

# Peterborough Arts Cinema

Films that make you think

Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> June at 7:30pm

**Toni Erdman** (2016)

US | 2h 42min, cert R (Number 1 Critics' choice)

**Director:** Maren Ade,  
**Stars:** Sandra Huller, Peter Simonischek & Michael Winterbottom

Winfried doesn't see much of his working daughter Ines. He pays her a surprise visit in Bucharest, where she's busy as a corporate strategist. The geographical change doesn't help them to see more eye to eye. Practical joker Winfried annoys his daughter with corny pranks and jabs at her routine lifestyle of meetings and paperwork. Father and daughter reach an impasse, and Winfried agrees to go home to Germany. Enter Toni Erdmann: Winfried's flashy alter ego.



Maren Ade has slowly and persistently become one of the most exciting filmmakers in Germany and since her rousing comedy "Toni Erdmann" she is considered to be the saviour of German cinema.

She had already triggered enthusiastic reactions with her romantic drama *Alle Anderen* (Everyone Else), which was awarded, among other things, the Silver Bear for Best Film at the 2009 International Film Festival in Berlin. And six years before in 2003, the young and talented director had stunned the critics with the low-budget drama *Der Wald vor lauter Bäumen* (The Forest for the Trees) that also won many awards. Maren Ade is a bit like an eternal insider tip. She invests so much time making her films that the final product comes over as a diamond solitaire, a sparkling little masterpiece that cannot be put into any category.

Maren Ade, a member of the so called Berliner Schule, a group of filmmakers who made a name for themselves with sober, even unwieldy, everyday stories, has been classed as superficial, but the concentration, sensitivity and especially the sense of humour that go into Ade's character dramas prove her to be a filmmaker in a league of her own. Even her university graduation film *Der Wald vor lauter Bäumen* (The Forest for the Trees) that was shot with a video camera – a study of the increasing desperation of a young teacher – bears the hallmark of particularly masterful direction. It is about a freshly graduated teacher, Melanie Pröschle, who has a strong Swabian accent and who wants to bring "a breath of fresh air" into the school. Unfortunately she fails in the most touchingly awkward way, both in her classroom as well as in her private life. It was with Melanie Pröschle that Maren Ade, a teacher's daughter from Baden, succeeded in creating a most distinctive, unmistakable character.

Unlike her film characters, who are struggling to make it in life, the path taken by Ms. Ade was surprisingly straightforward. Born in Karlsruhe in 1976, she was given a video camera at the age of 14 and made films with friends. She did an internship at a production company, spent a lot of time in art-house cinemas - "American independents" she recalls, "and not Godard," and in 1998 applied to the Munich Film School for a place to study directing and got one straight away. During her studies she founded the production company Komplizen Film with a fellow student, with whom she has since been able to not only get her own film projects of the ground, but also those of other "Berliner Schule" directors like Valeska Grisebach, Vanessa Jopp and Benjamin Heisenberg. Ms. Ade, who has two children with her partner, director Ulrich Köhler (*Schlafkrankheit* / Sleeping Sickness), is a career woman who has to reconcile her demanding job with her family life. (Incidentally, her second son was born during the post-production phase of *Toni Erdmann*.) As her own boss she is indeed in the comparatively luxurious position of being able to create her own working conditions. Nevertheless, "the central task of shooting a film is extremely stressful" and that is why she only makes a movie every seven years, "every two years just wouldn't work for me".

It is not only for that reason that her films require a long maturation process. A real business consultant, with whom she exchanged ideas extensively, served as a model for her protagonist Ines in *Toni Erdmann*. She can also see herself in the perfectionist Ines, "In filmmaking you have to aim high – very high." The film d'auteur director usually works with established theatre actors, for her demand that they should always be "of the moment" can only be fulfilled by actors who have experience of theatre rehearsals. "I always feel drawn towards the figures - I work a lot with subtexts when I write the scenes, with the characters' wants and wishes." It is the hurtful words in the dialogues, in particular, that are tuned with the finest needle. Ms. Ade is notorious for faithfully implementing her scripts word for word and repeating scenes up to 40 times. "I love playing with all the variants, fiddling around with the dramatic composition." Due to her incisive psychological approach she is, at the same time, able to avoid clichés: "It's like with any bogeyman – the closer the contact you have with him, the more he falls apart a little."

The secret of her cunningly devised comedy is the “Cringe Factor” French critics, in particular, were enthusiastic about these burlesque moments that do not happen very often in German films. They praised the film that was both cerebrally intellectual and fleet-footed at the same time, calling it a “gem” and a “euphoric pill”.

“For the time being I have nothing more to say,” says the acclaimed director and wants to “really take her time” with her next film.

Edited by Alex O'Reilly

