

WRITTEN BY LAILA STIELER

DIRECTED BY ANDREAS DRESEN

GUNDERMANN

"EVERY DAY
I WANT SOMETHING
I WILL NOT FORGET..."

ALEXANDER SCHEER ANNA UNTERBERGER

PRESSBOOK

Pandora Film Verleih
presents

CAST

Gerhard Gundermann
Conny Gundermann
Commanding Officer
Puppeteer
Helga
Wenni
Irene
Volker
Party Secretary
Werner Walde
Employee Stasi Archive
Veteran
Hamacher
Helmut
Mine Site Manager

Die Seilschaft

Mario
Micha
Andy
Tina
Thommi

Brigade Feuerstein

Reporter
Nurse
Young Nurse

Father Gundi

Alexander Scheer
Anna Unterberger
Axel Prahel
Thorsten Merten
Eva Weißenborn
Benjamin Kramme
Kathrin Angerer
Milan Peschel
Bjarne Mädell
Hilmar Eichhorn
Alexander Hörbe
Peter Sodann
Peter Rappenglück
Peter Schneider
Alexander Schubert

Mika Amsterdam
Sebastian Deufel
Steffen Lehmann
Lizzy Scharnofske
Frenzy Suhr

Till Kratschmer
Olivia-Patrizia Kunze
Jan Maihorn
Johannes Martin
Johannes Reinecke
Richard Schaeffer
Micha Voßmeier

Hans-Dieter Schütt
Andrea Brose
Leni Wesselman

Horst Rehberg
in loving memory

CREW

Writer
Director
Producers

Co-producers

Commissioning Editors

Director of Photography
Production Design
Costumes
Make-Up & Hair

Casting
Editing
Music Production
Sound

a production of
in co-production with

in association with
supported by

in co-operation with

Laila Stieler
Andreas Dresen
Claudia Steffen
Christoph Friedel
Peter Hartwig
Björn Hoffmann
Cooky Ziesche (rbb)
Andreas Schreitmüller (Arte)
Dagmar Mielke (rbb / Arte)
Andreas Höfer
Susanne Hopf
Sabine Greunig
Grit Kosse
Uta Spikermann
Karen Wendland
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Jens Quandt
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BuschFunk Musikverlag

GUNDERMANN

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with **Alexander Scheer, Anna Unterberger,**
Axel Prahel, Thorsten Merten, Bjarne Mädell, Milan Peschel,
Kathrin Angerer, Peter Sodann et al

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PRESS KIT

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128 Minutes | Format DCP | Cinemascope
English and French subtitles available

Photos **Peter Hartwig**
Author **Andreas Körner**



THE FILM

GUNDERMANN tells the story of a digger driver who writes songs. He is a poet, a clown, an idealist. He dreams and hopes, loves and struggles. He's a spy who gets spied on, a do-gooder who doesn't know better. He is torn. GUNDERMANN is both a music film and a love story; a drama about guilt and entanglement, about suppression and confrontation. GUNDERMANN is a film about the homeland. It takes a new look back at the GDR, a country that has disappeared. It's not too late - in fact, it's about time.

In GUNDERMANN, director Andreas Dresen looks at the life of Gerhard "Gundi" Gundermann - one of the most formative music artists of East Germany - with sensibility, affection, and humor. Gundermann died in 1998, at the age of 43. The screenplay is written by Laila Stieler. The leading role is played by Alexander Scheer, who sang all the songs in the film himself. His wife is portrayed by Anna Unterberger, with other roles played by Axel Prah, Thorsten Merten, Bjarne Madel, Milan Peschel, Kathrin Angerer, and Peter Sodann.

FROM HOYERSWERDA TO BERLIN

A DAY WITH CONNY AND LINDA GUNDERMANN

AT THE END OF THE LINE

The tangled weeds have long since been replaced by a glass sunroom, and soon things will be noisy again on Spreetaler Lake near Hoyerswerda. The tiny end house of the equally modest worker housing complex where the Gundermanns once lived, now houses different people with different ideas. And soon, where Gundermann sat for years in his excavator 1417, speedboats will roar through the waves. The clock just kept ticking. But things weren't always easy.

Spreetal is now a municipality in Lusatia and no longer an isolated town. It's called Sprjewiny Dol in Serbian, reflecting its Serbian roots. In the past, it was called "Hope III" or "Brigitta", after the nearby mine. Brandenburg and Saxony nearly touch here. The only thing standing between them is the federal highway 97, which separates the two states. The Gundermanns moved here as a family in 1987. They wanted to live somewhere greener, a little further away from Hoywoy, the town Gundermann alluded to when he sang: "... pale flowers of sand. Hot, loud, dusty and paved over, the prettiest city in the land..." Sixteen kilometers to the north, they found what they were looking for; they traded central heating in a housing complex for a coal furnace in the country.

Conny Gundermann doesn't spend much time in Spreetal anymore. She moved to Berlin five years after her husband's death. She took the Spree with her, so to speak, as well as her huge mountain of memories: beautiful, lively, grueling and sad times, especially the early summer of 1998 when Gundi died. But most of all she looks back at the time they spent together with their children, their friends and guests, and remembers the rain, which didn't stand a chance against the thick weeds growing up against the house. And the neighbors? "Oh," says Conny, "to them, we were the artists."

From there, Gundermann would ride his folding bike to work - to early, late and night shifts - and Conny would visit the nearby Kulturfabrik (arts center). Today, we won't step over the fence and through the patch of forest to the former site. The old building lies sleeping. Maybe the loud boats - synonymous with some hope of tourism - in the lake system that is just about flooded will wake it up. Maybe. Looking out over the rising water, on the other side, where Gundi's excavator used to dig, and where Conny and their "late arrival" daughter would sometimes visit him with cake, you realize just how close the site was. He wasn't kidding when he said he was digging a hole right up to his own house.



IDEA FACTORY

In the morning at the cafe on Hoyerswerder Market, Conny's smile is a welcoming one. It betrays only a grain of skepticism. Nevertheless, the 62-year-old agrees to our proposal to accompany her to several locations that were important to her and Gundi – whose name isn't mentioned once that day. She chose the café herself, not because it is especially nice, but because the Kulturfabrik (arts center) is around the corner. "KuFa" as she calls it, was very important for the Gundermanns. We've got to visit it!

Manager Uwe Proksch, born in 1961, moved to Hoyerswerda when he was seven. When he was 16, he began organizing concerts ... for Gundermann. "The parties were held in the plain concrete cellar of a high-rise building. He played solo concerts there. I just brought him and Hoyerswerda together. We live it! We want it!" Apparently even the Christian Democrat mayor is a fan. In a city that has lost 70,000 residents over the last three decades, it wouldn't be surprising if pessimism had conquered the cultural sector as well. Well, not at this table!

Conny Gundermann and Uwe Proksch talk excitedly about the legacy Gundi left in Hoyerswerda. Two examples: a chorus has been singing his songs since 2016 and there is a project where young and old dance to them. Conny Gundermann: "There are always lots of creative ideas here, and people who still carry Gundi in their hearts. But I never thought these discoveries would span the generations the way they do. Many of his songs can be interpreted universally: as a love song for a woman, a child, or for humankind. But it's always about the big picture, about the social context told through these wonderful, poetic images. The songs tell both the small and the big story, and when people sing them together it makes the songs even stronger." Much stronger than an official street sign in his honor could, for example. That's debated now and then, with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Uwe Proksch: "Everybody already calls the square in front of Kulturfabrik 'Gundermann Plaza,' so..." And in the ground floor of the building, a Gundermann "control center" has gone online. It is a multimedia station with texts, videos,

music files, and photos in the form of a simulated excavator control cabin.

Hoywoy, you really are forever loyal to him ...



INTO THE CITY

We drive through the streets, to take a look at what's still left of the places that connected Conny and Gerhard and what's been torn down. She tells us about their shared route to school where the year-older Gundi quickly took notice of her, the girl next door. She talks about their parent's apartments, their first meetings that took place around singing and the very slim chance, especially in Conny's eyes, to become a couple. But time worked for them.

The "knee" is still bent: the defiant high-rise where Gundermann had his bachelor pad with a picture of Che Guevara hanging over his bed. GUNDERMANN the film shows how he fought for Conny. To say he was persistent would be an understatement. She remembers, "I needed interaction. That was Gundi's only chance to win me over. He could give me that interaction. That's why we got together. Gundi could see who I really was. In the beginning, it was like I was looking at myself from the outside. I was amazed at what he discovered within me, and I was able to discover him through that.

We had discussions that made me grow. I felt a great deal of warmth with him. He didn't share that warmth with everyone, but I was one of the first to see Gundi's big, restless heart. He drew me into his way of life. That was new to me. It felt right. It was right. I come from a working-class family. There was a lot of value placed on personal growth through life experience, but Gundi was very well read. He opened up a whole new world to me. He was very patient about that, which surprised me because he was never very patient with other people."

And then Linda arrived, in 1991, parallel to Gundermann's new start with Seilschaft. The band had its first gig two days before Linda was born. "Both my children from my first relationship were big: Yvonne 17, Steffen 14 – out of the woods, as they say. For me, it wasn't about having another child. It was about having a child with Gundi. I was so lucky that it happened to me! And Gundi was so lucky it happened to him! It made him softer, opened up a new perspective for him. Linda taught him a whole new kind of patience."

IN PEACE

"Gundi" is written on his gravestone. No dates. It's written in plain white on a boulder. Gerhard Gundermann is buried in the Waldfriedhof Hoyerswerda cemetery. Fans often visit his grave and leave little gifts for him. On this March day, a CD of his last concert in Krams lies in the last bit of snow, the cover softened and wet. The dedication: "What I can no longer tell you: your songs have accompanied me for 20 years now. They shaped and influenced my life. Thanks! I'm glad you were here!" And: "This CD is worn out from being played too often, but I've already bought a new copy."

