

PERSMAP

DE DUITSE BIOSCOOPHIT

FRIEDRICH
MÜCKE

KAROLINE
SCHUCH

DAVID
KROSS

ALICIA
VON RITTBERG

EN THOMAS
KRETSCHMANN

EEN FILM VAN
MICHAEL BULLY HERBIG

BALLON

EEN VAN DE MEEST SPECTACULAIRE ONTSNAPPINGEN UIT DE KOUDE OORLOG

GEBASEERD OP EEN WAARBEURD VERHAAL

STUDIOCANAL presenteert een DUITSE FILM geproduceerd in coproductie met STUDIOCANAL FILM en SEVENPICTURES FILM
with FRIEDRICH MÜCKE, KAROLINE SCHUCH, DAVID KROSS, ALICIA VON RITTBERG en THOMAS KRETSCHMANN
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PRODUCED BY JET HOPKINS & THE BIOSCOPEERS
PRODUCED BY MICHAEL BULLY HERBIG
PRODUCED BY CHRISTIAN HELD
PRODUCED BY GLENN FAYTH
PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY MICHAEL BULLY HERBIG

www.ballonfilm.com

VANAF 18 JULI IN DE BIOSCOOP

STUDIOCANAL
SEVENPICTURES

BALLON

Een film van Michael Bully Herbig

BALLON is het waargebeurde verhaal van twee families die, ten tijde van de Koude Oorlog, in een race tegen de klok alles op alles zetten om van Oost- naar West-Duitsland te vluchten. De historische thriller toont een van de meest spectaculaire ontsnappingen in de geschiedenis.

Het is 1979 en in de toenmalige Duitse Democratische Republiek verlangen twee families naar vrijheid en een betere toekomst. Ze bedenken een gewaagd plan om met een zelfgemaakte luchtballon naar het Westen te vluchten. In het geheim bouwen Günter Wetzel (DAVID KROSS) en zijn goede vriend Peter (FRIEDRICH MÜCKE) een luchtballon, waarmee ze hun acht familieleden over de grens willen vliegen. Wanneer een eerste poging mislukt, komt niet alleen hun ontsnappingsplan in gevaar, maar staan ook hun levens op het spel. Met de Stasi op de hielen, doen ze een tweede poging om de gevaarlijke oversteek te maken.

Günter Wetzel, op wie het hoofdpersonage in BALLON is gebaseerd, zegt over de ontsnapping: "Ook al ben ik blij dat we die beslissing hebben genomen; als ik destijds had geweten wat ik nu weet, dan had ik het nooit gedaan omdat het zo gevaarlijk was." Van 1961 tot 1989 werden er 75.000 Oost-Duitsers gearresteerd omdat ze naar het Westen wilden ontvluchten. Maar liefst 800 verloren hun leven aan de grens.



Speelduur: 120 min. - Land: Duitsland - Jaar: 2018 - Genre: Drama, historie
Releasedatum bioscoop: 18 juli 2019

Meer over de film:

<https://www.cineart.nl/films/ballon>

Persmaterialen:

<https://www.cineart.nl/pers/ballon>

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Contents

CAST, CREW, TECHNICAL DATA.....	
SHORT TEXTS	5
PRODUCTION	6
BASED ON A TRUE STORY	6
TALKING TO THE WITNESSES	7
HELP FROM HOLLYWOOD	7
THE IDEAL CAST.....	8
COSTUME AND MAKEUP	10
THE ORIGINAL-SIZED BALLOON	10
THE ANTAGONIST	12
PÖßNECK IN BAVARIA	14
LITTLE BERLIN AND BERLIN	15
CONTACT TO THE EMBASSY	16
THE CLOCK IS TICKING	17
INCREDIBLE ADVENTURE	18
STATEMENTS FROM THE LEADING ACTORS	19
INTERVIEW	21
Interview with director and producer Michael Bully Herbig	21
BALLOON - A FILM IN NUMBERS	24
CAST	26
Friedrich Mücke.....	26
Karoline Schuch.....	27
David Kross.....	27
Alicia von Rittberg.....	28
Thomas Kretschmann	29
Jonas Holdenrieder.....	30
Tilman Döbler	30
CREW.....	
Michael Bully Herbig.....	31
Kit Hopkins & Thilo Röscheisen.....	32
Torsten Breuer	33
Bernd Lepel.....	33
Lisy Christl.....	34
Tatjana Krauskopf.....	34
Alexander Dittner.....	35
Ralf Wengenmayr.....	35

CAST

Peter Strelzyk	Friedrich Mücke
Doris Strelzyk	Karoline Schuch
Günter Wetzel	David Kross
Petra Wetzel	Alicia von Rittberg
Lieutenant Colonel Seidel	Thomas Kretschmann
Frank Strelzyk	Jonas Holdenrieder
Andreas "Fitscher" Strelzyk	Tilman Döbler
Erik Baumann	Ronald Kukulies
Klara Baumann	Emily Kusche
Peterchen Wetzel	Till Patz
Andreas Wetzel	Ben Teichmann
Captain Heym	Christian Näthe
Staff Sergeant Lesch	Sebastian Hülk
Lieutenant Colonel Schirra	Gernot Kunert
Lieutenant Colonel Tornow	Ulrich Friedrich Brandhoff

CREW

Directed and produced by	Michael Bully Herbig
Screenplay by	Kit Hopkins & Thilo Röscheisen and Michael Bully Herbig
Casting	Daniela Tolkien
Music by	Ralf Wengenmayr
Director of Photography	Torsten Breuer
Edited by	Alexander Dittner
Production Design	Bernd Lepel
Costume Design	Lisy Christl
Makeup	Tatjana Krauskopf
Line Producer	Uli Fauth
Production Manager	Christian Held

TECHNICAL DATA

Running time:	circa 120 minutes
Format:	2.35:1 (Cinemascope)
Sound:	Dolby Atmos
FSK:	TBA

SHORT TEXTS

CONTENTS IN BRIEF

Thüringen, Summer 1979. The Strelzyk and Wetzel families have been working on an audacious plan for more than two years: they want to flee East Germany in a self-made hot-air balloon. But the balloon crash-lands just before the West German border. The Stasi finds traces of the attempted escape and launches immediately an investigation, while the two families are forced, under extreme time pressure, to build a new escape balloon. The Stasi get closer and closer each day - a nerve-racking battle against the clock begins...

PRESS RELEASE

Hit director Michael Bully Herbig tells of what is surely the most spectacular escape from East Germany in his gripping movie thriller *BALLOON*, which is based on a true story. The screenplay was written by Kit Hopkins, Thilo Röscheisen and Michael Bully Herbig in close cooperation with the Strelzyk and Wetzel families. The film stars Friedrich Mücke (*Text for You, Friendship!*), Karoline Schuch (*Katharina Luther, I'm Off Then*), David Kross (*My Brother Simple, The Reader*), Alicia von Rittberg (*Godless Youth, Charité*) and Thomas Kretschmann (*Valkyrie, Downfall*).

BALLOON is a herbX film production in coproduction with STUDIOCANAL Film and SevenPictures Film. The historical yet still highly relevant thriller has been sponsored by FilmFernsehFonds Bayern, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg and Mitteldeutsche Medienförderung, Filmförderungsanstalt and Deutscher Filmförderfonds. STUDIOCANAL is responsible for world distribution. Shooting took place in Bavaria, Thüringen and Berlin in the autumn of 2017.

PRODUCTION

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

The most spectacular escape from East Germany

On 16 September 1979, the Strelzyk and Wetzel families fled from East Germany to West Germany in a self-made hot air balloon. Under cover of night the four adults and four children took off from a piece of forest land between Heinersdorf and Oberlemnitz, flew over the East/West German border and, after 28 minutes and 18 kilometres, landed in a field near the East Franconian town of Naila. The very next morning, German and international media were reporting on the "most spectacular escape from East Germany", "Stern" immediately secured itself the exclusive journalist rights; the American Disney Company made a film adaptation entitled *Night Crossing* and released it worldwide in 1982.

"I was very young at that time, but I still thought: if Hollywood make a movie with American actors about a story that took place in Germany, that must be something really exciting and spectacular", says Michael Bully Herbig, who was born in Munich in 1968. "Many people tried to escape from East Germany. They hid in boots, dug tunnels, tried to hijack planes or swam across rivers", says the filmmaker, listing the kinds of things people did, "but to sew together a giant balloon, squash yourselves into a windy gondola with a few ropes around it and climb to a height of 200 metres in it is incredibly audacious."

The years passed, Michael Bully Herbig wrote German TV history with his comedy show "bullyparade" (1997 - 2002) and made movie history with *Manitou's Shoe* (2001), *Dreamship Surprise - Period 1* (2004) and other hit comedies. "At the same time, I was always wondering how I would approach a movie thriller", says Herbig. But this vague idea did not take shape until 2011, when the director, author, producer and actor was asked by the German Film Academy (Deutsche Filmakademie) whether he could make himself available for a so-called "workshop talk": "I sat in front of about 20 Film Academy members; and at some point someone asked me if I could imagine doing something outside the comedy genre, like a film such as *The Lives of Others*. I said there was one thing I could not get out of my mind: the story of the two families that escaped to the West from East Germany in a hot-air balloon. All at once I heard a woman's voice coming from the rear left, shouting twice: "Don't touch it!" It was Kit Hopkins, the screenwriter." Hopkins remembers: "This is exactly the story I had been working on for years with Thilo Röscheisen. Which is why I jumped up and shouted 'Don't touch it! It's ours!' During the break I then got talking to Bully. He asked me to send him our material." The two authors had written a treatment for a two-part TV miniseries, which has different dramaturgical rules from those of a movie made for the cinema. Although the story was based on the true events of 1979, it used different names and locations.

TALKING TO THE WITNESSES

Consultancy contracts for the families

"I wanted to make the film for the cinema and it was crucial for me to get the real families involved", says Michael Bully Herbig. "The attraction for me was to get as close as possible to the actual events and adapt the film for today's viewing habits. So Kit Hopkins, Thilo Röscheisen and I contacted the Strelzyk and Wetzel families." Peter and Doris Strelzyk moved back to their previous house in Pößneck in Thüringen a few years after the reunification of Germany; Günter and Petra Wetzel lived in Hof, in Upper Franconia. "For reasons that are none of my business both couples had completely severed ties many years before, which is why we didn't manage to meet them together", says Michael Bully Herbig, "but none of them said anything bad about the others when we interviewed them separately." Herbig saw his visit to Pößneck as a living history lesson: "We were at the Strelzyk family's house and saw the cellar in which the balloon was sewn together." Günter and Petra Wetzel came to Munich for their first interview and brought historical photos and sketches of the balloon and its two predecessors with them. Because before the successful escape the families had already made two other balloons: a "faulty design" made of gas-permeable lining and a working balloon that had crash-landed in a forest on the East German side, close to the West German border, when the Strelzyks made their first attempt to escape.

