

FRANZ SEITZ FILM, BIOSKOP FILM, ARTEMIS FILM,
HALLELUJAH FILM, GGB (GERMANY) & ARGOS FILMS (FRANCE)
PRESENT

"THE TIN DRUM"

THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY GÜNTER GRASS
STARRING DAVID BENNETT, ANGELA WINKLER, KATHARINA THALBACH,
MARIO ADORF, DANIEL OLBRYCHSKI, BERTA DREWS, TINA ENGEL,
HEINZ BENNETT, ERNST JACOBI, ANDRÉA FERRÉOL, CHARLES AZNAVOUR
& JEAN-CLAUDE CARRIÈRE

ORIGINAL MUSIC MAURICE JARRE EDITOR SUZANNE BARON
ART DIRECTION NICOS PERAKIS SET DIRECTION BERND LEPEL
CINEMATOGRAPHY IGOR LUTHER

PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR EBERHARD JUNKERSDORF

PRODUCED BY

FRANZ SEITZ, VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF, EBERHARD JUNKERSDORF
AND ANATOLE DAUMAN

SCREENPLAY BY

JEAN-CLAUDE CARRIÈRE, FRANZ SEITZ,
VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF & GÜNTER GRASS

DIRECTED BY VOLKER SCHLÖNDORFF

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Foreign Sales

Florence Dauman

ARGOS FILMS

26 rue Montrosier

92200 Neuilly-sur-Seine, France

Tel: +33 (0)147229126 Fax: +33 (0)146400205

Mobile: +33 (0)6 85 02 92 74

argos.films@wanadoo.fr

Public Relations

Lucius Barre

Mobile: +1-917-353-2268

lucius@rcn.com

Thirty-one years after having won the Palme d'or for "The Tin Drum," Volker Schlöndorff returns to Cannes with The Director's Cut, presenting for the first time his original vision of Günter Grass's literary masterpiece.

Questions to Volker Schlöndorff

Why the Director's Cut now?

The rough cut of the movie, which we showed Günter Grass, ran 2 hours and 45 minutes. It left out a number of scenes we had shot but not printed. Meanwhile, our distribution agreement with United Artist forced us to cut the film down to 2 hours and 15 minutes, which was the maximum running time possible for theatres to book two evening screenings. Therefore, we resolved to polish the existing cut and never even looked at all the other material, much less take the time to edit it.

When the movie turned out to be a big success in the shorter version, we – of course – did not want to diminish the honours bestowed at Cannes and at the Oscars by letting the world know we thought the film was incomplete. Billy Wilder quite rightly reminded me at the time: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

Last summer, I was asked whether the lab storing the negatives of unused footage should renew our space rental agreement or dispose of the material. The question instantly piqued my interest in seeing how the material we left out could work nowadays; and I went to work right away to find out. First of all, we discovered images of impressive quality: maiden-like negatives, which had never been touched by a single hand since the reel had been taken out off the camera 30 years earlier. I turned to my working script, where I had made notes and comments on every single set up and shot. That document helped shape my pre-selection and sorting out of the raw material.

We were able to use Maurice Jarre's original recordings and only some voices had to be overdubbed by the actors, as those tapes had deteriorated. It was difficult for the 42-year old David Bennent to replicate his 12-year old voice, but digital processing provided a solution.

Which scenes are new?

For over 30 years, Mario Adorf rightfully complained that the cuts had damaged his role in the film. As he writes in his most recent book, "Mazerath, who was at first absolutely enthusiastic about the Nazis - declaring "we are experiencing historical hours, you can't be a bystander, you have to participate!" - suddenly rebelled when euthanasia orders classified Oskar as an unworthy living human being. He even managed to resist and prevent Oskar's being taken away. Actually, the surge of his resistance was of prime importance for rounding out his character.

I also vividly remembered the "Rasputin" scene we shot, in which Oskar imagines orgies at the court of Saint Petersburg. Screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière played the part of the bully Rasputin surrounded by naked playmates. It was hilariously funny for those of us on set. So 31 years later, Carrière gets to reappear as a young man. Moreover, David Bennent is unbelievable in that scene, when he launches into a long monologue directly into the camera about Goethe and elective affinities, without once batting an eye.

Finally, and probably most importantly, we were able to re-cut the whole scene with Fajngold, who was the Treblinka survivor. It accurately portrays the historical background of the displacement of the Germans in Danzig.

To give today's audience a better understanding of the period, I used old newsreels as "time markers." The movie is not only about the little big Oskar it is about contemporary history too. In line with the book, the film is an epic.

I am really glad that I finally had the chance to rework the movie and to complement it. Of course, I had to polish up some minor flaws for the Director's Cut, but, in the end, we did not want a totally different movie; we wanted to produce the real one - the complete one - the one we shot back then. It will be exciting to see which of the two versions will become definitive in the long run.

Notes by Franz Seitz

In April 1975, I asked Günter Grass to grant me the film rights to "The Tin Drum." At first, he wanted to know what my approach to the material would be. Two months later, Grass looked over the 50-page treatment I had prepared and agreed to let me go forward. I wrote a first draft of the script, which was awarded a prize in 1976. After overcoming the temptation to confide in a foreign director to tell this very German story, I approached Volker Schlöndorff, whose first film "Young Törless," I had produced.