Conny hasn't been here in a long time. Naturally. For her, Gundi rests somewhere else.

THE CORD TO BERLIN

One last pit stop on the way to Berlin. There, where the region is still a region, before the A15 and A13 highways lead to the capital city like an umbilical cord that thousands, especially young people, followed out of Hoyerswerda and surrounding areas. Conny Gundermann is not used to talking about herself, about her faded wishes and new insights, about tiny victories and bigger disappointments, about safety and conviction and passion. It's not long before she mentions Gundi. One has to be persistent, and is rewarded with clear, no nonsense but also emotional statements.

When we talk about singing, for example. After all, Conny Gundermann was a member of the legendary East German music theater singing group Brigade Feuerstein, from 1978 until the end of its heyday. "Singing meant everything to me. A place to think about how the world worked, and education too. But singing was also a great passion and it helped me to get a sense of myself, so I was able to work through a lot of things. Back then, maybe we didn't know how to sing or play right, but we liked doing it. The group was like a family.

After Brigade Feuerstein broke up, I just lacked the self-esteem to keep my own career going.

I also realized that Gundi needed partners on stage other than me. My withdrawal as an artist was a conscious one, I just don't know if it was the right decision. Maybe I could've continued

to grow more at Gundi's side. I took care of everything that was uncomfortable to him. I was always there. We worked things out together. I could see the things that he was doing from the outside. That's always a good perspective. Gundi needed that, and he consented to my decision to end my career. I just wasn't very happy about it."

Now she sings in her free time or sometimes breaks into song when she's riding her bike. Conny Gundermann works in Berlin as an accountant in a tax office. It was very difficult for her to let go of the idea that a person's job should be their passion. There had to be another way to live. "Once I realized that, I felt much better. I don't suffer at work or torture myself. I cope with it and feel secure." Certainly, that goes for the GDR, too. After all, views can change. "What is worth saving? Where did we make ourselves less than we actually are? I've revisited those things. At the same time, I was shocked at what people had actually been subjected to in that country. I just broadened my view beyond my immediate environment."

On to GUNDERMANN the film. What are Conny's hopes for the film? "That people discover Gundi's songs, or rediscover them. I hope that the film helps to see things from a different perspective. After all, those were the reasons I consented to the film. I'd decided never to agree to something like that. But in the end, it has to do with the opportunity to tell the story of Gundi's life and of life in the GDR in a more complex way."



LINDA FROM "LINDA"

Evening in Berlin. "I'm sitting in the back on the left," is what Linda Gundermann said on the phone. Of course, she's sitting in the restaurant in the back on the left. That has to be Linda! The physical traits of her father are plain to see, but there's a lot of Conny in Linda too. The young, 26-year-old woman is the best possible mix of her parents. During our conversation, she lives up to the expectations that one might have of her. She is to the point, contemplative, frank, and mindful.

The Linda from "Linda"! The Linda who *"fell into Gundermann's heart"*, who *"ripped the doors and windows wide open"* from *"a deserted house"*, so that *"the light could go in and out"*. "Just like her dad," people like to say. Does Linda hear that a lot? "Yeah, actually it's usually the others who say this or that trait comes from Dad. I distanced myself from that pretty quickly. It was painful while I was exploring my own identity, because it wasn't about my nose, my anger, my creativity. But I wanted it to be about me. Naturally, I also believe that I do think like my father, or in the way in which he used to. I also think my impatience is similar to my dad's in his youth. Especially when people don't pull their weight the way I'd like them to. But how much of it is genes? How much of it is socialization?"

Linda received her teaching certificate in Berlin and teaches children and youth English and math. She's even thinking about staying in Wedding, the neighborhood where she now lives. She went to high school in Hoyerswerda and still has relatives there, but she doesn't really feel like Hoyerswerda and Spreetal are home anymore. "The feeling of home is like an old film that's all fuzzy. You can still make out images, but it's no longer in reach. My father was also home to me, of course. I'd say I come from a hippie family that wasn't embarrassed to be silly in public, to let their inner child hang out. I can't remember ever feeling stifled. I think that was a kind of freedom, too ... The open-pit mining site was like a wonderland for me. We drove past it almost every day. First came the hill, then Spreetal, then the open-pit mine. I would know: I'm almost there. It was like an alien world, but home

at the same time. I wanted to be an digger driver for a long time myself. Once dad's excavator caught fire. We went there afterwards and it was still glowing hot, standing there in that Lusatian Mars landscape. That was breathtaking."

Memories are essential for Linda. The earliest memory of her father? "We're driving in the car on the way to the movie theater in Cottbus. It's one of our 'Dad and Linda days'. I start fighting with him because, just like the other kids in my nursery school, I want to go to McDonald's." And her strongest memory? "In 1997, I went along to one of his concerts for the first time. It was in Berlin-Weissensee. I'm about four. Dad always handed out things from the stage that he didn't need anymore. That evening my favorite bathing suit was one of them. It didn't fit me anymore but I was so outraged, really furious that he would dare do such a thing ... I just remember running onto the stage, then getting yanked off, and sitting backstage crying my eyes out until I fell asleep from exhaustion."

The "years of plenty" that Gerhard Gundermann foretold in his wonderful song for his daughter were few and far between. Linda was six when her father died. She gathers what she can about him from songs, interviews, stories, and his journals, more than she does from discussions. And she hears a lot of nonsense about her dad. So many people have their own image of him, even after just seeing him on stage a few times.

Linda is a vegetarian just as he was, and doesn't differentiate between the life of an animal and that of a human. She sings every day, composes songs, and plays the guitar. And she tries to cultivate the values her parents imparted on her: "That friends are the greatest asset. That you have to be careful not to lose them. That relationships are like houses - if there's a hole in the roof, the rain will leak inside and rot the beams. The concept of education as well. Instead of just swallowing pre-packaged tidbits, think for yourself. Let go of prescribed norms and conventions without giving in to embarrassment and changing your mind."



GERHARD GUNDERMANN

Gerhard "Gundi" Gundermann was born in Weimar in 1955. His parents moved with him to Hoyerswerda, right in the center of the Lusatian coal-mining region between Dresden and Cottbus. After high school he began studying at a GDR military college in Löbau. He was expelled and began working as a laborer before becoming qualified to operate large open-pit mining machinery in Lusatian brown coal mining. By that time, he was already writing texts and playing drums in the band Brigade Feuerstein - although the band didn't give him the right to sing along. After the "Feuersteins" broke up in 1986, he began doing solo projects and concerts.

Working in open-pit mining and its way of life gave Gundi ideas for songs and projects that often had to do with worker life, "simple people," his family, environmental problems, and his hometown of Hoyerswerda ("I was born here, 'Hoywoy'"). With the fall of the Wall in 1989/90, he got actively involved in the events of the political breakthrough. In 1992, he founded his band with the purposefully provocative name, Seilschaft, (old boy network), and they gave concerts until 1998, including opening for Bob Dylan and Joan Baez. On the tour for his album *Einsame Spitze* (1992), in which he collaborated with the band Silly, all at once, Gundermann finally reached a larger audience.

Parallel to his musical career, Gundermann worked as a digger driver. This decision was purposeful, as he wanted to remain independent from the music industry. In 1997, he lost his job like thousands before him. The mining pit Brigitta had long since closed. Gundermann was left without a profession. The profession of open-pit digger driver is on the list of 160 professions that didn't even exist in West Germany. He began to re-train as a carpenter, performing his new solo program, and recording the CD *Engel über dem Revier* (Angel over the Mining Site). This would be his last project. The years of the double burden of shift work and concerts took their toll. On June 21, 1998, at the age of 43, he died of a brain hemorrhage in Spreetal (near Hoyerswerda).

Politically speaking, Gundermann was (and still is) controversial. He was a member of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany), although he was expelled in 1978 due to "unwanted personal views." After protests, the expulsion was reduced to a harsh reprimand. In 1976, he was recruited by the Stasi

as an unofficial collaborator (IM) under the alias "Grigori." In 1984, he was expelled from the SED again, as well as from the Stasi for "general disobedience." In 1995, Gundermann's work for the Ministry for State Security (MfS) was made public. Gundermann faced his history as an informant, outing himself on stage during a concert, and giving the interview "Never Again: The End Justifies the Means" ("Nie mehr: Der Zweck heiligt die Mittel", Lausitzer Rundschau, May 1995).

Gundermann, always juggling mining and music, would become one of the most formative pop artists and musicians of the post-Wall era. His sudden death triggered profound grief and disbelief. On the 20th anniversary of his death, the Kulturfabrik Hoyerswerda (Hoyerswerda arts center) created a Gundermann archive, the so-called "Gundermann Control Center" (Gundermann-Schaltzentrale). With texts, videos, music files, and photographs, it is a memorial to his music and his impact, which stretches far beyond the city limits.



THE SOUNDTRACK

Gerhard Gundermann wrote songs. In the GDR, his songs were as easy to find in shops as apples were, but in the West, they were a rare delicacy. Some of his songs have practically become folk songs, a few have now made it into school books, and several are used as teaching material for singing classes in acting schools.

But most of all, they've made it into the hearts and heads of two generations and counting – and stuck there for good. His songs are earthly, fragile, existential; sometimes rousing, sometimes contemplative, orbiting uniquely between anarchy and potent melancholy. They're usually stories of flat land, of badlands.

