On television, he earned acclaim for his role in *Merz gegen Merz* (including the 2020 DAfF Award for Best Supporting Actor and a nomination for the 2025 German Acting Award) and enjoyed success with formats such as *Unter Freunden stirbt man nicht* and *Wellness für Paare*.

ANNE RATTE-POLLE as *Gretchen Kinski*

Since the beginning of her career in 2000, after studying at the hmt Rostock, Anne Ratte-Polle has been known for her award-winning work in both film

and theater. She has performed at major theaters in German-speaking countries, including Hanover, Munich, Zurich, and Berlin, where she appeared primarily at the Volksbühne under the artistic direction of Frank Castorf. With Herbert Fritsch's Dadaist play *Murmel Murmel*, she also made a name for herself internationally. Anne Ratte-Polle is known for her powerful, sensitive, and humorous acting style, with which she often brings idiosyncratic and complex female characters to life. Her first leading role in the film *The Night Sings Its Songs*, directed by Romuald Karmakar, received much acclaim and premiered in competition at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2004. Since then, she has returned regularly to the festival with films, including Denis Côté's Canadian drama *Un été comme ça*, which screened in competition at the 2022 Berlinale. Anne has received numerous awards: for her brilliant performance in *The Spoken Word* by İlker Çatak, she received the Bavarian Film Award in 2020 and a nomination for the German Film Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role. Her leading role as psychotherapist Ina in Katharina Woll's cinema debut *Alle wollen geliebt werden* (2022) also received considerable attention and won seven awards at international indie film festivals. Her entire film career was celebrated in the same year with the Acting Award at the Festival of German Film in Ludwigshafen. TV audiences know her from the critically acclaimed sci-fi mystery drama *Dark* (2017, Netflix), the international miniseries *Im Schatten der Mörder – Shadowplay* (2020, Netflix and Canal+), and the drama series *Funeral for a Dog* (2022, Sky). In 2023, Anne appeared in two leading roles: in the series *Zwei Seiten des Abgrunds* (HBO Max) and in the film *Mein Falke* (directed by Dominik Graf, NDR/Arte). She also appeared as Marlene Dietrich in Detlev Buck's comedy series *German Genius* (Netflix) in the same year. In 2024, she starred in the vampire series **Love Sucks** (ZDFneo) and in Oskar Roehler's *Bad Director*, for which she was nominated for Best Supporting Actress at the 2024 German Film Awards. Anne was last seen on the big screen as a bomb disposal expert in *Blindgänger* (2024, directed by Kerstin Polte) and in Philipp Stölzl's international production *The Physician II* (2025). Anne Ratte-Polle will soon be seen in a supporting role in Simon Verhoeven's film adaptation of Joachim Meyerhoff's *Oh, This Unspeakable Void* (2026). She is currently appearing in Constanza Macras' *The Hunger* at the Volksbühne Berlin. Anne

Ratte-Polle lives in Berlin and is a member of the European and German Film Academies.

TOM SCHILLING as *Hagen*

Tom Schilling, born in East Berlin in 1982, is currently one of the biggest stars in German cinema. He recently impressed audiences in the Netflix series *Murder Mindfully*, the second season of which is currently in production. He also recently appeared in two very different film adaptations of Erich Kästner's works, Carolina Hellsgård's *The Flying Classroom* (2023) and Dominik Graf's *Fabian: Going to the Dogs* (2021), which celebrated its world premiere in competition at the Berlinale. He celebrated a million-dollar hit with Christopher Doll's *One Million Minutes* (2024). His greatest success to date was the cult film *A Coffee in Berlin* (2012). Jan-Ole Gerster's directorial debut not only became a surprise box-office hit, but also swept the German Film Awards, winning a total of six Lolas, including Best Film, with Schilling named Best Actor. He landed a major commercial hit with the thriller *Who Am I – No System Is Safe* (2014), produced by Wiedemann & Berg, which also opened the door for Schilling internationally. He starred in Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *Never Look Away* (2018), which was subsequently nominated for the Oscar® for Best Foreign Language Film. He also had audiences laughing in *The Goldfish* (2019) by Alireza Golafshan. The actor celebrated another triumph as one of the leading actors in the International Emmy Award-winning three-part series *Generation War*, directed by Philipp Kadelbach. Schilling later appeared again in front of the camera for Kadelbach in the TV movie *Close Range* (2016). At the age of twelve, Schilling was approached by director Thomas Heise and cast in the play *Im Schlagschatten des Mondes* at the Berliner Ensemble, followed by further theater productions over the next four years. He made his big-screen breakthrough in 2000 with the film *Crazy*, directed by Hans-Christian Schmid, for which he received the Bavarian Film Award for Best Young Actor. Tom Schilling also appeared in Oskar Roehler's film *Kill Your Idols* (2015), as well as *Agnes and His Brothers* and *The Elementary Particles*. He went on to appear in international co-productions such as *The Art of Living* (2014) with Jack Huston and Brit Marling, *Suite Française* (2014) with Michelle Williams and Matthias Schoenaerts, and *Woman in Gold* (2015) with Helen Mirren and Ryan Reynolds.

