

# Speaking to Natja Brunckhorst – Two To One

**Director Natja Brunckhorst began her film career in the cult classic Christiane F. Here she talks about Bowie, Berlin and her new film, Two To One, which stars Sandra Hüller.**

Stories concerning The Berlin Wall in music, art and wider culture continue to fascinate and tell us something about the people and communities affected by it.

The new film, Two To One, captures an East German summer in 1990 with humour inspired by UK cinema, bright colours and stunning cinematography. The clothes and haircuts featured are a nostalgic nod to anyone who came of age in the late 1980s and early 90s.

Natja said: “I can’t stand bland and I have to look at it all the time! For me it’s important to make colourful pictures, we have this cliché that the East was dark and grumpy...no, it was summertime there too. My costume designer did a great job with the regional clothing.”

Two To One, which premiered earlier this year at the Glasgow Film Festival, stars German film star Sandra Hüller (Requiem, Zone of Interest) who delivers an excellent comic performance brimming with presence.



She continued: "It's a kind of gift she brings, that's why she is a star. You don't have to say too much. It's just wonderful to see all these actors, who are well-known in Germany,

together. What helps is a strong script and sending them out with a good feeling of the potential, they can smell it and know if it's good."

After a bunker full of banknotes is discovered that will soon be worthless and with the reunification of Germany coming into view, Maren (Hüller), along with her husband and ex-partner, develops a plan to benefit themselves and the wider community. The film never loses its light touch despite dealing with heavy political subject matter.

What the country has lived through in Germany's dark history, is conveyed through the characters.

Natja said: "I can't explain the film, it's done through the emotions and speeches of the characters, they are the heroes. I interviewed many people for the writing and they told me about the changes they had lived through, such as saving money and suddenly it's worthless; that's really destructive. At the same time, it's a comedy and deals with a family, you have to bring all these things together".

The spirit of the film suggests the great Ealing comedies such as *Whisky Galore* (1949) or even *The Italian Job* (1969) where the power lies in the ability of the ensemble to tell the story and provide laughs.

"East Berlin people have a restraint and humour of which I'm fond" added Natja, "it's a bit like British humour. Growing up the stars of Monty Python were my heroes".

Speaking of "Heroes" Brunckhorst was herself an actress starring in *Christiane F* about a teenage drug addict in West Berlin. What helped popularise the film was a David Bowie soundtrack which drew upon music associated with his time in Berlin. Bowie even made an appearance that was filmed in New York.

"This is a special story," she said. "I was 14, very young and

I didn't even know who Bowie was. I just started to listen to music and things like Grace Jones or whatever, I was told 'We will drive you to New York and you'll meet Bowie. He was working on a theatre project (on Broadway) performing as The Elephant Man. We travelled to New York in December 1980 to make the scene with Bowie and something happened. Just 15 blocks away John Lennon was shot and killed. From that moment Bowie was in shock and out of the film. Somehow our producer managed to persuade him to appear (performing Station To Station). We met and did the photograph where I sat on his knee but he was still in shock, I met him but I don't think I got to meet David Bowie because of this dramatic situation."

Fame and the early teenage years aren't a good combination and while Natja enjoyed the experience of making the film, the aftermath was a different matter.

She said: "I wasn't an actress; I was a girl. For the part they came to my school and asked if I wanted to be in the film, I was only 13 and I loved the shoot which was 84 days but after that, it was finished. I was back in my Berlin flat, my parents were away a lot of the time. I would travel on a regular school bus and everyone would be staring at me, it was no fun at all. Everywhere I went someone was staring at me. I cut my hair short and began to wear a suit that was from the 1950s. I met a boy who told me he was going to London the next day and I travelled with him and stayed there for a time. Then I did some modelling in Paris."

Natja returned to Berlin when she was 18.

Before directing she began to write for the screen and became well known in Germany for her work. She credits Christiane Felscherinow for the account provided in the book *Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo* (We Children From Zoo Station) which led to that first film opportunity in *Christiane F.*

"I'm very grateful to Christiane because she gave her story



which inspired the film, without that I wouldn't be here directing, I'd be a mathematician or something. I'm very thankful but also, it's part of my story and I can talk about it now. It's been 45 years since the film was made which is quite a time. In my next film, I'm hoping to use some Bowie songs, money is the problem but I will try".

During our interview on Zoom Natja pointed to a piano in the background which she plays to take a break from writing and find a connection to Bowie out there in the universe somewhere.

"I play Space Oddity" she admits, "it gives me joy."

Two To One is released in cinemas on Friday, 2 May.



Two to One



Natja



Two to One with Peter Hartwig