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Locarno Festival  
Concorso internazionale

**PRESSBOOK**

A FILM BY JAN SPECKENBACH

JOHANNA  
WOKALEK

**FREEDOM**

HANS-JOCHEN  
WAGNER



PLUTO FILM presents

# FREEDOM

A film by Jan Speckenbach

Germany, Slovakia 2017, 100 minutes

With Johanna Wokalek, Hans-Jochen Wagner, Inga Birkenfeld, Andrea Szabová, Ondrej Koval'

**World Premiere: 70. Festival del film Locarno**

**Section: Concorso Internazionale**



## LOGLINE

Nora walks out on her husband Philip and their children without a word of explanation. She is driven by an irresistible force. She wants to be free. Meanwhile, Philip is trying to manage his work and family life following her unexplicable disappearance. Philip's chain is the freedom Nora is looking for.

## SYNOPSIS

Nora (40) walks out on her husband and two children without a word of explanation. She is driven by an irresistible force. She wants to be free. She roams through a museum in Vienna, has sex with a young man and hitchhikes randomly on to Bratislava. She hides her identity by telling little lies. Once a woman of means leading a comfortable bourgeois life, Nora now changes her look, works as a maid and makes friends with a young Slovakian stripper, Etela, and

her husband Tamás, a cook. Meanwhile in Berlin, Nora's husband Philip is trying to manage the family, his job as a lawyer and his affair with Monika. Against his own convictions he has to defend a racist teenager in court. The only person Philip really opens up to is the unconscious coma patient beaten up by his young client. Nora's desire for freedom is Philip's chain.

# TECHNICAL DETAILS

Original Title	Freiheit
Genre	Drama
Country of Production	Germany, Slovakia
Year of Production	2017
Length	100 minutes
Shooting format	2K
Screening Format	DCP, 1:2,39, Dolby 5.1, 24fps
Languages	German, English, Slovak with English subtitles

# CAST

Nora	Johanna Wokalek
Philip	Hans-Jochen Wagner
Monika	Inga Birkenfeld
Etela	Andrea Szabová
Tamás	Ondrej Koval'
Lena	Rubina Labusch
Jonas	Georg Arms

# CREW

Director	Jan Speckenbach
Writer	Jan Speckenbach, Andreas Deinert
Director of Photography	Tilo Hauke
Editor	Jan Speckenbach
Production Designer	Juliane Friedrich
Sound Designer/Re-recording Mixer	Marian Mentrup
Producer	Sol Bondy, Jamila Wenske
Coproducer	Peter Badač, Jelena Goldbach
Production Company	One Two Films
Coproduction Company	BFILM, ZAK Film Productions
Financial Support from	Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, Kuratorium junger deutscher Film, FFA, Slovak Audiovisual Fund, ZDF - Das kleine Fernsehspiel



# DIRECTOR: JAN SPECKENBACH

Jan Speckenbach studied directing at the German Film and Television Academy (dffb) in Berlin. His short film **THE OTHER DAY IN EDEN** premiered at Cannes' Cinéfondation in 2008. One year later, his short film **SPARROWS** started a successful worldwide festival tour and qualified for the Oscar® as Best Live Action Short. Jan's debut feature film **REPORTED MISSING** premiered at the Berlinale and was nominated for the European Film Awards in 2012. His second feature **FREEDOM** will celebrate its world premiere in International Competition at Festival del film Locarno.

## Filmography (selection)

### **REPORTED MISSING** (2012), 90 minutes, 35mm

Festivals: Berlinale, Schwerin, CPH PIX Copenhagen, Busan, Cairo, Schwerin, Paris, Brasilia, Dublin, Glasgow, Taipei, Tokyo

Awards & Nominations: German Film Awards Shortlist, European Film Award Nominee – European Discovery

### **SPARROWS** (2009), 12 minutes, 35mm

Festivals: Cannes 2009 (Next Generation), Hof, Kiev, Lodz, Vienna, Hong Kong, Cleveland, Huesca, Bilbao, Uruguay, Bratislava, Berlin, Hamburg, Montreal, Dubai, New York, Paris, London, Tokyo, Buenos Aires, Warsaw, Moscow

Awards & Nominations: Premio Danzante for Best Short Film at Huesca Film Festival 2010, Oscar® Shortlist 2010 Best Live Action Short

[www.spatzen.net](http://www.spatzen.net)

### **THE OTHER DAY IN EDEN** (2008), 30 minutes, 35mm

Festivals: Cannes 2008 (Sélection Officielle – Cinéfondation), Hof, Rio de Janeiro, New York, Barcelona, Taipei, Lünen, Rome, Landshut, Bilbao

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Something fascinates me about disappearing. Already my first feature dealt with a missing daughter. Now in FREEDOM a mother leaves her family. The act of disappearing has two sides: there is temptation on the one hand, but brutality on the other. A woman walks out on her husband and her two children. A strong urge pulls her away, something inexplicable that she cannot resist. Her desire - or addiction? - for freedom leaves the others chained to their own uncertainty. One person's freedom is another person's prison.