KAROLINE HERFURTH as *Gisela Marder*

Karoline Herfurth is one of Germany's established film stars. She is not only highly regarded as an actress, but has also made a name for herself as a director and writer with outstanding films such as *Wunderschöner*, *Wonderfully Beautiful*, and *Simply Complicated*. Her directorial debut *SMS für Dich* was later remade in the US as *Love Again*, starring Priyanka Chopra Jonas in the lead role and featuring singing icon Céline Dion in her acting debut. In January 2023, Herfurth was awarded the Ernst Lubitsch Prize

for Best Comedic Performance in a German Film, followed in November by the Bambi Award for Best National Actress.

Born in Berlin, she was discovered in the schoolyard at the age of 15. Already in her first feature films, *Crazy* (2000, directed by Hans-Christian Schmid) and *Mädchen, Mädchen!* (2001, directed by Dennis Gansel), she demonstrated great acting talent and impressive charisma. In 2008, she graduated from the renowned Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts. Since then, she has appeared in well over 30 films across a wide range of genres and roles. She shone in German productions such as the vampire fantasy horror film *We Are the Night* (2010, directed by Dennis Gansel) and the sensitive psychiatric drama *Vincent Wants to Sea* (2010, directed by Ralf Huettnner), but also in major international bestseller adaptations such as *The Reader* (2008, directed by Stephen Daldry) and *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (2006, directed by Tom Tykwer). As the Mirabelle girl, she needed only a few minutes to reveal her secret and drive the perfume creator Grenouille mad. In 2012, she starred in the erotic mystery thriller *Passion*, directed by Brian De Palma, alongside Rachel McAdams and Noomi Rapace.

Instead of pursuing a permanent international career, Karoline Herfurth chose to take on new challenges in a wide variety of genres and roles in Germany. She repeatedly accepted roles involving great physical demands, for example as a young soccer player with cancer in Buket Alakus' *Eine andere Liga* (2005), as Jewish high-jump legend Gretel Bergmann in *Berlin '36* (2009), and as dancer Lily opposite Josef Bierbichler in the drama *Im Winter ein Jahr* (2008), directed by Academy Award® winner Caroline Link. For this performance, Karoline Herfurth received the Bavarian Film Prize for Best Young Actress in 2009. She demonstrated her great comedic talent in Bora Dagtekin's blockbuster hits *Fack ju Göhte* (2013) and *Fack ju Göhte 2* (2015), playing the chaotic and overwhelmed teacher Lisi Schnabelstedt alongside Elyas M'Barek and winning the hearts of millions of viewers. In 2015, she also appeared in Anika Decker's directorial debut *Traumfrauen*, alongside Hannah Herzsprung and Palina Rojinski.

Karoline Herfurth also enchanted younger cinema audiences as single mother Tanja Doretti in the *Rico, Oskar und ...* trilogy (2014, 2015, 2016), based on the novels by Andreas Steinhöfel, and in the title role of the film adaptation of Otfried Preußler's classic children's book *The Little Witch*. In the first German Amazon series *You Are Wanted*, she took on the role of Lena Arandt, who, together with hotel manager Lukas Franke, played by Matthias Schweighöfer, attempts to track down a group of hackers. In the second German Amazon series, she played the female lead in *Beat*, directed by Marco Kreuzpaintner, alongside Jannis Niewöhner and Alexander Fehling. In Bora Dagtekin's *The Perfect Secret*, she once again appeared on screen alongside Elyas M'Barek, Jella Haase, and a large ensemble cast.

