

pletely backfires. Ines is embarrassed by her father and his appearance. She ignores and denies him at times and his critical and moralistic questions (“*Bist du überhaupt ein Mensch? Bist du glücklich?*”) fall on deaf ears. Ines hates Winfried’s intrusive questioning and deflects it by preoccupying herself with preparation for her next business project.

What can her father do? How can Winfried overcome their “*Sprachlosigkeit*”? How can he liberate her from the grip of a false world? In his fatherly desperation Winfried Conradi does something crazy. He leaves the scene and returns as a different person. He calls himself *Toni Erdmann*, has false funny teeth, a wig with long shaggy black hair and pretends to be a personal consultant to business people. He mentions Ion Tiriac as his friend, the rich ex-manager of Boris Becker and a truly famous personality in this region. Wherever Toni appears he attracts the attention and loosens the strict business code and the behavior of the people he meets. Expressionless faces come alive and hearts are opened when Toni Erdmann enters a room.

Even Ines (who was ashamed of him just days before) is drawn to her father’s authenticity. She seems to recognize her own self-deception in his silly imposture. When she and her father are guests in a real Romanian family and she sings Whitney Houston’s “*Love of All*”, she does it with soulful passion and afterwards laughs unlike we have ever seen her before. The handcuffs that her father had playfully put on her to symbolize her chainlike attachment to a false life seem a distant past now.

As the last act of her emancipation, she hosts a party that turns naked when she tries to get out of a tight dress but twists and turns as if she was shedding her old skin. Ines and her guests end up without any clothes in a scene that oscillates between amusement and embarrassment. Disguise, imposture, reversing the alienation through alienation – only by inventing the artificial figure of Toni Erdmann is the father able to subvert his daughter’s business world and slowly end her alienation from herself.

For some viewers this is simply an interesting German comedy with two great performances by Peter Simonischek and Sandra Hüller. Seen from another perspective, it is a powerful and compelling commentary that exposes the ill effects of the neoliberal revolution that penetrates our entire world. Maybe herein lies the reason why 55 countries around the world have bought the rights for this movie. It renders a powerful critique of globalism and modern debt capitalism, exposing and intensifying the forms of alienation engendered by such a system, and suggesting a return to a more humanistic way of life as a solution. It should be very interesting to see how Sony Picture Classics with Jack Nicholson in the leading role will interpret this topic for the US and its globalized economy.

# THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

## *Friday Film Fest Series*



## Toni Erdmann

By Maren Ade

November 17, 2017

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

The German Society of PA

611 Spring Garden St.

215-627-2332

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# Toni Erdmann (2016)

**Director:** Maren Ade  
**Screenplay:** Maren Ade  
Janine Jackowski  
**Producer:** Maren Ade  
Jonas Dornbach  
**Camera:** Patrick Orth  
**Editor:** Heike Parplies  
**Length:** 162 Minutes  
**Cast:** Peter Simonischek as Winfried Conradi alias Toni Erdmann  
Sandra Hüller as Ines Conradi  
Michael Wittenborn as Henneberg  
Thomas Loibl as Gerald  
Trystan Pütter as Tim  
Hadewych Minis as Tatjana  
**Commentary:** Karl Moehlmann



## Reception

In 2016, for the first time in eight years, a German movie was invited to the main competition at the prestigious film festival in Cannes. In 2008 Wim Wenders' *Palermo Shooting* received this honor and last year it was the turn of Maren Ade's *Toni Erdmann*. The movie was enthusiastically received at the first showing and was considered a favorite for the Goldene Palme but failed to win the votes of the jury. The German *Erstaufführung* was on June 23, 2016 as the opening movie of the Munich film festival and it was released in German theatres on July 14, holding the number one spot on the movie charts for nine weeks. It won five European film prizes and received a Golden Globe and an Oscar nomination for best foreign movie but again failed to win the top prize. Its biggest success, however, was achieved with the sale of the rights to 55 countries around the world. Sony Pictures Classics acquired the rights for the US and plans a remake with Jack Nicholson in the leading role.

Maren Ade who had studied at the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen in München(HFF) had gained international recognition with her two previous feature films, *Der Wald vor lauter Bäumen* in 2003 and *Alle anderen* in 2009 with prizes at the Sundance Film Festival in 2005 and the International Film Festival in Berlin in 2009.



Maren Ade

## Entfremdung

*Toni Erdmann* is a father – daughter comedy in a quintessentially German setting. The music teacher Winfried Conradi is a product of the 1968-revolutionary student generation that gave rise to the political, environmental and cultural movement of the Green Party. He is environmentally conscious, socially sensitive and technologically challenged, a dreamer and a lover of all things natural and slow, dressed in wrinkled old clothes with an inclination to farcical jokes. In short, he is an aging hippie. Recently retired and living by himself after his divorce, time has stood still for him. His house is stuffed with relics of his past. When his old dog lies down to die in the garden he sleeps next to him to comfort him.

Winfried has a daughter named Ines who is successfully pursuing a career in business consulting. She is currently employed by the Morrison consulting firm and stationed in Bucharest, Romania, where she works on an outsourcing project in the oil industry. She has worked hard to establish her career and makes a lot of money. She lives in a world of business plans, efficiency and performance. In order to sell her outsourcing plans, she has to make perfect presentations to her clients, learning the text by heart and improving her body language with the help of a coach.

Her plans to make a Romanian oil company more profitable include layoffs and modern management approaches. The Romanian workers that we see are the *Nachhut* of a by-gone era. They seem to have all the time in the world, don't care about safety measures and work with great inefficiency. The contrast between the western consultants with their Mercedes and their western lifestyle and the losers of the global economic revolution in the east-European countries after the fall of the Iron curtain couldn't be greater. No wonder that Ines and her father have very little in common and are estranged.

When Ines visits her father in Aachen, it is no more than a stopover. She does not even have time to visit her grandmother. Winfried is deeply worried about his daughter, but is unable to reach her and make her understand the destructive dynamics of her ruthlessly efficient lifestyle. The alienation between the two becomes quite apparent when they talk about the fate of the superfluous workers. While Winfried has "*Mitleid*" with the human "*Ausschussware*" his daughter snarls at him: "*Wie sollen wir das modernisieren, wenn du dir bei der Vorstellung, dass nur einer entlassen wird, schon in die Hose machst?*" But the alienation the father is most concerned about is the self-alienation which Ines has within herself. She is unable to express any compassion and experience any real joy or connections in her life.

## Aufhebung der Entfremdung

The father senses the unhappiness of his daughter and decides to travel to Bucharest without giving her advanced notice. But his plan to save her com-