



MFG
BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG

FILM FACTS

Southwest

2.2026 May

IN FOCUS: CANNES

"Gabin" Selected for the Quinzaine des Cinéastes

IN FOCUS: VFX AND ANIMATION

The Wonderfully Weird World of "Gumball"
Scores BAFTA Nomination 2026

IN FOCUS: ANIMATED WEEK

Trailblazer at 70:
ROLAND EMMERICH Back Where It All Began

WHAT'S UP?

"Four Minus Three" / "Allegro Pastell" /
"Ozi: Voice of the Forest" And More

WHAT'S COMING?

"Don't Be a Stranger" / "House of Yang" / "Tamim"

WHO WINS?

Cartoon Movie Names REZA MEMARI Director of the Year
11 German Film Award Nominations for MFG-Funded Films



film.mfg.de

04-07

IN FOCUS: CARL BERGENGRUEN

Thirteen years at the helm of MFG: CARL BERGENGRUEN has shaped Baden-Württemberg as a leading film and media location, setting new directions with targeted funding, VFX, animation and Green Shooting. On 1 July 2026, he hands over to Wiebke Wiesner

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IN FOCUS: ITFS

ITFS turns Stuttgart into a global hub for animation. Festival directors MOZER and RICHTER discuss anniversaries, emerging talent and the future of animated film

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"Denn dieses Leben lebst nur Du" A finely balanced lightness

"Ozi: Voice of the Forest" When Hollywood gives the rainforest a voice—LEONARDO DICAPRIO

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DEAR READERS,

This issue is published in two languages. Not as a gesture, but as a reflection of reality: Baden-Württemberg is an international hub—visible in Stuttgart, present in Cannes, Annecy, and Hollywood.

How closely these layers are intertwined is demonstrated by Stuttgart Animated Week, comprising the International Festival of Animated Film, FMX, and the Animation Production Days. Here, festival, technology, and market converge.

The fact that ROLAND EMMERICH returns to his Swabian roots for FMX—a director who early on showed that spectacular genre cinema could emerge from Germany and later helped shape the evolution of visual effects from Hollywood—symbolizes this connection. At the same time, the APDs celebrate their 20th anniversary: two decades in which ideas became projects, projects became co-productions, and encounters evolved into lasting partnerships.

This strength is also reflected in recent successes. At the European animation forum Cartoon Movie in Bordeaux, REZA MEMARI was named 'Director of the Year' for his MFG-funded film "The Last Whale Singer." BAFTA nominations for "The Wonderfully Weird World of Gumball" in the categories 'Children's: Scripted' and 'Children's Craft Team' stand as examples of international visibility.

At the 62nd Grimme Awards, three MFG-funded productions—"The Empty Grave," "Elbow," and "Lena's Farm"—were honored, with additional projects receiving nominations. The region is also strongly represented at the 2026 German Film Awards: six MFG-funded films account for eleven nominations,



Carl Bergengruen, Managing Director of MFG Medien- und Filmgesellschaft Baden-Württemberg

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alongside a further eleven for "In die Sonne schauen," whose screenplay received the Thomas Strittmatter Prize. With the documentary "Gabin," selected for the Quinzaine des Cinéastes at the Festival de Cannes, the region is also present on the international festival circuit.

While films such as "Vier Minus Drei" and "Allegro Pastell" move into cinemas following their Berlinale premieres, new stories are already taking shape with projects like "Tamim" and "Don't Be a Stranger". The cycle of development, production, and distribution remains in motion—and with it, a region whose strength lies in this very dynamic. Continued support for our film and media location remains essential. We cannot afford to rest on the success of having increased production volume in animation and visual effects by 800 percent in recent years. Countries such as the UK, Ireland, the Czech Republic and New Zealand have recently and significantly raised their incentive

rates in this future-oriented sector. If we want to remain competitive internationally and further strengthen our position, companies in Baden-Württemberg will need greater national support going forward. We hope that the announced reform of federal film funding will provide this.

For me, this editorial also marks a farewell. My sincere thanks go to all our partners and companions along the way, as well as to the MFG team, who have supported and shaped this journey. After thirteen years, I am pleased to hand over responsibility on 1 July to WIEBKE WIESNER—and thus into the very best of hands.

Yours,

Carl Bergengruen

IN FOCUS: CARL BERGENGRUEN



CARL BERGENGRUEN with the team behind "House of Yang" at the Berlinale 2026 opening



30 Years of MFG: Minister-President WINFRIED KRETSCHMANN honors MFG at the 2025 anniversary celebration



Emmy Winners 2025: HEIKO BURKARDSMAIER and Accenture Song

"QUALITY CANNOT BE REPLACED"

Carl Bergengruen reflects on more than a decade at the helm of MFG

IN FOCUS: CARL BERGENGRUEN For thirteen years, CARL BERGENGRUEN has led MFG Baden-Württemberg, leaving a lasting mark on the film and media landscape of Baden-Württemberg. With a strategic focus on animation and VFX, new funding instruments, and initiatives such as Green Shooting, he has set key directions for the future and raised the region's profile both nationally and internationally. In this interview, he reflects on defining developments and an upcoming transition. On July 1, 2026, he will hand over the role of managing director to WIEBKE WIESNER.

Interview by SUSANNE VON KESSEL.

FILM FACTS *What was your vision when you took office just over thirteen years ago, in 2013/2014?*

My vision was to strengthen the film location across all areas. From documentary and feature film to cinemas, but with a clear focus on animation and visual effects. Back then, my declared goal, agreed with the state, was to drive strong growth in this sector through targeted funding, because I saw the greatest potential there. For the other division, which at the time was still called media development, I needed more than a vision. I needed a restructuring concept.

