



# PICTURE TREE INTERNATIONAL

presents

# WEST

a film by Christian Schwochow



## WORLD SALES

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## PRESS CONTACT

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## MAIN DETAILS

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

## TECHNICAL INFORMATION:

<b>Format</b>	DCP
<b>Running Time</b>	102'00"
<b>Screen ratio</b>	1:2,35
<b>Frames / second</b>	24
<b>Sound Format</b>	DOLBY DIGITAL
<b>Original version</b>	GERMAN, ENGLISH, RUSSIAN, POLISH
<b>Subtitled version</b>	ENGLISH

## FESTIVALS & PRIZES:

Montréal World Film Festival (Best Actress Award for Jördis Triebel, FIPRESCI-Prize)

Arras Film Festival (French Critic's Prize)

**Title:** WEST

**Tagline:**

### **Synopsis**

When Wassilij leaves, all he leaves behind is a white jumper he wraps around his son's shoulders when he is cold. For the boy it is to be just another short separation, alike for his mother. Her boyfriend Wassilij Batalow is a Russian physicist and attends many conferences. This time, however, he will not return.

Three years later a car stops in front of the house in East Berlin, where Nelly and Alexej live. Nelly, 30 years old, obviously very nervous with her exit visa in her bag, is leaving her home, the GDR. She pretends to get married to a man from the West while in truth she wants to start a new life together with her son. To leave everything behind. The grief, the suffocation, the memories and the probing questions by the Stasi (secret police).

But her country doesn't make it easy for her to leave. Her hands tremble when the border guard takes her son into the back room. Gerd Becker, who pretends to be Nelly's fiancé to bring her across the border, tries to calm her. Shortly afterwards, Nelly has to follow another border guard into a flat-roofed building. She has to answer questions, undress, let them examine her – for the hundredth time.

"I said: Gerd is my new dad", Alexej states when Nelly stumbles back to the car. She takes his hand. That's just a small white lie", she says and cries from relief when they have finally crossed the border into West Berlin – into freedom.

A group of youngsters roam the streets, with beer in hand. It is evening. From afar one can see the letters on a building in Berlin-Marienfelde: Emergency Refugee Centre. It is Nelly's sole shelter here in the West, where she doesn't know anybody at all. All the same it is the place of her hopes. She will be able to find a flat and a job in

West Berlin, and start anew with Alexej, Nelly believes.

But in the Centre everything starts from scratch: The examinations, the questions, the completion of forms and the 'hunt' for stamps for the residence permit – which can only be achieved by 'cooperation', by reporting from the other side.

The Allied secret services are asking for Wassilij. At home Nelly was told he was dead. A car accident. However, John Bird, the CIA agent, who interrogates her, doubts this. Suddenly Nelly has to ask herself if she has ever known the man she thought to have loved. Was he a spy? And if so – is he still alive? Instead of freedom, the feeling of suffocation and the Cold War continue to haunt Nelly in the West – and in her head. Suddenly she sees Wassilij – or didn't she? Torn between the hope for a better life, which so far she cannot even imagine and a deep mistrust towards institutions Nelly struggles with the hauntingly long wait in the transitional world of the Centre.

Together with thousands of others, who share a similar fate, Nelly and Alexej wait for a change.

Between bunk bed camps, interrogations and the queue for food they try to preserve their dignity. Which is not easy. As there is this fear and distrust. There are Stasi informants everywhere in the Centre, or so they say. Who is Hans, who so often looks after Alexej? Why is he always there when she is in need of something? Why is he in the Centre for already two years and has never made it out of there? Over and over again the paranoia catches up with Nelly. Only when she is about to lose the bond to her son she realizes that she has to face the decision: Will she continue to let her past rule over her present? Or will she dare a completely new beginning, together with her son?