He was a digger driver from the Lusatian brown coal mining region who wrote songs. Those songs would take him around the country: from concerts in student clubs, in big halls, little halls and concerts for miners, all the way to opening for Joan Baez's Germany tour, for Bob Dylan in 1994 and to the Volksbühne theater in Berlin, where they requested him for the 1995 New Year's concert. But his music also led him away from the stage and back into the cramped cabin of the excavator where new lines and refrains were born.

For the film, Alexander Scheer sang a dozen and a half of Gundermann's songs, accompanied by the band that supported Gisbert zu Knyphausen and others on stage and in the studio for years.

Together, through clear, modern arrangements and sounds, they recreated Gundermann's poetic power, spirit, and attitude, capturing the essence of his songs. The result is both heart-wrenching and heart-warming. You will see and hear it.

Simultaneous to the German theatrical release on August 23, BushFunk released the original soundtrack: all the film's songs are released in their entirety on CD, as downloads, and on a limited double LP.

www.BuschFunk.com: Künstler + Konzerte + Konsum.
As well as all CDs, DVDs and (song) books by and about Gerhard Gundermann



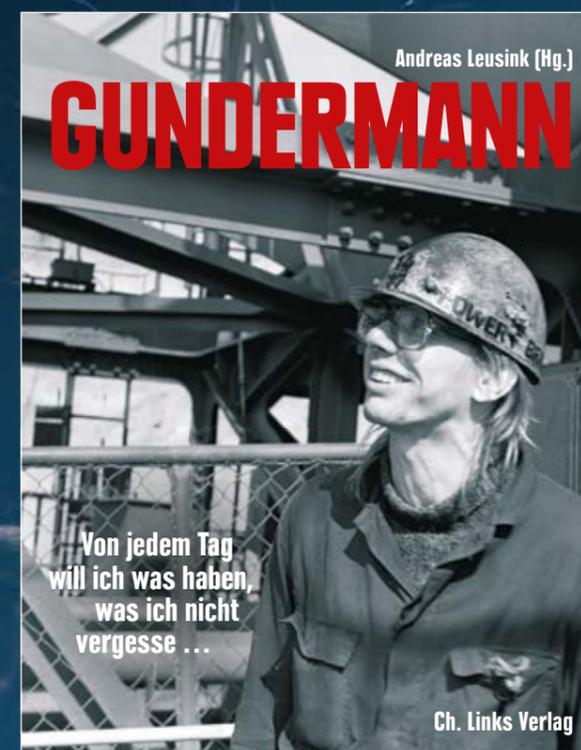
THE FILM BOOK

Gerhard Gundermann was a digger driver and a songwriter, a comrade and a rebel, a military school cadet who refused to take orders and a spy who got spied on. The book contains many previously unreleased texts, photos, letters, memories, documents, interviews, and also glimpses into the making of the film GUNDERMANN.

Andreas Leusink (Hg.)
GUNDERMANN

Von jedem Tag will ich was haben, was ich nicht vergesse
Briefe, Dokumente, Interviews, Erinnerungen
(I Want Something from Every Day that I Don't Forget:
Letters, Documents, Interviews, Memories)

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INTERVIEW WITH ANDREAS DRESEN

DIRECTOR



Mr. Dresen, this interview is taking place in the middle of the editing process for the film GUNDERMANN. You said once that you always learn something new about your own film during editing. How has it been so far?

In the beginning, every new film is a barren landscape. You have your narrative intent and then a finished script, and you think: yes, that's exactly how we need to tell the story. Then you start filming: the actors and the whole team come into the picture, and the vision changes. Later in the editing room, you try to piece together your original idea, cut by cut. And you suddenly realize that moving images and spoken words have a completely different effect than written words on their own. So you take a look at the whole thing and dust it off again. There were a lot more possibilities with GUNDERMANN due to the structure with the two time periods. We're just figuring out what's right and what's wrong.

That must be like open heart surgery. The open heart part, at least...

At some point you get scared that the changes you are making are ruining the things that used to work. Plus we have to find out if we are really reaching people emotionally or if they are just touched because they maybe knew Gundermann personally. To figure that out, we do test screenings. This is the first time that the main character of one of my films is a person who actually existed. But the Gundermann in our film is a fictional character nonetheless. After all, it would be presumptuous to try to make an exact replica of a real person.

And it would be boring!

Definitely! A movie has to take the liberty to fictionalize, compromise, and shift things. In that respect, it's how the screenwriter Laila Stieler and I envisioned Gundermann. Anyone who knew him would be able to find fault with our image of him. Those who didn't know Gundermann might see him as purely our creation. And that's okay, too.

In Richard Engel's documentary film ENDE DER EISENZEIT (The End of the Iron Age) the former mining site manager said this about Gerhard Gundermann: "He really drove us nuts." Did he drive you nuts, too?

Naturally, Gundermann's colleagues who worked with him directly have their own view of him. He could be a bit of a pain, I think. He was likable, but also a demanding and exhausting character. I didn't know him personally, only from concerts. He only drove me nuts in the creative sense, with the question: How can we manage to convey such a complex character in a movie? Especially because Gundermann isn't only likable; he challenges himself, his environment, and with it, the audience as well.

When did you set your sights on Gerhard Gundermann?

It was in 1983 while watching Richard Engel's documentary film GUNDI GUNDERMANN. It was broadcast late at night because there had been so much trouble with Gundermann in the past. Critical things were said in the movie that one rarely heard on GDR television. From that point on, Gundermann's name was etched in my mind. Richard Engel's film remains a wonderful historic document and a unique opportunity to see Gundermann in his early years.

How did you decide on the form for GUNDERMANN?

That was mostly Laila Stieler's doing. The two time periods were decided on pretty quickly. We knew we would start with Gundermann's confrontation of his own past in the nineties and skip back about 20 years. We wanted to explore the period in his life when two important events are unfolding: he is collaborating with the Ministry for State Security, which leads to a crisis of conscience, and he is falling in love with Conny. GUNDERMANN is a film about a person trying to come to terms with his own life, with his possible guilt, and with the past in a country that has disappeared. Naturally, it's also a film about a great poet.

And about the worlds of art and work.

Yes, that plays a big role. Gundermann wasn't just a singer; he was an artist with a unique social position. A person who went from the mine to the stage and back – with his head in the clouds and his boots in the brown coal mud. And, last but not least, it's a great love story.

GUNDERMANN is your sixth feature film with screenwriter Laila Stieler. What kind of chemistry do you share?

We have the same views of the world and of people. That also goes for Gundermann, so we were able to make all the fundamental decisions together. Laila and I have a similar sense of humor, which I think is really important. We are also open about critique and don't take the feedback personally. Working with her, I have a partner with incredible patience, meticulousness and diligence who approaches a story with a big heart.

Was it actually to your advantage that you worked on GUNDERMANN for ten years together?

It wasn't lost time. Both of us realized other projects during that time, but kept meeting to wrestle with GUNDERMANN. Sometimes it's good for the script to sit around for six months before you take a fresh look at it. Having some time before the project starts also helps to prevent polemics. GUNDERMANN shouldn't be a reaction to the social climate of the time. It's the story of someone's life.

Nevertheless, the film comes at a time when there's a lot of debate going on again about "East German identity."

I'm very careful with terms like "East German identity." And I hate the word "Ostalgie" (nostalgia for all things GDR). I don't want to go back to the GDR, which doesn't mean that I just quietly gave up on its ideals. Gundermann said it very well in one of his excavator journals: "I belong to the losers. I bet on the right horse, but it didn't win."

Gundermann took the GDR at its word ...

It's a huge tragedy and it broke many people in the GDR. The ones who believed in it became outsiders or were even persecuted. It's a paradox of history that the communists were suddenly spied upon. Gundermann saw for himself how it feels to be labeled the enemy. That quote says a lot. For example, that the utopian idea of a fair world is justified - but it's a question of implementation. The GDR didn't keep its promise, but that certainly doesn't mean that the utopian

idea is no good. Personally, I'm pretty fed up with all the clichés that continue to exist even so many years after the fall of the Wall, as well as with the tainted ways we see each other. In that respect GUNDERMANN is perhaps less reconciliatory than other films we've made on the subject.

SILENT COUNTRY from 1992 was an early, big contribution.

In GUNDERMANN, we go back to the place where we left off in SILENT COUNTRY. In AS WE WERE DREAMING, we attempted that, but it revolved more around the time after the GDR. Now it's about guilt and entanglement again, and the questions we were asking ourselves even back in the nineties.

important to us that people take a closer look, because there are no simple answers. That people don't automatically feel superior just because they weren't confronted with certain constraints. Quick moral judgments usually come from an attitude of assuming that this or that would never have happened to them. Hopefully GUNDERMANN is a complex example of a person who got socially involved and stirred things up, incurred guilt and faced his responsibilities head on. It shows that it was indeed possible to act responsibly yet still end up guilty. It's not at all about justifying all his actions. It's an interesting minefield ...



Regarding his 1995 album *Frühstück für immer* ("Breakfast Forever"), Gerhard Gundermann said that it was the pressure to remember that dictated the pitch of the songs. Do you think the pressure to remember was also the impetus for this film?

Of course! We wanted to delve into Gundermann and into memory. We wanted to tell this story from our hearts and with the same kind of passion that he himself possessed. There are inherent connections between him and us. And it's definitely also about reclaiming the right of interpretation for our own stories, rather than just wiping them away. It's

Many people saw Gundermann as a nutcase.

"Nutcase" has such a negative connotation. I would say he was more of a jester. A jester can annoy people, but he also has wisdom about life and the ability to judge situations outside of all conventions. He acts as a mirror to the world. Our portrayal of Gundermann, especially in the seventies, is that he was somewhat of a provocative jester and rebel.

