

## THE GERMAN SOCIETY'S

### Friday Film Fest Series



#### Alles auf Zucker – Go for Zucker

Director: Dani Levy  
Screenplay: Dani Levy, Holger Franke  
Photography: Carl-F. Koschnik  
Producer: Manuela Stehr  
Cast: Henry Hübchen (Jaeckie Zucker, Jakob Zuckermann), Hannelore Elsner (Marlene Zucker), Udo Samel (Samuel Zuckermann), Golda Tencer (Golda Zuckermann), Steffen Groth (Thomas Zuckermann), Sebastian Blomberg (Joshua Zuckermann), Anja Franke (Jana Zuckermann), Elena Uhlig (Lilly Zuckermann), Rolf Hoppe (Rabbi Ernst Ginsberg)

Release: January 2005  
Time: 90 minutes  
Language: German with English subtitles

Awards: German Film Award 2005 for best Film, Best Costume Design, Best Score, Best leading Actor, Best Screenplay Ernst Lubitsch Award 2005 (Best German Comedy)

#### An unorthodox Comedy – Karl Moehlmann

When the wall is built in 1961, the Jewish family Zuckermann becomes separated, due to Mother Zuckermann's decision to flee to the West with her first born son Samuel. She leaves Jakob behind in East-Berlin to fend for himself. While his brother becomes an orthodox Jew in Frankfurt, Jakob becomes Jackie the celebrity sportscaster in the GDR.

When the wall comes down 28 years later, Jackie's salad days are over. A pool shark who habituates seedy night spots, he is now in deep and out far due to his compulsive gambling, his boozing and his 45K Euro debt. At this propitious juncture, his wife Marlene lends her support by deciding to divorce him. Topping things off, Jackie misses the deadline for a payment. His son, the bank manager, then demonstrates his filial devotion by showing up with the police to demand payment. Jackie seems to have reached his nadir, exhibiting all the characteristics of a quintessential hard time losing Goy.

Jackie's shysterish *Dasein* hangs in the balance. Unless he comes up with the money, he will go to prison. A last change for salvation and redemption presents itself in the form of the all European Pool Tournament. Jackie also needs the 5000 Euro entry fee. Yet like any self respecting picaresque hero, when fortune is at its lowest ebb, Jackie's confidence remains undiminished. "*Ich stehe bis zum Hals in Scheiße, aber der Ausblick ist gut*".

At this juncture Jackie receives the news that his mother has died and left her two sons an inheritance. Plots of necessity requiring such twists, mother Zuckermann has stipulated in her will that the two estranged brothers have to reconcile before they can get any money. The prospect of a prodigious inheritance has revived the bonds of affection in Marlene's bosom and intensified her interest

in all things *jüdisch*. She is determined that Jackie and the family will fulfill the terms of the will.

When Samuel and his family arrive in East-Berlin at Jackie's apartment for the funeral and Shiva, the inevitable dynamics of mutual incomprehension, cultural collisions and the unearthing of long buried memories humorously illuminate the dilemmas of Jewish identity (or non-identity as the case may be) in present-day Germany.

### **Retrieving a lost tradition**

When my Italian wife met the American brother-in-law of a friend she was asked: "So, you are married to a German?" "Yes", she replied. "Well, have you heard the joke about the German comedian?" he continued. "No", my wife answered. "Neither have I", he said. The Italians have Roberto Benigni and the Americans have Jerry Seinfeld, Woody Allen, Mel Brooks and many others who exemplify a long tradition of ironical, self deprecating Jewish humor. Due to extenuating circumstances, to find the German-Jewish tradition of comedy, you would have to go back almost 80 years. In the meantime, the Germans had to make do with Heinrich Lübke of the Adenauer era.

*Go for Zucker* is perhaps one small step toward the reclamation of that lost tradition, marking a new beginning in what used to be an integral part of German film culture. It is also one of the very few movies about German Judaism that doesn't center on the holocaust, instead approaching the subject of Jewish life in contemporary Germany with a refreshing *Unbefangenheit*. It shows the strengths and weaknesses of the Jewish characters and showers an ecumenical ridicule on everyone, including the piously orthodox Samuel, who lands in a nightclub in the lap of a Palestinian beauty. This film might not resonate with American tastes, but it was a considerable hit in Germany and thus serves as a good barometer of what Germans consider amusing.

### **The Director**

Dani Levy is a Jewish director born in 1957 in Basel/Switzerland. From 1977 -1979 he was in the ensemble of the Basel Theatre and from 1980 -1983 he was a member of the Rote Gruetze Theatre in Berlin. His films include: *Du mich auch* (1985), *Abgeschleppt* (1990), *I was on Mars* (1991), *Ohne mich* (1993), *Stille Nacht* (1995), and *Väter* (2002).

He has been awarded various international prizes including the FIPRESCI Critics Award at San Sebastian for *I was on Mars* and the Hypo bank Young Director's Award for *Ohne mich* at the Munich Filmfest in 1993. He has also appeared as an actor in various feature and TV films and received the German Film Award for his direction of *Go for Zucker*.