

**STRAND
RELEASING**

presents

THE AUDITION

A FILM BY
INA WEISSE

Starring Nina Hoss, Simon Abkarian

PRESS NOTES

OFFICIAL SELECTION

Toronto International Film Festival

Country of Origin: Germany, France
Format: DCP / 1:1.85 / Color
Sound: Dolby 5.1 Surround
Running Time: 99 minutes
Genre: Drama
Not Rated
In German and French with English Subtitles

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SYNOPSIS

Anna Bronsky is a violin teacher at a music-focused high school. Despite the opposition of all other teachers, Anna drives through the admission of a student, Alexander, in whom she detects a remarkable talent. Committed, she prepares him for the intermediate exam and neglects her family – her son Jonas, whom she brings into competition with her new student, and her husband Philippe. Her colleague Christian, with whom she has an affair, persuades her to join a quintet. When she fails during their joint concert, the pressure mounts and she focuses all her attention on her student Alexander. Come the day of the exam, events take a tragic turn.

IN CONVERSATION WITH INA WEISSE

Just like *The Architect*, your first feature, *The Audition* is the product of your collaboration with Daphne Charizani. Did you do a lot of research to capture her world with such precision?

Daphne and I played cello and violin respectively for many years and were also members of an orchestra, so that world, and its often-excruciating practice regime, was very familiar to us. We set out to describe that process, the work that goes into music. Later, when scouting high schools with a music program, I met Ilja, who plays Anna's violin student. I spent a lot of time with him in his daily life prior to shooting.

Anna is a violin teacher and mother. Are her standards and harsh judgment of her own child the core and source of the drama?

The source is her quest for the absolute and her inflexibility toward herself. On top of an inferiority complex. From an early age on she discerned in a praise nothing but hidden criticism.

We tried to capture one woman's inner turmoil and insecurity. When you call everything into question, when you set high standards for yourself while riddled with the fear of failure, you become vulnerable because you know that no one can free you of doubt. Anna's conviction that music always comes first – that it's a constant struggle, that nothing can ever be good enough – puts her under great pressure. The pressure increases after it doesn't work out for her with the quintet, when she demands even greater excellence of her student. For her, it is all about the boy, but in the end, it is about her too.

Considerable life experience is there between the lines: the film does not dissect the complexity of relationships. For example, you show Anna's affair almost in passing. How did you settle on that narrative approach?

She has an affair that only seems to be shown in passing. Most likely, her husband knows about it, but there is real closeness and warmth between them. I did not want to judge.

Likewise, Anna's relationship with her father is only intimated.

You sense pain there and you imagine perhaps that she did not have an easy childhood, that there was suffering caused by her father.

As a mother, does Anna reproduce the behavior that she was confronted with as a child?

Yes and no. She fights it. She passes on to her son and her student the pressure that she feels. In that respect, she makes herself guilty. And she knows it.

Why doesn't Anna pick up on her son's suffering and jealousy?

She sees it and suppresses it despite her elevated sensitivity and ability to perceive nuances of tone. She imposes on her son the pressure to perform that she personally feels.

Her husband, the father of her child, is an extremely benevolent figure. Can you say a few words about him?

The father's affection for his son, unlike Anna's, is not bound by any conditions. He leaves his son free to choose. Likewise, with Anna, he sees her problems, but he does not intervene, because everybody must choose their own life. Compulsion and restrictions are not his style. He's there for her. And he sees the danger looming over the family. Simon Abkarian captured magnificently the different facets of the character.

Can Anna's intransigence and anger over her student's performance and posture be seen as a battle with herself? With her fears, failures and limitations?

Yes, Anna struggles to deal with her anxieties.

How did you approach the character and her inner contradictions with Nina Hoss?

I've been looking forward to working with her every day. She played this ambivalent character with great empathy. She acquired these musically difficult pieces on the violin in an admirable way.

How did you work with the other actors? How much freedom do you grant yourself on set?

It took some time to find the right actors to play the lover and the husband. Of course, I knew Simon Abkarian and Jens Albinus from their films, but when I met Simon in Paris and Jens in Copenhagen, it was immediately obvious how wonderful it would be to work together. The freedom on set came from trust, from mutual understanding of how to get the scene where it needed to be.

Is the trust you enjoy partly due to being an actor yourself?

I don't think so. I know the tricks of the trade, of course—mechanisms you can fall back on in certain situations. And I also know how brave and committed you need to be to allow yourself to get into certain situations.

Would you describe it as a quest for veracity?

Obviously, you look for the nub, the crux of a scene. You reach for its essence. And that process continues in editing, with Hansjörg Weißbrich. We kept on boiling it down to a concentrate.

How did you choose the pieces that are played in the film?