He wanted to make films himself. That would've been something!

Yeah, why not! I would've loved to have seen them.

We've got to talk about how you cast the main character. Did you do an audition? Was that necessary?

No, actually, but we did one anyway ... We'd considered Alexander Scheer for the part from the beginning. But his performance in the audition was so striking that it left us without a doubt in the world that he would play Gundermann. I'm still extremely happy with the decision. It's not so much about looking the part, which he also undoubtedly does, but Alexander Scheer has the same kind of fire that makes the character so compelling. He was on fire about the film, and is unbelievably talented as an actor. He has the ability to

crawl inside a character and understand him from the inside out. Plus he's very musical. After all, Alexander sang all the songs in the film himself and accompanied them on guitar.

Scheer grabs Gundermann by the scruff of the neck ...

It was a huge feat. He's in nearly every scene. In pre-production, but also during the filming process, he researched his way deep inside Gundermann, and conquered the role in no time at all.

There are 18 songs in the film GUNDERMANN. Did you include so many songs so the audience could discover or rediscover him?

Of course we wanted the audience to become acquainted with Gundermann's great songs. Their unique melancholic poetry makes them essential and they can be deeply touching. I wanted to share that feeling of being profoundly touched, that's why there is so much space given to the songs within the film. But it was important to us that they were revised and that we didn't just play them back verbatim. They are a kind of cautious adaptation. Jens Quandt supervised the music recording, and I chose Gisbert zu Knyphausen's old band. They're all "West musicians" who didn't know Gundermann, and were excited to explore and adapt the songs.

You actually sing Gundermann songs in concerts. How is it to sing his songs?

Not easy. You've got to forget any kind of craft, or the songs seem pitiful and feel wrong. They're straight from the heart. You've got to let it just pour out from your heart, but that's also what makes it so hard.



INTERVIEW WITH LAILA STIELER

SCREENPLAY



Ms. Stieler, let's imagine for a second that Gundermann never existed as a real person. That you, as an author, dreamed up this uncompromising musician who had lived in the GDR, who was an digger driver who worked shifts in open-pit mines, who was a spy but who was also spied on, whose cover was blown after reunification, and who became a father late in life and then died early. Do you think any production company or director would ever accept that script?

I'm not sure I could even dream up something that crazy. But as a matter of fact, "what if" was a game we played a lot while working on GUNDERMANN. What if Gundermann was really just a fictional character and we could really indulge ourselves in the story, or even make a mockumentary. How great would it have been not to have to stick to the biography and all the facts!

Yet the Gundermann in the film naturally isn't purely based on fact.

We stand with one foot in reality and one foot in fiction. It's always exciting to create fictional elements within a biography. That balancing act is a lot of fun, but it's a very difficult one to master. The crux is that a biography isn't based on the dramaturgy of a film. Real life sprouts up here and there, arches here, cuts off there ... It's no use thinking anything along the lines of: maybe it would've been better for the film if things had happened differently, and I could bend the story better to fit the film. The film material is the actual life lived, and the film is in there somewhere, not the other way around.

In GUNDERMANN there is a really nice "what if" moment. What would've happened if he'd really spoken to Bob Dylan backstage when he and his band opened for him in 1994? That idea came from Alexander Scheer, and I very gratefully included it. I knew right away, the only thing Gundermann can say right there in the film is that Springsteen's the greatest.

Now, there are countless "Gundermen". Everyone who knew him has their own version.

At this point, there are even people who think that what happened in the film is the real deal, they think it really happened. Sometimes I even get it mixed up myself.

Were you actually liberated by all these "Gundermen" because, as a screenwriter, you had to "build" one yourself? Or did it feel more like a pressure?

Both. I freed myself from the expectations and opinions that Gundermann could only be portrayed one way or another. You're always thinking about a character, so they change from one version to the next. There are constants that are

usually clear right from the beginning. At the same time, there can be extreme changes along the way. I remember thinking of Gundermann in the beginning as more of a clown. Almost like Eulenspiegel, a guy who's constantly messing with people. But after just one meeting with Conny and his band, it was clear that humor wasn't really his thing. So he became more serious to me. My Gundermann leaned more towards being an idealist, definitely naïve, but not stupid. The other nuances of the character came as we went along.

You've worked on both biographical as well as literary adaptations. There are distinct parallels in the approach to both genres. It's about respect, but most importantly, about having your own consistent view.

... and about getting very well acquainted with the material, letting the material overwhelm you until you've reached a certain place, then liberating yourself from it, bit by bit.

What were the premises for the structure of the screenplay?

Right away, I had two premises. On one hand, Gundermann's wooing of Conny, which ultimately leads to their relationship. It's a love story with highs and lows. It took place over six years. I thought that timeframe was great on its own. It's easy to capture, easy to get your head around. It played right into my hands, dramaturgically speaking. The second important thread was Gundermann's work for state security and the confrontations around this in the nineties. It has to conform to certain dates in the end. But the way there, the stages, like the inner conflict and the search for identity, those things allowed space for invention.

Did you know Gerhard Gundermann personally?

No. The songwriter scene wasn't really my thing. But I'd heard of Gundermann as early as the late eighties, and I'd seen him on stage. My impression of him was more earthy and poetic, and not as heroic as people said. He was what he sang: very passionate.

Your view of Gundermann and his era is a product of you and Andreas Dresen being socialized in the East.

That's crucial! I don't think that it's possible to distance yourself from your own experiences. An important premise I had while writing the screenplay – but also in my ongoing work during the film's creation – was to listen very carefully when people who were socialized in the West didn't understand something: a certain term, abbreviation or code. At the same time, we didn't want to explain every detail of the GDR's complex and controversial history in GUNDERMANN, or any motivations or behaviors. After all, you can educate

yourself, have discussions. You can just accept what you see and then add your own thoughts. In 2018, we should be allowed to start off with grey area and not just black and white. And with all the prejudice around Gundermann as a person or in the GDR at the moment, I stopped wanting to deal with it. It didn't need me anymore.

So the universal aspect, not just the themes of guilt and insight, suppression and forgiveness ... is something the viewer has to discover themselves?

Yes, because I am a firm believer that the more precisely you describe a situation, a character, or a country, the more universal the effect will be.

A great deal of material exists about the real Gundermann, in the form of songs, song versions, texts, live recordings, interviews. Is that always helpful for the research?

At some point I had to hold up a stop sign. There is a ton of material, but a lot of it is similar. At first, it's very hard to navigate,

like a forest screaming for paths. But it gets sorted out little by little. Discussions were the most valuable element for my work. I stuck to discussions with Conny and Linda Gundermann as well as musical colleagues. It helped me a lot to go beyond just researching the person. I really dove into the era: How does memory work? How does suppression happen? What role does shame play in the process of suppression? It almost resembled psycho-neurological research.

Do you think you were able to capture Gerhard Gundermann?

No, I don't think so. A few aspects of his personality, at most. His early years, his beginnings with Singergruppe and Brigade Feuerstein, how they lived and loved together, which was pretty free and anarchistic ... There was definitely a lot of material there. Or in the late eighties, when Gundermann started his great search, his experiments with theater or at the Akademie der Künste (Academy of Arts), all those things were facets that we could've expanded upon. But they are stories in and of themselves.

GUNDERMANN is at once a love story, a music film, and a "Heimatfilm" (a film about the homeland).
I'll add a fourth to that: a tragicomedy.

Alexander Scheer became "your" Gundermann. How do you see him?

We're so lucky it's him! I really can't imagine anyone else in that role. I'm amazed at the character he created. He has a gorgeous voice, very different to the real Gundermann, but similar in the way that it merges with the text and the music, turning it into something very unique.

Were you on the set often during filming?

Not really. I'm very Prussian when it comes to my work ethic: if I'd had more to do on set, then I would've spent more time there.

Where would you classify GUNDERMANN in the canon of Stieler/Dresen films, which now comprises an impressive four shorts and six feature films?

I'd file it under "Heimatfilm", a film about homeland... It's like a return, in terms of examining a country and the emotional conditions we lived through. We've remained faithful to ourselves since then, but yes, it's like a return.

What kind of chemistry do you need to be able to make a new film together?

I have to admit, it's hard to describe. We've known each other since 1985, which is almost an eternity. What I've always liked about Andreas Dresen is his emotional sensitivity and generosity. The uninhibited way he approaches people and telling stories. Maybe it sounds too cute, but I think it's true of Andreas: he's interested in people to the point that it's moving. That's something I was drawn to when we first met, and I'm still drawn to it today.

You end up with films that elevate the thousands of "little" life stories into great film stories.

Everyday life plays a decisive role for Andreas and me. If we were to describe Maria Stuart, we would start with her teacup and her everyday life, and not her state affairs.

You said once that you and Andreas Dresen are connected by "extreme projects". Is GUNDERMANN one of them?

Yes, I'd say that. On one hand, because I see the film as a supplement to a history that's important to me and that I haven't seen on screen before. On the other hand, it's the biography of a person who actually existed. I hadn't had that kind of collaboration with Andreas Dresen before.

How do you motivate each other when things get tough?

We go for walks. Very, very long walks.



INTERVIEW WITH ALEXANDER SCHEER

GERHARD GUNDERMANN

So, Mr. Scheer, be honest: Bruce Springsteen or Bob Dylan?
Dylan! Springsteen had some great albums, but for me it's Dylan all the way!

Do you know what I'm alluding to?

I've got a pretty good idea. I took the liberty of adding something to the screenplay. I said to Andi, "You know, if Gundermann is so close to Dylan backstage, he's got to talk to him! And the scene deals with recognition – everybody knows Dylan, but who's the guy with the glasses?"

