

Calendar of Events

May

- Sat. May 18 500 of Lager Brewing: German Tradition and the American Dream, 2:00pm
Sat. May 18 Frankfurt in May, 3:00pm
Thu. May 30 Presentation by Petra Goedde: The Politics of Peace. A Global Cold War History, 6:00pm

June

- Sun. June 2 Annual Members Meeting and Elections, 3:00pm
Sat. June 8 Buchclub: *Holzfällen*, 1:30pm
Sat. June 8 Philly Bikes!, Time TBA
Sat. June 15 Konversationsabend: Wandertag, 10:30am
Sat. June 29 *Hiwwe wie Driwwe* Movie Night, Time TBA

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Friday Film Fest Series



3 Tage in Quiberon

Directed by Emily Atef

May 17, 2019

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

The German Society of Pennsylvania
611 Spring Garden St.
Philadelphia, PA 19123

3 Tage in Quiberon (2018)

Director: Emily Atef
Producer: Karsten Stöter
Screenplay: Emily Atef
Cinematography: Thomas W. Kiennast
Release Date: February 2018
Spieldauer: 115 minutes
Cast: Marie Bäumer (Romy Schneider)
Birgit Minichmayr (Hilde Fritsch)
Charly Hübner (Robert Lebeck)
Robert Gwisdek (Michael Jürgs)
Commentary: A. Krumm



Romy, bist du da?

Emily Dickinson's take on fame might equip us with some useful insight:

Fame is a bee. It has a song— It has a sting— Ah, too, it has a wing.

Is fame the key to understanding Romy Schneider? Can we explain all the triumph by the song and the wing, or blame all the tragedy on the sting? Or is it misguided to reduce a *Lebenslauf* to one hermeneutical leitmotif? *Es kommt darauf an...*

Fame found Romy Schneider before she could find herself, kidnapping her when she was scarcely beyond childhood. Her father had already abandoned the family when she was only six. Between the father and the fame, some say the corpse of an inner child was left to fester within. Portentously, she fell in love with her abductor, others say, despite her many protestations to the contrary. Perhaps she believed she could achieve some kind of manageable concordat with her intoxicating paramour, a *modus vivendi* that would enable her to exploit and enjoy that fame while still allowing her to inhabit her own parallel private world.

It was not to be. None of us are around for very long, but most of us enjoy the underappreciated privilege of keeping “the noiseless tenor” of our way for the duration of our existence. There is much to be said for the palliative side effects of obscurity. Romy Schneider wasn't around for very long either, but her brief tenure was utterly devoid of “noiseless tenor.” She died in 1982 at the age of forty three. Ernst Marischka's first *Sissi* film thrust her onto the world stage while she was still only seventeen years old.

She achieved cinema verite; verite in life eluded her. As she plaintively mused: “*ich kann alles im Film, im Leben nichts.*” The public loved her as

much as the camera did. Her beauty was uniquely accessible and inviting rather than overpowering or intimidating. Helen had a face that launched a thousand ships; Romy had a face that conquered three countries and inspired a documentary (*Romy: Portrait eines Gesichts*). Those in the business were able and willing to relentlessly market that face. It did not hurt that she was a superbly gifted actress.

To escape the suffocating “first fame” of the *Sissi* franchise, in 1958 she adopted a new language and a new country, moving to Paris to be with her new love Alain Delon. She worked with the leading directors of the 60s and 70s, including Luchino Visconti, Orson Welles and Claude Sautet. All of them recognized the gifts beneath the beauty. Each of them was integral to her development as an actress. For Romy Schneider, Visconti was her great mentor. “*Er war mein eigentlicher Lehrer. Er hat mir Disziplin beigebracht und die Erkenntnis, dass man immer wieder neu an sich arbeiten muss.*”

Although her professional life was a series of triumphs in these decades, her personal life was a source of continual turmoil and sorrow. Delon left her in 1963. She married Harry Meyen in 1966, paying for his divorce from his current wife to the tune of 200,000 marks. By 1968 that union was already falling apart and by 1973 they had parted ways, which cost Romy another 1.4 million marks when the divorce was finalized in 1975.

Meyen's final magnanimous gesture to her was to commit suicide in 1979. But he had rendered one signal service for Romy. He had forced her stepfather (Hans Herbert Blatzheim) to disclose how he had handled Romy's income and assets while she was a minor, and it turned out that Daddy Blatzheim had effectively embezzled 1.2 million Swiss francs from Romy to help keep his own businesses afloat.

She married again in 1975, but by 1981 that marriage had likewise fallen apart. Her second husband (Daniel Biasini) also enjoyed living high on the hog on Romy's dime. By this time she was heavily dependent on alcohol in combination with a preferred array of pharmaceuticals to keep her going while filming. Remarkably, it was only during filming that she actually felt



With Welles, c. 1962



With Delon, c. 1960



With Meyen, 1960s

alive. The intervals between films were voids to be endured, which she also attempted to fill with alcohol and pills.

There were always paramours, some disposable, some more durable. While filming she sometimes opted for the co-star de jour; while not filming her choices were more eclectic. Some of the men who passed through her life, such as Delon, or Bruno Ganz, with whom she had a passionate affair, she deeply loved. Theories abound, interpretations proliferate: did she abandon them; did they abandon her; was she incapable of truly connecting with one man?

Or was that callous first lover Fame the real issue? Did the *Wechselwirkung* of the song and the wing and the sting suffocate the possibility of any other enduring relationship? Speculation has gone on endlessly, both during her life and since. All that is certain is that although she could always find another man, she never connected with the *Lebensgefährte* she professed to need. She always ended up alone.

