

THE GERMAN SOCIETY'S

Friday Film Fest Series



Erleuchtung garantiert – Enlightenment Guaranteed

Credits

Director Doris Dörrie

Screenplay Doris Dörrie

Principal Cast Anica Dobra, Ulrike Kriener, Heiner Lauterbach, Uwe Ochsenknecht, Gustav Peter Woehler

Festival Screenings Hof 1999, Berlin 2000 (New German Films), Gothenburg 2000, Rotterdam 2000

Length 108 min

Year of Production 2000

Précis

By Allen Krumm

With an unlikely amalgam of *Journey To The East*, *Diary Of A Mad Housewife*, and *Pilgrim's Progress*, Doris Dörrie presents us with the rather confused attempt of two brothers (Uwe and Gustl) to seek the light in their navels, a.k.a *Enlightenment Guaranteed*. Minus some frequent flyer miles, their journey often seems more regress than progress.

Both men deal with interiors, Uwe selling “mobile kitchens for flexible people” and Gustl working as an interior exorcist. Uwe jogs, Gustl plays with his miniature sand garden. Uwe is a lout to his long-suffering Frau Petra, Gustl and Frau Ulrike appear content and copasetic. While Gustl seems to suspect he needs some light, Uwe is oblivious, happy to wallow in his loutishness.

Gustl, a devotee of the Zen arts, has planned a trip to the famous monastery in Monzen, outside Tokyo, for a long time, lovingly encouraged by the faithful Ulrike. Petra, mired in her domestic purgatory of one lout and four kinder, one day has the inevitable epiphany, sees her man in the proper light and departs abruptly with the kids in tow. Uwe, after taking a comfortable bath in self-pity, decides the only remedy is to tag along with his brother's existential *Drang nach Osten*.

Each sibling has a most favored coping mechanism: Gustl quotes Zen scripture (“It is normal to suffer”), and Uwe soliloquizes incessantly into his camcorder, even at 30,000 feet in the toilet. Arriving in Tokyo they pool their ineptitude and manage to become homeless in one night, assisted by a misguided faith in Japanese corporate symbols. Eventually they are rescued by a fetching fellow expatriate named Anica, who gets them temporary employment in a Japanese version of a Bavarian honky tonk, and ultimately puts them on the train to Monzen and enlightenment.

Initiated and indoctrinated by the good brothers of the monastery (most of whom seem utterly baffled by their presence), Uwe and Gustl, equipped with their portable black whoopee prayer cushions, settle in and began to follow a regimen of gonging, ritual bathing, meditating, floor scrubbing, bowing and begging. They keep on seeking, with forgivable relapses and occasional corrections for technique, and Uwe finally breaks on through to the other side (sort of): "Whatever happens, happens."

Heading back to Tokyo, we sense they have made progress, since Uwe is now tossing scriptural quotes at Gustl and Gustl has bonded with the camcorder. Uwe is a bit kinder and gentler, Gustl a bit more ready to make those hard decisions ("I've decided I'm gay.") Most importantly, *die Brüder* are now able to check out life with their Zen crafted Lebens-lenses, and calibrate their engagement *das Leben* accordingly. So we leave them in their little yellow tent, basking in their hard-earned *Erleuchtung*, practicing their spiritual calisthenics, perfecting their "aerobics for the soul."

Director

Doris Dörrie was born in 1955 in Hanover. She attended drama, acting, and film at University of the Pacific in Stockton, and the School for Social Research in New York (1973-75) after graduating from high school.

Like Wenders, she was a student at the Hochschule für Fernsehen und Film in Munich. Her first feature *Straight through the Heart* in 1983 was followed by *Im Innern des Wals* 1984. Her biggest success and the kickstart of her career was *Männer.../ Men...*, released in 1985 - a national and international success. Some said that Rainer Werner Fassbinder's death in 1982 was the end of the New German Cinema, others say it was the release of Doris Dörrie's comedy.

Following her success with *Men...*, she released *Paradies/Paradise* in 1986 and *Me and Him* in 1989

(which went straight to video). *Happy Birthday, Türke* opened in 1992. It is based on a novel by Jakob Arjouni who since then has released a trilogy of novels focusing on a Turkish private eye working in Frankfurt/Main, encountering daily racism and xenophobia. The wonderful *Nobody Loves Me* (1994) won the Film Strip in Gold at the German Film Awards for Maria Schrader (who became more famous with *Aimee and Jaguar*) and was followed by the episodic *Bin ich schön? / Am I Beautiful* in 1998.

Doris Dörrie has filmed all her feature films with the same crew. Her husband and cameraman, Helge Weindler, died of cancer in 1996 while shooting *Bin ich schön?*. Her latest North American release is *Enlightenment Guaranteed*, somewhat of a sequel to her biggest success, a *Men II*.