You didn't seem too shy about playing Gerhard Gundermann. Did you grapple with it?

I did at first. When I heard that Andreas Dresen wanted to make a film about Gundermann, my ears perked up right away. I knew one of those guys, namely Dresen, better than the other. I was 14 when the Wall fell. Back then I was stocking up on the Stones, Hendrix, and Zappa, not some singer-songwriter. Gundermann was too East German and sounded that way too. It wasn't until Dresen's request arrived that I sat down and listened to a Gundermann song in its entirety. The song was "Gras". I immediately sent the message to Dresen: "I'll play him for you, with all that I've got."

How did your first meeting with Andreas Dresen go?

I came to the meeting wearing glasses and homemade Gundi-teeth. I already had some Gundermann slang down too. Stuff like: "The degree to which you open your mouth should be proportionate to your job performance!" But Dresen didn't seem too impressed by it.

No one was very surprised that you ended up getting the role.

Nope, not even my actor colleagues. Everybody seemed to know more than I did.

When did closeness develop between you and Gundermann?

It was there from the moment I heard that first song. The tone was somehow familiar to me, the atmosphere in his song lyrics. They touched me in an unusual way, reminded me of where I come from. The rest came from reading about him: about Conny, the love of his life, about being an digger driver, the Stasi...

Didn't you start drowning in material at some point?

Oh, it can never be too much! But I didn't have a whole lot of

time. In 2017, I was just finishing my last season with Castorf at the Berliner Volksbühne theater, and I had a guest performance with Moliere in Avignon. Long story short: I only had about 6 weeks to prepare for the role before shooting started. Six weeks to learn to move like Gundermann, to think like Gundermann, to work with the screenplay, and to learn 18 songs.

You're in almost every scene in GUNDERMANN. The director said it was a huge feat.

And he's right! But I do really get a ton of pleasure from delving into a character. After all, I want something from every film that I don't forget, too. Thirteen-hour shoots every day for 42 days, clear across two different time periods, 18 songs that have to get into your bones before recording them in the studio or singing them live on set, preferably while you accompany them on guitar! Yeah, you could say it was a tight schedule! And there was a nice parallel: just like Gundermann, I slept just four hours a night. I think that was the perfect method for me. Just like Gundermann, speeding along in the fast lane. What was it he always said? "No pressure, no brown coal, eh?"

They say Gundermann was your "Seventh Samurai".

Yes, it was. That's a reference to Gundi's third album and the film by Kurosawa. Along with the musicians, terrorists, and communists in my filmography, there are several illustrious historical characters romping around too. And Gundermann is my seventh biographical role. Each time that means doing detailed research, watching everything, listening to and reading everything that there is about the guy. I have to know the material in my sleep before I can just get on set and act. After all, you want to see a person on the screen, not somebody using some encyclopedia framework as a guide. But to do that, I have to be able to forget all that I know. Only when I instinctively reach for what's become integrated can I be free and in the moment.

What were your essential sources?

The documentary by Engel and the interview book by Schutt. All the discussions and writings. And the music, of course. But in the end, it was the excavator journals, the kind of diary he spoke into his Dictaphone. I got it a week before we started shooting. There are ten, thirty-minute volumes. And there are so many extra details! How much gas he pumped, how he played with Linda, sometimes pretty crude philosophical thoughts on the world, tons of song ideas. It's as close as one can get to him.

How important was it to you to copy all the Gundermann gestures: his sniffing, his gait and dialect, all the physical stuff like dental prosthetics, his nose inhaler, and the most original glasses around?

Really important! Those are the transformation tools. Because it's not just about putting on a costume, it's a metamorphosis. The more I change on the outside, the more I can be myself. I can see new sides of myself and surprise myself. Making changes to the outside is a roundabout way to access something on the inside that I didn't know I was able to show. Just look at Gundermann! He's just nose, glasses, teeth. "We've got to ask the Rathenower Optische Werke (Rathenow Optical Works) if we can get our hands on one of their original frames! We've got to do something with the nose and the teeth!"

Were you trying to do Gundermann justice?

It was about capturing him as closely as possible so that my Gundi would be believable, even if you don't understand the details right away. Sometimes I noticed Gundi was smiling down at us. For example, it would rain exactly when it was supposed to rain. When his daughter Linda admitted to me while shooting in Frannz Club in Berlin that she felt like she was looking back through time at the father she hadn't seen in so long, it was the greatest compliment.

Did you leave any Gerhard Gundermann riddles unsolved?

I didn't have to worry about that. Laila Stieler and Andreas Dresden made sure of that in the screenplay. But I certainly didn't want to explain him.

You say GUNDERMANN is your most important film in 20 years. Why is that exactly?

There were some great films in there like SUN ALLEY, CARLOS THE JACKAL, WEST, or 54 HOURS. But in GUNDERMANN, it all comes together: you hardly ever get to read a character of such complexity in a German script, let alone play them. And a character who was also a musician – because I need music like the air I breathe. A story that takes place in the country where I grew up. And it's with Andreas Dresden, who always has something to say in his films and has this indescribably conscientious, open way of interacting.

Looking at your life, you would've been a perfect fit for Dresden's film AS WE WERE DREAMING. You were 14 when the Wall fell, which makes you part of the last generation of East Germans, a generation that spent the post-Wall era running around with illusions and disillusion, with drugs and techno music...

That's right! When I read the book by Clemens Meyer on which the film was based, that time came flooding back to

me. Except that we were kids in Berlin, not Leipzig. But it was movies I was crazy about. I ran to the cinema three or four times a week, five years straight.

What movies did you see?

Everything that a tiny cinema in the East had been dying to show and could finally do it. One retrospective after another: Scorsese, Coppola, Polanski, Bergman, French New Wave, the Italians, Fassbinder, Herzog, the early Murnau and Lang classics, John Ford's westerns. That was my education.

Regarding the music: you sang 18 Gundermann songs as your character, but also as Alexander Scheer. That sounds like an exciting situation.

It really was! When we recorded in the studio, I sang the songs like Gundermann, which felt amazingly easy because the cosmos of the lyrics was familiar to me. The arrangements are more pared down than the original – clearer and more austere, more focused on the song. When we go on tour in the beginning of the film, I sing the songs as Scheer and that's pretty exciting too.

You don't meet many people who want to discuss Gerhard Gundermann as a singer and composer. Most people just jump straight to his lyrics. How is it for you as a musician?

I'm not a musician; I'm more of a music maker. For me, John Lennon was a music maker. Not someone who impressed with their virtuosity, but rather, someone who had his innermost feelings on the tip of his tongue.

Like a character singer.

Yes, someone with their own style who never tried to be anything else.

Did you attempt to understand what brought him to earn his daily bread with excavation rather than with art?

I attempted to, yes. He didn't want to be financially dependent on his art or on what songs he came up with. What he earned with his excavator was supposed to pay for rent and food. I did understand that he needed that work, even though it was so lonely and monotone. The excavator cabin is like a space capsule for thought. I can also understand the contradiction when he says: "I'm digging up electricity.



It's not nice, using your homeland as fuel, but it's necessary. Otherwise the lights will go out across the land." Excavating is about responsibility; concerts are about free play and reflection. You can't separate them, you need them both.

How was it for you as a city kid to shoot in that open-pit mining moon landscape?

It was nuts! I didn't want to leave the operator cabin of that thousand-ton monster. I really dug up tons of brown coal with that thing! And it did weird things to me, down there, 400 meters below street level!

Let's talk a little bit about your partner in the film, Anna Unterberger.

Definitely! Film is a team sport after all. And the ensemble that Dresden put together was just sensational. They're all

great actors! But my relationship to Anna was the most important to me, because our love story carries the entire film. Understanding the nature of East Germany was definitely the hardest part for Anna. She comes from South Tyrol and was the youngest in our troupe. But she knew how to make the most out of that discrepancy. It reflected something of the reality of the character she was playing: Conny, the inexperienced woman who falls in love with Gundi, the interpreter of worlds. Anna made me strong and I could be strong for her. There is a scene when Conny realizes she loves Gundi more than she thought she did. We're standing in the door of this high-rise apartment, looking into each other's eyes... And suddenly the sound man cuts because he hears knocking sounds in one of the clip-on mics. It was Anna's heart thumping. I mean, you can't give any more than that, right?

BIOGRAPHY

ANDREAS DRESEN DIRECTOR

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- 2018 GUNDERMANN
- 2017 THE BOY WHO SOLD HIS LAUGHTER
- 2015 AS WE WERE DREAMING
- 2013 16 X DEUTSCHLAND (EPISODE: BRANDENBURG)
- 2012 HENRYK FROM THE BACK ROW
- 2011 STOPPED ON TRACK
- 2009 WHISKY WITH VODKA
- 2008 CLOUD NINE
- 2006 SUMMER IN BERLIN
- 2005 WILLENBROCK
- 2002 VOTE FOR HENRYK!
- 2002 GRILL POINT
- 1999 NIGHT SHAPES
- 1997 CHANGING SKINS
- 1994 DAS ANDERE LEBEN DES HERRN KREINS
- 1992 SILENT COUNTRY

Andreas Dresen was born in 1963 into a theater family, and started shooting his first amateur films as early as 1979. From 1984–1985 he worked as a sound technician at the Schweriner Theater, before doing a traineeship at DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme (studio for feature films) and working as assistant director to Gunter Reisch. From 1986–1991, Dresen studied directing at the Konrad Wolf Film University of Babelsberg (HFF). He has worked as an independent author and director since 1992. He lives near Potsdam and is a member of the Academy of Arts, Berlin (Akademie der Künste), the Europäischen Filmakademie (European Film Academy) as well as founding member of the Deutschen Filmakademie (German Film Academy). His first feature film SILENT COUNTRY (1992), a tragicomedy about the impacts of German reunification on rural East Germany, won both the Hessen Film and Cinema Prize and the German Critics' Prize.