Notes by Günter Grass

Since 1959, when "The Tin Drum" was first published, every two years I received an offer for a film adaptation. What was suggested was always insufficient, only concerned with certain aspects of the book and only corresponding to a limited vision of the work. Then came Seitz and Schlöndorff.

In Schlöndorff I found a true *interlocutor*, someone who provoked me with his questions, who delved into the heart of the subject and who, during our dialogue, forced me to reconsider a book from which I had become detached. Thanks to Schlöndorff's provocative questions, I was able to collaborate on the dialogue for the film.

I saw straight away that he had understood the epic dimensions of the book. I also felt that he would be forceful enough to reshape the material, not to follow the book slavishly, and to replace the ways of literature with those of cinema.

Notes by Jean-Claude Carrière

This is the story of Oskar: an uncommon childhood, the world about him, the wonders and dangers of the city, the rise of Nazism. He witnesses the attack on the Polish post office. It was there the first shots of the Second World War were fired.

The war is seen as never before: dramas and madness, Oskar's rebellions, his fun and his loves – until he is forced to leave for the West in 1945. The West, where "everything is better."

It is, first of all, a realistic film, deeply rooted in the Danzig lower middle-class, with its pettiness, its fears and, at times, with a certain grandeur.

It is also a fantastic, barbarous film, in which shafts of black light suddenly pierce the suburban streets, the small shops, the monotony, and the daily round. This second, ever present dimension, explosive, haunting, rises as prosaic reality from the ground.

And it is the story of Oskar, the incredible drummer who beats out his anger, who shouts his existence and who has decided to remain small among "the giants."

Notes by Volker Schlöndorff

13 February 1978

Visiting Grass for three days with Jean-Claude Carrière. "Not Catholic enough, too analytical, too articulated," he said of our script. He missed the irrationality, the abrupt origins of historical events, and the plot intersections where everything tragically collided. On the one hand he insisted on a more hardened realism and encouraged surreal touches on the other: Fantasy as an integral part of reality – Oskar's reality.

These few key words were enough for us to begin a new draft and the detour from our linear version proved quite useful. We departed from the novel, creating an autonomous narrative for the film, one that we can improve, discard, and bring to life. Grass agrees to initially conclude the film in 1945.

14 May 1978

Again with Grass, this time on the Elbe about thirty miles northwest of Hamburg, and almost a year after our first visit. The finished script, hopefully more Catholic and less rational, is much more detailed and will make a two-and-a-half hour film. We polish the dialogue once more, which is a lot of fun. It's not a comedy, but nevertheless very funny.

No mistrusting the filmmaker anymore and no fear of the author. A year's work brought us closer together. "Next time we'll just start by writing an original script," he said as I left.

Only when Günter Grass sent me to Gdansk, when I saw the suburbs, places where the old stores once existed, I realized that this is a very realistic book, almost a documentary report.

The decision to make a film is born in a split second and is usually a product of emotion, rather than consideration. "The Tin Drum" really poses questions about the meaning of childhood, the observing of adults, and of the meaning of pain after losing one's mother and father. I don't think it a mere coincidence that Grass, who was born in Gdansk, wrote a book about his childhood. I still see this town as a "toy-town," where one can explore like a child in a Legoland, endlessly admiring the facades, spires, churches, and defense walls. When seeing it all and reminiscing about childhood dreams, one can believe that Gdansk is exactly such a dream fulfilled.

29 August 1978

Ocean beach at Brösen. Maria frightens Oskar with her black triangle. It is one of the few scenes for which I have storyboarded every angle, because Katharina Thalbach does not want to appear naked. The restriction turns to our advantage, since Oskar's glance contains more tension and eroticism than the display of genitalia. It is enough for the viewer to be under the impression that the two are naked.

To top things off, there was a storm and it rained the whole day. We brought heaters in and tried to warm up the cabin as David and Kathi, wrapped in a blanket, were getting used to one another. There was real chemistry between the two. David's wide-eyed look, as she suddenly stands naked before him, expresses shock and amazement in so hugely exaggerated and grotesque manner, that there was no embarrassment.

David and Oskar – Notes by Volker Schlöndorff

David Bennent, who plays Oskar, was born on September 9, 1966, in Lausanne. He is the son of actor Heinz Bennent and dancer Diana Bennent.

The protagonist of "The Tin Drum" could not have been an actor playing a child. It had to be a real child – a child that could understand problems comparable to those of Oskar Mazerath.

David is a medium. He has grasped the novel so well, we have read it to him so often and he has questioned it so frequently, that he became part of every situation. When the character was three-years old, David arrived on the set with his face covered in cake and behaved like a child. When he was to be eighteen, David mimed the adults he had observed and behaved quite like a young man. When he played the lover, David did not leave his partner all day; and in her dressing room slipped under her skirt.

And then in a flash he was able to take himself out of the part and tapped on his drum, no longer like Oskar Matzerath but like David Bennent. He used the drum to create a distance between himself and Oskar. It was both a link and a retaining wall.

Oskar Matzerath is neither an extraordinary child nor an abnormal child. He is a deeply normal child. The way he looks at the adult world is the way any child looks at his world: the more adult they are, the more grown-ups expose themselves to a touch of infantilism, without ever again touching on the seriousness of childhood.

While directing the story of Oskar, I often had the feeling of catching up and of reliving with David my own lost childhood.