"I was really happy about the trust both families extended to me", says Michael Bully Herbig. "The talks were very informative and gave the project a real push. We concluded consultancy contracts with both families so that we would always be able to access their knowledge while we were making the film." Screenwriter Thilo Röscheisen adds: "It was very important for us to take every detail into consideration and also capture the attitude towards life in this dramatic time for the families properly. But we also wanted to portray the other side, i.e. the Stasi, as authentically as possible. With the help of both the families we were able to view more than 2000 pages of Stasi files from the former Gauck Commission that had been written about the Strelzyks and Wetzels after their successful escape."

HELP FROM HOLLYWOOD

Roland Emmerich's contacts

"Unfortunately, during the time of the screenplay development it turned out that the families had sold the entire rights to their life stories to Disney at the end of the seventies", says Kit Hopkins when describing the start of a three-year period of uncertainty that also strained Michael Bully Herbig's nerves: "I had asked Peter Strelzyk to send me a copy of the contract with the American studio so that we would not have any problems. But this is exactly when the problems started, because both families had sold the film rights exclusively and in perpetuity to Disney. I showed the contract to three different lawyers - but there it was again: 'Don't touch it!' For two years I tried to get the rights, but to no avail. At one point we got very close, but four weeks later we received a rather matter-of-fact mail and the sobering realisation that it wasn't going to work. That meant the end of the project."

But Michael Bully Herbig did not give up and a few weeks later he made one last-ditch attempt. "I thought: Now I want to settle this and flew to Los Angeles to contact Roland Emmerich. I had met him a few years before. So, I called him and got to visit him, and he understood immediately what sort of film I had in mind.

As chance would have it, two of his previous production partners from Sony and Warner had just gone over to Disney. Then Roland said this incredibly casual sentence: 'I'll call them in a minute'. One week later I had a meeting with Sam Dickerman at Disney. To cut a long story short: with Roland Emmerich's help I managed to get the German language remake rights."

Kit Hopkins and Thilo Röscheisen started working on the screenplay again immediately. The fact that the audience would already know what would happen at the end of the film did not stop the two authors from telling a gripping story: "The path is the goal", says Kit Hopkins. "Even though we know the families manage to escape, the question of how they managed to do it in such adversity remains exciting." The most important decision was to dispense with the year-long preparation for the escape in the story and dive straight into the first attempt. "This gives the film a high tempo right from the start and makes it a gripping thriller", says Thilo Röscheisen. When the screenplay was as good as finished, Michael Bully Herbig also got Leander Haußmann involved, who directed the historical tragicomedy *Hotel Lux* (2011), in which Herbig starred. "I wanted to know what Leander Haußmann thought of our portrayal of East Germany in 1979. He knows the regime from experience and as a filmmaker and theatre director has his very own perspective of the East/West German past. That was a massive inspiration to me."

The search for partners who could implement the project with Michael Bully Herbig's production company herbX film quickly proved to be fruitful. "Just one dinner with Studiocanal made it clear that they wanted to do it", says Herbig. "Studiocanal are the biggest studios in Europe and they will also be distributing the film worldwide from their base in France."

THE IDEAL CAST

Four young leading actors

Friedrich Mücke and Karoline Schuch play Peter and Doris Strelzyk. David Kross and Alicia von Rittberg play Günter and Petra Wetzel. "They are exciting roles, for which our casting manager Daniela Tolkien suggested the most ideal actors", says Michael Bully Herbig. "And Friedrich Mücke and Karoline Schuch also come from Berlin and Thüringen respectively. I thought that the more of their own experiences the actors and team members could put into the film the better it would be for the film."

In preparation for his part, Friedrich Mücke not only read the script, but also the non-fiction work "Schicksal Ballonflucht - Der lange Arm der Stasi [The fate of an escape by balloon and the long arm of the Stasi]", which Peter and Doris Strelzyk wrote in 1999 in collaboration with the journalist Gudrun Giese. The actor also watched long extracts of the interview Michael Bully Herbig had had with the Strelzyk family. The opportunity to meet and talk to Peter Strelzyk personally had sadly passed. His role model died at the age of 74 in March 2017, after a long illness. "Peter Strelzyk is a hero in the classic sense", Friedrich Mücke emphasises. "It is fascinating that a family father dares to undertake such an adventure so that he, his wife and their two sons can have a better life. I'm now exactly the age that Peter Strelzyk was then. I'm married and have three children. I have to ask myself whether I would take this risk myself. There was not only the danger of the balloon crashing. They could also have been caught. The parents would have gone to prison as deserters of the Republic and the children would have gone into care. But they would not be deterred

from their aim."

Karoline Schuch sees an important support for Peter Strelzyk in Doris Strelzyk. "I think their relationship was filled with a great deal of love. It had to be that way for this crazy project to take place. Because you can only undertake such a bold adventure if you have mutual trust. Doris Strelzyk is a strong woman who, while not taking complete control, is firmly convinced that her husband is not carelessly playing with the fate of the whole family." Jonas Holdenrieder as the 15-year-old son Frank and Tilman Doebler as his eleven-year-old brother Andreas, who was nicknamed Fitscher, complete the Strelzyk family.

David Kross learned everything about the technology and operation of a gas burner during a balloon trip with Friedrich Mücke and a professional pilot. But he was also trained in the art of operating an old-fashioned sewing machine. "I didn't like this fiddly work and lost my patience after the first hour", says David Kross. "It's unimaginable that someone could sew a balloon casing from bits of material day and night. You need incredible discipline and motivation to stick to this idea." David Kross sees Günter Wetzel as "the head of the team who designed and calculated it all." Michael Bully Herbig agrees with him: "Günter Wetzel was quieter and maybe more circumspect than Peter Strelzyk. He was the planner, the cool calculator, while Strelzyk was a swashbuckler and an absolute optimist. The combination of these two men could not have been created any better if this had been a work of fiction, just like the story of this escape by balloon as a whole." David Kross describes Günter and Petra Wetzel with their young sons as a happy family in unhappy circumstances: "They felt as if they were imprisoned in this regime and wanted to escape to the West to live a free life there. Executing this plan despite all the risks involved shows a strong will and a great deal of courage. When I read the screenplay I was very impressed."

Petra Wetzel is played by Alicia von Rittberg. "Petra Wetzel is a very young mother with two children aged five and two", says Alicia von Rittberg, "The plan to escape in a self-made balloon puts her in an extreme dilemma: on the one hand she is afraid that something might happen to her young children but on the other she knows that she will never see her sick mother in the West again if she decides not to go along with the escape." Just like Doris Strelzyk, Petra Wetzel also gets more and more active as the film progresses: "At first she plays the role of the mother more than anything else, but when she knows that the new balloon has to be finished in a few weeks because the Stasi are on to them, she and Doris Strelzyk get more actively involved immediately", says Alicia von Rittberg. "They drive across East Germany, taking turns to go into shops and buy small lengths of material so that they do not look suspicious."

David Kross and Alicia von Rittberg also met Günter and Petra Wetzel during the shooting. "That was incredibly exciting because they both said they had the feeling they were watching their younger selves", Alicia von Rittberg remembers. "I was in awe at the prospect of playing a real person. This is why I immersed myself in the story and read and watched everything I could find about East Germany in the late seventies. I wanted to know how the people lived and thought."

COSTUME AND MAKEUP

Living everyday chic

The costume and makeup also helped the leading actors to get into their roles and the times they were set in quickly. "There was no place for new fashion in East Germany; you would get noticed very quickly if you tried", says costume designer Lisy Christl. But that does not mean that absolutely everything was grey in East Germany either: "That is a misconception that has taken root in the West in particular", Lisy Christl corrects. "Of course there were colourful things, because people knitted and sewed a lot of things themselves. There were shops in which the corresponding fashion was available, and there were relatives in the West that would send such clothing to East Germany."

The costume designer familiarised herself with the fashion of 1979 months before the shooting started and put together picture folders that she discussed with Michael Bully Herbig and the actors. While the clothing for many of the extras and supporting actors came from the stock of the Babelsberg Studios, most of the items were made specially for the main actors. "The appearance of the Strelzyks and the Wetzels should be lively and have a kind of everyday chic that fits in with the times", says Lisy Christl. Makeup artist Tatjana Krauskopf agrees completely: "The characters should look authentic but at the same time be cool and attractive. This is why when designing the main characters we did not stick rigidly to the appearance of the originals, but tried to do justice to the zeitgeist of the times. We didn't want to force fancy dress onto the actors because the audience would not take the characters seriously."

THE ORIGINAL-SIZED BALLOON

1245 square metres of material and a gondola held together with a washing line

The eponymous hero and secret star of the film is the hot-air balloon in which the Strelzyk and Wetzels families succeed in escaping to the West. "It would theoretically have been possible to recreate the balloon digitally", says Michael Bully Herbig. But the director decided against it. "25 years ago it was possible to dazzle movie audiences with digital dinosaurs, but cinemagoers are oversaturated these days, because there is virtually nothing they have not seen on the big screen. The trained eye can spot whether something has come from a computer or has been made and shot in real life. A real balloon of this size just impresses me more than a computer-generated one would have. And I also wanted the actors to be able to touch this 'monster'."

Michael Bully Herbig agreed with production designer Bernd Lepel and cameraman Torsten Breuer to build the balloon in which the two families managed to escape and a second balloon, in which the Strelzyks crashed during their first attempt to escape, in their original sizes – despite all the disadvantages that resulted from this decision: "The costs are massive, they are not easy to handle and you have to depend on the weather", says Herbig. "A shooting schedule like this is not ideal, especially when you are filming at night and with children. Too much wind would make this wall of material uncontrollable and the shooting would become even more dangerous. There is a lot of fire involved, too, everything wobbles and it all goes up to a height of 30 metres, which makes things more dangerous for all those involved."

External property manager Johannes Wild immersed himself in the mammoth task of having the two balloons constructed as closely as possible to the originals and in such a way that the two "toy vehicles" would have to be absolutely safe and suitable for film purposes. He did his research at the Naila *Heimatmuseum*, in which the original escape balloon was on display until 2017 (it is currently being restored and will be moved to the Museum of Bavarian History in Regensburg at the end of 2018) and discussed every last technical detail with Günter Wetzels. The balloon company Wörner in Augsburg, which had already restored the original escape balloon in 1979, was given the order to prepare the two balloons. The first one was 28 metres high and made up of large-area lengths of material in white and beige. The second balloon was 32 metres high and made up of 1245 square metres of colourful material that weighed 150 kilograms and had a capacity of 4200 cubic metres of hot air.