Prize-winning work for TV followed, including the sensational drama CHANGING SKINS (1997), about two students who kidnap their party-loyal school principal. Dresen had his big break with his episodic film NIGHT SHAPES which competed in the 1999 Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale), and won the German Film Award in the Silver category. His next film POLICEWOMAN (2000) won Dresen the gold Grimme-Preis. Two years later he celebrated his biggest success yet with GRILL POINT: the entirely improvised tragicomedy about two couples in Frankfurt an der Oder would become a worldwide audience favorite. The film went on to win numerous awards, including the Silver Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival, the Bavarian Film Award, and the silver German Film Award. His documentary film VOTE FOR HENRYK! (2003) was followed in March 2005 by WILLENBROCK, Dresen's film adaptation of the novel by Christoph Hein. In January 2006, the tragicomedy SUMMER IN BERLIN was released in theaters, and went on to win the Ernst-Lubitsch-

Preis and the Bayerischen Filmpreis for best director that same year. CLOUD NINE, an improvised drama about love and sexuality in old age, was released in German theaters in 2008. The film won, among other prizes, the jury "Coup de Coeur" in the section "Un Certain Regard" at Cannes and the main prize at the Trieste Film Festival. At the Deutschen Filmpreis, Ursula Werner won Best Leading Actress and Andreas Dresen won Best Director. CLOUD NINE received the bronze Lola for Best Film. In WHISKEY WITH VODKA (2009), Dresen shone a comedic light on the film industry, its idiosyncrasies and vanities. The film won Best Director at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival. In 2011, Dresen's film STOPPED ON TRACK screened at Festival De Cannes in the section "Un Certain Regard". The drama about a father diagnosed with terminal cancer won the section's main prize. The German Film Academy also recognized the film with four „Lolas" in the categories Best Film, Best Leading Actor (Milan Peschel), Best Supporting Actor (Otto Mellies), and Best Director. In 2015, AS WE WERE DREAMING, the film adaptation of Clemens Meyer's popular novel, was the third of Dresen's films to screen in competition at the Berlinale. Wolfgang Kohlhaase, with whom Dresen had already collaborated on SUMMER IN BERLIN and WHISKY WITH VODKA, wrote the screenplay. In 2017, Dresen released his first children's film: THE BOY WHO SOLD HIS LAUGHTER, based on the 1962 novel by James Kruss. The film won awards at festivals in Chicago, Minsk, Zagreb, and Seattle, as well as at the Goldener Spatz children's film festival.

Andreas Dresen staged his first play in 1996: Goethe's Urfaust at the Staatstheater Cottbus. This was followed by further theatrical work at the Schauspiel Leipzig and the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, where the director staged debut productions of his own play, *Zeugenstand* („Witness Box") in 2002 and, in April 2006, Horvath's *Kasimir and Karoline*. In February 2006, he celebrated his directorial opera debut in Basel with Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. This was followed by *The Marriage of Figaro* in 2011 at the Schloss-theater in Potsdam. In 2014, he staged a production of *Arabella* at the Bavarian State Opera.

Andreas Dresen has been a constitutional judge of Brandenburg since 2012. Starting in the 2018 summer semester, he will also take up the newly established professorship for film acting at the Rostock University of Music and Theatre in Rostock.



LAILA STIELER SCREENPLAY

Laila Stieler was born in Thuringia in 1965. After graduating from high school, she first worked at "Elektrokohle Lichtenberg," then in GDR television before she studied dramaturgy at the Konrad Wolf Film University of Babelsberg (HFF). She has been working as an author, dramaturg, and producer for film and television productions since 1990. Her most well-known film screenplays include *SILENT COUNTRY* (1992), *POLICEWOMAN* (2000), and *WILLENBROCK* (2005), all directed by Andreas Dresen. She was awarded the gold

Adolf-Grimme-Preis for Best Screenplay for *POLICEWOMAN*, and was awarded the "Internationalen Literaturfilmpreis" for *WILLENBROCK* in 2005. Her other feature film screenplays include *LOVE LIFE* (director: Maria Schrader) and *THE HAIRDRESSER* (director: Doris Dörrie). Her screenplays for television productions include *GERMAN HISTORY X: NSU* (2016, director: Züli Aladag), *BRIEF AN MEIN LEBEN* (2015, director: Urs Egger), and *DIE LEHRERIN* (2011, director: Tim Trageser), which she also produced.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

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| 2018 | GUNDERMANN |
| 2017 | Eine Braut kommt selten allein (TV, director: Buket Alakus) |
| 2016 | German History X: NSU (TV, director: Züli Aladag) |
| 2015 | Brief an mein Leben (TV, director: Urs Egger) |
| 2013 | Willkommen auf dem Land (TV, screenplay and production, director: Tim Trageser) |
| 2011 | Die Lehrerin (TV, screenplay and production, director: Tim Trageser) |
| 2010 | THE HAIRDRESSER (screenplay and production, director: Doris Dörrie) |
| 2009 | Wohin mit Vater? (screenplay and production, director: Tim Trageser) |
| 2009 | Mein Mann, seine Geliebte and ich (TV, director: Dagmar Hirtz) |
| 2008 | Patchwork (TV, director: Franziska Buch) |
| 2008 | CLOUD NINE (director: Andreas Dresen) |
| 2007 | LOVE LIFE (director: Maria Schrader) |
| 2007 | Ein verlockendes Angebot (TV, screenplay and production, director: Tim Trageser) |
| 2005 | WILLENBROCK (Director: Andreas Dresen) |
| 2000/2002 | Achterbahn (TV series, screenplay for 2 episodes) |
| 2000 | Policewoman (TV, director: Andreas Dresen) |
| 2000 | Schwiegermutter (TV, director: Dagmar Hirtz) |
| 1997 | Die Konkurrentin (TV, director: Dagmar Hirtz) |
| 1994 | Mein unbekannter Ehemann (TV, director: Andreas Dresen) |
| 1992 | SILENT COUNTRY (director: Andreas Dresen) |

ALEXANDER SCHEER GERHARD GUNDERMANN

Alexander Scheer is regarded as one of the most versatile actors of his generation. Self-taught, he was discovered at the age of 22 by Leander Hausmann. He became a household name after playing the lead role in *SUN ALLEY* in 1999. Securing work with the help of his patron at Schauspielhaus Bochum, his path would lead him to the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, the Burgtheater in Vienna, and back to his hometown. Beginning in 2001, under Frank Castorf's direction he developed into one of the leading protagonists of the Volksbühne theater in Berlin, in productions such as *The Idiot*, *The Gambler* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. For his depiction in *KEAN* of the legendary English actor Edmund Kean, he was voted actor of the year by TheaterHeute magazine.

In addition to his work on stage, Scheer acted in several German and international film and television productions. *GUNDERMANN* is Alexander Scheer's seventh biographical role in a film. His recent characters included Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards (*EIGHT MILES HIGH*, 2007), master terrorist Johannes Weinrich (*CARLOS THE JACKAL*, 2010), Blixa Bargeld, the front man of the band Einstürzenden Neubauten (*PUNK BERLIN 1982*, 2015), Friedrich Nietzsche (*IN LOVE WITH LOU*), early communist Wilhelm Weitling (*THE YOUNG KARL MARX*, 2017), as well as kidnapper Dieter Degowski (*54 HOURS*, 2018)

ANNA UNTERBERGER CONNY GUNDERMANN

Anna Unterberger studied acting from 2005-2009 at the Vienna Conservatory and began her career at the summer festival in Kottlingbrunn and the Drachengasse theater in Vienna. Other acting engagements followed including at the Salzburger Landestheater.

While still studying, she played the role of Gretchen in Urs Odermatt's *MEIN KAMPF* for which she was nominated for the "Förderpreis Neues Deutsches Kino" award. Anna Unterberger also played roles in *JEW SUSS: RISE AND FALL* by Oskar Roeler, *MEASURING THE WORLD* by Detlev Buck, and *13 MINUTES* by Oliver Hirschbiegel. She worked with director Wolfgang Murnberger twice, in 2016 for *ACHTERBAHN* and in 2017 for *STEIRER KIND*.

