Peccadillo Pictures Present

BERLIN 36

Starring Karoline Herfurth (in Brian De Palma’s soon-to-be-released Passion)

Cert: 15(tbc) | Country: Germany | Runtime: 100 mins | Language: German
Extra Features: Interviews with cast, crew and Gretel Bergmann

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PLOT SYNOPSIS

1936 Olympics Games, Berlin. Hitler's Aryan policies and increasing racial discrimination against the Jews lead the USA to threaten a boycott insisting that Nazi Germany must allow Jews onto their team. They specifically demanded the participation of leading Jewish high jumper Gretel Bergmann (Karoline Herfurth - The Reader, Perfume).

The Nazis reluctantly include Gretel in their team, but to ensure that she doesn’t win gold they also include a mysterious rival, the unknown Marie Ketteler (Sebastian Urzendowsky – The Counterfeiters). Like Gretel, Marie is also an outsider and both athletes soon form a strong bond of friendship and mutual support. But Marie hides a dark secret known only to the Nazi elite, a secret so dangerous it could completely undermine their Olympics success.

Inspired by true events, Berlin 36 is one of the biggest untold Olympic scandals.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO ‘BERLIN 36’

THE BERLIN OLYMPICS – A HISTORY

From the very start, Pierre de Coubertin, who is considered creator of the modern-day Olympic Games, proclaimed the motto: "All types of sports, all nations." He demanded that the games should serve peaceful purposes and not be politically driven. They were to promote international understanding and tolerance among nations. As their symbol, he proposed in 1913 the five interlocked Olympic rings, which represent unity and harmony among the five continents.

On 13 May 1931 the President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Count Henri de Baillet-Latour, announced the official result of the vote for the assignment of the XI Olympic Summer Games. Berlin received the most votes. Just as today, the countries selected to carry out the games had to uphold the Olympic idea.

This met with considerable resistance among the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), however. The idea of the unification of all people displeased the NSDAP, since it ran counter to the party's own understanding of the dominance of one nation and one race.

On 30 January 1933 Adolf Hitler came to power, and in March the "Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda," headed by Dr. Joseph Goebbels, was founded. A little over a year later, on 27 July 1934, the "German Reich Society for Gymnastics" was founded, and was headed by Reich Sports Leader Hans von Tschammer und Osten. He was also president of the German Olympic Committee.
All other sports associations that had existed previously lost their independent status – sports had thus also been brought into line with Nazi ideology. As time went by and the discrimination and persecution of German Jews provoked a wave of outrage, especially in the United States, the Americans threatened to boycott Berlin as Olympic site.

Under international pressure, the Nazis attempted to present themselves to the world as tolerant. But the IOC repeatedly demanded a guarantee from the German regime that German Jews would be able to take part in the Olympics. Now the Nazi leadership had come up with a plan to ensure that Germany did not lose the Games. They promised to remove propaganda signs with the text "Jews undesired" and confirmed free access to the Games for "all races and confessions". Since the Americans initially put no faith in the promises of the Germans, they sent Olympic Committee head Avery Brundage to Germany in 1934 to get an impression of the situation there. After his six-day visit there he announced that the Games were in the right hands.

However, Brundage was not impartial: he had shown no interest in the fate of the Jewish population of Germany from the very start. He ignored reports about the discrimination of Jewish athletes and even before his journey to Germany, had endorsed the Olympics under the swastika, without any reservations. Moreover, he supported the suspension of two of the American sprinters who had qualified for the Games. The Germans had promised Brundage that 21 Jewish athletes had been invited to the training camp.

The Olympic Summer Games in Berlin were held from 1 to 16 August 1936 and were considered brilliantly organized. Even the Germany-critical New York Times called them the "greatest sports show in history," which was seen by 3.7 million people. Adolf Hitler opened the games on August 1, 1936, in front of no fewer than 120,000 people. As the nations marched by, the Germans gave the Hitler salute. However, since it is practically the same as the Olympic salute, even if the arm is not raised as high, it did not cause any undue commotion.

**GRETEL BERGMANN – TRUE LIFE STORY**

Gretel Bergmann was born in Laupheim near Ulm on 12 April 1914. She began her athletic career there as a high jumper. In 1933 she was barred from her club because of her Jewish background. She immigrated to London and became a British Master in 1934.