FILM FACTS *Why?*

Over time, that second division had accumulated very different areas of activity, including support for the IT sector in Baden-Württemberg—fields with little overlap, some of which were no longer financially viable. A complete reset was necessary.

FILM FACTS *Meaning?*

We streamlined the second division and aligned it with a clear objective: supporting the creative industries in Baden-Württemberg. That is why it is now called MFG Kreativ. It was the right decision, because in times when the automotive

sector is under pressure, Baden-Württemberg needs a strong creative economy more than ever: strong publishers, strong communications agencies, strong game studios, and so on.

FILM FACTS *And where does MFG's film funding stand today compared to then?*

In film funding, we have achieved our goal of significantly expanding animation and visual effects in Baden-Württemberg through precisely tailored funding instruments—some of which did not previously exist anywhere else in Germany.

FILM FACTS *Were there developments that surprised even you?*

We quickly realized we were on the right track with our funding strategy in animation and VFX, as new companies emerged and existing ones grew. But the results of the recent Goldmedia study still surprised us: Baden-Württemberg is now the leading German hub for animation and VFX. An 800 percent increase in growth among local companies in recent years. What other sector can even imagine figures like that?

FILM FACTS *How will revenue be affected by the announced closure of Pixomondo next year?*

Hard to say. In any case, it is very unfortunate that this highly professional, internationally active VFX company is closing. But our funding budgets will not shrink. We will be able to allocate more funding to other VFX companies, enabling them to initiate larger projects and generate more revenue. I am therefore optimistic that the revenue lost from Pixomondo from 2027 onward will be compensated elsewhere.

FILM FACTS *Films such as "The Grand Budapest Hotel", "Bridge of Spies", "Rheingold", or most recently "Amrum" have gained international attention and awards, with*



Premiere 2024: Cast and creatives at the premiere of "Cranko"



German Sustainability Award 2024: Green Shooting recognized for sustainable production standards



Thomas Strittmatter Prize 2023: MASCHA SCHILINSKI and LOUISE PETER

support from MFG Film Funding. What does such involvement mean to you in terms of both visibility for Baden-Württemberg and your strategic funding approach? That's an interesting question. Of course, the many (often major) awards won by MFG-funded films, such as Emmys, Lolas, Oscars®, Grimme Awards, are a wonderful confirmation that our jury has a strong instinct for quality. They are good for our reputation. But our funding decisions are never driven by awards. The primary question is always what a project brings to Baden-Württemberg as a film- and media-hub, not what it brings to MFG. And just as noteworthy as awards is the fact that MFG-funded films repeatedly rank among the most successful German productions— "The School of Magical Animal" being a prime example.

FILM FACTS How important are such international productions for the local industry, especially in light of current global developments? For the VFX sector in Baden-Württemberg, these large productions are indispensable. Hollywood, Netflix and Co pay for top-level visual effects from local studios, thereby strengthening the region. Interestingly, these productions require proportionally less MFG funding than domestic projects, as they generate regional effects of over 500 percent. They are also crucial to ensure that graduates of the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg—who are excellently trained—do not leave the state after completing their studies.

FILM FACTS As you mentioned, Baden-Württemberg is now Germany's leading hub for animation and VFX, according to the Goldmedia study. What were the key factors behind this rise? The most important success factor is the consistent project-based funding of animation and VFX projects. Among these, the quasi-automatic line producer funding introduced at the time has been particularly crucial.

FILM FACTS Line producer funding is considered a game changer. How did this model come about, and is it still competitive internationally? We first analyzed what the animation and VFX industry truly needs. Then and now, the answer is an automatic funding system—one that allows a local VFX studio to tell a Holly-

wood partner with certainty: I will receive a 20 percent grant. Hollywood studios are known to avoid jury-based funding due to uncertainty. While we cannot legally establish a fully automatic system at a regional level—that can only be done federally—we operate our line producer funding as if it were automatic. During delegation trips, we made it clear to every Hollywood studio: it may "only" be 20 percent, but you can rely on receiving it for every project. Hollywood monitors this closely—and because it works, high-profile projects like "Stranger Things," "The Penguin," and "House of the Dragon" are awarded to Stuttgart.

FILM FACTS But is 20 percent really enough by international standards? It's true that countries like Ireland, France, and Canada offer higher incentives. But that is what we have available, and unfortunately, the federal government does not fund VFX productions. However, automatic funding instruments like line producer funding achieve greater impact with fewer resources precisely because they are reliable. They are the future. In addition, there is a whole package of accompanying measures—most notably the regional network of animation and VFX companies under the umbrella of MFG: the Animation Media Creators Region Stuttgart, one of the key building blocks.

FILM FACTS What role does AMCRS play in this success? Continuous exchange, joint large-scale projects, shared training programs, joint initiatives such as recruiting—the local animation and VFX industry benefits enormously from the AMCRS network, under the active and highly knowledgeable leadership of our cluster manager STEFANIE LARSON.

FILM FACTS The animation and VFX industry now extends far beyond the film sector into fields such as automotive, medicine, and engineering. How is this transfer of technology changing Baden-Württemberg as a industry hub? It is advancing the region technologically, which in turn also benefits the animation and VFX industry. Half of the commissions for local animation and VFX studios come from industry, incidentally not only from the sectors you mentioned, but also from construction, which relies heavily on digital visualization for planning and preparing building projects.