Karoline Herfurth is not only one of the outstanding acting talents of her generation, but also a highly successful filmmaker. In 2012, she presented her first directorial work, the short film *Mittelkleiner Mensch*, at the Hof Film Festival. With her feature film debut *SMS für Dich*, she established herself in 2016 as one of the most successful young directors

in German-language cinema, serving as co-writer, director, and lead actress alongside Friedrich Mücke and Nora Tschirner. This was followed in 2019 by the comedy *Sweethearts*, in which she again appeared opposite Hannah Herzprung. In 2022, two films were released in theaters for which Karoline Herfurth served as director, co-writer, and lead actress, attracting millions of viewers: *Wonderfully Beautiful*, which portrays five women from different generations grappling with society's obsession with self-optimization, and *Simply Complicated*, which humorously turns conventional ideas about family upside down. Most recently, she appeared in *A Million Minutes*, Christopher Doll's directorial debut, based on Wolf Küper's autobiographical novel. With her latest work, *Wunderschöner* (2025), she once again achieved major audience success. The episodic film reunites the characters from the previous film: five women who no longer want to base their lives and self-worth on being desirable.

LAURA TONKE as *Joachim's mother Iris*

Laura Tonke was born in Berlin in 1974. At the age of 15, she made her sensational acting debut in Michael Klier's drama *Ostkreuz* (1991). After studying theater studies, she appeared from 1997 onwards in numerous film productions by renowned directors, including Tom Tykwer's *Winter Sleepers* (1997), Bernd Schädewald's junkie drama *Der Pirat* (1998), and Dominik Graf's thriller *Bittere Unschuld* (1999). At the Golden Camera Awards in 2000, she was honored with the Lilli Palmer Memorial Camera as Best Young Actress, before achieving her definitive breakthrough in Christopher Roth's RAF drama *Baader* (2002) as Gudrun Ensslin and in Eoin Moore's *Pigs Will Fly* (2002). She won the New Faces Award for both roles and was nominated for the German Film Award for Best Supporting Actress.

In 2003, Laura Tonke made her debut at Berlin's Volksbühne under the direction of Frank Castorf, and since 2005 she has been a regular performer with the German-English performance collective Gob Squad. Over the past two decades, she has impressed audiences with her versatility in film and television, including roles in Michael Klier's *Farland* (2004), Christoph Hochhäusler's *Falscher Bekenner* (2005), and Adolf Winkelmann's *Contergan* (2007), in the culture-clash romance *Madly in Love* (2010), and in RP Kahl's erotic drama *Bedways* (2010). She was part of the cast of the ZDF series *KDD – Kriminaldauerdienst* (2010) and also appeared in guest roles in *Das Duo*, *Tatort*, and *Ein Fall für zwei*.

She was celebrated by critics and audiences alike for her title role in Sonja Heiss' tragicomedy *Hedi Schneider Is Stuck*, which premiered at the Berlinale in 2015. Laura Tonke made film history at the 2016 German Film Awards when she won two Lolas: Best Actress for *Hedi Schneider Is Stuck* and Best Supporting Actress for Laura Lackmann's *Mängel exemplar*—a distinction no other actress had achieved before. Her further honors include the German Television Award and the Hessian Television Award for her performance in Max Zähle's *Are You Happy?* (2018), the German Acting Award for her

supporting role in *Polizeiruf 110 – Der Verurteilte* (2020), and the Günter Rohrbach Film Prize for *When Will It Be Again Like It Never Was Before* (2023).

In 2017, Laura Tonke appeared in Sonja Kröner's *Summer Houses*, Laura Lackmann's romance *Zwei im falschen Film*, and Helene Hegemann's *Axolotl Overkill*, which celebrated its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival. This was followed by Philipp Kadelbach's *So Much Time* (2018) and Robert Thalheim's *TKKG – Every Legend Has a Beginning* (2019). She starred opposite Moritz Bleibtreu in Laura Lackmann's *Caveman* (2023), was part of the ensemble cast of Nicolette Krebitz's Berlinale competition entry *A E I O U – The Quick Alphabet of Love* (2022), and played a leading role in Benjamin Pfohl's *Jupiter* (2023), which received the New German Cinema Prize at the Hof Film Festival. In 2024, Laura Tonke once again partnered with Moritz Bleibtreu in Alireza Golafshan's family comedy *All Fifty Fifty* and led the cast of David Dietl's *Parties & Friends – A Toast to Us!*. Most recently, she appeared in Benjamin Heisenberg's children's film *The Prank* (2025) and in the bestselling novel adaptation *22 Lanes* by Mia Maariel Meyer.

