

prising that so many people want to escape this prison-like country and curse “dies Sch...land”. Women in particular are attuned to the allures of the West, especially those who have or are looking for West-German lovers. They are impressed by the gifts from the *Wirtschaftswunderland* and the promise of a better life in the West. When Jörg tell Barbara that he could move to East-Germany and be happy with her there she tells him: “*Du spinnst, hier kann man nicht glücklich werden.*”

“I can’t go on livin’ life this way – at last I am free” are lyrics from the song by Chic that plays as the movie ends. And if Barbara would escape to the West, she would at last be free and this movie would validate the black and white, good vs bad clichés about the East-West divide. But Barbara doesn’t escape. As the mistrust between her and Andre slowly passes and both are more and more passionately involved in their work, their patients and the human side of their profession, the lure of the West and her lover fades. When Jörg tells her that he makes enough money so that she doesn’t have to work anymore in the West she pauses and thinks. We see a gradual shift towards trusting Andre, opening up to him and letting their affection for each other take root. Not leaving doesn’t end her dislike of the repressive side of the GDR, it just gives her a future with a man that loves her and with the type of work that she loves. The East-German writer Anna Seghers once said:

“*Wenn du deine Vergangenheit verlierst, wirst du keine Zukunft haben.*”

Barbara chooses a future in the GDR that is based on her past and might well bring her private happiness and professional satisfaction. The story suggests that life in East-Germany before and after the fall of the wall was much more complex than people in the West imagined. “Barbara” is a powerful refutation of the orthodox description of the East proclaimed so often over the years by the *Besserwessies*.

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Friday Film Fest Series



Barbara

By Christian Petzold

October 25th, 2013

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

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Barbara (2012)

Credits:

Director:	Christian Petzold
Screenplay:	Christian Petzold, Harun Farocki
Cinematography:	Hans Fromm
Editing:	Bettina Böhler
Music:	Stefan Will
Cast:	Dr. Barbara Wolf (Nina Hoss), Dr. Andre Reiser (Ronald Zehrfeld) Stasi –Officer Klaus Schütz (Rainer Bock), Stella (Jasna Fritzi Bauer), Jörg (Mark Waschke), Karin (Christina Hecke)
Length:	105 Minutes
Country:	Germany
Language:	German with English subtitles
Awards:	Berlinale 2012 – Best Director German Filmprize 2012 – Nominated for Oscar – Best Foreign Film

Director Christian Petzold (1960 -) – Feature Films

- 2000: The State I Am In (German: Die innere Sicherheit) (Harun Farocki, Julia Hummer, Richy Müller, Barbara Auer, Katharina Schüttler)
- 2003: Wolfsburg (Benno Fürmann, Nina Hoss, Astrid Meyerfeldt)
- 2005: Gespenster (Harun Farocki, Julia Hummer, Sabine Timoteo, Benno Fürmann)
- 2007: Yella (scenario with Simone Baer, with Nina Hoss)
- 2008: Jerichow (with Nina Hoss, Hilmi Sözer and Benno Fürmann)
- 2012: Barbara (Nina Hoss)

Commentary by K. Moehlmann

The Plot

The film is set in East Germany in 1980, nine years before the fall of the wall. Doctor Barbara Wolf (Barbara) was a physician at the prestigious Charité hospital in East-Berlin and had developed a romantic relationship with Jörg, a businessman from West-Germany. The details of their relationship remain undisclosed. Barbara files for an exit visa (*Ausreiseantrag*), which in the eyes of the GDR, equals treason since the *Arbeiter und Bauernstaat* has paid for her education and she is supposed remain grateful and loyal. Consequently, she has been transferred to this small provincial hospital near the Baltic Sea, working in a department led by chief physician Dr. Andre Reiser.

Reiser has been informed by the Stasi-Officer Klaus Schütz about Barbara's arrival and her security details. Initially it appears that he is supposed to gain information on her as an informant. Barbara senses this immediately and separates (*separiert sich*) herself from Reiser and his staff.

Things gradually change when a young woman named Stella who is suffering from meningitis is delivered to the hospital. She had been an inmate at a youth detention centre in Torgau for juvenile offenders where she was forced to do hard labor. Barbara gains her trust and provides her with medical, psychological and personal care.

After Reiser discovers that Stella is pregnant, Barbara is increasingly impressed by Reiser's work and slowly begins to trust him. She learns that three years previously he was also sent (*abgeschoben*) to this provincial hospital as a form of punishment. He had been indirectly responsible for a medical error with two premature babies (*Frühchen*) resulting in their permanent blindness. His career in medical research (and possibly even a move to the Charité) was consequently derailed.

He was offered a transfer to this hospital by the Stasi (*die feinen Herren*) if he remained silent and cooperative in reporting back to them. But he assures Barbara that he is not eager to work in this direction (*kein Ehrgeiz in dieser Richtung*).

In the meantime, Barbara's lover Jörg prepares her escape across the Baltic Sea to Denmark. He sends her money and brings her other gifts as he meets her in the nearby woods and at a Interhotel designed for foreign businessmen and visitors. The Stasi, unable to locate her for several hours, subject her to a debasing body search without finding the money or the plans for her escape.

The plot intensifies when Mario, a suicide patient with severe head injuries, is admitted to the hospital and Barbara and Reiser struggle to help him. The story comes to an utterly unpredictable conclusion when Stella flees the detention center, injures herself and seeks shelter in Barbara's house. Barbara commits to helping Reiser with a surgery planned for the same day as her escape.

GDR and Happiness

Hier kann man nicht glücklich werden (Oder doch?)

The movie was essentially filmed in chronological order in the city of Brandenburg (Ortsteil Kirchmöser) as well as by the Baltic coast in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Everything looks authentically East-German, from the run-down, grey buildings, the stark hospital, the plain interior of her apartment and the unattractive, smelly cars to the busses and trains, the simple clothes and even the food. The depiction of the methods of surveillance by the Stasi is genuine as well, echoing the techniques portrayed in Donnersmark's "Das Leben der Anderen". In sum we are given a vivid sense of the repressiveness of the East-German state and the shortcomings of the communist economy. It is not sur-

