

# DIRECTOR PORTRAIT



Isabel Kleefeld

Born in Düsseldorf, **Isabel Kleefeld** partly financed her studies at Berlin's Free University and the University of Arts (HdK) by working as an editorial assistant on programs produced at local broadcaster SFB and later as a production assistant and script/continuity consultant on various films. After graduation in 1993, she worked as a first assistant director for such colleagues as Detlev Buck (JAIL-BIRDS), Sönke Wortmann (THE CAMPUS), Lars Becker (KANAK ATTACK) and Oliver Hirschbiegel (THE EXPERIMENT) before making her directorial debut in 2001 with the TV film SCHLUSS MIT LUSTIG which earned third place in Studio Hamburg's Young Director's Prize. Her 2004 TV film DAS GESPENST VON CANTERVILLE received a Best Film nomination at the 2005 German Television Prize and won the Bavarian Television Award for Best Director. In 2007, she was awarded the highly regarded Adolf Grimme Prize for her screenplay and direction of ARNIES WELT. Last year, Kleefeld made her feature film directorial debut with RUHM, an adaptation of Daniel Kehlmann's bestseller *Fame: A Novel in Nine Episodes*. Her other films include: KÖNIGSKINDER (TV, 2002), MORD AUF REZEPT (TV, 2005), UNTER VERDACHT – EIN NEUES LEBEN (TV, 2006), UNTER VERDACHT – DIE FALSCH FRAU (TV, 2008), SLEEPLESS (SCHLAFLOS, TV, 2008), MAMA KOMMT! (TV, 2008), and BLOND BRINGT NIX (TV, 2009).

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## THE ALL-ROUNDER

### A portrait of director Isabel Kleefeld

"I have been blessed by good fortune and happy coincidences," says writer-director Isabel Kleefeld, who had originally considered a career in journalism when she came to study Politics, Journalism and Communications at the Free University in Berlin in the late 1980s.

It was during this time that she began working as a production assistant at the local public broadcaster SFB on political and entertainment magazine programs to help finance her studies. "Then, through a commissioning editor for the TATORT crime series at the station, I was asked if I might be interested in working as an assistant director on some productions," Isabel recalls, adding that she also served as a script and continuity consultant and finally decided to stay in the film industry once she graduated from Berlin's University of Arts (HdK) in 1993.

Over the next seven years, Isabel established herself as a first AD working with such directors as Sönke Wortmann, Detlev Buck, Rainer Kaufmann, Oliver Hirschbiegel and Christian Zübert.

"They were my film school where I learned my craft," she continues. "I had the chance to work on different kinds of productions and for production companies as diverse as Constantin Film, Claussen+Wöbke, BojeBuck and Little Shark Entertainment. It was through this work as an assistant director that I developed my own taste and got to know the kind of things I like."

Isabel suggests that it was "more by chance" that she then came to have a crack at directing itself. "Oliver Stoltz of Dreamer Joint Venture and screenwriter Martin Gypkens approached me to work with them on a project. It was to be Oliver's first time as an independent producer for TV, Martin's as a writer, and my debut as a director. The project was SCHLUSS MIT LUSTIG for Pro7."

This first TV movie was crowned with success with the awarding of one of Studio Hamburg's Prizes in 2001, but Isabel imagined that she would carry on as before as a first AD.

"I didn't expect to get another offer so quickly to direct because I hadn't come up the classical way through film school," she says. "Being a lateral entrant would be much harder nowadays than it was, say, 10 years ago."

However, the last ten years have seen her working as a director for public and private broadcasters on TV movies, with the spectrum of genres stretching from thriller through family entertainment to comedy and drama.

Her 2002 TV film *KÖNIGSKINDER*, produced by Studio Hamburg for ZDF, won the German Television Prize's Promotion Award for the two young lead actors Luise Helm and Adrian Topol, while the SAT.1 TV movie *DAS GESPENST VON CANTERVILLE* earned her a Bavarian Television Award in the category of Best Direction and a nomination for the German Television Prize in 2005.

In 2007, her episode of the *UNTER VERDACHT* series (*EIN NEUES LEBEN*) was nominated for the Adolf Grimme Prize, while the WDR TV film *ARNIES WELT*, which premiered at the Hof International Film Festival, came away with a Grimme Prize for her screenplay and direction on this Little Shark Entertainment production. A second Grimme Prize went that year to the film's lead actors Caroline Peters, Matthias Brandt and Jörg Schüttauf, while Enno Hesse was awarded the Günter Strack Newcomer Prize for his performance. In 2009, Senta Berger received the German Television Prize and the 2010 Golden Camera for her performance in Kleefeld's WDR TV film *SLEEPLESS*.

Isabel admits that offers to direct for the cinema came in "every now and then, but I felt, that if I do something for cinema, then it should be something I would personally like to see in the cinema. Many of the story ideas I got to read would be great for TV, but were not really for cinema."

Then, by coincidence, she read some of Daniel Kehlmann's novels and said to the producers Christoph Friedel and Tom Spiess that she would be interested in adapting the work of Daniel Kehlmann for the cinema.

As a result, in 2008, she met Kehlmann who gave her the galleys of his new novel *Fame*. By July 2009, Isabel had completed the first draft of her screenplay for the adaptation of the book. "It was an extremely pleasant collaboration," she recalls.

"I only adapted six of the novel's original nine episodes because we wanted to focus on the central themes in this complex tragicomedy," she explains.

The electrical engineer Joachim Ebling (Justus von Dohnányi) buys a mobile telephone and receives calls which are supposed to be for someone else. The famous actor Ralf Tanner (Heino Ferch) is no longer called from one day to the next as if somebody had taken over his life. The writer Leo Richter (Stefan Kurt) is being accompanied by his girlfriend, the doctor Elisabeth (Julia Koschitz), on a reading tour through South America to present an as-yet-unpublished story to his audience. The terminally-ill Rosalie (Senta Berger) is looking for deliverance at a Swiss association for assisted suicide, yet doesn't really want to part company with this life. Meanwhile, the internet blogger Mollwitt (Axel Ranisch) doesn't desire for anything more than to leave this world to be able to get to know Lisa, a character in one of Leo Richter's novels. And the crime authoress Maria Rubinstein

(Gabriel Maria Schmeide) steps in as a replacement for Leo and goes missing on an adventurous tour through the East.

The European co-production by Cologne-based Little Shark Entertainment and Terz Filmproduktion with Switzerland's Hugofilm Productions and Austria's DOR Film Produktionsgesellschaft was shot over 39 shooting days during autumn 2010 and April 2011 at locations in North Rhine-Westphalia, Argentina, Mexico, Switzerland and the Ukraine.

*RUHM* was Isabel's sixth collaboration with cinematographer Rainer Klausmann and she could also draw on the services of other members from her "film family" such as the film editor Andrea Mertens and production designer Andrea Kessler.

She admits that filming in these exotic locations – from Mexico's Cancun to the Crimean peninsula – was "quite an adventure. But it was all there in the original stories that they are set around the world. What fascinated me on *RUHM* was this feeling of being everywhere but actually nowhere, the constant search for identity in persistent mobility and communication which sometimes ends with disastrous or with absurdly funny consequences."

Martin Blaney