The Bach *Presto*, which the student practices, and Bach's *Chaconne* are pieces that every violinist plays at some point. They were chosen at an early stage. Unlike the concert that the school orchestra plays at the end of the film. I was looking for a piece whose mood would not be

a commentary on the film's ending. The song that Simon Abkarian sings at the beginning, *Le Temps des Cerises*, was an anthem of the Paris Commune. There was a German version by Wolf Biermann that I found very moving. The sudden hard cuts out of the musical pieces were decided on very early in the editing process and established the rhythm of the whole film.

The Audition is your second feature after The Architect. With producer Felix von Boehm and DP Judith Kaufmann, you also shot a documentary about the Neue Nationalgalerie.

Yes, Felix von Boehm was a close, trusted partner on both films. Judith Kaufmann has a precise, poetic eye that expresses itself in all her work. The same is true of Susanne Hopf, our production designer.

Would you say that the family and educational model described in the film has a certain German dimension? Does the film question today's Germany in relation to the German past?

Of course, a society is shaped by its history and develops a certain code of conduct. Each family reacts in its own specific way. However, the pressure exerted by early musical education, the drill that can also be observed in sport, is not an exclusively German phenomenon.

Would you say it's a female eye?

I don't know. I'd be more inclined to say empathetic.

INA WEISSE BIOGRAPHY

Born in Berlin, Ina Weisse studied drama at the renowned "Otto Falkenberg" school, and performed in various plays. After studying philosophy, she graduated from Hamburg Film Faculty. Her final project was awarded the "First Steps Award" in 2002.

Her debut feature film "Der Architekt" premiered at the Berlinale and won "Deutscher Filmpreis" for Best Actress and Best Screenplay at the Max-Ophüls Film Festival.

As an actress, she appeared in movies such as "Das Ende einer Nacht" ("Deutsche Fernsehpreis" for Best Actress, "Günther-Rohrbach-Filmpreis" and the "Adolf-Grimme-Preis"). In 2016 she won again the "Deutsche Fernsehpreis" for best actress for the films "Ich will dich" and "Ein großer Aufbruch".

NINA HOSS FILMOGRAPHY

2017 – *Return to Montauk* by Volker Schlöndorff

2014-2017 – *Homeland (TV Series)* created by H. Gordon & A. Gansa

2014 – *Phoenix* by Christian Petzold

2014 – *A Most Wanted Man* by Anton Corbijn

2013 – *Gold* by Thomas Arslan

- 2012 – **Barbara** by Christian Petzold
2007 – **Yella** by Christian Petzold
Silver Bear for Best Actress (Berlinale)
2006 – **The Elementary Particles** by Oskar Roehler
2003 – **Wolfsburg** by Christian Petzold

SIMON ABKARIAN FILMOGRAPHY

- 2019 – **The Swallows of Kabul** by Zabou Breitman & Eléa Gobbé-Mévellec
2017 – **Djam** by Tony Gatlif
2015 – **Don't Tell Me The Boy Was Mad** by Robert Guédiguian
2014 – **The Cut** by Fatih Akin
2014 – **Gett: The Trial of Viviane Amsalem** by Ronit & Shlomi Elkabetz
2012 – **Zero Dark Thirty** by Kathryn Bigelow
2009 – **Army of Crime** by Robert Guédiguian
2007 – **Persepolis** by Marijane Satrapi & Vincent Paronnaud
2006 – **Casino Royale** by Martin Campbell
2006 – **Armenia** by Robert Guédiguian
2004 – **Yes** by Sally Potter
2002 – **Ararat** by Atom Egoyan

JENS ALBINUS FILMOGRAPHY

- 2018 – **Lifeboat** by Josefin Kirkeskov
2015 – **Rosita** by Frederikke Aspöck
2014 – **Silent Heart** by Bille August
2013 – **Nymphomaniac Vol. 1** by Lars Von Trier
2010-2013 – **Borgen (TV Series)** – created by Adam Price
2007 – **Daisy Diamond** by Simon Staho
2006 – **The Boss Of It All** by Lars Von Trier
2000 – **Dancer In The Dark** by Lars Von Trier
2000 – **The Bench** by Per Fly
1998 – **The Idiots** by Lars Von Trier

CAST

Anna	Nina Hoss
Philippe	Simon Abkarian
Christian	Jens Albinus
Alexander	Ilja Monti
Jonas	Serafin Mishiev

CREW

Directed by

Ina Weisse

Written by

Daphne Charizani

Ina Weisse

Director of Photography

Judith Kaufmann

1st Assistant Director

Sandro Silva

Editor

Hansjörg Weißbrich

Original Sound

Guillaume Sciama

Sound Mixer

Bruno Tarrier

Casting Directors

Nina Haun (Germany)

Youna De Peretti (France)

Patrick Dreikauss (Germany – Children)

Production Designer

Susanne Hopf

Costume Designer

Petra Kray

Production

Lupa Film

Felix von Boehm

Production Manager

Sabina Belcher

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In Association with Port-Au-Prince, ZDF-ARTE, DFFF, MBB, MDM, FFA Mini-Traite/CNC, Panoptimo

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Strand Releasing

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