Berlinale 2026: WOLFRAM WEIMER and CARL BERGENGRUEN at VTFF GreenTec Day



Looking back at 2024: "Woodwalkers 2" opens as a box office success in Germany



Baden-Württemberg Premiere: "Vier minus drei" premieres in the Southwest and is currently in theaters

FILM FACTS *Hardly any major German film today is made without a mosaic of funding from multiple sources. Still, with "Girl You Know It's True", "Rheingold", "Cranko" and "System Crasher", MFG has been involved in highly influential films, many of them closely tied to the region. What matters most: artistic courage, commercial success, or visibility for Baden-Württemberg?*

In short: all three. But visibility does not necessarily mean the Black Forest has to appear on screen. We also support projects that are not shot here but whose visual effects are created in Baden-Württemberg, also to reduce so-called "funding tourism".

FILM FACTS *You place a particular emphasis on emerging talent. How important is targeted support for young creatives for the region?*

Supporting emerging talent is essential for maintaining and developing any production hub. We consistently fund debut and emerging productions—both through our regular funding schemes and through dedicated programs such as Young Documentary Film, which we run together with SWR and through which we enable five new documentary films each year.

FILM FACTS *The Thomas Strittmatter Prize, for example: how central is script development funding to the creation of outstanding films?*

Without strong scripts, there are no strong films. That's why we need to support filmmakers—especially young ones—in developing such scripts by funding their development. Through the Thomas Strittmatter Prize, we also draw the industry's attention to particularly strong screenplays by emerging writers. That helps enormously as a door opener. Without the Strittmatter Prize, scripts such as "System Crasher" and "In die Sonne schauen" might never have made it to the screen.

FILM FACTS *With "In die Sonne schauen", winner of the Silver Palm in Cannes 2025, early support once again proves its impact. What does this success mean to you?*

Above all, it is a success for our approach to supporting emerging talent. The screenplay first won the Thomas Strittmatter Prize in 2023, which brought it visibility. And then this remarkable success with the Jury Prize in Cannes—

something we had never seen before. But almost all Strittmatter Prize-winning scripts have been produced. Most recently "Vena" by CHIARA FLEISCHHACKER, which went on to win the First Steps Award for Best Feature Film and received two German Film Award nominations.

FILM FACTS *You initiated the Green Shooting working group in 2017, which today includes virtually the entire industry. What was the trigger?*

A French study showing that the country's audiovisual sector produces as many CO₂ emissions as the entire telecommunications sector. That was a wake-up call for me to address the high emissions in our industry.

FILM FACTS *How do you assess the results after nine years? Where does Green Shooting stand today and what needs to happen next?*

We have come further than I would have expected. This vast audiovisual sector in Germany—from feature films and series to cooking shows and news programs—now produces a significant share according to the ecological standards developed by the Green Shooting working group, thereby reducing CO₂ emissions. To my knowledge, no other country has such a comprehensive voluntary commitment across the entire audiovisual industry.

FILM FACTS *To what extent has sustainable production become a competitive factor?*

We are seeing other countries adopt our ecological standards and introduce similar commitments. But that does not yet mean that films and series sell better because they are produced with lower CO₂ emissions. We are not there yet.

FILM FACTS *The games industry in Baden-Württemberg has nearly doubled in recent years. What are the reasons behind this boom?*

According to the Goldmedia study, this is largely due to the highly effective Games BW funding introduced by MFG six years ago, which is precisely tailored to the needs of the games industry. At the same time, MFG's extensive networking and advisory activities have also played an important role in driving growth.



10 Years of AMCRS (2019): STEFANIE LARSON at Animation Production Days



Villa Aurora, Los Angeles 2014: Exchange with the international film community



Berlinale Eve 2026: With WIEBKE WIESNER at the Baden-Württemberg panel on animation and VFX

FILM FACTS *Are there synergies between games, animation and VFX—both creatively and technologically?*

Yes, significant ones. These sectors often use the same technologies. For example, VFX work is increasingly carried out using game engines that are also used in the production of digital games.

FILM FACTS *Why is the cultural and creative industries sector now at least as systemically relevant as traditional industries—especially in a state like Baden-Württemberg?*
At a time when key industries such as automotive are subject to increasingly volatile fluctuations, strong sectors like the cultural and creative industries are extremely important for Baden-Württemberg.

FILM FACTS *Where do you currently see the greatest need for action to ensure this development remains stable?*
We would like to expand our advisory services for creatives, as the demand for guidance in the sector is enormous. At the same time, other federal states have significantly increased their games funding. Baden-Württemberg should follow suit; otherwise, highly trained graduates will move elsewhere instead of building their careers and companies here.

FILM FACTS *In 2023, the industry finally reached collective agreements. Why did MFG already make social standards a condition for funding in 2017? You were also honored with the German Actors' Association's honorary Inspiration Award for this.*

From the outset, I did not consider it acceptable to support productions with public funds where people are not paid enough to make a living. That's why, since 2017, we have required every submitted project to be reviewed by a production manager to ensure that staff are paid according to collective agreements and that working hours are realistically calculated, and so on. If not, we offer companies the opportunity to revise their budgets before the jury session, thereby significantly improving their chances of funding. This has led to a clear overall improvement in compliance with social standards.

FILM FACTS *What do you hope for the next ten years of film and media funding in Baden-Württemberg?*

More funding to adequately support all sectors—from feature films and documentaries to cinemas, animation, and VFX.

FILM FACTS *Keywords: AI, internationalization, sustainability, skills shortages. Are these at the top of your agenda?*

All important topics. We are continuously engaging with AI, as it is a defining issue for the entire industry. In a disruptive process, AI will fundamentally transform production workflows across the audiovisual sector, not only in animation and VFX.

FILM FACTS *You have shaped MFG for many years and will hand over to WIEBKE WIESNER on July 1, 2026. How do you view the transition?*

A touch of wistfulness, of course—but also gratitude and a very positive outlook. A successor this capable and well-suited is a stroke of luck for Baden-Württemberg – and equally so for my colleagues at the MFG, I am convinced.