For practical reasons, the balloon construction company Wörner did not use the taffeta that was used in 1979 due to a lack of alternatives, but balloon silk instead. "It does not absorb water as quickly when it is spread out on the wet grass and always has the same weight", says Johannes Wild. "This improved controllability and had a positive effect on our nocturnal shooting schedule." But taffeta was always used whenever the camera showed it at close range: whether it was when it was being bought in various fabric shops, sewn in the Strelzyk family's cellar or when the Stasi's forensics division was examining the first balloon that had crash-landed near the East German border to the West.

The gondola for four adults, four children and four large gas cylinders was 1.4m by 1.4m, like the original, and the outer demarcation consisted of four vertical rods with washing line tied around them. "We had to make the gondola more stable for the film than it was originally", says Johannes Wild, "otherwise we would have not been given permission to use it for transporting actors or stunt people." The Federal Aviation Authority banned both balloons from any free movement in the air. The reason for this was not the way they were made or the materials used, which "would have been approved by the TÜV", as external property manager Johannes Wild swears. The problem was more that both attempts to escape took place at night, but the German Federal Aviation Authority does not permit any hot-air balloons to take off at night. So both balloons were always operated as captive balloons and were never permitted to rise higher than 30 metres above the ground. This was guaranteed by four tear-resistant ropes, which were secured to screw-in ground anchors and also thick tree trunks, all of which made it virtually impossible for the balloons to fly away. The burden on this safety system easily reached tonnes because even low wind speeds were sufficient to make the gigantic area of material difficult to control.

"I had a whole lot of respect for these balloons, but I'm really happy now that we undertook this incredible effort", says Michael Bully Herbig. "After all, the film is called BALLOON – and accordingly it was important to me that all the scenes with the balloon should appear authentic, impressive and dangerous." The actors were only allowed to be a maximum of three metres above the ground in the gondola; for any shooting that took place at a height of four to 30 metres the experienced balloon pilot Stefan Dolpp and several stunt people would be sitting or standing in the gondola. Stunt coordinator Torsten Jerabek was responsible for safety. He decided in which cases the actors had to be replaced with stunt people or life-sized dolls. The people in the gondola were protected only by a rope rail and some by seatbelts. There were no additional safety measures: "That's occupational risk", says Torsten Jerabek. "But we do, of course, also carry out load tests with weights beforehand. All of the individual components of the gondola were welded together by qualified people. We rely on them doing everything right."

Although dangers and calculated risks are part and parcel of a stunt coordinator's job, Torsten Jerabek finds it hard to imagine the risks the Strelzyk and Wetzel families exposed themselves to when escaping in 1979: "Building a balloon without any previous knowledge and using it to escape to the West was an insane thing to do. The chances of nothing going wrong were remote. But Peter Strelzyk and Günter Wetzel were always convinced that it would work. I think it was also the prerequisite for their success."

A number of close-ups of the actors were shot in a mock-up, for which only the lower part of the balloon casing was built along with the gondola. A crane held this above the ground, either at the location in Dietramszell or against a night-black background in the studio on the Bavaria premises. "Although it had been agreed that we would not be allowed to float around at a height of more than three metres, I really had to overcome my weak will power for the many scenes in the balloon", says Friedrich Mücke, who only conquers his fear of heights and flying for professional purposes: "Since I flew back from America from the shooting for *Friendship!* eight years ago, I haven't been on a plane since." Nonetheless, he used the opportunity to take part in a balloon trip with David Kross and an experienced pilot before the BALLOON shoot started: "It had a really therapeutic effect." It came as a surprise to David Kross during this balloon trip to find out that the self-made escape balloon from 1979 was even bigger than the balloon he and Friedrich Mücke had taken out for a test drive: "It's hard to imagine that two couples, with their limited means and an old sewing machine, had sewn all this little pieces of material together to make what was, at the time, the biggest hot-air balloon in Europe. The more time you spend with this story, the crazier it becomes."

THE ANTAGONIST

Thomas Kretschmann

Any thriller can only be as good as the protagonist's opponent. In BALLOON, Thomas Kretschmann plays this part grandiosely: as Stasi Lieutenant Colonel Seidel, who wants to stop a second escape attempt by hot-air balloon at all costs. "Seidel is the hunter, the bloodhound", says Thomas Kretschmann. "After the first escape attempt fails just before the border and the balloon casing is found, the Stasi puts its entire machinery in operation. The film is set up like a crime drama, and Seidel is the inspector who wants to track

down the supposed villains. He is pretty cunning, an analyst, a tactician; he has no scruples and knows how to dissect people very precisely." Thomas Kretschmann weighs up the authenticity of the story: "When I read the screenplay, I could smell the fear that this Seidel spread among the people. I experienced people like this for myself in East Germany. One sat opposite me once during the entrance exam for the Ernst Busch acting school. To top it all, he asked me right at the end if I would prefer to do three years of national service rather than just one and a half. I knew that if I contradicted him the next one down from me would get my place."

Thomas Kretschmann indirectly suggested himself as a candidate for the role of Lieutenant Colonel Seidel: "I once said to Michael Bully Herbig at an event that I would like to appear in something directed by him because I thought he was so great. But I had actually been thinking of a comedy." Herbig immediately recognised the chance for him and his first thriller to cast movie stars who are established both in Germany and in Hollywood, and who all have an East German past. "I invited Thomas Kretschmann to a screenplay talk, and we realised very quickly that our view of Seidel was pretty much identical", says Michael Bully Herbig. Thomas Kretschmann calls it an "irony of fate" that he of all people plays a Stasi man who wants to prevent East German citizens from escaping: "I fled East Germany in 1983 and ran across the Hungarian border to Yugoslavia on my 21st birthday. They could have shot me there, but they couldn't have blown me up because there were no mines on that particular border."

Thomas Kretschmann sees the role of the Lieutenant Colonel as a gift: "The further a role is away from me, the more secure I feel as an actor. I'm glad that I'm playing the hunter and not the hunted, a role I know much better from my own past. Seidel is not only evil. The film shows why he is as he is: he has a mission. He is one of those who tells others what to do and grinds them down until they no longer have any will of their own." Michael Bully Herbig and costume designer Lisy Christl decide not to give the Lieutenant Colonel a uniform. "The Stasi only usually wore uniforms on anniversaries and special occasions, but they would have been an obstacle for them in their daily work", says Lisy Christl. "Seidel wears suits and overcoats that are reminiscent of traditional inspectors."

Thomas Kretschmann played the decisive move himself in terms of Seidel's hairstyle. Michael Bully Herbig remembers: "He called from Canada, where he was working on a film with Mel Gibson, and sent a photo that showed him with very short hair and a full beard. It looked great and I didn't recognise him at all to start with. After the shooting had finished, he kindly didn't shave off his beard completely but stood in front of me two days before his first day of shooting here with a moustache and short hair. This is exactly how I wanted Lieutenant Colonel Seidel to look in the film. We had already made the first scene with a long dialogue and a lot of extras when the historical adviser, who we always had on the set, came up to me and said: "Herr Herbig, I would just like to draw your attention to the fact that moustaches were banned in the Stasi." What? "Moustaches were not permitted in the Stasi or the NVA (*Nationale Volksarmee*, the National People's Army)." Now, there were 50 people from the team all looking at me and waiting to know if we should carry on or send Thomas Kretschmann to makeup for a shave." But Herbig did not want a type change for his antagonist and started to prepare mentally for a beating from the critics: "After that day of shooting it wouldn't let me go. I called Leander Haußmann and told him I thought I had made a massive cock-up because I had filmed Seidel with a forbidden moustache. Suddenly, Leander Haußmann shouted:

"No! That was OK! There was an exception." What exception? "If you had a hare lip, the moustache was permitted!"

PÖßNECK IN BAVARIA

The rebuilding of East Germany

"Pößneck has a very nice, beautifully restored town centre", says production designer Bernd Lepel about the Strelzyk and Wetzels' home town. What was a pleasure for the 12,500 inhabitants of Pößneck was a problem for the filmmakers: "We could no longer film the Pößneck of 1979 in today's Pößneck because the town has been so well restored", says Lepel. His search for alternatives took him to the other side of the previous border, to Nordhalben in Bavaria. "The slate roofs were built in the same style as they were in neighbouring Thüringen", says Bernd Lepel. The population of Nordhalben has decreased in recent decades from 2200 to 1700 because major employers have left the area. The production now benefited from the empty properties; it also supported the "Bavaria effect", i.e. it allowed the sponsorship money from FilmFernsehFonds Bayern to be spent directly in Bavaria.

An empty bakery in Nordhalben was converted into a pharmacy, inside and out, and the community's deserted Volksbank became the East German Sparkasse. Other deserted businesses were converted into the textile shops in which the families bought the taffeta for the balloon. Plenty of patina and rotten window frames served to age the facades of many houses artificially, plain signs, parked Trabants and Wartburgs, an old telephone box and propaganda posters with messages such as "Socialism - humanity in word and deed" made the journey through time back to 1979 perfect. "We changed entire streets in a way that we can only normally do on the reconstructed streets at the studios in Babelsberg or at Bavaria", says production designer Bernd Lepel and praises the patience of the people of Nordhalben: "The mayor and the people there were incredibly helpful; they even let us close the high street for ten days."

Michael Bully Herbig praises the "perfect filming conditions" in Nordhalben and gives just one example of the community's cooperation: "In one scene, the textile seller is being questioned by a Stasi man while the shop window reflection shows another one standing in front of the shop smoking. The camera had already been set up, the sunlight was just perfect, but then, of all things, I noticed that a sign with an iron rod set in concrete was ruining the beautiful shot. We just called the town hall and immediately got approval for this rod to be removed. I've never known a whole town and its mayor be so supportive of a film production."

Gartenstraße in Nordhalben was another main motif of the film because the Strelzyks' house is located there and - just opposite - that of Stasi employee Erik Baumann. "I went to see the original street in Pößneck", says Michael Bully Herbig. "The Stasi man actually lived on the Strelzyks' right, but I gave myself a little poetic licence for the film and put him on the other side of the street. I thought that would provide more suspense, because the Strelzyks' house in the film would be even more in focus." From the Stasi man's point of view, it was particularly tragic that the hot-air balloon was sewn together in a neighbour's house unnoticed while at the same time a search was going on across Thüringen for evidence of an impending desertion of the Republic.