DEVID STRIESOW as *Joachim's father Richard*

Devid Striesow was born in 1973 in the former GDR, on the island of Rügen. After graduating from school, he completed his training at the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts in Berlin, graduating with a diploma in 1999. Immediately afterwards, he made his cinema debut in 2000 in Rainer Kaufmann's *Cold Is the Evening Breeze*. Since then, he has been one of the busiest German actors in film, television, and on stage. He has worked with many of the most renowned directors, and his roles span an enormous range. His work includes Gregor Schnitzler's *What to Do When It Burns* (2001), Hans-Christian Schmid's *Lichter* (2003), Ulrich Köhler's *Bungalow* (2002) and *Montag kommen die Fenster* (2006), Oliver Hirschbiegel's *Downfall* (2004), Dennis Gansel's *Napola – Elite for the Führer* (2004), Christoph Hochhäusler's *Falscher Bekenner* (2005), Dominik Graf's *Der rote Kakadu* (2006), Stefan Ruzowitzky's *The Counterfeiters* (2007), Andreas Kleinert's *Freischwimmer* (2007), Nicolette Krebitz's *Das Herz ist ein dunkler Wald* (2007), Christian Petzold's *Yella* (2007), Matthias Glasner's *This Is Love* (2009), Margarethe von Trotta's *Vision – From the Life of Hildegard von Bingen* (2009), Tom Tykwer's *Three* (2010), Lars Jessen's *Fraktus* (2012), Burhan Qurbani's *We Are Young. We Are Strong* (2014), Julia von Heinz's *I'm Off Then* (2015), Micha Lewinsky's *Nothing Happens* (2015), Franziska Meletzky's *Vorwärts immer!* (2017), Jan Georg Schütte's *Wellness für Paare* (2016), Barbara Albert's *Licht* (2017), Christian Theede's *Die Pfefferkörner und der Fluch des schwarzen Königs* (2017), Markus Goller's *Simpel* (2017), Mark Schlichter's *Alfons Zitterbacke – Chaos Returns* (2019), Franziska Stünkel's *Nahschuss* (2021), and Edward Berger's Oscar®-winning *All Quiet on the Western Front* (2022). Most recently, Striesow was seen in Sonja Heiss's Meyerhoff film adaptation *When Will It Be Again Like It Never Was Before* (2023), which celebrated its world premiere at the Berlinale, and in Dito Tsintsadze's *Roxy* (2024).

In addition to his feature films, Striesow has appeared in numerous television films and series, including *Bella Block*, *The Funeral*, *Tatort*, and *Bloch*. His more recent television work includes *Die Hochzeit* and *Das Fest der Liebe* by Jan Georg Schütte, the German Apple TV+ series *Where's Wanda?*, as well as *Sternstunde der Mörder* and *Nackt über Berlin*. He has also appeared regularly on stage at the Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus. Striesow has received numerous honors: in 2004, he won the Alfred Kerr Prize for Best Young Actor at the Berlin Theatertreffen for his performance in Jürgen Gosch's production of *Summer Guests*. In 2007, he won the German Film Award for Best Supporting Actor for *The Counterfeiters*. Together with Andreas Schmidt and Jördis Triebel, he received the Hessian Film Prize in 2011 and the Grimme Prize in 2012 for *A Good Summer*. He also won Grimme Prizes for *Blueberry Blue* (2011) and *The White Rabbit* (2016), received the Bavarian Television Award for his performance in a television film by Florian Schwarz, and was awarded a Bambi in 2016 for *I'm Off Then*. In 2022, Devid Striesow was nominated for the Nestroy Award for Best Actor for his performance in Thorsten Lensing's stage production *Crazy for Comfort*.

BEHIND THE CAMERA

SIMON VERHOEVEN, *director and screenplay*

Simon Verhoeven was born in Munich in 1972. He is the son of actress Senta Berger and director and screenwriter Michael Verhoeven. He came into contact with the world of theater and film at an early age. At the age of thirteen, he wrote his first play, which was performed by his high school theater group, and also composed the music for it. After graduating from high school, he gained experience as a set runner and video operator before enrolling at the Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute in New York to study acting. He left the program after seven months to study directing and screenwriting at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University (NYU). After graduating, Simon Verhoeven continued his music studies at Berklee College of Music in Boston, focusing on composing film music. As an actor, he has appeared in more than thirty cinema and television productions, including Roland Suso Richter's award-winning television film *Mogadishu*, as well as American productions such as *Party Girl* (1995), alongside Parker Posey and Liev Schreiber, and *Bride of the Wind*, directed by Academy Award® winner Bruce Beresford. Verhoeven also appeared in the German-Russian fairy-tale film *Vasilisa* alongside Nina Hagen.