FILM FACTS *And on a personal note: if you could define one guiding principle for the future of the industry, what would it be?*

That tomorrow, just as today, we will need strong films and series. And that quality cannot be replaced.

CARL BERGENGRUEN

Since 2013, Carl Bergengruen has served as Managing Director of MFG Baden-Württemberg, playing a key role in shaping the region's media landscape. After early positions as a television film editor at SWF and MDR, and later as Head of Film and Series at SWR, he moved on to lead Studio Hamburg GmbH in 2010 before joining MFG in 2013.

Under his leadership, Baden-Württemberg has evolved into Germany's leading hub for animation and VFX—driven by targeted funding strategies that have significantly expanded the sector.

Beyond traditional film funding, Bergengruen has also set strategic impulses. In 2017, he co-founded the Green Shooting working group, establishing industry-wide ecological standards for film and television production in Germany in collaboration with broadcasters, streamers, and production companies. During his tenure, numerous MFG-backed productions received international recognition, including Emmys, German Film Awards, and Grimme Awards. Carl Bergengruen will step down at the end of June 2026.

IN FOCUS: ITFS

ANIMATION. STUTTGART. GLOBAL STAGE.

Mozer and Richter on ITFS 2026

IN FOKUS: ITFS The Stuttgart International Festival of Animated Film (ITFS) will once again transform the city into a hub for the animation industry from May 5 to 10, 2026. With around 150 events where industry professionals exchange ideas and approximately 70,000 visitors annually, the ITFS is one of Germany's most widely attended film festivals after the Berlinale and the second-largest animation festival in Europe after Annecy. Audiences have plenty of gems to discover and can try their hand at creative activities.

Every year, the ITFS brings Stuttgart's city center to life with a curated program of international and national competition sections, thematic film series, and interactive formats designed to foster knowledge exchange and

industry networking. The festival showcases the full spectrum of animated film, ranging from artistic short films to international feature-length productions and innovative games. This year, 104 films were selected from around 2,000 submissions across the five competition sections. Among the highlights of ITFS 2026 is the screening of LOTTE REINIGER's "The Adventures of Prince Achmed". Members of the SWR Symphony Orchestra will perform live during the screening of the first surviving feature-length animated film in cinematic history, performing the original score by WOLFGANG ZELLER.

Festival directors Heike Mozer and Annegret Richter are responsible for the ITFS program and organization.

Interview by KATHARINA DOCKHORN.



Festival directors Annegret Richter and Heike Mozer (right)



A scene from LOTTE REINIGER's 1926 silhouette film "The Adventures of Prince Achmed"

FILM FACTS To what extent has the festival established itself as a meeting place for the industry?

ANNEGRET RICHTER For the industry, the ITFS is also the second-largest animation festival in Europe after Annecy International Animation Film Festival. Our festival has now become a major draw, especially for students, who can hardly get tickets or access to the market in Annecy anymore. Stuttgart offers them—and all industry guests—a festival where everything is close at hand, with direct contact to the audience.

HEIKE MOZER In 2025, we welcomed around 4,000 accredited guests. Approximately 40,000 visitors attended our Open Air program on Stuttgart's Schlossplatz in 2025. The downtown theaters recorded around 30,000 visits. This year, we are once again offering a free five-day program at the Open Air featuring a colorful mix of curated animation programs for children and families. In the evenings, we will also be screening more sophisticated films for a mature audience. These include "Pelikan Blue," the 2025 ITFS Animovie winner, and "Flee," winner of the 2021 European Film Awards for Animation and Documentary.

FILM FACTS What highlights do you have in store for 2026?

ANNEGRET RICHTER To mark the 100th anniversary of the premiere of LOTTE REINIGER's "The Adventures of Prince Achmed," we are focusing on silhouette animation. We are screening the documentary "Lotte Reiniger—Dance of the Shadows" as well as works by MICHEL OCELOT and JÖRG HERRMANN, who carried on this tradition at the DEFA Studio for Animated Films. Both will each lead a master class, offering insights into their sources of inspiration and creative processes. We'll also look at how the art of silhouette animation is taught at film schools in Germany and Singapore. An exhibition at the Festival Centre will showcase works by students from Berlin and Singapore. In the four sections of the international competition, we're unfortunately showing fewer films than usual this year with 28 films in total, as individual entries are becoming longer. It's encouraging that well-known German directors like ROBERT LÖBEL, MAX MÖRTL, and JON FRICKEY have been selected for the international competition with their new films "Time" and "Ploo," as well as many newcomers from Germany. We'll also take a look at the animation scene in the Netherlands and Kenya, where a vibrant animation scene has emerged in recent years.

"EXCLUSIVE INSIGHTS INTO TOMORROW'S MOST PROMISING PROJECTS" The ITFS Series

ANDREA BAUER – INSIGHTS



At ITFS, I'm particularly passionate about the Insights. They bring together international experts and young talents, offering valuable know-how, experience, and lively exchange through masterclasses, making-of presentations, studio presentations,

and talks. One of my favorite formats is the "Work in Progress" series—exclusive insights into promising projects of tomorrow, brimming with ideas that open up new perspectives. My personal highlight this year: "Animation from Kenya" (May 9th) at the Festival Centre.

JULIA DANGAUER – GAMEZONE

I'm excited about the new projects in the GameZone! Students from four universities are showcasing fantastic projects from all sorts of fields—from animation and science to educational gaming.



