

THE GERMAN SOCIETY'S

Friday Film Fest Series



Die Brücke

Credits:

Produced: Fono-Film, Berlin, 1959
Length: 99 Minutes
Director: Bernhard Wicki
Cast: Volker Bohnet, Fritz Wepper, Michael Hinz, Franz Glaubrecht, Karl Michael Balzer, Volker Lechtenbrink, Günther Hofmann, Cordula Trantow
Writer: Michael Mansfeld, Karl Wilhelm Vivier (Novel by Manfred Gregor with the same title)
Awards: Nominated for Best Foreign Film Oscar in 1959
Golden Globe for Best Foreign Film 1959

The Director:

Bernhard Wicki was born October 28, 1919 in St. Pölten, Austria. After high school, he enrolled in the acting school of the State Theatre under the guidance of Gustaf Gründgens in Berlin. Working in a painting class in Dessau, Wicki was denounced and was imprisoned in the concentration camp Sachsenhausen from 1938 until 1939. After being banned from Berlin, he went to the Max-Reinhardt-Seminar in Vienna and had his acting debut in 1940 as Faust at the Schönbrunner Castle theatre in Vienna. He landed his first role in a movie in 1940 in Gustav Ucickys "Der Postmeister" with Heinrich George. Playing in theatres in Zürich and Basel between 1944 and 1950, he became a Swiss citizen.

After 1945, he began his great film career as an actor and later as a director. He had a role in Harald Braun's "Der fallende Stern" (1950), in Helmut Käutner's "Die letzte Brücke" (1953/54), in Laszio Benedek's "Kinder, Mütter und ein General" (1955). He played Graf von Stauffenberg in "Es geschah am 20. Juli" also in 1955 under director G.W. Pabst.

In 1958, he directed his first short movie "Warum sind sie alle gegen uns?". One year later, he achieved international success with his first feature film "Die Brücke" for which he received an Oscar nomination and a Golden Globe.

In Hollywood, he filmed Dürrenmatt's "The visit" (1963/64) with Ingrid Bergman and Anthony Quinn and two years later the World War II secret service story "Morituri" with Yul Brynner and Marlon Brando. In the early nineties, he continued to have roles in television movies and in regular feature films. For his 80th birthday, the great actor and director was honored with a gala in Munich. Two months later, on January 3, 2000 he died in Munich of heart failure after a long illness.

Die Brücke – Karl Moehlmann

The Bridge is a very powerful universal anti-war movie. This drama concerns a group of seven schoolboys who band together to defend their local bridge against the advancing American troops in the closing hours of World War II. The film is brutally realistic and shows the insanity of this war in the courageous but senseless sacrifice of these promising young men. They were led to believe that they were fighting for important ideals when the war was lost already and their lives could have been spared. The fact that one of the two surviving boys is killed in an altercation with his own troops adds a painful tragic twist to the catastrophic end of the movie.

At Home

The first episode of the movie is an important exposition of the main characters. We get to know the seven boys at home with their parents, at school with their English teacher Studienrat Stern and in their leisure time at the bridge playing Indians and in school building a boat.

Hans Scholten – the most reasonable, mature and serious of the boys; he lives with Albert Mutz and his mother, who asks him to **take care of Albert** when they drafted into the army.

Albert Mutz - the friend that Hans Scholten is supposed to take care of. He is the only survivor and lives to **chronicle** the horrible events.

Karl Horber – Karl grows up with his widowed and handicapped father who owns a hair salon in the town. He has a crush on Barbara, the hairdresser in his father shop. He is shocked when he discovers that Barbara is his father's lover. He becomes bitter and obstinate and develops a hatred of all women and adults. His father's last word that he belongs to a "Kindergarten" is the trigger word that leads to his death.

Klaus Hager –evacuated from the big city to the countryside just like Hans Scholten, Klaus has a tender love affair with Franziska, the only girl in the class. He

hits and bloodies Karl's nose when he makes a negative remark about Franziska. The image of Karl's bloody face will return to make Klaus feel remorse for Karl's death.

Siegi Bernhard – the son of a laundry woman and lives in very simply social circumstances. He is the smallest and youngest of the group and thus the most teased and protected one. He is involved in several **tests of courage** to show that he is equal to the others.

Walter Forst – he is the son of the local party leader. He is physically and mentally the exact opposite of Siegi – strong, self-confident and courageous. He sees the hollowness of the party propaganda in his own father who gets ready to leave while his son is drafted into the army. He also sends his wife away to carry on an affair with the maid. This hatred of his father and his subsequent disillusionment drives him to the most **daring acts** in the movie.

Jürgen Borchart – he is the son of a fallen German officer and helps his mother manage their estate and a group of slave laborers. He believes in everything his father said and he wants to emulate him. Looking and acting almost like a "Junker" himself, his mother hands him **his father's pistol** as he eagerly and enthusiastically awaits his chance to follow in his father's footsteps.

Military Training

As the young recruits are being trained in military exercises, we get to know their leader corporal Heilman. Their English teacher, Studienrat Stern has an important conversation with the company commander in which he expresses his believe that the ideals of freedom, fatherland and heroic sacrifice has fallen into the hands of "Falschmünzer" (counterfeiters) and that he cannot understand why these children should be senselessly sacrificed at this point in the war. He pleads with the commander to save the boys from involvement at the front. Even though the commander reacts with indifference, citing his orders, this request later leads to the assignment of the boys at their local bridge. This bridge is unimportant, behind the front and destined to be

blown up anyway. Ironically it is this assignment that leads to their eventual demise.

The War

The third segment begins when the boys are setting up position at the bridge. They are seemingly out of danger and far behind the collapsing front. But when corporal Heilmann is killed by the local patrol, we see the first of two dramatic turnarounds (peripetie) that lead to the final catastrophe. The second comes when Hans suggests that they go home. Jürgen in his blind fervor takes over the group and prevents them from doing such a reasonable thing. As the fighting at the bridge intensifies, parallels to the first segment appear as the boys again emerge as individuals. Both the boys and the American soldiers they are fighting are portrayed empathetically. "This happened on April 27, 1945. It was so unimportant that no army report mentioned it." With this terse epilogue, *The Bridge* ends with an allusion to the most famous of all anti-war stories "Im Westen Nichts Neues" (*All Quiet on the Western Front*).