The Strelzyk family's house and garage were composed of a "kit" from several motifs. The outside shots were in Nordhalben; the inside ones in a house in the Upper Bavarian parish of Baierbrunn and recreated sets at the Bavaria Studios. "These rooms are very small", says production designer Bernd Lepel, who had the Strelzyk family's semi, complete with its cellar, rebuilt to scale. "The further the sewing of the balloon progresses, the more the cellar gets buried in material", says Bernd Lepel, whose team of ten managed to procure an original Gritzner sewing machine from the 1950s. Günter Wetzel sewed the hot-air balloon together in the Strelzyks' cellar with this model from the former Gritzner works in Durlach, a suburb of Karlsruhe.

"There's a bit of East Germany in every last detail", leading actor Friedrich Mücke says enthusiastically. "Every day of shooting recalled countless memories of things that shaped my childhood, starting with the lids of the jam jars and finishing with the Trabis and Wartburgs that went through Nordhalben, rattling loudly and stinking." The historical cars all came from private collectors, as did the blue and white Wartburg the Strelzyk family drive in the film: "Our little lead actor went through a lot", the director says in praise. "We even drove over the fields in it when the first and second balloon launches were being prepared. Of all times, it decided to break down at the entrance to the hotel in Berlin, which we had spent hours setting up. The camera sweep was ready, the actors and extras were ready, but then the engine roared and nothing would work anymore. Fortunately, we had decided to film the first rehearsal. This is then what made it into the film itself."

LITTLE BERLIN AND BERLIN

Further film locations

The beginning of the film shows the failed escape attempt of a young East German citizen, who tries to get through the border fence using a step iron. Michael Bully Herbig and cameraman Torsten Breuer shot this scene in a real former death strip, which belongs to the *Deutsch-Deutsches* Museum in Mödlareuth. The town, located near Hof, was once nicknamed "Little Berlin" because it was divided by a heavily guarded border. The fence, built provisionally from wood and barbed wire in 1949, was extended continuously after 1961, the year the Berlin Wall was built, so that there was no legal means of crossing from the east part of Mödlareuth to the west part. It was not until 9 December 1989, exactly one month after the wall fell, that a border crossing was set up; six months later the concrete barrage in the centre of the town was largely taken down. Local politicians and private persons gave support to the idea of preserving part of the border as a museum and memorial. "It is uncanny filming the fatal failure of an escape attempt at such a historical location", says Michael Bully Herbig. "But we are grateful that we were allowed to do the filming in Mödlareuth and those in charge trusted us to do it." The team, spearheaded by production designer Bernd Lepel, cleared parts of the overgrown ditch, special effects supervisor Dirk Lange extended the border fence by rebuilding an SM-70 ("Splitter Mine Model 1970") spring gun, of which East Germany placed more than 70,000 along a total of 447 kilometres of border fencing between 1971 and 1984.

The film team also received a filming permit for the Stasi Museum in Berlin. Its centrepiece is the office floor, which has been preserved in its entirety, of Erich Mielke, who was in charge of the Ministry of State Security from 1957 until the end of East Germany. "Most people have an image of Stasi interrogation rooms being furnished and decorated in a grey and sombre manner", production designer Bernd Lepel says, referring to

a commonly held prejudice. "But very often they just used-whatever wallpaper was there, ~~sometimes~~ even three different types in one room. These were the kind of wallpaper patterns you could also find in a living room." The sets department worked in close cooperation with the Stasi Museum in order to be able to organise the smallest logos and stamps as used by the Stasi in 1979 correctly. Even the costume and makeup departments immersed themselves deep in the Stasi world. Tatjana Krauskopf talks of the Stasi employees having a "uniform look": "Witnesses of the time have told me that you could often recognise Stasi people from a hundred metres."

Harry Fakner was the military historian who accompanied the shooting. It was not only the weapons, uniforms and the smallest insignia that were subjected to his critical eye. Fakner also drilled the actors in the appropriate behaviour of the National People's Army, which was very different in 1979 from that of the Bundeswehr in West Germany.

The Stasi and NVA undertake massive personnel and technological efforts in the film to make sure a second escape attempt by balloon cannot be made. They even deploy a fleet of Soviet MIL Mi-2 helicopters. There is only one functioning example of this type of helicopter in the German-speaking area; the helicopter is subject to the War Weapons Control Act and may no longer be imported. The owner of this rare helicopter in Germany is leather goods manufacturer Valerian Kießling, who imported the multi-purpose helicopter from Poland and uses it for just-in-time deliveries for his clients. The helicopter scenes were shot at the airfield in Kulmbach, which Michael Bully Herbig has chosen on account of its "retro look" as a military starting field of the National People's Army. Visual effects company ScanlineVFX then used their computers to guarantee that the showdown had not only one helicopter, but an entire fleet that would chase the airborne balloon along the East/West German border.

The very first day of shooting, 18 September 2017, started with a crowd scene at the Ernst Thälmann High School in Pößneck: the youth initiation ceremony of Frank Strelzyk. The ceremony meant a lot of work for all groups involved, because 30 "Young Pioneers", 60 parents, 18 siblings, five teachers, seven SED functionaries and a 20-strong children's choir of Thälmann Pioneers had to be kitted out. Most of the female extras, who had made themselves up very nicely for their appearance in the morning, were immediately sent to remove their make-up again: "There is a massive difference in quality between the East German make-up of 1979 and our make-up today, which contains a lot of silicon", says make-up artist Tatjana Krauskopf. "Whenever possible, we used original old East Germany stock for the female extras, because it did not hold as well and did not create an even colour."

CONTACT TO THE EMBASSY

Another escape attempt

After their first, failed escape attempt, the Strelzyk family go to Berlin. "Some people were so desperate that they clutched naively at every straw and thought to themselves: maybe it will work somehow", says Michael Bully Herbig. When Herbig heard of this unconventional escape attempt during his first interviews with the family, he could hardly believe it: "The deeper I got into it, the more incredible the stories I heard became. It was actually the Chinese embassy. But as we were working on the screenplay, it became much too

complicated for us to bring the Chinese into things now. To make it a bit more understandable for today's audiences, we decided on the American embassy." The Old Town Hall in the centre of Berlin, a typical early 20th-century administration building, was used as the American embassy for the film.

The capital is also home to the "Stadt Berlin" Interhotel, in which the Strelzyk family are accommodated for a few days and nights. Production designer Bernd Lepel and his team set up the foyer and the front of the listed radio station in Nalepastraße. Where the East German Broadcasting Company once had its headquarters, there was now the bustle of businesspeople, suitcase carriers, receptionists and tourists from all over the world. "Along with the youth initiation ceremony, the hotel scenes, were the days of shooting that involved the most people", says costume designer Lisy Christl, who along with her team fitted 75 extras and minor actors for this scene alone: "The international flavour of this scene has a lot of colours and conspicuous fashion elements", says Lisy Christl.

THE CLOCK IS TICKING

Post-production

Alexander Dittner, who has so far edited all the films directed by Michael Bully Herbig has directed, was also on board again with BALLOON and put together the film material from a total of 50 days of shooting. The cooperation with ScanlineVFX, which has been ongoing for nearly 20 years, was also continued. Although with the balloon itself only the safety ropes had to be removed digitally, there were all kinds of other visual effects to process. Composer Ralf Wengenmayr, another of the director's companions since his first movie, wrote and arranged the music for the film. "After I had watched the first edited version, I said to Bully: Trust your film! It is so exciting that we should only make limited use of the music." Michael Bully Herbig agreed with Wengenmayr but expressed a decisive wish: "The film needs a pulse. The audience must subliminally perceive a ticking clock that inconspicuously but effectively makes the protagonists' heartbeat palpable." Ralf Wengenmayr adds: "A central element of this score is a pulse generated by analogue and digital percussive sounds that goes through the entire film right from the start. In combination with the in part unsettling, distorted sound arrangements, the music makes what our protagonists feel palpable."

The director and composer agreed to dispense with the orchestral sound character that had permeated Michael Bully Herbig's films so far for the first time. "We wanted to create a score that was modern but timeless, which would capture and enhance the protagonists' emotions", says Ralf Wengenmayr. "That gives the film an additional emotional level that is oppressive and driven by fear but also hope." Ralf Wengenmayr and the Babelsberg Film Orchestra recorded the music on July 3, 8 and 9 at Studio Babelsberg. "We only recorded the string section for this score", says the composer. "The other sound levels were created on the computer or produced with analogue synthesiser technology."

BALLOON also uses well-known songs from East Germany and from the 70s. At the beginning of the film, the Pioneer song "Unsere Heimat" is played, sung by a children's choir at the youth initiation ceremony. "Of course the song has been heard in many films already, but that was no reason for me not to use it", says Michael Bully Herbig. "It is about stirring emotions and memories with a certain song and therefore sounding authentic. In my view there was no alternative to this Pioneer song." The children's song "Brummi

Brumm, der Brumbär" was also in this category. "Petra Wetzel said in her interview that she sang this song during the balloon escape in order to calm the children down", says Herbig. "At that time it was *the* children's song in East Germany, and everyone who knows it will experience a lot of emotions, just as we go for emotions in a big way in the film." Several rock and pop songs that were originally planned for in the screenplay ended up on the cutting-room floor after post-production. But British rock band The Sweet's "Ballroom Blitz" stayed in: "The song was a big hit and brings a massive dynamic into the scene in which Frank Strelzyk sits on his bed, frustrated, and listens to loud music." Furthermore, the music has a political dimension: "Although listening to Western music was not completely banned", says Michael Bully Herbig, "when you have a neighbour who works for the Stasi and you are sewing a hot-air balloon to escape from East Germany in in your cellar, loud Western music is perhaps not the best idea."

INCREDIBLE ADVENTURE

A German-German story

Looking back, Michael Bully Herbig is actually glad that there was a gap of over five years between the first idea and the start of the shoot. "I learned a great deal about the former East Germany during this long preparation time. There was no black and white, but several nuances. Of course there were also people who learned to live with this system or even felt well within it. We show them just as much as those people who suffered under it." In all his interviews with the Strelzyk and Wetzel families Michael Bully Herbig always asked one particular question: was there one specific moment when you decided to flee East Germany? "The answer was always no", says the director. "It had just built up over their four lives. For Peter Strelzyk it was the fact that you were not allowed to state your opinion freely and you could go to prison for three years for telling a political joke. Günter Wetzel was not allowed to study what he wanted to. He felt hemmed in and wanted to get out. Petra Wetzel had a mortally ill mother in the West she was not allowed to visit. And Doris Strelzyk had a brother who had wanted to flee when he was young, was sent to prison for it and lost all courage to face life. Just these four protagonists in our film had four completely different motives, but in their sum they say a lot about the former East Germany."