## NOTE TO THE PRESS



Christian Schwochow, Director

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

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

## DIRECTOR'S BIO

CHRISTIAN SCHWOCHOW (director)

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

## DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

### SCRIPTWRITER

			TV movie, post-production
2011	Die Unsichtbare Feature film	2013	Westen Completed
2008	Novemberkind Feature film	2012	Der Turm TV movie
2007	Terra X - Expedition ins Unbekannte TV Series documentary, 1 episode	2008	Novemberkind Feature film
2006	Marta und der fliegende Großvater Feature film	2007	Terra X - Expedition ins Unbekannte TV Series documentary, 1 episode
2005	Tantalus Short	2006	Marta und der fliegende Großvater Feature film

### DIRECTOR

		2005	Tantalus Short
2014	Bornholmer Straße		

### PRINCIPAL CAST:

NELLY SENFF

**Jördis Triebel**



HANS PISCHKE

**Alexander Scheer**



ALEXEJ

**Tristan Göbel**



JOHN BIRD

**Jacky Ido**



## PRINCIPAL CREW

Director

Christian Schwochow

Script

Heide Schwochow

Based on the original novel "Lagerfeuer" by Julia Franck

Editor

Jens Klüber bfs

Director of Photography

Frank Lamm

Original Sound

Jörg Kidrowski bvft

Original Music

Lorenz Dangel

Sound Design

Rainer Heesch

Production Design

Tim Pannen

Costume Design

Kristin Schuster

Makeup Design

Wolfgang Böge BvM

Casting

Uta Seibicke

Production Manager

Andreas Jupe

Line Producer

Tassilo Aschauer

Producers

Katrin Schlösser, Ö Filmproduktion

Thomas Kufus, zero one film

Christoph Friedel, Terz Filmproduktion

Co-Producers

Helge Sasse, Senator Film Produktion

WDR, Barbara Buhl

SWR, Stefanie Groß

rbb, Cooky Ziesche

ARTE, Georg Steinert

## BIOS OF THE KEY CAST

### JÖRDIS TRIEBEL

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

### TRISTAN GÖBEL

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

### ALEXANDER SCHEER

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

### JACKY IDO

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

## Interview with Christian Schwochow and Heide Schwochow

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

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

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

### **In what way?**

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

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

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

### **What exactly fascinated you about the “Lagerfeuer” story?**

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

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

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

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

CHRISTIAN SCHWOCHOW: My ideas were far more childlike. I was eleven, when we left. My school was at Falkplatz, at Prenzlauer Berg, right where the wall was. When somebody could get his hands on a “Bravo” (Teen Magazine) or we could exchange some stickers for our collection – to me, that was the West. Later I thought:

The moment of leaving is comparable to a separation. When you're in a relationship, which suffocates you, you will eventually think: I want to split up. But that doesn't necessarily mean there is already an alternative for this relationship. You don't immediately know what kind of a new relationship you want to engage in – or what kind of life you want to live.

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

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

**Did you have difficulties, settling in?**

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

HEIDE SCHWOCHOW: Yet, it was actually quite easy for us, in comparison. Those, who went to the West when the wall was still up were not allowed to see their families for months, for years even. And if they couldn't settle in there was no way to go back, to say: It was a mistake. That would have been interpreted as a defeat by the

East. That's what it's like for Nelly Senff and Hans Pischke in the movie. Going back was hardly an option.

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

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

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

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

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

HEIDE SCHWOCHOW: Nelly can only see: How does this person behave as a human

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

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

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

**How long did you work on the script?**

HEIDE SCHWOCHOW: All in all: three years.

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

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

## WORLD SALES

**Picture Tree International GmbH** was founded by Andreas Rothbauer and Alec Schulmann and is an internationally aligned and integrated world sales and production company with headquarters in Berlin.

The core business of **Picture Tree International** is the worldwide licensing of film rights and the co-production of

international feature films in an integrated business model.

The company will handle an overall international sales line-up of up to eight films per year and will internally coproduce two projects.

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