PANDORA FILM PRODUCTION

CLAUDIA STEFFEN & CHRISTOPH FRIEDEL

Pandora Film was founded in 1981 and established itself as one of the most prominent distributors of quality international art house cinema productions. In 1997, Pandora Film moved its base to Cologne. The company's courage to realize extraordinary film projects has been rewarded with numerous accolades at all the A-list film festivals and both national and international film awards. Today Pandora Film Produktion presents itself as an independent production company with a growing catalog of over 120 films.

www.pandorafilm.com

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

- 2018 **GUNDERMANN**
- 2018 **HIGH LIFE** (director: Claire Denis)
- 2018 **IN MY ROOM** (director: Ulrich Kohler)
- 2018 **THE HEIRESSES** (director: Marcelo Martinessi)
- 2017 **COCOTE** (director: Carlo de los Santos Arias)
- 2016 **PAULA** (director: Christian Schwochow)
- 2016 **MARIJA** (director: Michael Koch)
- 2016 **NOCTURAMA** (director: Bertrand Bonello)
- 2014 **1001 GRAMS** (director: Bent Hamer)
- 2014 **LOSE MY SELF** (director: Jan Schomburg)
- 2013 **LAYLA FOURIE** (director: Pia Marais)
- 2011 **ABOVE US ONLY SKY** (director: Jan Schomburg)
- 2010 **AT ELLEN'S AGE** (director: Pia Marais)
- 2009 **GIANTE** (director: Adrian Biniez)
- 2007 **THE UNPOLISHED** (director: Pia Marais)
- 2004 **WHISKY** (director: Juan Pablo Rebella und Pablo Stoll)
- 2004 **STRATOSPHERE GIRL** (director: M.X. Oberg)
- 2001 **MOSTLY MARTHA** (director: Sandra Nettelbeck)
- 1999 **LUNA PAPA** (director: Bakhtiar Khudoinazarov)

THE MUSIC WAS PLAYED BY

Alexander Scheer – vocals, guitar

Gunnar Ennen – guitar, keyboards

Jens Fricke – guitar

Frenzy Suhr – bass

Sebastian Deufel – drums, piano

Guest performance by **Andreas Wieczorek** – saxophone

Recording: **Michael Ungerer** at **Blackbird Music Studio**

JENS QUANDT ABOUT THE MUSIC PRODUCTION

Gerhard Gundermann and I met for the first time in 1980. We come from the same artistic sand box: a multifarious, exciting songwriter and theater song scene spanning artistic levels from beginner to professional. He was twenty-five, I was seventeen.

The fundamental idea of Andreas and me for the film music was: we want to get close to Gundi but also keep our distance. That might sound a bit strange, but we weren't making a documentary. We were making a fictional film about Gundi. That entails and demands one's own artistic perspective and attitude, as well as room for interpretation. Ultimately, it's about bridging the gap between back then and the present day: Taking the songs from the seventies, the Feuerstein era, and the nineties, the Seilschaft era, and making them accessible in 2018. And that means breaking down doors so that more people, also in the West, can discover Gundi and his lyrics and songs.

My first thought was a kind of Gundi all-star band: Brigade Feuerstein, Gundermann and friends, Gundermann and band,

I'd only watched some live gigs on the internet, and they had the exact incredible musical energy and retro, vintage chic that I'd been hoping to find. I suggested two songs as a test: "Linda," a poetic, quiet song and "Keine Zeit Mehr" as the powerful counterpart to check the energy levels. During our first rehearsal and arrangement in a silo in Bielefeld, they came up with tons of ideas. With their musical way of thinking and feeling, they won my heart right away. In early August, two months before shooting began, we started working on the next two songs.

As far as Alexander (Scheer) is concerned: the way he works, he's like Gundi squared, or cubed! His reactions, his energy, how he totally overextends himself. It's terrific! Alexander had to nail the songs, the lyrics, the "Gundermannian" phrasing in a crazy short time, plus find his own interpretive style. Actually, everybody did: Alexander, Sebastian, Jens, Gunnar, Frenzy, the whole band plus Michael Ungerer, our recording engineer.

Gundi had... and I think that's more apparent now, looking back... the poetic gift to move us timelessly. I think that's

SONGS IN THE FILM

- GRAS (Grass)
- HOY WOY
- BRIGITTA
- TRAUIGES LIED VOM SONST IMMER LACHENDEN FLUGZEUG (Sad Song about the Airplane that's Usually Always Smiling)
- SOLL SEIN (Should Be)
- LINDA
- BRUNHILDE
- KEINE ZEIT MEHR (No Time Left)
- MÄNNER UND FRAUEN (Men and Women)
- HOCHZEITSLIED (Wedding Song)
- WEISSTUNOCH (Rememberwhen)
- KLEINE LEISE TRAUIGKEIT (Small Quiet Sadness)
- VATER (Father)
- HIER BIN ICH GEBOREN (I was Born Here)
- ICH MACHE MEINEN FRIEDEN (I'm Making my Peace)

Wilderer, Silly, Seilschaft... he had a lot of contemporaries. That idea stuck, also for logistical reasons. At the same time, Andreas and Gisbert zu Knyphausen are old friends. For me, and probably for Andreas too, there were some interesting similarities but also differences between Gisbert and Gundi. Gisbert told us in late June of last year, after thinking it over for a few days, that he didn't have the energy because he was in the middle of releasing an album with nine musicians. That was just three months before shooting began. And I said, "Then we want your band!"

what makes him such a great artist in the end. In the film, we were concerned about having our own musical, artistic standard, so we could translate the music for the here and now. That's the nice thing about music: everyone can discover something else. It's up to the listener. It's all there.

Jens Quandt has been doing the music for Andreas Dresen's films for many years and also plays keyboards with Dresen in their band: Prah! & Band.

STATEMENTS

GUNDERMANN TAKES CENTER STAGE

BY FRANK RASCHKE

It was the late summer of 2006 when I began to delve into the songs of Gerhard Gundermann for the first time. In preparation for my new position at the University of Music and Theater in Leipzig, I was searching for appropriate material for actors and got a hold of the Gundermann songbooks published by the BuschFunk music publishing house.

His songs weren't very well known back then, although people knew the name Gundermann. A few of the musicians from my jazz orchestra VIELHARMONIE that I directed from 1985 to 1998 had played in Gundi's band. In the last days of August 2006, I took my first conscious look at the songwriter's work, and was immediately fascinated by the poetic power of the lyrics.

The songs "Soll sein", "Gras", "Wer hat ein helles Licht bei der Nacht" – these lyrics had a much higher literary quality than I had ever imagined. Together with the work of Brecht, Gundermann's songs became the decisive material in the musical education of the actors in my course, and remain so to this day. Is it not the most a songwriter can achieve to inspire and amaze laypeople and experts alike?

At first, my enthusiasm for Gundermann the songwriter was met with skepticism from my long-time (East German) theater colleagues. But my students shared my enthusiasm from day one. In the first years, I discovered many songs together with them and we developed special arrangements and interpretations. Over the years, a whole canon of Gundermann songs came together. In the meantime, the resonance we received from public performances had become unanimously positive.

So it was only fitting that we collect our own interpretations of Gundermann songs into a program, and the idea for the SCHAUSPIELBRIGADE was born. Students, graduates, and even lecturers declared their willingness to collaborate on the project. In the Berlin cinema "Babylon", as part of the 60th anniversary of Gerhard Gundermann's birth, the SCHAU-

SPIELBRIGADE LEIPZIG had their debut performance, a CD of which was later released by the BuschFunk publishing house.

Until this day, the SCHAUSPIELBRIGADE performs five to eight concerts a year with the same lineup, which lives on thanks to the diverse interpretations and stylistic diversity of the arrangements.

But only one person takes center stage at each concert: the songwriter Gerhard Gundermann.

Frank Raschke is a musician and university professor.



POETRY AND STUBBORNNESS AS A STANCE

BY THOMAS RÜHMANN

Naturally, I knew Gundermann back in GDR times, but he wasn't so tangible to me back then. His music and lyrics weren't really good yet. My personal breakthrough with him didn't come until 1991 and his album *Einsame Spitze*. Suddenly he'd take up residence in my head and my soul.

Gundermann refused to take a break after the fall of the Wall. For us in the East, the shape of the world had changed completely. In 1989, I could hardly imagine something like reunification and was totally taken aback and shocked to see the first German flags with the GDR emblem cut out in Dresden. Gundermann simply kept working despite that vacuum phase and that encouraged me tremendously. His poetry and stubbornness as a clear stance helped me a great deal. I was totally blown away by his rugged will to survive and his very unique description of the relationship between man and nature.

As an digger driver, he dug right up to the side of his house and got to thinking. The way he wrote songs and verse was powerful and electrifying. The lyrics are universal, not just bound to Lusatia or to this country. He talks about people and planets. That's crystal clear. Gundermann had a unique perspective of the world and his place within society. You need to if you expect to withstand the passage of time. He was the one who taught me how brave one should be and that you can't run from your own truth.

That's why I was shocked when I heard he had been an unofficial collaborator with the Stasi. I could imagine some of his motives. Gundermann had dreamed of world revolution,

after all. He made mistakes for a certain time and then he was spied upon. He basically broke even in the end. Sure, it tarnished my image of him a bit, but I have made peace with Gundermann.

And his interpretation of Neil Young's "Rockin' in the Free World", "Alle oder keiner", is always on the playlist when I tour with my band across the country. That's the way it's got to be!

Thomas Rühmann is an actor and musician.

IN A NUTSHELL – MY TIME WITH GERHARD GUNDERMANN

BY ANDREE STRÖHLA

Around 1986/87 I met Gundi as the brain of Brigade Feuerstein and close friend of my former life partner Conny. So I knew him personally before we took on our later roles of songwriter and events manager. In June 1990, he had his first gig at the club "Passage" in Dresden. This would grow into an exciting collaboration that spanned several years. His solo concerts soon became insider tips and sold out in a flash.

He performed with a relaxed, no thrills attitude. He'd fill the gaps between songs with funny anecdotes and cheeky remarks. The concerts rarely lasted less than three hours. He had extremely high expectations of himself. At times he wanted to postpone concerts just because he wasn't yet satisfied with the program he was offering. It was all or nothing, always at least 100 percent. Yes, he really meant business. I respect and admire that.

We offered always offered his most current lineup, and it was "einsame Spitze" (lonely at the top) for him as far as audience turnout as well. 260 on one of his best nights, and that with space for just 100! Gundi sat on a bar stool framed by two speakers, the audience all around him, squeezed in on chairs, stools, overturned beer crates, standing, sitting, squatting, kneeling... Then they went home inspired and humming away happily.