Michael Bully Herbig has enormous respect for the bold action the families undertook nearly 40 years ago: "What they experienced was an incomparable adventure. We tell of courageous people who wanted freedom and had an unshakeable belief that they would achieve their aim. This is the fascination of their story, which is also a piece of East/West German history." Without getting too moralistic, Michael Bully Herbig also wants to clarify a few things with BALLOON: "There is a young generation that hardly know or care to know anything about East Germany. I compare that with my generation who could hardly fathom why, 39 years after the end of the Second World War, they were confronted with the atrocities committed by the National Socialists. I thought that at the time too: hell, I was born in 1968. What's this got to do with me? It was another generation who screwed this up. But the older I become, the closer history gets to me. The temporal distance no longer matters then; I just judge what happened and how it influenced people. This is why we did everything we could to make this East/West German history authentic but also keep it entertaining and exciting at the same time. I would be delighted if BALLOON were seen by audiences of all ages, both after its release and 30 years on."

STATEMENTS FROM THE LEADING ACTORS

Friedrich Mücke

"The balloon escape was definitely the most spectacular escape from East Germany. I didn't know all the details of the story. I thought there was one family, one balloon and one escape attempt. But there were two of each of those. I have often asked myself whether I would dare to fly off to a new life in a self-made balloon with my wife and children. It's difficult for me to find a comparable reason because we have a good life in Germany. We can see and feel this Stasi apparatus in the film. I know stories from my parents who were observed by the Stasi. Life is restricted when you can't live freely and never know if a friend is really a friend. I am impressed by these two families who took their fate into their own hands. The plan may have been dreamt through rather than thought through, but they were absolutely determined to go through with it."

Karoline Schuch

"Two families flee East Germany in a self-made balloon. That's definitely serious material for a movie. And the more I got into it, the greater my desire to take part in this film became. The question that always preoccupied me was: how great must the need be for you to put you and your children's lives in such danger? As a mother of two children I decided that I wouldn't be able to do it. But then I live in a free, free-thinking and lavish world. So I'm in no position to make a judgement. But placing myself in the emotional world of the two families was a special experience. The more I occupied myself with it, the more admirable I found the courage they mustered nearly 40 years ago."

David Kross

"Friedrich Mücke and I took a trip in a modern balloon as preparation. We thought: this is a bloody big thing! But then we were told that the self-made balloon had been even bigger. It is incredible how two families sewed this monster together from a bunch of rags in a tiny cellar. I'm impressed by all the discipline, solidarity and boldness. It was a masterful achievement, especially as the entire project was accompanied by great fear the whole time. The families might not just have crashed; they would also have ended up in prison if the escape had failed. But they felt trapped in a political system in which they didn't want to live. They had great motivation to lead a free life in the West. That involved an incredible amount of courage and I find it heart-warming that they made it."

Alicia von Rittberg

"I have great respect for the courage and achievement of the two families. You must have a clear vision and determination to implement such a daring plan. The balloon that was used for the shooting was just as big as the balloon the families built. I stood in front of it in amazement and suddenly realised the miracle the Strelzyks and Wetzels had performed. Every detail had to be right because the lives of both of these families depended on this balloon. I wouldn't even dare to say I would have had the courage to attempt such an escape. Because fortunately I live in completely different circumstances and don't have to risk my life in order to be able to enjoy my freedom."

Thomas Kretschmann

"After every day of shooting I felt completely whacked and emotionally exhausted. I take that as the best indicator that the East Germany in this film is being shown realistically. I fled from this system at that time and now I'm representing it in my role as a Stasi Lieutenant Colonel. I have always had problems with people who shamelessly abuse their positions to exert power over other people. The Strelzyk and Wetzel families also wanted to get away from this system. I reckon three quarters of all East German citizens would have fled if they had had the opportunity and the courage. Of course there were also people who did not achieve happiness after successfully escaping. And in my opinion that was absolutely down to their having false expectations of life in the West. It was different in my case: I did not go to anywhere. I just left."

INTERVIEW

"THE STAR OF THE FILM IS THE STORY OF THE TWO FAMILIES"

Interview with director and producer Michael Bully Herbig

How did the Strelzyk and Wetzel families react when they heard that Michael Bully Herbig wanted to bring their escape from East Germany by balloon back to the big screen?

My biggest worry, of course, was that they would think: A comedian from Bavaria making a film about us - is he having a laugh? But that was dismissed very quickly. They realised that my primary aim was to tell their story to a modern audience with modern viewing habits. We got to the contents very quickly. It was important for me to have the trust of both families. Without their approval and cooperation I wouldn't have made this film.

What did you find out about East Germany during your research?

It was basically a good thing for the preparations for the film to have taken over five years. Because during this time I was able to occupy myself with life in East Germany in depth. The theme suddenly became omnipresent. It's like this: if your wife is pregnant, then you just see pregnant women everywhere. This is how it was for me with this topic. No matter who I met, wither privately or professionally, we ended up talking about the situation in East Germany at the time and successful and unsuccessful attempts to escape. Everyone was telling me stories they had either heard about or experienced themselves.

You were eleven when the families successfully escaped in 1979. Now you are 50. Why didn't you make the film before?

I now literally feel more mature in terms of doing this story than I did 10 or 20 years ago. Becoming a father in the meantime has also helped me. I can better understand what it must mean to take your children up in a self-made hot-air balloon and therefore also risk their lives in order to give them a different future.

A better future?

I say "a different future" deliberately. I would not like to say that it was better in every single case. It is simply about many people being dissatisfied and unhappy in East Germany. They felt imprisoned, controlled by others and were not allowed to say what they wanted. Accordingly, a lot of attempts were made to escape. For the most varied of reasons.

What was special about the escape in the hot-air balloon?

For one thing, this story really did go around the world. This escape was so spectacular that Günter Wetzel is still giving talks on it today. And Peter Strelzyk, who sadly died a year ago, told me at our first meeting that he had even had autograph requests from Asia and America. I generally try to avoid saying that any escape attempts were "more dangerous" or "more exciting" than others. Every escape has its own explosive nature and its causes. But the balloon flight is, especially from a filmmaker's point of view, just

incredible and adventurous. Of course I asked myself if there would be any point to tell a story on the big screen that had already been a film at the beginning of the eighties. But the longer I talked to the Strelzyk and Wetzel families and the more details became known from the Stasi files, the more I felt reassured that making the film from Germany for an international audience was the right thing.

You restrict yourself to the roles of director and producer. Or is there at least a Hitchcock-style cameo in there?

No. Out of deep conviction. There will definitely be people who find it hard to believe that Bully has made a thriller about East/West German history. Of course this is an entertaining movie too, but it is a very different genre. I know that with my face it is hard for me to change genres and I also have no ambitions in that respect. But if I am consistent and stay behind the camera and only push my name forward as much as is absolutely necessary, this genre change can work well. The star of the film is the story of the two families. And the balloon, which we have reconstructed in its original size.

What did you attach importance to when assembling the cast and the team?

I wanted to have a certain DNA in this production. It was important to me that as many actors as possible, especially those in the minor roles, and as many of the team as possible had a connection to the East. Whether they grew up there or had friends and/or relatives in East Germany. When Nadja Engel, for example, who plays Günter Wetzel's mother in the film, was standing in front of our reconstructed Cooperative store, she said to me: "I'm getting goose pimples. This is like going back in time". That was proof to me that we were on the right track.

Following on from BUDDY and BULLYPARADE – THE MOVIE, you are continuing to work with cameraman Torsten Breuer. What colour concept did you agree on before you started?

Fortunately, it is possible to leave something like that open to a certain degree today and postpone the grading until post-production. Torsten Breuer wanted to move toward cyan in the grading and we worked on the patterns accordingly. The most important thing to me was that we should do a lot of work with backlight and strong contrasts and not just show East Germany in dismal and colourless pictures.

How did you achieve this aim?

Those people who wanted to flee East Germany in particular were, of course, well informed as to what people in the West wore. Our costume designer Lisy Christl implemented this outstandingly. The leading actors wear cool clothes. They may not always have been available in the shops but many people also wore self-made things. In East Germany you made the best of everything you could find. It was always important to me to portray the year 1979 authentically in a historical film without ever subjecting the roles to ridicule. Nobody should say: "Look how they're walking around! Those haircuts! Those clothes! And those funny cars!"

You always had a fondness of dialects in previous films. Did you ever think about using the Thüringen dialect in this story, which is, after all, set in Thüringen?

I did. But after the first tests we decided not to do it because some of the dialogue took on an involuntarily humorous element because of it. But I didn't want everyone to speak strict High German either. The sentences could be chucked about a bit so that the dialects could be surmised. With Friedrich Mücke, for instance, his East Berlin twang shows through and with Karoline Schuch this light Thüringen touch.

BALLOON – A FILM IN NUMBERS

The Strelzyk and Wetzel families succeeded in fleeing East Germany in a self-made hot-air balloon on **16 September 1979**. After **28 minutes** and **18 kilometres**, at a maximum height of **2000 metres**, they landed in the Bavarian border town of Naila at about **3 am**.

In the small gondola measuring **1.4m by 1.4m**, whose floor consisted of **0.8 millimetre** steel, sat Peter Strelzyk (who was then **37**) and his wife Doris (**31**) with their sons Frank (**15**) and Andreas, nicknamed "Fitscher" (**11**), and Günter and Petra Wetzel (both **24**) with their sons Peterchen (**5**) and Andreas (**2**).

The self-made balloon was **32 metres** high, the casing was made of **1245 square metres** of material, which had a capacity of **4200 cubic metres** of air. The balloon was the biggest in Europe in **1979** and earned an entry in the Guinness Book of Records.

It was the **third** balloon that Peter Strelzyk and Günter Wetzels had built since they had made the decision to escape in this way on **7 March 1978**. The **first** balloon consisted of **900 square metres** of air-permeable cotton material and was incapable of flying. The families bought **1000** square metres of taffeta for the **second** balloon.

The **first** escape the Strelzyk family attempted on their own was on **3 July 1979**; it ended in a crash of the hot-air balloon after **34 minutes** – in the restricted area just before the border.

According to Peter Strelzyk, all the escape attempts cost a total of **76,000 East German marks**.