My highlight: The games that you can try out in the GameZone as a result of the 72-hour HdM PlayFusion Game Jam. The five nominated games for the Animated Games Award Germany can also be tested at the Staatsgalerie from Wednesday to Saturday, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., and on Sunday, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

CHRISTINE SCHÄFER – ITFS ANIMOVIE COMPETITION



What I find so inspiring about the ITFS AniMovie Competition is the diversity of artistic styles, which once again demonstrate clearly the narrative possibilities that animated film offers adults. In "Light Pillar" (May 6), director Zao Xu poetically combines animation with live-action footage,

telling a tragic love story against the backdrop of a futuristic film set. "Allah is Not Obligated" (May 7) portrays the life of child soldier Birahima in an unflinching and powerful way. "My Life in Versailles" (May 8) is a recommendation for the whole family.

KATHARINA VOGT – YOUNG ITFS FILMS

What I appreciate about Young ITFS Films is the artistic and narrative breadth that animation offers young people. Cultural diversity becomes tangible and invites them to view the world from different perspectives and find their own voice. I'm particularly



looking forward to the German premiere of "The Boy at the Edge of the World" (May 10th), followed by a Q&A with the directors, as well as the short film program "One Day At a Time" (May 10th) for teenagers and young adults.

MATTHIAS ROTT – SPECIAL PROGRAMS



Personal and close to the filmmakers and their works, the special program "In Persona" offers a unique opportunity to engage closely with the creative process.

For example, ÜLO PIKKOV (May 7) and HISKO HULSING (May 6) will present their own works, talk about what inspires them, and offer insights into their creative process. I find the handling of the materials from which the films are made and the tactile quality they give them particularly interesting.

CHRISTIN STEGMEYER – ITFS SHORT FILM COMPETITION

The ITFS International Competition, ITFS Student Competition, ITFS Tricks for Kids Competition, and ITFS Trickstar Nature Award short film competitions offer a high-quality glimpse into the diversity of international animation.



I find it particularly exciting that current trends in the animation industry are reflected in the programs: This year, there's a trend toward longer short films (around 20 minutes) and the theme of introspection.

IN FOCUS: APDs

WHERE IDEAS TAKE SHAPE

Marlene Wagener on 20 Years of APDs

By KATHARINA DOCKHORN and SUSANNE VON KESSEL

IN FOCUS: APDs The Animation Production Days (APDs), part of Stuttgart Animated Week, are among Europe's leading co-production and financing markets for animation. Each May, Stuttgart Animated Week unites three key events for the animation industry: ITFS, FMX, and the Animation Production Days. 178 participants from 27 countries are expected for this anniversary edition, taking place from May 5 to 7, 2026.

"We're celebrating our 20th anniversary this year, and it's fantastic to see that Animation Production Days have become such a fixture on the industry calendar," says MARLENE WAGENER, who leads the event.

Projects presented at APDs recently include the series "Team Nuggets" by IRENE SPARRE from Denmark, ELENA WALF's "Lena's Farm" as well as "Nitso and the Shaggy Alphabet", all of which were broadcast on Kika. "The Light of Aisha" by Mago Production was successfully released in German cinemas. The demand from the industry is once again high.

A MARKETPLACE FOR CO-PRODUCTION AND FINANCING

Once again, the APDs are generating strong industry interest. During this time, Stuttgart becomes the place to be for the animation industry. 110 producers and creatives will explore financing and collaboration opportunities for their projects with 68 representatives from broadcasters, VOD platforms, world sales agents, distributors, and funding institutions. German television broadcasters ZDF, KIKa, Super RTL, WDR, MDR, HR, SWR, and BR, as well as France Télévisions, BBC, Canal+, streaming platforms, distributors like Warner Bros. Discovery, and many others, are looking for the next major project. "The projects presented here are designed for the European and international market, many still in an early stage of development. So it's about exploring the potential of these projects," explains MARLENE WAGENER. In addition to tailored one-to-one meetings for the selected projects, APDs offer ample opportunities for informal discussions and professional exchange. The attractive program is complemented by a conference with high-profile panels on May 5, 2026. Professor LILIAN KLAGES will discuss "Artificial Intelligence in Film: Practice, Education, Society" with NIRA BOZKURT (AI Officer at the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg), LARRY CUTLER (Chief Technical Officer and co-founder of Baobab Studios), and ALEKSI HYVÄRINEN (Don Films & The Alchemist). They will provide an overview



Industry professionals connect and exchange ideas at the Animation Production Days

of AI applications in current film production and engage in discussions with each other and the audience about the possibilities for shaping the future of AI.

The second panel, "The First Yes!", curator and moderator JANINE WEIGOLD has invited JO ALLEN (Commissioning Editor, BBC Children's & Education) and THOM CHAPMAN (President/Founder, Victura Media). Together, they will explore which signals influence audience decisions and how the strategic development of projects must be adapted so that IP (intellectual property) works across platforms from the outset.

The three-day event will also feature roundtable discussions, a pitch session for newcomer projects, and various networking events, offering further opportunities for exchange within the industry. "The manageable size and focus of the event are our greatest strengths. At the same time, the APDs are well integrated into Stuttgart Animated Week with its two major partners, ITFS and FMX. This is a great package for many participants," says MARLENE WAGENER.

A formal reception hosted by the state government in the White Hall of the New Palace in Stuttgart will kick off the event on the evening of May 4. The Film and Media Festival GmbH, which organizes Stuttgart Animated Week in cooperation with the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg, has secured director REZA MEMARI to deliver the welcoming address. The production of his lovingly animated family film "The Last Whale Singer," which delighted thousands of cinema audiences, is closely linked to the three Stuttgart events.

The APDs center on their Business Meetings and the APD Conference. At the conference, MFG Managing Director CARL BERGENGRUEN will deliver welcoming remarks, focusing on the region's funding opportunities and the strength of its VFX industry. The Animation Production Days (APDs) are a joint venture of the Internationales Trickfilm-Festival Stuttgart (ITFS) and FMX—Film & Media Exchange.