# INTERVIEW WITH JAN SPECKENBACH

**Let's start with the title, FREEDOM. How did it come about?**

The title introduced itself at some point during the writing process. It originally had a sarcastic touch. Sarcastic, because Nora presumably won't find freedom. But the sarcasm has now retreated into the background for me. The film actually poses the almost provocatively general question as to freedom. For us all, the concept is a commonplace: so much a part of the myth of the Western world is our awareness that we enjoy freedom, that we no longer question it. But when you think about it at greater length, it suddenly collapses into its components and seems almost devoid of meaning.

Of course one must ask: freedom from what? The freedom that a refugee from the Middle East crisis zone yearns for is naturally not the freedom Nora seeks. It seems almost tasteless to compare the two. After all, she has everything: money, a husband, children, work, what more could she ask for? And yet she is evidently looking for something that goes beyond all this. Does she have the right to do so? That's where things get complicated. If you say no, you deprive her of some aspect of her freedom. If you say yes, you're joining her on her path.

**You vacillate between two perspectives, that of Nora, who leaves, and that of Philip, who remains. Each part has the potential for a**

**separate film.**

That was the difficulty. I was determined to tell both sides without denouncing either. It would have been easier to stay with one figure. But to me, that was excluded from the very beginning. I wanted the dialectic. I also wanted the paradoxical bond between these two characters. Both must change if they want to make their way, and both must also forget. I liked the idea that by her departure, Nora makes of Philip the man whom she might not have left. Which is why metamorphosis was so important to me - everyone should be transformed, parents and children alike, because life is a permanent transformation that we mostly aren't aware of. Thanks to the children, who grew almost two years older during the course of production, it becomes apparent that time cannot be turned back.

**In the last third of the film, you break with the chronological narrative style and suddenly jump back into the past.**

It's the evening before Nora leaves. The last evening as a family. We see her with the children, with her husband. She seems transported, absent, although she's still there. We gain insight into the mute state of the marriage, into Nora's perplexity, perhaps into her inner emptiness in this life of work and dinners, children and conversations. So many people, especially women, keep themselves on an even keel

with anti-depressants and beta-blockers. Nora abstains from all that. But it's apparent that her departure has nothing triumphant, nothing arrogant about it, but that she is driven by a wordless agony. It was important to me that you get a sense of her distress. You don't have to understand her. But you shouldn't condemn her.

**The River Lethe plays an important role, not least because of the introductory sentence, but also due to the presence of the Danube, on whose banks the cities of Vienna and Bratislava are situated.**

Berlin on the other hand only has the Spree, a pretty petty stream by comparison... Yes, the Lethe. I'm fascinated by the role of memory, for it is this that really constitutes us as human beings – and also the role of forgetting, which is a necessity for continued existence. People who cannot forget anything go insane. These days we have a very casual relationship with memory because we think we can save everything electronically. We take photos by the day, but hardly anyone still has these pictures ten or twenty years later. We have externalised memory, and thereby outsourced it. It's a sort of cultural amnesia. I exaggerate, of course. But something becomes apparent through this heightening. Forgetting, in the form of dementia, is also one of the civilisational diseases of our time. With dementia there is a tendency to run away, which is a huge problem in the care sector:

those suffering from the disease have to be locked away. The parallels are apparent. Why do those who lose their personality, be it by oblivion or otherwise, run away?

**Your main protagonist shares a name with the heroine of Ibsen's "A Doll's House". Nora and Philip are also lawyers, as is the husband of Ibsen's Nora, and, as in Ibsen's play, your Nora unflinchingly leaves her husband and children.**

The basic impulse is the same, and it has lost hardly any of its explosive force. In this, Ibsen was very successful. And the name is, of course, a bow to him. In Nora, when considered as by Ibsen, the origin of her search lies in the question as to who she really is. This is still provocative today. One's primary need to find oneself is more decisive than the responsibility towards others, including children.