With the permission of the two families, the authors were able to view more than **2000 pages** of Stasi files, which had been kept on the Strelzyks and Wetzels after the successful attempt, at the former Gauck Commission.

The film took place over **50 days of shooting**. Shooting started on **18 September 2017** and finished on **1 December 2017**.

Casting agent Daniela Tolkien and director Michael Bully Herbig cast **55 actors**. The **five leading roles** were played by Friedrich Mücke, Karoline Schuch, David Kross, Alicia von Rittberg and Thomas Kretschmann. It was the **first** time working with Michael Bully Herbig for all of them.

The Augsburg balloon construction company Wörner manufactured **two original-sized balloons** for the shooting: **28 metres** and **32 metres** high. Both of them were allowed to rise to a maximum height of **30 metres** as captive balloons. The actors were not allowed to be higher than **three metres** above the ground. Stunt people of life-sized dolls were used at heights between **four and 30 metres**.

For safety reasons, wind speed during shooting could not exceed **four knots (7.4 km/h)**.

Production designer Bernd Lepel and his team of ten designed about **70 motifs**.

Costume designer Lisy Christl and her team had to make **80 costumes** and organise **750 further costumes**. Three sets of clothing were sewn or knitted together for the leading actors. Many of the uniforms and costumes for the **750 extras** came from the stock of Studio Babelsberg AG or private collectors and second-hand shops.

30 Trabants and Wartburgs were rented from private collectors and associations in order to enliven the street scenes.

Michael Bully Herbig was **eleven** when the Strelzyk and Wetzel families made their successful balloon attempt in **1979**. At the age of **43** he started with the first preparations for the film. When the film is launched in Germany on **27 September 2018**, Herbig will be **50**. BALLOON is Michael Bully Herbig's **eighth** film as a director. And his **first** thriller.

Günter Wetzel has been a flying instructor since **1992** and has, in his **20-year** career, trained many pilots of motorised planes, power gliders and ultra-light aircraft. The cameo appearance by Günter and Petra Wetzel in the final scene of the film lasts less than **five seconds**. They are sitting in the airfield canteen in Kulmbach in the background.

The original escape balloon will be exhibited in the Museum of Bavarian History in Regensburg from **May 2019**.

More than **5000 East German citizens** succeeded in escaping to the West, most of them in the first few months after the Wall was built, since the border had not yet been sealed completely.

CAST

Friedrich Mücke

(Peter Strelzyk)

Friedrich Mücke was born in Berlin in 1981. From 2003 until 2007 he studied at the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts in Berlin and was then accepted into the ensemble of the Munich *Volkstheater*. There, he was involved in performances of "Peer Gynt" and "Don Carlos" and played the starring role in "Michael Kohlhaas". He also appeared at the Salzburg Festival in "Jedermann" and at the *Deutsches Theater Berlin* in "Glaube, Liebe, Hoffnung". His cinema debut was a striking supporting role in Thomas Kronthaler's *Write Me - Postcards to Copacabana* (2009). He starred with Matthias Schweighöfer in Markus Goller's road movie comedy *Friendship!* (2009), for which Mücke won a Bavarian Film Award for Best Newcomer. He played architect Walter Gropius in the artist biography *Mahler on the Couch* (2010), directed by Percy and Felix Adlon. He then appeared in Oliver Ziegenbalg's novel adaptation *Russendisko* (2012) and Maggie Peren's refugee drama *Colour of the Ocean* (2012). In the same year he played royal equerry Richard Hornig in Marie Noelle's and Peter Sehr's *Ludwig II* and starred in 30 episodes of the TV series "Add a Friend" (2012-2014).

In 2013 and 2014 Friedrich Mücke played "Tatort" inspector Henry Funck as part of a trio of Erfurt investigators. At the Max Ophüls Film Festival, both the drama *Staudamm* (2013), in which Mücke played a paralegal confronted with the after-effects of a rampage, and the tragicomedy *Bocksprünge* (2014) with Mücke playing a lovesick gynaecologist, premiered. He worked once again with Matthias Schweighöfer on *Joy of Fatherhood* (2014), as he already had on *What a Man* (2011), and played his easy-going brother. He also belonged to the cast of the tragicomedy *Alles ist Liebe* (2014).

In 2015 Friedrich Mücke starred in three outstanding television productions: in the miniseries "Weinberg" he played a nameless man who wakes up in a vineyard with memory loss and discovers he has supernatural abilities. The German Television Awards jury found this performance worthy of a nomination, as they did his role as the inspector who takes on an underworld boss in 1920s Berlin in "Berlin One". Mücke received critical acclaim and the Jupiter Film Award for his part in Friedemann Fromm's drama "Unter der Haut". Here he plays the employee of a pharmaceutical company who wants to make the dangers of an alleged miracle cure public.

In 2016 Friedrich Mücke played the leading male part alongside Karoline Herfurth in her directing debut *Text for You*. In the same year he played the villain in the children's film *Robbi, Tobbi und das Fliewatüüt*. He then starred in Dominik Graf's TV drama "Am Abend aller Tage" and an episodic role as a senior public prosecutor in Dominik Graf's "Tatort: Der rote Schatten" (2017). Friedrich Mücke voiced the protagonist, Dug the caveman, in the German version of the British Claymation film *Early Man* ("Steinzeit bereit") (2018).

Karoline Schuch

(Doris Strelzyk)

Karoline Schuch was born in Jena in 1981. From the age of 5 she could be seen in several performances on the stage of the Jena Children's Studio. As a teenager she took acting lessons and voice training, including at the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts in Berlin. She had her first experience in front of the camera in a permanent role in the daily soap "Verbotene Liebe" (2000-2002) and from 2001 as the recurring character of the daughter of the Cologne "Tatort" inspector Freddy Schenk (Dietmar Bär). Karoline Schuch's film debut was in Annette Ernst's *Kiss and Run* (2002). Then came the television comedy "Die Schönste aus Bitterfeld" (2003), Margarethe von Trotta's relationship drama *The Other Woman* (2003) and the "Tatort" episode "Bevor es dunkel wird" (2007), for which she won the Günter Strack Television Award for Best Newcomer. She played Princess Paula in the fairy tale adaptation "The Valiant Little Tailor" (2008).

Karoline Schuch thrilled audiences in Christian Klandt's social drama *Weltstadt* (2008) as a teenager without prospects. In the Bernd Eichinger production *Time You Change* (2010), directed by Uli Edel, she played the first great love of rapper Bushido. Then came striking roles in Til Schweiger's thriller *The Guardians* (2012) and Marc Rothemund's *Mann tut was Mann kann* (2012) and its sequel *Da muss Mann durch* (2015). In Friedemann Fromm's drama "Unter der Haut" (2015) Karoline Schuch played Friedrich Mücke's character's wife, as she does now in *BALLOON*.

Director Julia von Heinz cast Karoline Schuch in the leading role in *Hanna's Journey* (2014), as Hape Kerkeling's pilgrim friend in the bestseller adaptation *I'm Off Then* (2015) and for the title role in "Katharina Luther" (2017), which earned her a Bavarian Television Award nomination. At the same time as she was working in film and television, Karoline Schuch completed a diploma in psychology at Freie Universität Berlin in 2010.

David Kross

(Günter Wetzel)

David Kross was born in Henstedt-Ulzburg by Hamburg in 1990. After playing minor television roles and gathering stage experience at the "Kleines Theater Bargteheide", Bernadette Buck recommended the talented pupil to her father, Detlev Buck, for the starring role in the social drama *Tough Enough* (2006). Kross was celebrated at the Berlin Film Festival for his reserved portrayal of a 15-year-old who leaves his sheltered mansion world of Zehlendorf and ends up in a fierce battle for survival in the Berlin suburb of Neukölln. Detlev Buck also cast him for a guest appearance as a baker's apprentice in the children's film *Hands off Mississippi* (2006). He then played the starring role in Marco Kreuzpaintner's Offried Preußler adaptation *Krabat* (2008) and an internationally acclaimed starring role in Stephen Daldry's German/American Bernhard Schlink adaptation of *The Reader* (2009). The role of the young lover of a former concentration camp guard (played by Kate Winslet) earned David Kross several awards, including the Trophée Chopard in Cannes and the Jupiter, as well as a European Film Award nomination. European Film Promotion named him German Shooting Star at the 2009 Berlin Film Festival. One year later he received the Austrian Film and Television Award, the Romy, also in the Shooting Star category.

David Kross spent time in Cambodia and Malaysia, among other places, for his third cooperation with Detlev Buck, "Same Same But Different" (2009). Steven Spielberg cast him as a German soldier in *War Horse* (2011); in the Norwegian/Swedish production *Into the White* (2012) he played a war pilot who had crash-landed, fighting for survival with British soldiers in snow and ice. For German cinemagoers, David Kross appeared in Hans Steinbichler's drama *Promising the Moon*, Detlev Buck's bestseller adaptation *Measuring the World* (2012) and Sherry Horman's comedy *The Pursuit of Unhappiness* (2012). In the German-French Heinrich von Kleist adaptation *Michael Kohlhaas* he played the preacher, to whom the eponymous hero, played by Mads Mikkelsen, entrusts his daughter. Kross appeared in the historical drama *Angélique* (2013), directed by the French director Ariel Zeitoun, as King Louis XIV.

In the children's series *Rico, Oskar und der Tieferschatten*, David Kross played a smart and extremely busy yuppie from 2014 onwards; in Özgür Yildirim's novel adaptation *Boy 7* (2015) he played a man suffering from memory loss who gets wind of a conspiracy. Stephan Wagner cast him as a BND spy in the TV film "Die Akte General" (2015), and in 2016 he played the light athlete Carl "Luz" Long in the sports drama *Race* (2016). In Markus Goller's road movie *My Brother Simple* (2017) David Kross put in a stunning performance as a mentally handicapped man who searches for his father together with his brother (played by Frederik Lau). Both leading actors received a Bavarian Film Award. He was also part of the cast of the German-Irish culture clash comedy *Halal Daddy* (2017) and starred as legendary goalkeeper Bernhard "Bert" Trautmann in Marcus H. Rosenmüller's biopic *Trautmann* (2018).

Alicia von Rittberg

(Petra Wetzel)

Alicia von Rittberg was born in Munich in 1993 and had already put in performances in front of the camera as a primary and secondary school pupil. For example, she played the young Romy Schneider in the biopic "Romy" (2009). She won the Bavarian Television Award in the Sponsors' Award for Newcomers category and the Günter Rohrbach Film Award for her starring role as a humiliated child in care in the television film "Und alle haben geschwiegen" (2012). Alicia von Rittberg became known to international audiences in 2014 when she played a small part alongside Brad Pitt in David Avers' film *Fury*. In the same year she appeared alongside Josefine Preuß in the historical crime drama "The Midwife" and received a New Faces Award in the Best Newcomer category for her performance. She also appeared in the sequel "The Midwife 2" in 2016.