MFG Baden-Württemberg is supporting the event alongside the Ministry of Science, Research, and the Arts Baden-Württemberg; the Filmförderungsanstalt (FFA); and the EU's Creative Europe MEDIA program.

Panels explore new technologies and creative trends shaping animation at APDs





IN FOCUS: FMX

FROM STUTTGART TO HOLLYWOOD AND HOME AGAIN

By KATHARINA DOCKHORN

IN FOCUS: FMX ROLAND EMMERICH returns to his home region of Swabia on May 6 to mark the 30th anniversary of the premiere of his groundbreaking science fiction classic "Independence Day". The director and producer will present his movie at FMX2026, which takes place from May 5 to 7 at the Haus der Wirtschaft in Stuttgart. In addition, the 70-year-old filmmaker will discuss the film's production and his career. The blockbuster also turned the spotlight on the Film Academy Ludwigsburg. Visual Effects Supervisor Volker Engel and several of his colleagues studied there. Today, the academy's graduates are in demand worldwide as experts in VFX production across all genres and many of them, like alumnus JACOB FREY, also speak at FMX. On May 5, he will provide insights into the production process of Disney's "Zoomania 2".

"FMX is Europe's leading conference for the latest developments in visual effects, animation, and digital media production," says JAN PINKAVA, FMX Conference Chair. "The Forum, as part of FMX, is the most important platform in Europe for studios and companies in the animation and VFX industry to showcase themselves, their products, and their technologies. We consistently offer a top-tier program featuring workshops by international companies, as well as a significant selection of innovative hardware, software, and service providers at the FMX Marketplace, international studios in our Recruiting Hub, and international schools on the School Campus."

The conference and the industry in Baden-Württemberg are benefiting from a man whose visionary ideas were long dismissed by the German film industry. ROLAND EMMERICH started creating spectacular genre cinema in the '80s and in the early '90s, when no one thought that would be possible in Germany. In the early 90s, ROLAND made "Moon 44" with VFX supervisor VOLKER ENGEL in a warehouse close to Stuttgart before they moved on to Hollywood. "From

Europe's leading conference for the latest developments in visual effects, animation, and digital media

there, they started hiring alumni of the Animationsinstitut at the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg, like VFX producer Marc Weigert, because of their excellent training in digital post-production," says JAN PINKAVA paying tribute to the filmmaker's career. He notes how he revolutionized the film world with his ideas and his company Centropolis: "ROLAND EMMERICH has played a key role in establishing the Stuttgart region as a world-class center for VFX and animation."

ENGINEERING SPECTACLE THE SWABIAN WAY

EMMERICH earned the nickname "Spielbergle from Sindelfingen", a playful nod to Swabian frugality, because he produces his cinematic spectacles at a cost far below the usual Hollywood average. In doing so, he often relied on innovative solutions that bridged the analog and digital worlds. While filming his drama "Anonymous" about Shakespeare, he had the London of the Elizabethan era recreated as a massive set at Studio Babelsberg. The houses, however, were only one story tall. They took on their final form during digital post-production. The advantage of this method was that it allowed for the creation of a wide variety of distinct-looking buildings, much like a modular construction system. JÖRG BACHMAIER, CEO of Studio Babelsberg, will highlight such possibilities during his presentation at the

conference, showcasing the state-of-the-art facilities located just outside Potsdam and Berlin.

As always at FMX, attendees will have the opportunity to look over the shoulders of numerous renowned industry figures. "Our goal is to offer the most significant creators of digital visual worlds a plat-



© Claudette Barius

Pioneer ROLAND EMMERICH

IN FOCUS: FMX

form on which to present their latest projects," says JAN PINKAVA, describing the program's approach. "FMX has both the status and the deep and extensive network, so we can directly reach out to top international talents and luminaries, including Emmy and Academy Award winners."

ERIC SAINDON of Wētā FX, who has just been honored with his second Academy Award for "Avatar: Fire and Ash," will provide insights into the creative process behind the design of these fantastical visual worlds. "He will let the FMX audience in on how he worked his magic," promises JAN PINKAVA. BETH ALBRIGHT will present the stylized animation in Pixar's "Hoppers," while STUART PRENN from Framestore will discuss the science fiction novel adaptation "Project Hail Mary." DAVE COOK from BlueBolt, on the other hand, brought 1930s Britain back to life for "Downton Abbey: The Grand Finale." Another highlight from the extensive lineup of "making-of" presentations, according to JAN PINKAVA, is the appearance by ADAM SAROPHIM, who is the lead animator at Sony Pictures Imageworks. He will reveal some secrets surrounding "K-Pop Demon Hunters," which won the Oscar for Best Animated Feature.

Cinematographer DAVE ALEX RIDDETT takes the audience behind the scenes of 40 years of stop-motion filming with clay figures at Aardman Animations, which won the hearts of film fans with "Wallace & Gromit," "Chicken Run," and "Shaun the Sheep." From France, Benoit Bargeton of Illogix Studios, who is behind "Le mal aimé," is expected to attend. He will discuss how an independent studio can master top-notch animation.

SWABIAN PIXELS, GLOBAL IMPACT

FMX has long been the meeting place for Germany's VFX industry as well. Over the past decades, numerous companies that help set global standards have established themselves in Baden-Württemberg. One of them is Stuttgart-based Accenture Song Content Germany GmbH. CEO HEIKO BURKARDSMAIER, an Emmy winner for "Game of Thrones" and "The Penguin," is a regular speaker at FMX. MAX RIESS and MONA MOHR from the Stuttgart-based company PIXOMONDO have been nominated for the Lola in the "Best Visual Effects" category for "Woodwalkers 2." FMX speaker MAX RIESS brought the world of the successful franchise to life.