My Nora is in a sense even more radical because she does not justify or express herself, she just acts. Why she takes this immense step will always remain undetermined, and why? Presumably because she doesn't know herself. Because only her path itself might explain why she took it. That's why I was more interested in what comes after the decision, and not so much in what led to it.

# CAST: JOHANNA WOKALEK

Johanna Wokalek is a German stage and film actress. She studied under Klaus Maria Brandauer at the Max Reinhardt Seminar in Vienna and in 1998 had her first movie role in Max Färberböck's *AIMÉE & JAGUAR*. Since then Wokalek has played in numerous movies and acted on stage. From 2010 to 2015 she was part of the permanent ensemble of the famous Vienna Burgtheater. In 2008 she received the Bambi Award for her portrayal of the Red Army Faction member Gudrun Ensslin in Uli Edel's *THE BAADER MEINHOF COMPLEX*. Other award-winning appearances in German films that Wokalek is best known for include Hans Steinbichler's *HIERANKL* and Til Schweiger's *BAREFOOT*. She played the lead role in Sönke Wortmann's film *POPE JOAN* in 2009. Since 2014 Wokalek has also been playing roles in operas, most recently in spring 2017, when she played the french speaking lead role in the highly praised enactment of Jeanne d'Arc at the Frankfurt Opera.

## Filmography (selection)

- 2017 **FREEDOM**
- 2015 **IN YOUR ARMS**
- 2012 **THE PURSUIT OF UNHAPPINESS**
- 2010 **THE COMING DAYS**
- 2009 **POPE JOAN**
- 2008 **THE BAADER MEINHOF COMPLEX**
- 2008 **NORTH FACE**
- 2007 **SILENT RESIDENT**
- 2005 **BAREFOOT**
- 2003 **HIERANKL**
- 1998 **AIMÉE & JAGUAR**

# CAST: HANS-JOCHEN WAGNER

Hans-Jochen Wagner (born December 20, 1968) is a German stage and film actor. After graduating from the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts in Berlin, he started at the Burgtheater Vienna in 1997. He played at various other theaters before coming to the Schauspielhaus Düsseldorf, where he has been part of the ensemble since 2006. His first leading role in a movie was 2003 in Stefan Krohmer's **THEY'VE GOT KNUT**. In 2012 Wagner received the Festival des deutschen Films Special Award, as part of the ensemble for Sören Voigt's film **IMPLOSION** and in 2014 at the Deutsches Fernsehkrimi Festival he received the Award for Outstanding Solo Performance in **POLIZEIRUF 110 - DER TOD MACHT ENGEL AUS UNS ALLEN**. Films that Wagner is best known for include Cate Shortland's **LORE**, Maren Ade's **EVERYONE ELSE** and Franziska Schlotterer's **CLOSED SEASON**.

## Filmography (selection)

- 2017 **FREEDOM**
- 2016 **THE BLOOM OF YESTERDAY**
- 2013 **SILENT SOMMER**
- 2012 **CLOSED SEASON**
- 2012 **LORE**
- 2011 **IMPLOSION**
- 2009 **EVERYONE ELSE**
- 2006 **WINDOWS ON MONDAY**
- 2006 - 2013 **POLIZEIRUF 110** (TV series)
- 2003 **THEY'VE GOT KNUT**

PLUTO FILM DISTRIBUTION NETWORK AND FILM KINO TEXT PRESENT A ONE TWO FILMS PRODUCTION IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH BFILM, ZAK FILM PRODUCTIONS AND ZDF - DAS KLEINE FERNSEHSPIEL  
JOHANNA WOKALEK AND HANS-JOCHEN WAGNER IN FREEDOM WITH INGA BIRKENFELD ANDREA SZABOVA ONDREJ KOVAL GEORG ARMS RÜBINA LABUSCH  
CINEMATOGRAPHY TILO HAUKE PRODUCTION DESIGN JULIANE FRIEDRICH 1. AC LUISE SCHRÖDER COSTUME DESIGNERS STEPHANIE RIESS ZUZANA HUDAKOVA ANNA WÜBBER  
MAKE-UP & HAIR MICHAELA PAYER EVA KRANICH ALINE SCHLEGEL PRODUCTION SOUND JAN HETMER TOBIAS RÜTHER ANDREAS SAMLAND SOUNDDESIGN & RE-RECORDING MIXER MARIAN ALEXANDER MENTRUP  
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CO-PRODUCERS PETER BADAC JELENA GOLDBACH PRODUCERS SOL BONDY JAMILA WENSKE WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY JAN SPECKENBACH

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