

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Friday Film Fest Series

This was the beginning of the *Montagsdemonstrationen* that would swell to crowds of nearly twenty thousand a month later. On Saturday, October 7th the GDR celebrated the 40th anniversary of its formation with large parades in East-Berlin in the presence of Michail Gorbatschow, the reform-minded leader of the Soviet Union. In Leipzig, hundreds of people gathered in front of the Nikolai-church for a demonstration surrounded by many Stasi-people and police officers and soldiers.

The crowd was asked to clear the square. When that didn't happen, the so-called "*Zuführung*" of the demonstrators take place. Dagmar Voss, a participant from Ilmenau remembers: "*Jeweils zwei Polizisten schnappten sich einen Demonstranten und schoben ihn auf den LKW. Wer sich wehrte, bekam einen Schlag mit dem Stock ab. Uns wurden die Ausweise abgenommen und es ging in einer kurzen Fahrt zur Stasizentrale. ... Nach dem Verhör ging die Fahrt zu einem Messegelände mit Gartenbau- und Tieraussstellung. Dort wurden wir in Pferdeboxen eingesperrt.*" Seven hours later, the demonstrators were released.

Montag, der 9. Oktober 1989

Following the events of the weekend of Oct. 7, the security forces prepared for a big showdown on Monday, Oct. 9. There were rumors about a "Chinese Solution" ala Tianemin Square, with a violent crackdown of the expected large Monday demonstration. The SED ordered 1000 of its members to the Nikolaikirche, where 600 demonstrators had already gathered. Shortly before the end of the peace prayer, a call for non-violence by the conductor of the Gewandhaus-Orchester **Kurt Masur** and local SED-Leaders ("**Aufruf der Leipziger Sechs**") was read in the church. Seventy thousand people participated in the demonstration that followed the peace prayer.

During their march around the inner city ring they chanted "**Wir sind das Volk**" und "**Keine Gewalt**". Indeed, the security forces stayed back and didn't intervene. The peaceful revolution had won. A Stasi-General conceded: "*Wir waren auf alles vorbereitet. Nur nicht auf Kerzen und Gebete.*" The movie ends with this demonstration on Oct. 9, which marks a major date in German history. What happened on November 9, 1989 and on Oct. 3, 1990 would not have been possible without this demonstration. Gorbachov should be remembered for something that was not part of the events of Oct 9th - the Russian tanks that had intervened in 1953 and in 1968 stayed home, and the revolution remained peaceful.

Der Film

The movie is based on Erich Loest's novel of the same name. *Nikolaikirche* was produced as a television production. The shorter cinema version was produced by the director himself. The movie follows the fate of the Bacher family from 1987 until the demonstration on Oct. 9, 1989. It shows the different members of this family in the *Spannungsfeld* between the Stasi and the peace movement. While architect Astrid Potter, the daughter of Albert Bacher, a highly distinguished officer of the People Police of the GDR, comes to recognize the mendacity of the system and is looking for new ways, her brother Alexander Bacher continues to build his career as a Stasi officer. Although he tries to shield his family from the investigation of his own agency intense conflicts within the family are unavoidable and symbolize the situation of the entire population of the GDR during this *Wendezeit*.



Nikolaikirche

By Frank Beyer

November 7th, 2014

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

Non-Members \$15, Members \$12

The German Society of PA

611 Spring Garden St.

215-627-2332

Support provided in part by the
Philadelphia Cultural Fund.



