



TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

FRIDAY
FEBRUARY 3, 2017
7:00PM • WHITNEY
HUMANITIES CENTER

PRESENTED WITH
SUPPORT FROM
PAUL L. JOSKOW
'70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.

THE LIVES OF OTHERS



Set in the German Democratic Republic before Perestroika and the fall of the Berlin Wall, director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's debut feature *THE LIVES OF OTHERS* tells the story of a playwright, an actress, and the Stasi agent assigned to spy on them. The complicated web of morality that develops among the officer and his targets is the backdrop for a fierce indictment of the corrupt East German regime, as well as a tribute to the good people forced to make impossible choices within it.



Von Donnersmarck, the son of a member of the German nobility who worked as a Lufthansa executive, was raised in Germany, Belgium, and New York, studied Russian in St. Petersburg in the final days of the Soviet Union, and earned a graduate degree in philosophy, politics, and economics at Oxford. While at Oxford, he won an essay competition that granted him an apprenticeship to work with Richard Attenborough on the film *IN LOVE AND WAR* (1996). After the conclusion of the apprenticeship, von Donnersmarck enrolled at the University for Television and Film in Munich, where he made a number of award-winning short films.

While at film school, von Donnersmarck wrote an outline for a story called "Sonata for a Good Man," about a Stasi officer and the playwright he is tasked with surveilling. Over the next three years, he polished the script and assembled funding for the film, which was shot at the end of 2004. The film, hailed by *The New York Times*' A.O. Scott as "a suspenseful, ethically exacting drama, beautifully realized" by a director who "demonstrates astonishing visual and narrative rigor," seemed to come out of nowhere, and announced a bold new talent.

The great strength of *THE LIVES OF OTHERS* lies in the way it manages a delicate balancing act incorporating careful historical detail and the suspenseful twists of a spy thriller. Some of von Donnersmarck's influences indicate the inspiration for this balance. Quoted in a 2007 *New York Review of Books* piece about the film, he mentions two films he admires: Claude Lanzmann's *SHOAH* and Anthony Minghella's *THE TALENTED MR. RIPLEY*. Combining historical rigor from one and suspense and deception from the other, von Donnersmarck finds a balance that doesn't do a disservice to historical fact (despite some noted mistakes and inconsistencies) and keeps the viewer engaged through the trappings of a stylish thriller.

At the heart of the film is Ulrich Mühe, who plays Hauptmann Gerd Wiesler of the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, the State Security police who are otherwise known as the Stasi. Mühe was born in Sachsen in the German Democratic Republic, and was a former Berlin Wall border guard who became a much-honored actor on stage, television, and film. He won international acclaim for his role as the troubled Hauptmann Wiesler, including the Best Actor prize at the Bavarian Film Awards, the German Film Awards, and the European Film Awards. He became ill with stomach cancer not long after making the film, and passed away the summer after its wide release in 2007.

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
FLORIAN HENCKEL VON DONNERSMARCK
(2006) 137 MINS.
DISTRIBUTED BY **SONY PICTURES CLASSICS**
STARRING
**MARTINA GEDECK, ULRICH MÜHE,
SEBASTIAN KOCH, AND ULRICH TUKUR**
ACADEMY AWARD WINNER,
BEST FOREIGN LANGUAGE FEATURE

DID YOU KNOW: VON DONNERSMARCK FOLLOWED UP *THE LIVES OF OTHERS* WITH *THE TOURIST* (2010), STARRING JOHNNY DEPP AND ANGELINA JOLIE. THE FILM, A REMAKE OF A 2005 FRENCH THRILLER, WAS MET WITH OVERWHELMINGLY NEGATIVE REVIEWS, AND THE DIRECTOR HASN'T RELEASED A FILM SINCE. THIS NOVEMBER, HIS THIRD FEATURE, *WERK OHNE AUTOR* (WORK WITHOUT AUTHOR), REUNITES THE DIRECTOR WITH *THE LIVES OF OTHERS* STAR SEBASTIAN KOCH AND RETURNS TO FAMILIAR TERRITORY: TWENTIETH CENTURY GERMAN HISTORY.

NEXT UP: CELEBRATE THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE AMERICAN RELEASE OF *THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS* (1966), DIRECTOR GILLO PONTECORVO'S SEMINAL FILM ABOUT THE ALGERIAN WAR AGAINST THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT OF NORTH AFRICA. **THURSDAY, MARCH 2 AT 8:00 P.M.**