He wrote a song about Dresden where he mentions the club in the third verse:

"There's a little club in Dresden Gorbitz that you'll know from the long line outside. We play for food, drink and a tiny wage, and the club is called 'Passage'. Let's play tonight in Dresden, 'cause that's where we feel alright. Let's not look toward the West, let's play in Dresden tonight."

On July 5, 1998, he sang one last time in the little club. A week before his sudden death, we met in the Hoyerswerda cultural center for the 20th anniversary of the founding of Brigade Feuerstein. It was a cheerful meeting with lots of old friends. We had lovely evening. We had interesting discussions, made plans...

Unaware that it would be the last time. Once in a while when I listen to his songs I think: "Oh, Gundi, what a crazy time it was! You are so missed!" And every time I feel a pang in my heart.

Andree Ströhla worked in the cultural sector. He is now retired.



TAKE A LISTEN TO THIS!

BY HEINER KONDSCHAK

In late June of 1999, my colleague Monika gave me a tape cassette. "Take a listen to this," she said, "It's an East German songwriter who died last year!" I didn't want to listen to it. I imagined it'd be like Reinhard Mey in a Saxony dialect. The tape lay in my car for weeks untouched.

Weeks later, as I was stuck in traffic on the A8 and could tell it was going to be a while, I put in the tape (with strange acoustics because I was stuck in the "Engelbergtunnel" between Leonberg and Heilbronn). It was a recording of a radio broadcast on the first anniversary of Gundi's death. The songs that I heard were mostly from his last concert in "Krams" on June 14, 1998, one week before his death. The songs hit me like bomb in the gut: totally unexpected.

When the traffic jam was over, I stopped at the nearest parking lot and listened to the whole (for me absolutely incredible) recording two or three times over. When I got home I ordered all his music you can find online from BuschFunk in Berlin: CDs, Videos, DVDs.

In 1999, I was co-art director with my colleague Monika of the "Kinder und Jugendtheater" (child and youth theater) of Landestheater Tübingen (LTT). We had a very talented musical ensemble. I put my own "best of Gundi" CD in each of their lockers, and they all loved it. Although our assignment was to bring children and youth culture to the people of Badne-

Württemberg, we decided to organize a Gerhard Gundermann concert for adults.

After a meeting with the director, it was clear: Great experiment! But it can't cost a dime because the budget for 2000 has already been spent. I was able to offer him a drummer. Then I spoke with all the full-time theater employees who I knew were musical or had at least held an instrument before. Bit by bit, we built the LTT-Randgruppencombo: an actress, two actors, the secretary, the assistant director, the administrative director the drummer and me. Together we played the first Gundermann concerts from late June to early October of 2000. We didn't quite realize what we had done until May 2001 in the Tränenpalast in Berlin.

Even today, 18 years later, each of our concerts is like a gift to us. Thank you, Gundi, Conny, Linda, and BuschFunk for making that possible for us. And thank you to the combo for going along with all the madness... and for years on end, without pay. But maybe that's down to the wonderful spirit of Gerhard Gundermann. Every concert, I'm reminded how a woman came up to me after a show and said, "They're not songs; they're food for the soul."

Thank you for that, too!

Heiner Kondschat is a musician and theater director.

A FEW THOUGHTS BETWEEN THE SONG LINES

BY PETER WAWERZINEK

I remember the time when everyone suddenly loved songwriters. Back then I liked Manfred Krug, Georg Danzer, Ulrich Roski, Ludwig Hirsch, Liederjan, Kurt Demmler, Reinhard Mey, Herman van Veen, Franz Josef Degenhardt and Dieter Suverkrup weren't my thing. I was interested in Pluhar and Wegner because male dominance went against my listening habits. I did foster some sympathy for Gundermann because he drove a huge bucket-wheel excavator and dug up the landscape with it. He looked like the eternal hippie, at a time when I'd put away my parka, Jesus-sandals, and patched jeans. From all his lyrics, one song stuck with me that I felt reflected my stifled artistic impulses:

*All the films I want to shoot have already been shot
All the clothes I should've sewn have already been sewn
All the songs I wanted to write have already been sung by the Boss
I'm just a poor dog but who
Let me off my leash*

Shortly after the Wall fell, a civil rights activist approached me and said I should take a look at my file, that it was OV. "Oh gosh," I thought, blushing. I thought "OV" meant "officer in duty." I had such a big mouth, they didn't have to hire me, they probably just had to take notes. I asked him what OV meant. "Operative activity," was the answer. That didn't sound much better. "I'm sorry, but... what does that mean exactly?"

"They gave you an alias." Man, did I feel uncomfortable! The civil rights activist slapped me on the shoulder, "No worries! You were one of the good guys!" And I didn't ask him how he'd read my file even though I'd have to file a request to do so. So I can imagine how Gundermann must've felt when they exposed him. I can see him with his huge glasses. He looks like a bug and seems like a smart-aleck kid to me. "Tee-hee! I blabbed and sang for the Stasi. They called me Grigori." The record was called Jazz, Lyrik, Prosa. Manfred Krug spoke the text. And I thought the text was great. I almost knew it by heart.

My adoptive parents were in the Party. I knew as little about West TV in Ostseebad Rerik as Gundermann did in Hoyerswerda. But not once, not even as an orphan in a state orphanage did I say the GDR was my country, that the Stasi was there to protect us. I never wanted to be a double agent like Gundi. I wanted to leave Earth and live on the moon or become a captain. I will never trust a system for exactly the same reasons Gundermann names at the end of this song:

*Every emperor I wanted to serve has already been hung
Every ship I wanted to sail has already been sunk
Every sword I wanted to swing is already full of rust
I am just a poor dog but am I really off the leash*

Peter Wawerzinek is a writer.

HE STAYED TRUE TO HIS ANGELS

BY ANTJE VOLLMER

Without songs and songwriters, a land cannot live. It starves and withers if it loses its longing, hope, passionate resistance, and poetry. The songwriter Wolf Biermann once embodied that for the GDR. But after his expatriation, he shook the sand of the Mark from his feet. He lost himself and his land on his relentless march of no return – always bearing west, aiming for the top.

It was others who would stay true to their country and their people. Their most important contribution: they stayed. They held the utopian flag up high for those who wanted to keep fighting and dreaming. They met in bars, little homemade outdoor festivals far from Berlin, in churches, youth clubs, and campsites. Wenzel and Mensching were a well-kept secret in the North with their sparkling Dadaist gems and songs full of melancholy and beauty.

On the other side of the GDR in Lusatia, was Gerhard Gundermann, who offered his people a reason to stay. He was an digger driver who believed in the "Bitterfeld Way" even more than its architect. A Socialist whose staunch individualism was too much for the Party to swallow. An ardent, angry believer of a true socialism that couldn't survive without such honest ideals.

The downfall of this utopia provided him with his most beautiful songs. They are foreboding and full of morbid poetry. "Einmal" (once) which he sang with Tamara Danz, leaves the listener dumbfounded. What can one sense and sing about without knowing it? And with his song "Engel über dem Revier" (angel over the mining site) her fulfills Rilke's motto outright: *"Be ahead of all parting, as though it already were behind you..."*

This song is a parable for all kinds of parting. He mourns the demise of the brown coal site and its age-old miner culture with it. He knew the GDR, homeland to both his songs and his rebellious hopes, would fall. And apparently, he was quietly aware of his own limited lifespan. The guardian angel, the proletarian muse, abandoned us all at once.

He watched over me almost my whole life

Now he is leaving me...

So come and get him for yourself...

The legacy of a songwriter who stayed true to his angel, his land, and his dreams. Every country deserves a singer like that. Including the GDR, which we are no longer officially allowed to mourn.

Antje Vollmer is a publicist, politician, and a former vice president of the Bundestag.

EULOGY

BY KLAUS KOCH

I begin every June 21 with a ritual: After breakfast, I sit in a chair or in the car if I have to, and listen to "Krams".

"My mother is just as dead as my father so I must wander the land alone. I make my money in the theater, people call me Harlequin..."

That's how the CD begins.

It is the anniversary Gundermann's death, and the recording is of the last concert he ever gave. A week before he died, it took place on a Sunday afternoon of the summer of 1998, in small arts center in the remote village of Krams.

Gundi is tired from too little sleep after the big party for the 20th anniversary of Brigade Feuerstein and from the long drive. The audience, on the other hand, is blown away by the unfamiliar intensity of his performance. Between songs he talks a lot about the summer solstice, about Rio and Tamara graduating high school. It is also our last encounter.

A week later, came a call in the middle of the night and the terrible news. It would sweep across the East German landscape in a slow deep wave. You can still feel it today when his songs are played or when people talk about him.

Two days later, on a Monday morning, I'm on my way to Spreetal. Somewhere between "How am I going to walk through that door?" and the first anxious thoughts about who should speak at the funeral, came another call. It was from BMG music. They suggested we release the duet "Einmal" (once) by Tamara Danz and Gundermann as a single. They would take care of everything. All we had to do was release the rights for the recording. I came away from it feeling like I'd been hit by a truck. When they tried calling again, I hung up on them. It was my first autonomous interaction with a cellphone display.

While writing this, I received a rare email from a music company, this time it's SONY. They have an idea and would like to release an LP of the joint concert of Silly and Gundermann & Seilschaft, preferably before summer's end.

I have not (yet) answered them, but I see it as a good omen.

Klaus Koch runs the music publishing house BuschFunk in Berlin.

WRITTEN BY LAILA STIELER

DIRECTED BY ANDREAS DRESEN

GUNDERMANN



**"EVERY DAY
I WANT SOMETHING
I WILL NOT FORGET..."**

ALEXANDER SCHEER ANNA UNTERBERGER

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