

looks suspiciously familiar to anyone who has ever visited Gran Canaria Island.

Haim Kasan, Katschekistan's George Washington in waiting, has been whisked away into the hinterlands of that country and the BND is bereft of knowledge and contacts which would enable them to find and rescue him. Serendipitously, there is one man who can help them. His name is Jochen Falk, a legend within the *Auslandsnachrichtendienst* of the late DDR. Naturally the BND attempts to woo him. After an awkward initial courtship, Falk says yes, for all the wrong reasons, as comedy requires. He also stipulates that he will rescue Kasan his way, with his people, which means his old *Spion Kumpel* from the *Auslandsnachrichtendienst*.

So the quest is set in motion: Falk and his venerable team must go into Katschekistan, rescue Kasan from the clutches of a rather vaguely defined group of bad guys, and return him to Germany in time for a scheduled peace conference. They must do so in order that East and West Katschekistan can be reunited, and become a fulfilled and happy nation just like Germany has been since reunification.

Falk and his confreres, despite their abundance of mixed motives, have long since been living in exile as captives of *Alltagsleben*, and seize with gusto this chance to return and set things right one last time. The agon of age versus youth (a natural ally of comedy) is in full play. These old agent men may be slightly ridiculous at times, but they have skills (some soft and the remainder mostly analog). The here and now sometimes puzzles them, but it never defeats them. They keep their tottering balance, and deal with situations as they arise with a proven *gerade rechtzeitig* methodology. They are full of a slightly *veraltet* but functionally shrewd wisdom, yet are never full of themselves.

Comedy is permitted a variety of endings, although this entails reconciliation in one guise or another. Happily ever after has always been the *Schwerpunkt* of comedy's teleology. *Kundschafter des Friedens*, wittingly or not, implements a modified limited hangout version of traditional anagnorisis (discovery or recognition of the true state of things) in order to achieve this requirement. This assertion is not fantastic nonsense, because agents Falk and Kern, old agent nemeses extraordinaire, do agree on one thing: they need illumination, specifically in terms of the birth mystery imbedded in the plot.

They give the letter containing the result of Kern's DNA paternity testing to Paula in order to, quite appropriately, let her settle the Whose Your Daddy *Streitfrage* for them. Having sojourned with these old agent men, agent Paula has grown in stature and wisdom. She handles the demands of discovery as any pro would...on a need to know basis.

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Friday Film Fest Series



Kundschafter des Friedens

By Robert Thalheim

February 16, 2018

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

The German Society of PA

611 Spring Garden St.

215-627-2332

Support provided in part by the
Philadelphia Cultural Fund.



Kundschafter des Friedens (2016)

Director: Robert Thalheim
Producer: Andreas Banz, Frank Evers, Dirk Engelhardt
Screenplay: Robert Thalheim, Oliver Ziegenbalg
Cinematography: Henner Besuch
Music: Uwe Bossenz, Anton Feist
Release Date: January 2017
Spieldauer: 92 minutes
Cast: Henry Hübchen (Jochen Falk);
Michael Gwisdek (Jaecki);
Thomas Thieme (Locke);
Jurgen Prochnow (Frank Kern);
Winifried Glatzeder (Harry);
Antje Traue (Paula)
Commentary: A. Krumm



Old Agent Actors ...

Beauty is difficult. Ezra Pound said that and he was right. Ezra had a gift for irritating people, but in this instance, everyone agreed with him. Comedy is difficult as well. With death as its mother, beauty is self-sufficient. Comedy (whose parentage is a matter of ongoing dispute) is on the other hand very needy.

Like a good database, comedy needs referential integrity. This referential integrity is the beating heart of comedy, because comedy needs to refer to the really real as its point of departure. With the real as the point of departure, comedy is then free to hit the road for parts unknown, or unreal, or unreasonable, or whatever imagined circumstances, contradictions or contrasts are required, and then pivot and return when the time is right. In that turning, if the difficulties are surmounted, laughter emerges to greet us.

Comedy needs context both thick and thin, because if a kindly contextual hand does not reach out frequently and take us in tow, we will wander right past the laughter lurking all about us. It also does no harm to have a recursive interplay of the verbal and the visual spiraling around that alternately thick and thin context. Comedy of course needs to be serious now and then, and most importantly, comedy needs to never appear to be trying to be funny, while never ceasing to strive with deadly earnestness to be funny. Appearances are everything. All of the foregoing is very difficult.

Kundschafter des Friedens will never be accused of instantiating the formal structures of comedy that one might encounter in Menander or Aristophanes. Elements such as high mimetic or low mimetic are not much in evidence. Nor

does one find clear delineations of such stock characters as the Alazon or the Eiron or the Bomolochos or the Agroikos. The entire production seems to be cheerfully indifferent to such things (or perhaps invincibly ignorant of them) and hence it progresses along entirely unimpeded by such complicating parameters or properties. Yet this charmingly modest spy spoof nonetheless negotiates the aforementioned exigencies of the difficult with undaunted gumption.

Kundschafter des Friedens begins in the here and now of the BRD as its point of departure, yet achieves some portion of its referential integrity by eliciting echoes of the essence of something long gone, something that was, at least once upon a time, also really real. That would be the transitory socio-political-economic phenomenon known as the DDR. There is something inimitably *DDRish* about this lighthearted satire. Maybe the referential vibes reside in the excessively contrived plot or in the slightly *gleichgeschaltet* rhythm of the dialogue, or perhaps in the cheesy peppy 'secret agent man' music used to transition us from one scene to the next.

The strongest vibes, however, emanate from the fact that the actors assembled for this movie were genuine stars of DDR cinema. They have an infectious and autonomous synergy that enables this movie to avoid being crushed by the deadweight of a seriously pedestrian script. There must have been something in the air (a tradition, a shared sensibility, some touchstone of technique) for actors in the DDR. Perhaps this is a stretch, but the impression of a communal source, of a stylistic school, is pervasive.

This is simply a marvelous cast. Henry Hübchen (of *Alles auf Zucker* fame) is Jochen Falk, the leader; Michael Gwisdek (the old man who delivered the haunting soliloquy in *A Coffee In Berlin*) is Jaecki, the Techniker; Thomas Thieme (the lecherous and corrupt minister of culture in *Lives Of Others*) is Locke the Logician and the resident grifter of the group; and Jurgen Prochnow (the memorable Kapitän in *Das Boot*) is Frank Kern, the nemesis emeritus. This time around, they are, in sum, old agent men.

The ensemble is rounded out by Winifried Glatzeder (*Die Legende von Paul und Paula*) who plays the aging lounge lizard Harry (and still another spy in *Ruhestand*) and Antje Traue as BND agent Paula, the youthful, beautiful counterweight to all these old agent men. Even Ms. Traue is of native born DDR stock. In her case, she was privileged with the mercy of a late birth. The Wall collapsed when she was eight years old.

Comedy looks favorably upon conundrums because conundrums give birth to quests. The conundrum for the BND (the *Bundesnachrichtendienst* - the foreign intelligence agency of Germany) is that they have had an important client abducted from under their noses. That client is the rightful president of the fictive country of Katschekistan, a former soviet republic whose landscape