

the former inn keeper Vroni, who owned a pub before her husband lost all their money. And there is Nora's sister-in-law, Theresa, whose marriage is in crisis also because her husband's financial mismanagement. Thus, reasons abound for women to insist on having a say in things and free themselves of their husbands' yoke.

Graziella, an Italian woman, who now owns Vroni's old pub and plans to turn it into a pizzeria, is very supportive of these women, and her restaurant becomes the center of the feminine rebellion. Needless to say, not all women are supportive. In fact, their main opponent and a defender of the old order is a woman. When it becomes clear that Nora lacks public support for her cause, Graziella suggests that the women go on strike, camp out in her restaurant, and let the men fend for themselves.

This creates not only a plethora of comedic situations at home, but also an abundance of resistance and male anger. Things heat up when the men barge into the restaurant and try to drag their wives home. This causes Vroni to have a heart attack and die, which surprisingly serves as a catalyst for a positive outcome of the referendum.

Ein "Tiger"

Vroni's tragic death doesn't eviscerate the comedic essence of this film, and there is a happy ending, both in terms of women's voting rights and of the evolution of gender roles. Nora's husband Hans eventually not only accepts women's suffrage and Nora's emancipation, but also changes his own domineering attitudes and perspectives.

And then there is Nora, who is beautifully portrayed by the actress Marie Leuenberger. She is very authentic as *Hausfrau* in a traditional marriage in this rural community, but then slowly transforms into a woman who insists on *Mitbestimmung* in domestic and national political affairs. She also discovers her own sexuality in this process. Originally, Nora and the women of her environment and upbringing had never learned to experience sexual pleasure in their traditional roles as child bearers and wives. But when they participate in a clinic of sexual self-discovery, the "Tiger" is born, and the sexual relationship with her husband is dramatically changed.



Marie Leuenberger

We can only share in the triumph of this group of women in achieving a more human and equitable society. The fact that it took Switzerland of all countries until 1971 to establish this level of social justice amplifies the resonance of this movie. One wonders why it took another 36 years to make this movie about this important part of Swiss *Sozialgeschichte*. The old German saying, "*Was lange währt, wird endlich gut*" needs a Swiss version: "*Was länger währt, wird schweizerisch gut.*" This movie encapsulates that sentiment perfectly.

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Friday Film Fest Series



Die göttliche Ordnung

Directed by Petra Volpe

September 24, 2021

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

The German Society of Pennsylvania

611 Spring Garden St.

Philadelphia, PA 19123

Support provided in part by the
Philadelphia Cultural Fund.



Die göttliche Ordnung (2017)

Director: Petra Volpe
Script: Petra Volpe
Camera: Judith Kaufmann
Production: Zodiac Pictures, SRF, Teleclub
Producers: Lukas Hobi, Reto Schaerli
Editor: Hansjörg Weissbrich
Music: Annette Focks
Length: 96 Minutes
Language: Swiss German, German
Cast: Marie Leuenberger as Nora Ruckstuhl
Rachel Braunschweig as Theresa
Maximilian Simonischek as Hans Ruckstuhl
Sibylle Brunner as Vroni
Marta Zoffoli as Graziella
Bettina Stucky as Magda
Ella Rumpf as Hanna

Commentary by Karl Moehlmann

Schweizer Langsamkeit

We all know that the Swiss are a proud and independent people and that they approach life and political decisions with a more stoic attitude or *Langsamkeit* than other western countries. This engenders their charm and their reputation as being very civic-minded, law abiding, orderly, thorough, precise, and possessing unimpeachable rectitude. Strife and conflicts are settled with consensus and old and proven community- or *Kanton*-based democratic processes.

In spite of all these virtues, or perhaps because of them, it took Switzerland more than 50 years longer than other of the western democracies to approve *das Stimmrecht für Frauen*. In Germany, *das allgemeine aktive und passive Wahlrecht für Frauen* was implemented on November 30, 1918, right after the end of World War I, the end of the monarchy and the beginning of the Weimar republic. In the US, women's suffrage was passed in 1920. The 19th amendment prohibits the US and the states from denying the right to vote to citizens of the US on the basis of sex, in effect recognizing the right of all women to vote.

Not so in Switzerland – in a *Volksabstimmung* on **February 1, 1959**, 66.9% of the eligible men voted “No” with only one-third of the men being in favor of the voting right of their wives and daughters. Things changed only slowly. On **March 1, 1969**, 5,000 men and women converged on the parliament in Bern to demand a new vote. While the number of participants seemed relatively small, the demonstration included several influential (and surprisingly, conservative) women's organizations like the *Gemeinnützige Frauenverein*, the *Landfrauenverband* and the *Katholische und Evangelische Frauenverband* in addition to the more pro-



gressive *Frauenbefreiungsbewegung* (FBB).

Two very slow moving years later, the second *Volksabstimmung* on this issue on **February 7, 1971** finally saw a two-thirds majority of men (65.7%) voting to grant women the right to vote and run for office. (Except for the two Appenzeller *Kantone* in the eastern part of Switzerland, all other areas approved this vote also for their local decisions within the next 12 months.) Today, 42% of the members of parliament, the *Nationalrat*, are women, which puts Switzerland actually ahead of Austria (39.9%) and Germany (31%). Slow, but steady progress.

Göttliche Ordnung

In 1971 in the quaint village of Appenzell in the northeastern part of Switzerland, the world seems still in order, that is in the old order, in which the men decide about everything, including decisions that are made for and about women, for example, how the household money is being spent or if a woman is allowed to accept a job and work outside the house. The sexual revolution and women's liberation sweeping through other western democracies has not reached this remote part of the Swiss mountains.

The traditional *Rollenverteilung* between men and women seems firmly cemented in this rural community. Most denizens of the community, whether male or female, regard it as fixed, an immutable ordinance of God. The outcome of the next *Volksabstimmung* taken only by men in a few weeks about the active and passive right of women to vote and run for office seems a foregone conclusion here. Of course, it would be a resounding “No”, just like 12 years earlier in 1959.

Enter Nora Ruckstuhl, who lives with her husband Hans, two sons, and an ill-tempered and discontented father-in-law. At first, she seems content with her role as a *Hausfrau* and doesn't look like someone who could stir things up or question the existing order, even though she does want to find a job and go back to work while her husband wants her to stay home and have another child. But one day, when she travels to the bright lights of a nearby city, she encounters a woman from the *Bund zur Frauenbefreiung* who gives her a brochure about the upcoming vote and the need of women to speak up and make their interests heard. This lady also gives Nora a copy of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*.

Nora is impressed and begins a carefully calibrated rebellion against the *göttliche Ordnung* that rules her marriage, her village, and her country. She connects with other women who also have sufficient grievances for expressing their discontent and who are slowly finding the courage to question their traditional roles. There is

