

THE GERMAN SOCIETY'S

Friday Film Fest Series



Männer

Credits:

Writer/Director: Doris Dörrie

Cast: Heiner Lauterbach, Uwe Ochsenknecht and Ulrike Kriener

Produced in 1985

Length: 96 minutes

Director:

Doris Dörrie was born in Hanover in 1955. She studied Theater at the University of the Pacific in California, Philosophy and Psychology at the New School in New York City and also

attended the Academy of Television and Film in Munich. She began making television productions in 1976 at the age on 21 and made her first feature film, *Straight Through the Heart*, in 1983. Although she has made more than a dozen features, *Männer* remains her most successful one and perhaps the only big success in the U.S. She is also an avid writer of short stories and has published one novel.

Synopsis – Brian Conboy

Ostensibly and perhaps by reputation a comedy, *Männer* functions on both a comedic and a dramatic level and often ingeniously combines both qualities in the same scenes and actions. Despite its numerous gags and generally lighthearted treatment it is a thoughtful and intelligent work. It refuses to adhere to long established and effective film conventions that would allow us to more easily identify it, gives us characters that transcend archetypes and presents them with a full range of plausible personality traits.

The story begins as **Julius and Paula Armbrust** have been happily married for 12 years and Julius, a successful advertising executive, is also happily having extramarital affairs, especially with one of his secretaries. Julius' idyllic life comes to an abrupt halt when he discovers that his wife is also having an affair. Instead of a quintessential male sexist heal, which in part he is, we find that Julius sincerely loves his wife and his emotional reactions are a fascinating mixture of rage, sorrow and tenderness. Subsequent to his discovery, Julius announces to Paula that he is taking a five-week vacation apart from his family. However, instead of leaving town he clandestinely follows her and discovers the identity of her lover, **Stefan**, a rather poor artist type who lives in a bohemian group household. He discovers that there is a vacancy in the house; moves in under a false identity and befriends Stefan. Both Stefan and Paula continue their affair and remain unaware of Julius' machinations.

With the opening scenes the feminist character of the film is established in the form of the classic male double standard – that is the notion that the extramarital affairs of women are qualitatively more serious, more immoral

and more destructive than those of men. After Julius and Stefan meet the film seems to depart from its feminist theme and concentrates most of its time and energy on the developing relationship between the two men and the nature and meaning of their radically disparate lifestyles. Herein we find the real theme of the film in the conflicts and contrasts between the conformist and materialistic business world and the idealistic and creative art world.

Entwined in this conflict is the concept, discreetly articulated in conversations between Julius and Stefan, of freedom and entrapment: the entrapment of a successful career vs. the freedom and power derived from its wealth: the freedom of the bohemian lifestyle vs. the entrapment of its poverty. This difference is at the heart of the reason for Paula's affair and here the feminist and bohemian themes dovetail. She is seeking escape from the entrapment of her secure but regimented life and finds adventure and freedom in what Stefan's lifestyle symbolizes. And there is no doubt that Stefan is attracted to the status, wealth and power of Paula's materialistic world and in the end he is quite easily lured into it and into complete corruption.

Dörrie eschews a simple resolution to the dilemma and suggests that, perhaps there is none at all. She sees entrapment on both sides of the equation and concludes that freedom is only an illusion. Indeed the last scene of the film (perhaps we can call it a fake happy ending) brings Julius and Paula back to the same condition of discontent found at the start of the film, a conclusion that is at once plausible and surprising and is as mendacious as it is profound.