Nikolaikirche (1995)

Credits:

Director: Frank Beyer
Screenplay: Frank Beyer
Eberhard Görner
Erich Loest (Author of book with same name)
Production: Provobis, WDR, MDR, ORF, ARTE
Camera: Thomas Plenert, Peter Badel
Music: Johann Sebastian Bach
Length: 133 Minutes



Cast: Barbara Auer (Astrid Potter)
Ulrich Matthes (Alexander Bacher)
Annemone Haase (Marianne Bacher – Astrids und Alexanders Mutter)
Günter Naumann (Albert Bacher – Astrids und Alexanders Vater)
Daniel Minetti (Harald Potter – Astrids Mann)
Ulrich Mühe (Pfarrer Ohlbaum)
Otto Sander (kirchlicher Superintendent)

Commentary: Karl Moehlmann

1989 – 2014

25th Anniversary of the Fall of the Wall

On November 9th of this year, we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the fall of the wall and the beginning of the end of Germany's division and the Cold War. What seemed impossible to the people in the GDR and to most outside observers happened with unimaginable speed and unexpected peacefulness. The Nikolaikirche in Leipzig and the *Montagsdemonstrationen* played a crucial part in this peaceful revolution. We are showing this movie to commemorate the brave people of East Germany whose fearless actions brought down the repressive East German regime and the ugliest symbol of the Cold War, *die Mauer*.

We would like to dedicate this screening to the courageous Leipzig ministers **Christian Führer** and **Christoph Wonneberger** who initiated the peace prayers at the Nikolaikirche that eventually led to the demonstrations in the fall of 1989. While Führer gained fame for his role in the fall of 1989, Wonneberger suffered a heart attack in October 1989 and receded quickly from public consciousness. The courageous theologian retired in 1991 and received the *Bundesverdienstkreuz* in 1995. Führer died in Leipzig on June 30th this year at the age of 71.



Christian Führer (1943 – 2014)



Christoph Wonneberger (1944)

The character of the minister Ohlbaum, played by **Ulrich Mühe** (the Stasi-officer in the acclaimed 2006 movie "Das Leben der Anderen") is a composite of Pfarrer Christian Führer" and Pfarrer Wonneberger". Along with these two heroic clergymen, Germany and Germans everywhere should reference the Nikolaikirche as a historic symbol of the unification of the country.



Nikolaikirche Leipzig – Außen- und Innenansicht

Die friedliche Revolution

In May 1989 Hungary started to tear down its border fortifications with Austria. When the West-German Media reported these events, it triggered the largest escape movement in the history of the GDR. Tens of thousands, especially young people, many of whom were returning from their vacation on the Black Sea or other eastern European states, took advantage of the hole in the "Iron Curtain" and fled to West Germany through Austria. Just as it was in August of 1961 with Walter Ulbricht's *Antifaschistischer Schutzwall* (also known as a "protective womb") the people were voting with their feet.

Already during the summer of 1989, several hundred East Germans sought refuge in the West-German Embassy in Prague. When the border controls at the Czech-Hungarian border became tighter the number of people in the embassy swelled to several thousands. Through the diplomatic efforts of Secretary of State Hans Dietrich Genscher, they were allowed to travel to West-Germany, but had to return to the GDR first. During the night of Sept. 30, 1989 these "freedom trains" traveled through East Germany where tight security could not prevent chaotic scenes at several closed train stations. The sequence of these events was repeated until the GDR closed its border with Czechoslovakia on Oct. 3, thus keeping its population completely imprisoned in their own country.

These events, *diese Fluchtwelle*, changed the mood of the populace. Many people overcame their fear and lethargy and got organized with *Gleichgesinnten*. Groups like *Neues Forum*, *Demokratischer Aufbruch* and *Demokratie Jetzt* sprang up and demanded more freedom and democratic rights for the citizens of East Germany.

Meanwhile, the *Friedensgebete* in the Nikolaikirche in Leipzig organized by Führer and Wonneberger grew in popularity. This church was the only quasi-public place where people could discuss topics that were completely taboo in the GDR - such as environmental pollution, the persecution of *Andersdenkenden*, the lack of freedom including freedom of travel (Reisefreiheit), the decay of the cities and the arms race. On Monday Sept. 4, 1989 following the peace prayer in the church at 5pm, about 1000 people gathered in front of the church for a demonstration.