Whatever the debilitating effects of her personal life, the effects of being marketed and monetized for 25 years surely took a toll as well. She loved acting, she loved the process of making films, yet becoming someone on demand, to be and not to be on a scripted schedule, along with the enervating baggage that goes along with being a 'Movie Star' as defined by an often hostile press, was surely an enormous drain on her cache of emotional and psychological energy. It should be noted that the hostile press was mostly German. As one observer wryly noted: "*Die Franzosen lieben ihre Stars zu Lebzeiten, die Deutschen erst, wenn sie tot sind.*"

In sum, Romy Schneider was at mid life in extremis, a lost soul apparently afraid to be in a room alone with herself. Neither lovers nor medication nor money (and least of all that dubious consort Fame) were sufficient distractions from the aching emptiness within her.

And so she came to Quiberon in March of 1981. The choice of Quiberon was not exceptional in itself. She went there nearly every year to lose weight and rest up. The facilities could function both as a resort and, if desired, as rehab clinic. But this time she was burnt out and probably much closer to the end of her physical and psychological tether than even her closest friends imagined. It was during her cure at Quiberon that she gave her famous Stern interview, in which she declared: "*Ich bin eine unglückliche Frau von 42 Jahren und heiÙe Romy Schneider.*"

Her friend Christiane Höllger arrived with the photojournalist Robert Lebeck (whom Schneider knew and trusted from previous work together), and Michael Jürgs, who at that time was Stern's leading reporter. According to Jürgs, it was Romy herself who had solicited the interview. This

would refute the charge that the entire interview episode was a textbook case of tabloid journalism at its exploitative worst.

Both Sarah Biasini, an actress who is Romy's daughter by Daniel Biasini, and Jürgs, have disputed certain aspects of this docudrama. Ironies abound here. A jaundiced perspective might discourse as follows: we are talking about the response of an actress and a journalist to a docudrama wherein actors pretend to be the actress' mother and the journalist himself. When he conducted the actual interview, Michael Jürgs, the actual journalist, pretended to be an objective truth seeker while working for a tabloid magazine that specialized in exacerbating and exploiting (for money) the artificial celebrity culture surrounding the actual original actress (Romy Schneider) who also pretended to hate the celebrity and fame.



Schneider and her daughter Sarah, c. 1980

A cynic might be forgiven for concluding that films like this are self-referential black holes. The devoted aficionado of Romy Schneider in particular and docudramas in general will, with the implacable equanimity indigenous to the spirit of true aficionados, simply recognize the buzzing of that bee called Fame. With a bee, there is always a buzz, or in this case, the fabricated echo of a buzz.

In any case, Sarah Biasini's reaction to the film (a very negative one) is understandably that of a loyal daughter defending the legacy and memory of her mother. However, Michael Jürgs has vouched for much of the content and said that he felt the film was a success. He was particularly enthralled with the performance of Marie Bäumer. Director Emily Atef, who consulted with Jürgs for detailed background information, has acknowledged that she fictionalized certain aspects of the screenplay, but even Jürgs conceded that such treatment fell within the compass of legitimate artistic license.

Self-referentiality and cynicism notwithstanding, it was a remarkable interview. When asked if he had ever had any other interview of such *Gesprächsintensität*, Jürgs noted: "*Meine Gespräche mit Günter Grass waren ähnlich intensiv und offen, hatten aber nicht diese Wahrhaftigkeit wie in Quiberon.*" For her part, Schneider only changed one small portion of the interview (Jürgs had guaranteed her the right to edit and change whatever she wished). Upon reading the published edition of her interview, she scribbled at the bottom: "*Ich werde weiterleben – und richtig gut!*"

On July 5, 1981, the most brutal blow of her life occurred when her 14-year-old son, a son with whom she had struggled to connect and with whom she had only recently become reconciled, died by bleeding to death while impaled on a spike of a high wrought iron fence over which he had attempted to climb. Touchingly, one of the few people she communicated with in the wake of that tragedy was Jürgs, to whom she said in a brief letter: "...*Manchmal glaube ich, dass ich so ruhig und so schön und so unbeschmutzt daliege und schlafe wie mein armes Kind, aber ich muss doch wieder aufwachen, und das ist oft noch sehr hart.*"

Less than a year later, in May of 1982, Romy Schneider died of heart failure, a heart failure brought on as much by heartbreak and sorrow as by the abuse inflicted on her body by her excessive intake of alcohol and pills. Her premature death is an irreplaceable loss to anyone enamored of film and the craft of acting.

Watch her early films in the fifties (yes, especially the *Sissi* trilogy); watch her at the peak of her career during the 60s up through the mid 70s in such films as *Der Prozess*, *The Thief*, *The Things Of Life*, *Ludwig* and *L'important c'est d'aimer*...she was superb. Then watch her later films from the late 70s to the early 80s: *Gruppenbild mit Dame*; *Une histoire simple*; *Death Watch*; *La Passante du Sans-Souci*. She got better with age. Her besieged beauty only served to intensify the aura that made her performances so compelling.

One can only imagine her legacy if she had been granted the gift of time, time filled with healthy stretches of "noiseless tenor", sequestered from the song and the sting of fame. Imagine her oeuvre if she had acted for another 20 or 30 years. But she was not granted that gift. Neither did she achieve her dream of becoming a grandmother and living a simple life in the country. The gift of time expired on a May morning in 1982; the haunting question: "*Romy, bist du da?*" had already been answered long before.



Schneider with her mother and Ernst Marischka, c. 1956



With Meyen, c. 1965



Late 1970s



Schneider in *Mädchenjahre einer Königin*, 1954



Schneider with Visconti and Delon, c. 1960



In *Quiberon*, 1981



Marriage to Daniel Biasini, 1975



With Alain Delon during *Christine*, 1958