She shared the big screen with Ewan McGregor in the British spy thriller *Our Kind of Traitor* (2016). Sönke Wortmann chose Alicia von Rittberg to star as brave nurse Ida Lenze in the critically acclaimed historical television series "Charité". She received the Bambi Media Award for this role. In 2017, Alicia von Rittberg played one of the leading roles in Alain Gsponer's film drama *Godless Youth*, a dystopian future story based on Ödön von Horvath's eponymous novel. The actress is also studying Economics at the Zeppelin University in Friedrichshafen alongside her acting work.

Thomas Kretschmann

(Lieutenant Colonel Seidel)

Thomas Kretschmann was born in Dessau in 1962. As a teenager he was part of the East German national swimming squad and won several championship titles. In 1983 he signed up for the Ernst Busch National Academy of Performing Arts in East Berlin, but fled to West Germany shortly after his admission interview, via Hungary, Yugoslavia and Austria. In West Berlin he was taken on at the Schiller Theatre without ever having completed an acting degree. He had further engagements at the Vienna *Schauspielhaus* and the Hamburg *Kammerspiele*.

Thomas Kretschmann's debut was in the television play "Der Mitwisser" (1989), for which he received the Max Ophüls Award in the Best Newcomer category. After memorable starring roles in Klaus Lemke's milieu study *Die Ratte* (1993) and Joseph Vilsmaier's war drama *Stalingrad* (1993) he expanded his international career. He performed in Patrice Chéreau's award-winning historical drama *Queen Margot* (1994) and starred in Dario Argento's *The Stendhal Syndrome* (1996). At the turn of the millennium Thomas Kretschmann moved to Los Angeles and established himself in the American movie industry with parts in various genres such as the war film *U-571* (2000), the comic adaptation *Blade II* (2002) and the romantic drama *Head in the Clouds* (2004). He put on a haunting performance as sympathetic German officer Wilm Hosenfeld in Roman Polanski's Oscar-winning war drama *The Pianist* (2002). He appeared in Germany in the Bernd Eichinger production *Downfall* (directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004).

He then appeared in Enki Bilal's science-fiction tale *Immortal* (2004), the horror thriller *Resident Evil: Apocalypse* (2004) with Milla Jovovich, Hans W. Geißendörfer's romantic drama *Snowland* (2005), Peter Jackson's remake of the classic *King Kong* (2005) and the controversial psychodrama *Grimm Love* (2006), for which he received the Actor's Award at the Sitges Film Festival. Further projects in which he was involved were Brad Anderson's thriller *Transsiberian* (2007) and the action film *Next* (2007) with Nicholas Cage. Kretschmann produced an outstanding performance in 2007 as war criminal Adolf Eichmann in the drama *Eichmann*. A year later he was part of the cast headed by leading actor Tom Cruise in Bryan Singer's *Valkyrie* (2008) and played alongside Angelina Jolie in the action thriller *Wanted* (2008). He played king Leopold of Belgium in the historical film *Young Victoria* (2009).

Thomas Kretschmann has also appeared in a series of major television productions, including the title role in the classic adventure "The Sea Wolf" (2008), flight captain Schumann in Roland Suso Richter's drama "Mogadischu" (2008) and Harry Meyen in the Romy Schneider biopic "Romy" (2009). He played the father in a family that emigrated to Papua New Guinea in the bestseller adaptation *Jungle Child* (2011), also directed by Roland Suso Richter. In 2012 he played Dracula in Dario Argento's *Dracula 3D*, while by way of contrast he played vampire hunter Van Helsing in the American TV series "Dracula" from 2013 until 2014. In the fantasy adventures *The Return of the First Avenger* (*Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, 2014) and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015) he played Baron Wolfgang von Strucker. Then came the action films *Hitman: Agent 47* (2015) and *Central Intelligence* (2016). Kretschmann played one of the leading roles in the South Korean production *A Taxi Driver* (2017). The film was the biggest Korean box-office hit ever. He has most recently appeared in *Waiting for Anya*, (2018) with Anjelica Huston and Jean Reno.

Jonas Holdenrieder

(Frank Strelzyk)

Jonas Holdenrieder was born in Munich in 1999. While still at school he watched a "making of" report on the children's film *The Crocodiles* (2009), which inspired him to go in front of the camera himself one day. He got his first role in Michael Karen's television film "Für immer Frühling" (2011), before starring in Alain Gsponer's novel adaptation *The Little Ghost* (2013) as primary school pupil Karl. At the same time Bora Dagtekin stuck him in a vending machine selling sweets in his role as Peter Parker in *Suck Me Shakespeer* (2013). Jonas Holdenrieder played Ludo Schwarzer in three parts of the fantasy film series *Vampire Sisters* from 2012 until 2016. Since 2016 he has been part of the cast of the television film series "Marie fängt Feuer"; he also starred in the Max Ophüls Award-nominated short film "Mein rechter, rechter Platz ist frei" (2017). Jonas Holdenrieder lives near Munich. He plays the drums and the marimbaphone. While he was at school he won the Bavarian "Jugend musiziert" competition in 2012, 2013 and 2014 and in 2012 he came second in the state competition. Jonas Holdenrieder finished school with a technical baccalaureate in 2018 and now wants to concentrate solely on his acting.

Tilman Döbler

(Andreas "Fitscher" Strelzyk)

Tilman Döbler was born in Berlin in 2006. After gathering initial experience on the stage, he made his camera debut in the high school film "Ferien" (2016) and appeared in the television film "Wir sind die Rosinskis" (2016). In the international animated film *Richard the Stork* (2017) he voiced the orphaned sparrow Richard, who grows up with storks. Tilman Döbler starred alongside Valentin Wessely in the television film "Sugar Sand" (2017), which was filmed mostly in Prague but set in 1970s Brandenburg. The weekly newspaper "Die Zeit" wrote in praise of his performance: "Tilman Döbler's performance as Fred cannot be praised highly enough. He embodies grandiosely the way in which children were confronted daily with the political regime without understanding it."

CREW

Michael Bully Herbig

(Director, co-author and producer)

Michael Bully Herbig, born in Munich in 1968, has been an established name in the German show and film industry for many years as a director, actor, author and producer. After starting out on the radio from 1992 until 1995, he founded his company herbX medienproduktion gmbh in 1996. As an author, actor, director and producer he was responsible for, among other things, "bullyparade", which ran for six seasons on ProSieben. Bully's work was honoured with three nominations for the international comedy award the Golden Rose of Montreux and two German Television Award nominations in 2000 and 2001. He wrote and starred in the ProSieben pilot film "Easy Bully", which was also nominated for the Golden Rose of Montreux.

Herbig provided his first bigscreen laughter in 2000: he celebrated his successful directing debut with *Erkan & Stefan*, the first movie adventure of comedy duo Erkan Maria Moosleitner and Stefan Lust. He voiced the protagonist Kuzco in the animated Disney film *The Emperor's New Groove* (2001).

In January 1999, Michael Bully Herbig founded the film production company herbX film gmbh, which took on its first movie project with *Manitou's Shoe* (2001). He directed, produced, wrote and played both leading roles in this Western comedy. *Manitou's Shoe* had a total cinema audience of nearly twelve million, making it the most successful German film ever. Bully received the Bavarian Film Award and the German Film Award among others. When *Dreamship Surprise - Period 1* hit the cinemas in 2004, it became the second most successful German film in history, with a total audience over more than nine million. No producer or director had ever achieved this feat before.

One year later, the first season of the innovative ProSieben show "Bully & Rick" received the German Comedy Award. While Bully was still working on the second season as producer, author, director and actor, he produced his first computer-animated adventure *Lissi and the Wild Emperor*, a tongue-in-cheek tribute to the popular *Sissi* films. This made Michael Bully Herbig the first director in Germany to make a CGI movie comedy. His courage paid off: *Lissi and the Wild Emperor* was the most successful German film at German box offices in 2007.

In the same year, Bully could be seen in a very unusual role in an international film: he showed himself from his quieter, or rather silent, side in *Asterix at the Olympic Games*. He provided some unearthly to-do in 2008 as Boankramer in Joseph Vilsmaier's *Die Geschichte vom Brandner Kaspar*. He received the Bavarian Film Award and his third Bambi for his performance. He also produced *Vicky the Viking*, the first live-action version of the adventures of the little Viking boy from Flake, in 2008. Bully found his "strong men" (the original German title translates as "Vicky and the Strong Men") in a major public casting show on

ProSieben: he allocated the roles of Vicky's trusty companions in the six-part casting show "Bully sucht die starken Männer".

Vicky the Viking opened on 9 September 2009 and became the most successful German film of the year, with an audience of five million. Bully received his fourth Bambi, his sixth German Comedy Award and his seventh Bavarian Film Award, among others, for this film. But the most unusual accolade to date is the honorary glass screen that the Cinema Association awarded to the most successful director in Germany at the time for outstanding achievements: Michael Bully Herbig managed to get 30 million people to go to the cinema with five films in ten years. A unique record! The "Bullyverse" ("Bullyversum") opened in June 2011 at Bavaria Filmstadt, in which visitors, who so far have numbered almost 350,000 a year, can view the sets and props from Bully's films in a large experience centre covering 1500 square metres.

In 2012, Bully was honoured with the Bernd Eichinger Award, the first time this award was given, as part of the 62nd German Film Awards. Before he retook his place on the director's chair for *Buddy* (2013), Bully appeared in Leander Haußmann's *Hotel Lux* (2011), Helmut Dietl's *Zettl* (2011) and Don Scardino's Hollywood comedy *The Incredible Burt Wonderstone* (2013) alongside Steve Carell, Steve Buscemi and Jim Carrey. Bully returned to the small screen in 2013 with the ProSieben sitcom "Bully macht Buddy". Like its greater role models from the US, this format, in which Bully and Rick Kavanian play themselves, was recorded live before a studio audience.

Bully appeared in the Wolfgang Petersen-directed comedy movie *Four Against the Bank* (2016), playing an uptight investment adviser who teams up with three bank robbers. The trio were played by Til Schweiger, Matthias Schweighöfer and Jan Josef Liefers. The anniversary production *Bullyparade - The Movie* opened in 2017 and spent four weeks at the top of the German movie charts. Michael Bully Herbig, Rick Kavanian and Christian Tramitz played the most popular roles from the TV show "bullyparade" for one last time. Most recently, Bully voiced the animated half-dragon Nepomuk in Dennis Gansel's novel adaptation *Jim Button and Luke the Engine Driver* (2018).