At the request of the Nazis, who feared that the U.S. and other important nations would withdraw their participation in the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin if German Jews were not allowed to participate, Gretel Bergmann returned from London. She was allowed to prepare in a training camp along with 20 other Jewish athletes. Shortly after she won the Württemberg Championship, but was denied a starting slot at the Olympics.
In a letter of 16 July 1936, sent one day after the Americans had boarded a ship for the journey to Berlin, she was informed that her achievements were allegedly unsatisfactory – even though she had set a German record with 1.60 meters shortly before and led that year’s list of the 30 best women high jumpers.

Disillusioned, she emigrated to the U.S. in 1937 and married the physician Bruno Lambert. In the U.S. Gretel Bergmann won the high jumping championships as Margaret Bergmann-Lambert in 1937 and 1938, and the shot-putting competition in 1937 as well. In 1942 she became an American citizen. In 1996 Margaret Bergmann-Lambert was inducted in the "National Jewish Sports Hall of Fame." In 1999 she obtained the Georg von Opel Award, which is presented to athletes who have actively contributed to the welfare of society or who had been active without the expectation of material rewards. A sports hall in Berlin and another in her hometown of Laupheim were named after her.

In 2004, when asked how far she thought she might have gotten at the Olympics, Bergmann replied: "Gold, it couldn't have been anything else. Gold. The more furious I was, the higher I jumped." She added: "To show what a Jewish girl was capable of in front of 100,000 people – that would have been sheer heaven."
CAST AND CREW BIOGRAPHIES

DIRECTOR - KASPAR HEIDELBACH


His directorial film debut was *Nie mehr zweite Liga* (2000), starring Peter Lohmeyer, Jochen Nickel and Dietmar Bär.

Heidelbach further garnered praise with the lavish historical drama *A Light in Dark Places* (2003), for which he won the Bavarian Television Award and the Grimme Award. Other films include the successful family comedy *Theo, Agnes, Bibi und die anderen* (2007) as well as the relationship TV drama *Die Katze* (2007) with Götz George and Hannelore Hoger in the lead roles.

In spring 2008 Heidelbach directed *Es liegt mir auf der Zunge* in which Jan Josef Liefers plays the first TV chef of the then young West Germany, Clemens Wilmenrod.

Following BERLIN '36, Heidelbach begun working on his next feature film BESONDERE SCHWERE DER SCHULD with Götz George in the lead role.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR – KASPAR HEIDELBACH

What was your first reaction when you heard about the true story of Gretel Bergmann?

At first, I simply couldn't believe it. Then I found it incredibly fascinating that a man was smuggled into the women's team. I kept thinking about all kinds of problems he would have had, and how he could have kept this a secret, but luckily scriptwriter Lothar Kurzawa also had many ideas about this.

We then dramatized the story, to a certain extent, and added a few more conflicts.

What was your intention in tackling the story of BERLIN '36?

There were three aspects for me: the true story, the historical surroundings and the drama. It was a rare gift that one of the persons involved is still alive today. I visited Gretel Bergmann last year in New York. I was very impressed, since she was a role model for us. In addition, it was also a lot of fun for me to create an artificial world and to set a finale in the Olympic Stadium.

After all your research, how would you describe the feeling of that time?

Independently of the regime, the people were proud that the Olympic Games could take place in Germany.
How did Gretel Bergmann react when she learned that a film about her was to be shot?

She has two sons, and one of them is a producer in California. The Americans once considered filming the story. But she said that if someone was to make it, then it had to be someone from Germany. After she gave her asset, she was exceptionally curious to see the film. She still has a wristwatch with German time, and when we paid her a visit, she cooked for us. Veal goulash, spaetzle and cucumber salad; a typical Swabian meal.

How did you decide on who to cast for the two lead roles?

I had been following the career of Karoline Herfurth since the very beginning. She was our first choice and I was happy that she immediately accepted. The difficult part, however, was casting the boy who was supposed to play a girl. I felt from the very start that you could not fake it and cast a girl who looked boyish. Sebastian Urzendowsky was my choice since he’s a good actor. When you see the person he plays in the original, Sebastian looks even more feminine.