Accenture Song is one of more than 30 VFX, games, and animation studios in the region that joined forces several years ago to form the Animation Media Creators Region Stuttgart (AMCRS) initiative. Their work is coordinated by MFG Baden-Württemberg. AMCRS and Accenture Song VFX are among the premium partners supporting FMX.

WHERE AI MEETS CRAFTSMANSHIP

Of course, the event cannot avoid the topic of artificial intelligence. "Artificial intelligence is a transformative technology for the media industry," says JAN PINKAVA. "For the last ten years, the latest developments from machine learning to generative AI have, of course, been a focus of FMX. This year, a dozen sessions will address this topic, including insights

from foremost experts exploring and discussing what AI can do and how creators can combine it with traditional craft. One of those speakers is BEN GROSSMANN of Magnopus, who has contributed to "The Wizard of Oz at Sphere" in Las Vegas. Another is CASSIDY CURTIS of Google DeepMind, presenting a state-of-the-art case study in artist-driven, AI-assisted expression in animation.

Several program highlights will be recorded and will be available online for four weeks after the conference. ED HOOKS, author of the seminal work "Acting for Animators" and a regular at FMX, will give his masterclass for the last time. For the expert, who is over 80 years old, this will be his farewell appearance in Stuttgart, where he will leave a painful void, as Jan Pinkava laments.

The lavishly designed volume "Industrial Light & Magic: 50 Years of Innovation" by IAN FAILES offers a glimpse into the history of special effects. He will be signing copies of his book. The four days are not only filled with many informative presentations. The Stuttgart event is always a place for exchange, networking, exploring opportunities for collaboration, and professional development. It also serves as a networking hub for students seeking jobs. For several days, the Haus der Wirtschaft transforms into an open space where students can easily strike up conversations with Oscar and Emmy winners. The foundation for many careers has been laid here, partly because studios like Pixar, Disney, and ILM are on-site with their scouts.

FUNDING AT THE FOREFRONT

The U.S. industry attracts talent from around the world. To retain highly educated specialists in the country and help them launch innovative companies, the MFG offers a program tailored to their needs through its Line Producer Funding. To produce fictional and documentary films and series that are fully or predominantly animated or require a significant amount of virtual filming or visual effects, the MFG grants a subsidy of 20% of the local production costs, up to one million euros.

The federal government has also recognized the value of VFX and launched the German Federal Film Fund (DFFF II) nearly ten years ago. It subsidizes 30% of eligible production costs incurred in the country, provided they amount to at least 20 million euros and the German production costs commissioned from service providers total at least eight million euros. For animated films, the threshold is two million euros. Up to 25 million euros can be approved per project. This guideline is currently being revised. At the same time, the federal film funding budget is set to be increased from a total of 133 to 250 million euros, which is also expected to benefit the VFX industry.

A networking hub where students connect with industry professionals



© Claudette Barius

IN FOCUS: CANNES

"GABIN" PREMIERES IN THE QUINZAINES DES CINÉASTES

AMA Film Bows on the Croisette

FOCUS: CANNES The documentary "Gabin" will celebrate its world premiere in mid-May at the "quinzaine des Cinéastes" section of the Cannes Film Festival. Producers ULLA LEHMANN and ANDREA ROGGON will walk the red carpet alongside their French colleagues ELISE HUG and CÉCILE LESTRADE from Alter Ego Production. More than a decade ago, the two founded AMA FILM GmbH in Stuttgart, which specializes in the production of high-quality documentaries and documentary formats with a strong potential for international distribution. Their portfolio ranges from the musician portrait "Mülheim Texas - HELGE SCHNEIDER Here and Now" to "The Inner Glow," in which STEFAN SICK accompanies people with dementia and their relatives, and

NIKO APEL's "From Muslim to Muslim." The latter follows two imams who are fighting against radicalization trends. In addition, ANDREA ROGGON and ULLA LEHMANN developed the screenplay for TIMM KRÖGER's acclaimed feature film "Die Theorie von allem," which was shown in competition at the Venice Film Festival in 2023.

Before heading to the Côte d'Azur, the two producers are celebrating the premiere of TORSTEN SCHÜTTE's "Ensemble Modern—Why We Play" at the Lichter Filmfest in Frankfurt am Main. The documentary will then be screened at DOK.fest Munich. Arsenal Filmverleih will release it in theaters on June 14.

Interview by KATHARINA DOCKHORN.



Sensitive Gabin longs to work with living animals rather than dead meat

© AMA FILM / Rita Productions / Chambe

FILM FACTS *Where is the film headed?*

ULLA LEHMANN Director MAXENCE VOISEUX is very loyal to the French region of Hauts-de-France. For his feature film debut, he spent ten years following a boy living in the region: Gabin was supposed to take over his father's butcher shop. The male members of the family all work in livestock farming or meat processing. Gabin, however, is different. He is sensitive, loves animals, and would rather work with living animals than handle dead meat. He is torn between family loyalty and the urge to find his own path.

FILM FACTS *A conflict that many people can surely relate to?*

ULLA LEHMANN We hope the film will appeal to almost all age groups. Although it is strongly rooted in the northern region of France, it touches on universal themes on various levels. Like many areas around the world, Gabin's hometown was left behind during globalization. A second universal aspect is intergenerational conflict. It has already generated international interest, as we saw during our market pitch at the Visions du Réel festival in Nyon in 2023.

FILM FACTS *Where you won the Unifrance Pitch Award.*

Who will be bringing the film to theaters?