Kit Hopkins & Thilo Röscheisen

(Screenplay)

Kit Hopkins grew up in New York, Los Angeles and Sydney and has lived in Munich since 1979. She first worked as a fashion editor for "Vogue Deutschland", then as a freelance journalist for "Madame", "European Travel&Life" and "Departures". She has worked as a screenwriter since 1992. Her first film, *Father's Day*, became a surprise hit in 1996. She has been a lecturer and tutor at dffb in Berlin since 2006. She is a founding member of the German Film Academy.

Thilo Röscheisen has been involved in the development of many films for the big and small screens as a dramaturge and script consultant. He has worked mostly as a screenwriter since 2005, mostly in collaboration with Kit Hopkins. Together, they wrote the screenplays for the award-winning television film "Schutzlos" (2009) and the event film "Starfighter - Sie wollten den Himmel erobern" (2015).

Torsten Breuer

(Photography)

Many cinema and television productions bear the unmistakable signature of cameraman Torsten Breuer, who was born in 1954 in Norderney: his camera work includes Katja von Garnier's *Making Up!* (1992), *Bandits* (1997), *Windstorm* (2013) and *Windstorm 2* and her Scorpions documentary *Forever and a Day* (2015), and also Caroline Link's *Annaliese & Anton* (1998) and two Marcus H. Rosenmüller films: *Schwere Jungs* (2007) and *Perlmutterfarbe* (2008). Further work includes Cyrill Boss's and Philipp Stennert's crime comedy *Jerry Cotton* (2010; German Camera Award for Torsten Breuer) and Bora Dagtekin's movie directing debut *Türkisch für Anfänger* (2012). Breuer worked with director Dennis Gansel on the award-winning teen dramas *Before the Fall* (2004) and *The Wave* (2007) and the modern vampire classic *We Are The Night* (2010) and the novel adaptation *Jim Button and Luke the Engine Driver* (2018). He worked with director Neele Leana Vollmar on the culture clash comedy *Maria, He Doesn't Like It!* (2009) and *Rico, Oskar und der Tieferschatten* (2013). Then came Michael Bully Herbig's *Buddy* (2013) and *Bullyparade - The Movie* (2017).

Torsten Breuer's television work includes several episodes of the ZDF detective series "Kommissarin Lucas" with Ulrike Kriener, and also the films "Die Tote im Moorwald" (2011), "Liebe Amelie" (2005), "Operation Rubikon" (2002), "Ein unmöglicher Mann" (2000) and "Split Second" (1999). Torsten Breuer is also a successful composer. He has written scores for Sönke Wortmann's comedy hits *Alone Among Women* (1991), *Little Sharks* (1992) and *Maybe... Maybe Not* (1994) among others.

Bernd Lepel

(Production

Design)

Bernd Lepel first worked as a stage designer at various theatres. As a production designer he has designed several international cinema and television productions, including *Innocent Lies* (1995), "Crimetime" (1997), *Bear's Kiss* (2003), *Pope Joan* (2009), "Borgia" (2011) and the Oscar-nominated Bernd Eichinger productions *Downfall* (2004) and *The Baader Meinhof Complex* (2008). Bernd Lepel was also the production designer for three more Bernd Eichinger productions: Andrew Birkin's Berlin Film Festival winner *The Cement Garden* (1993), Hark Bohm's two-part TV miniseries "Vera Brühne" (2001) and Doris Dörrie's *Naked* (2002). He also worked with Doris Dörrie on *The Fisherman and His Wife* (2005) and *Bliss* (2012), and also on a series of successful opera productions: "Turandot" (2003) at the Berlin State Opera, "Rigoletto" (2005) at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich and "Madame Butterfly", also in Munich, "La Finta Giardiniera" at the Salzburg Festival, "250 Jahre Mozart" (2006) and "Don Giovanni" at the Hamburg State Opera (2012). For Sherry Hormann's drama *3096 Days* (2012) Bernd Lepel had, among other things, the dungeon in which kidnap victim Natascha Kampusch was held for 3096 days reconstructed.

Before *BALLOON*, Bernd Lepel had already worked with Michael Bully Herbig on *Buddy* (2013) and *Bullyparade - The Movie* (2017). He was also responsible for production design in Florian Gallenberger's drama *Colonia Dignidad* (2015), Oliver Hirschbiegel's television series "The Same Sky" (2017), Sönke Wortmann's television series "Charité" (2016) and Matti Geschonneck's novel adaptation *In Times of Fading Light* (2017).

Lisy Christl

(Costume)

Lisy Christl, born in 1964, started working with renowned directors such as Michael Haneke (*Funny Games*) right at the start of her career. Her repertoire encompasses costumes for historical films, children's films (*The Sturb*) or present-day German films such as Christian Petzold's *Wolfsburg* (2003) and Lars Büchel's *Peas at 5:30* (2004). Lisy Christl was nominated for a German Film Award for her costume design in Florian Gallenberger's drama *Shadows of Time* (2005), set in 1940s India. She finally received the award for the drama *John Rabe* (2010), set in China in 1937, which was also directed by Gallenberger.

Lisy Christl has worked on Alain Gsponer's *Lila, Lila* (2009), Matti Geschonneck's *Boxhagener Platz* (2009) and Hans-Christian Schmid's *Home for the Weekend* (2012), among others. She received an Oscar nomination and her second German Film Award in 2012 for her splendid Elizabethan costumes in Roland Emmerich's *Anonymous*. She then also worked on Roland Emmerich's action thriller *White House Down* (2013). Further projects include Markus Goller's *Alles ist Liebe* (2014), Ericson Core's *Point Break* (2015), Karoline Herfurth's movie directing debut *Text for You* (2016) and Terrence Malick's *Radegund* (2017).

Tatjana Krauskopf

(Make-up)

Tatjana Krauskopf was born in Kiel in 1967. She studied Law in Freiburg, Art History in Regensburg and German Studies in Berlin before starting a make-up artist apprenticeship at Hasso von Hugo in 1990. Among other places, she worked at the Gärtnerplatz Theatre in Munich, the Bregenz Festival, the Rhine-Main Theatre and on numerous film and television productions: *Requiem for a Romantic Woman* (1998), *Crazy* (2000), *no More School* (2000), *Emil and the Detectives* (2001), *What to Do in Case of Fire* (2001), *Distant Lights* (2003), *Play It Loud!* (2004), *Platinum* (2004), *Schuld und Rache* (2006), *Vier Töchter* (2006), *Krabat* (2008), *Die Jahrhundertlawine* (2008), *Almanya - Welcome to Germany* (2009), *Beloved Sisters* (2013), *Aus der Tiefe der Zeit* (2013), *Mara and the Firebringer* (2014), *Die Hölle bin ich* (2014), *Hanna's Sleeping Dog* (2016), *13 Minutes* (2015) and *Grießbockerlaffäre* (2017). Together with Nannie Gebhardt-Seele, Tatjana Krauskopf won the German Film Award in 2015 for the costume design of *Beloved Sisters*. She was also nominated for the German Film Award in the same year, along with Isabelle Neu, for the costume design of *13 Minutes*.

Alexander Dittner

(Editing)

Alexander Dittner was born in Hanover in 1967 and has been working as a freelance editor since 1996. He has been working with Michael Bully Herbig since the start of "bullyparade" (1997 - 2004), which means he was also on board for his films *Erkan & Stefan* (2000), *Manitou's Shoe* (2001), *Dreamship Surprise - Period 1* (2004), *Vicky the Viking* (2009), *Buddy* (2013) and *Bullyparade - The Movie* (2017).

He worked with director Gregor Schnitzler on *Soloalbum* (2004) and the Berlin Film Festival entry *The Cloud* (2006). In 2004 Alexander Dittner made his first and only film to date, the television documentary "Gegen die Grenze - Das Leben des Michael Gartenschläger", which he also directed and wrote the script for. In the years after this, he worked mostly on children's and family films, such as *Herr Bello* (2007), *The Wild Soccer Bunch 5* (2008) and *Lilly the Witch: The Journey to Mandolan* (2011), but also edited comedies such as *Zwölf Meter ohne Kopf* (2009), *Single by Contract* (2010) and Helmut Dietl's last work *Zettl* (2011). Alexander Dittner proved his skill with animated films with *Die Konferenz der Tiere* (2010) and *Tarzan 3D* (2014).

Alexander Dittner was nominated for a German Film Award for his editing work on Oliver Hirschbiegel's drama *13 Minutes*. He also worked with Hirschbiegel on the highly acclaimed television series "The Same Sky" (2017). Most recently, Alexander Dittner edited Joachim Lang's *Mack the Knife - Brecht's Threepenny Film* (2018).

Ralf Wengenmayr

(Music)

Ralf Wengenmayr was born in Augsburg in 1965. In 1981 he started his degree in Piano and Composition at the University of Augsburg, but basically taught himself composition by studying the scores of great classical works. From 1984 onwards he was a solo and bar pianist; in 1987 he went on a European tour as a member of the "Original Broadway Show Company" with a production of "West Side Story". In 1989 he won the first German Film Music Competition in Berlin and has since worked on numerous scores for film and television.

His successful cooperation with director Michael Bully Herbig began with *Erkan & Stefan* (2000). Then came the soundtracks to *Manitou's Shoe* (2001), *Dreamship Surprise - Period 1* (2004), *Lissi and the Wild Emperor* (2007), *Vicky the Viking* (2009), *Buddy* (2013) and *Bullyparade - The Movie*. He also penned the music for Christian Ditter's 3D film *Vicky and the Treasure of the Gods* (2011) and *Love, Rosie - Für immer verliebt*. Ralf Wengenmayr wrote the music for Tobi Baumann's *Ghosthunters: On Icy Trails* (2015) and Dennis Gansel's novel adaptation *Jim Button and Luke the Engine Driver* (2018).

In addition to two nominations for the German Film Award in the Best Original Score category, the soundtrack to Leander Haußmann's *Hotel Lux* (2011) (starring Michael Bully Herbig) received the "Marc Aurelio Jury Award" at the International Film Festival in Rome. In 2012, Wengenmayr received a German Music Author Award in the "Film Score Composition" category. He was on the jury at the initial selection for the 2013 German Film Awards, the 2015 German Music Author Awards and the 2015 German Film Music Awards.