Does the religious and racial aspect still play as big a role as back then?

When you hear what's going on in our sports arenas here and in Italy, then it becomes clear that racism is still always latently present, only that it is aimed at Blacks, unfortunately.
KAROLINE HERFURTH – GRETEL BERGMANN

Born in Berlin in 1984, Karoline Herfurth studied at the renowned acting school “Ernst Busch” and is considered as one of the rising young German talents.

At the age of 15 she starred in CRAZY (dir: Hans Kristian Schmid, 2000), and subsequent films include GIRLS ON TOP 2 (dir: Peter Gersina, 2004)

IN ANOTHER LEAGUE was honoured with the Audience Prize at the 26th Max Ophüls Awards of 2004 and the Bernhard Wicki Award at the 16th International Filmfest Emden-Aurich-Norderney in 2005. Her talent as an actress, and her nearly inexhaustible energy and charisma, then steered her toward a further career high point: she played the unforgettable role of the Mirabel Girl in Tom Tykwer’s bestseller adaptation PERFUME – THE STORY OF A MURDERER (2006).

Karoline then starred in the EMMY-Award nominated TV production Das Wunder von Berlin, directed by Roland Suso Richter. In 2007 Karoline Herfurth was awarded the Deutscher Entertainment Preis (DIVA) as New Talent of the Year and the TV MOVIE Award.

In 2008, she won the Bavarian Film Award 2008 as best newcomer for A YEAR AGO IN WINTER. Other films include Stephen Daldry’s Oscar-winning THE READER (2008), VINCENT WANTS TO SEA (2010), and ERRORS OF THE HUMAN BODY (2012). She has recently competed Brian de Palma’s PASSION (2012).

SEBASTIAN URZENDOWSKY – MARIE KETTELE

Sebastian began gathering experience in front of film and TV cameras as a child. Born in Berlin, he was discovered by talent scouts at his school and at the age of eight made his debut in the TV movie Babysitter.

His first major role was in Hendrik Handloetgen’s directorial debut PAUL IS DEAD (1998) inspired by the conspiracy theory surrounding the alleged auto accident of Paul McCartney in 1966. In the following years he starred in two Tatort episodes, and appeared in Dominik Graf’s Berlin Festival entry A MAP OF THE HEART, as well as in Hans Christian Schmid’s DISTANT LIGHTS.

He crafted an impressive performance as youthful child murderer Jürgen Bartsch in the film THE CHILD I NEVER WAS. Urzendowsky made his real breakthrough with the lead role in Matthias Luthardt’s film PINGPONG, which was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 2006 in the Semaine de la Critique.

In Stefan Ruzowitzky’s World War II drama THE COUNTERFEITERS, Sebastian plays the Russian concentration camp inmate Kolya Karloff, who is forced to work in the counterfeiter’s workshop. The film was awarded an Oscar for Best Foreign-Language Film. He has also appeared in TV series THE BORGIAS (2011).
CREDITS

CAST
Karoline Herfurth  Gretel Bergmann
Sebastian Urzendowsky  Marie Kettele
Axel Prahl  Hans Waldmann
Thomas Thieme  Hans von Tschammer und Osten
Robert Gallinowski  Sigfrid Kulmbach

CREW
Kaspar Hiedelbach  Director
Lothar Kurzawa  Screenplay
Hedy Altschiller  Editor
Achim Poulheim  Art Director
Götz Weidner  Set Director
Lucia Faust  Costumes
Arno Steffen  Music
Gerhard Schmidt  Producer

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About Peccadillo Pictures:
Peccadillo Pictures is one of the UK’s most recognised film distributors of Art House, Gay & Lesbian and World Cinema titles with an impressive collection of films from across the world. Launched in 2000, Peccadillo nurtures new and upcoming talent alongside established directors. In addition, Peccadillo Pictures also distributes short films and re-releases of classic titles. As well as bringing an array of films to cinemas across the UK and Ireland, Peccadillo provides film viewing on a variety of platforms, from online, video on demand, iTunes, Blu-ray and DVD.