In 2001, Verhoeven made his debut as a director and screenwriter with the coming-of-age comedy *100 Pro*, starring Ken Duken. His major breakthrough came in 2009 with the cinema comedy *Männerherzen*. The film was a hit with both audiences and critics and received numerous awards, including the Jupiter Award for Best Film, the Bavarian Film Award for Best Screenplay, and the German Film Award for Best Supporting Actor. The satirical anthem *Alle Kinder dieser Erde (All Children of This Earth)*, written by Simon Verhoeven and sung in the film by Justus von Dohnányi, became a viral YouTube hit. Remakes of *Männerherzen* were produced in several countries, and Verhoeven went on to direct, write, and compose the sequel *Männerherzen ... und die ganz ganz große Liebe* (2011).

With *Unfreund* (2015), Verhoeven ventured into a completely different genre, directing a horror thriller with an international cast set in the cyber world and released in numerous territories. His next film, the political satire *Welcome to Germany*, dealt with the refugee crisis and became the most successful German film of the 2016 cinema year. It received many honors, including the Peace Prize of German Cinema, and was nominated for the European Film Award. A stage adaptation premiered at the Burgtheater in Vienna and was later performed at several German theaters. In 2020, *Nightlife* was released in cinemas. The comedy, which Verhoeven describes as an homage to the screwball comedies of his childhood and which stars Elyas M'Barek, Palina Rojinski, and Frederick Lau, received the German Film Award for the most-watched film of the year and was also honored with the Ernst Lubitsch Prize.

In November 2023, Verhoeven's film *Girl You Know It's True* was released in German cinemas. Based on his own screenplay, it tells the story of the rise and scandal of the pop duo Milli Vanilli. The leading roles were played by Tijan Njie as Robert Pilatus and

Elan Ben Ali as Fabrice Morvan, alongside Matthias Schweighöfer as music producer Frank Farian. The film was highly praised by critics, released internationally, and won two German Film Awards for Best Costume Design and Best Makeup. In 2024, Verhoeven's *Old White Man* was released in theaters, becoming another major box-office success.

JOACHIM MEYERHOFF, *author*

Joachim Meyerhoff, born in 1967 in Homburg/Saar, grew up in Schleswig and has performed as an actor at numerous theaters, including the Burgtheater in Vienna, the Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, the Berliner Schaubühne, and the Münchner Kammerspiele. He has been voted Actor of the Year three times for his work. In 2011, he began publishing his multi-part cycle *All the Dead Fly High*. His novels have received numerous awards, most recently the Kassel Literature Prize for Grotesque Humor in 2024.

JANINE JACKOWSKI, *producer*

While studying at the HFF Munich, Janine Jackowski founded the production company Komplizen Film together with Maren Ade in 1999. Over the past 25 years, she has produced more than 60 films and series, many of which have been selected for and awarded at international film festivals. These include *Toni Erdmann* by Maren Ade (2016), which premiered in competition at Cannes, won five European Film Awards, and was nominated for a Golden Globe, a César, a BAFTA, and an Oscar® for Best Foreign Language Film.

Western by Valeska Grisebach premiered in the Un Certain Regard section at Cannes in 2017, and *Una mujer fantástica (A Fantastic Woman)* by Sebastián Lelio won the Oscar® for Best Foreign Language Film in 2018. *Synonyms* by Nadav Lapid won the Golden Bear at the Berlinale in 2019, and the series *Skylines*, developed by Dennis Schanz, launched as a Netflix Original in the same year. Pablo Larraín's *Spencer* premiered in competition at the Venice Film Festival in 2021 and earned Kristen Stewart an Oscar® nomination for Best Actress. She also co-produced Marie Kreutzer's *Corsage* and Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *About Dry Grasses*, both of which premiered at Cannes.

Most recently, she produced *Maria* by Pablo Larraín (Venice Competition 2024) and co-produced *Sentimental Value* by Joachim Trier, which screened in competition at Cannes and is Norway's Oscar® entry this year. Janine Jackowski is a member of the ACE Network, the EPC, the German, British, and European Film Academies, and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Komplizen Film is a co-founder of the international producers' alliance The Creatives, an association of nine independent production companies worldwide.

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Beta Cinema // beta@betacinema.com // Phone: +49 | 89 | 673469 – 828

www.betacinema.com