ULLA LEHMANN It's not set in stone yet, but the film will be coming to German theaters in any case.

FILM FACTS *Why have you focused your company primarily on the production of documentary films?*

ANDREA ROGGON We both come from a documentary background and are passionate about good documentary films. Nevertheless, I wouldn't say we're exclusively focused on that. We've also worked on feature film projects, some of which are inspired by the language of documentary filmmaking. For us, the quality of the stories is the top priority when selecting projects. Artistic documentaries for the cinema offer viewers the chance to take the time to immerse themselves fully in a topic. They can open up new perspectives on the world. We find it so exciting that these films are a major priority for us.

FILM FACTS *Are your bags packed for Cannes yet?*

ULLA LEHMANN There's still a lot to do, but we're very excited about the invitation to Cannes and looking forward to the trip. This project is very close to our hearts since we were closely involved throughout the entire process of "Gabin," from development through editing to post-production.

FILM FACTS *How did you get involved in the project, and what happened next?*

ULLA LEHMANN French producer ELISE HUG from Alter Ego Production presented it in 2020 at the EURODOC Producer's Training Program, which we also attended. We were immediately enthusiastic and successfully applied for co-development funding together in 2021 through the Franco-German Mini-Treaty (CNC/FFA). We also received funding from the MFG Film Fund and the Mini-Treaty Production Fund. Likewise, we were also able to convince SWR/Arte to back the project, which is unusual for a predominantly French production.

© AMA FILM / Rita Productions / Chambe



Gabin is torn between family loyalty and forging his own path

FILM FACTS *Even though your range of topics is quite broad?*

ANDREA ROGGON An idea simply has to inspire us, and the subject must have the potential for a feature-length documentary. We've carried out several long-term projects where we were repeatedly surprised by how things unfolded. That's also part of what makes this profession so appealing. In our line of work, we need long-distance runners. Financing international co-productions and feature-length documentary films also takes time in addition to the time spent on the research, shooting, and editing. This is what creates the artistic quality that sets them apart from quickly produced television formats.

FILM FACTS *To what extent does the MFG support you?*

ANDREA ROGGON The MFG is a crucial and highly valued partner. It supports the development of diverse company profiles, so we feel very well supported. We never had the feeling that their decisions were primarily driven by commercial considerations. They support a broad spectrum of films, including risky projects like our documentary "Midwives" by SNOW HNIN EI HLAING about two midwives in a crisis zone in Myanmar, which then premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. What was also special about "Midwives" was that no German TV network was involved. A network's participation in the financing serves as a guarantee for film funding agencies that the film will find an audience. Since it is becoming increasingly difficult these days to secure a broadcaster for feature-length documentaries, CARL BERGENGRUEN, the long-time managing director of MFG, has shown a willingness to try out other models and ensure distribution—that is, reaching audiences—through alternative channels.

FILM FACTS *Many documentary filmmakers produce their films themselves. What is the advantage of collaborating with a company?*

ANDREA ROGGON That's a personal question closely tied to the director's personality. During the long creative process, you can feel isolated and need advice or simply encouragement to keep believing in the project. I studied directing and always imagined producing my films on my own through my company. The partnership with Ulla already proved its worth during the production of my debut documentary, "Mülheim Texas—HELGE SCHNEIDER Here and Now". Had I been both



Released in theaters on June 14: "Ensemble Modern—Why We Play"

director and producer, I wouldn't have been able to handle many of the tasks involved in such a complex project on my own. Furthermore, Ulla viewed the scenes with a more objective eye and never shied away from taking a contrary position when it served the film's best interests. That's precisely how we envisioned our partnership from the very beginning.

FILM FACTS *What was it about the content of "Ensemble Modern—Why We Play" that drew you in?*

ANDREA ROGGON We've known Thorsten Schütte since our time at the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg; he was the program coordinator for the subject of documentary film directing back then. In 2020, he told me enthusiastically about his experiences with the Ensemble Modern. At that time, he was already deep into his research, and his stories about the artistic processes within the ensemble piqued our curiosity.

FILM FACTS *Contemporary music isn't accessible to everyone. Do you still expect a lot of public interest?*

ANDREA ROGGON We love it when films succeed in opening up new perspectives for viewers. Of course, we know that modern music isn't always accessible, even for people who are generally interested in music. But the film conveys a great enthusiasm for experimentation and for forging one's own path. We hope this enthusiasm will also inspire people who aren't necessarily fans of contemporary music. We believe the film will also stand the test of time as a documentary and find an audience beyond Germany's borders.

FILM FACTS *Are you planning any special events for the world premieres at the LICHTER Filmfest in Frankfurt am Main and at DOK.fest in Munich?*

ANDREA ROGGON The premieres in both cities will be accompanied by performances by the ensemble. They'll perform a sample after the audience has already immersed themselves in the ensemble's world through the film. We want to harness the momentum of the festivals for the theatrical release.

FILM FACTS *Do you plan to focus the company more on the international market in the future?*

ULLA LEHMANN The German film industry is undergoing a fundamental transformation; there are few certainties. In this situation, we see potential in international co-productions. ■

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Christian Becker, Producer, Ratpack Film

« ...Ideally, I'd love to do all my film editing, mixing, and color grading at Bewegte Bilder in Tübingen. It was so effortless, highly professional, and simply always a pleasure. »

Maggie Peren, Director and Writer

« For me, Bewegte Bilder is the standout choice when it comes to post-production. The professional and warm collaboration was fantastic. »

Holly Fink, Director of Photography

« Warner Bros. and we were extremely satisfied with how the entire audio and video post-production process was handled. We all had a wonderful time in Tübingen and would definitely love to come back! »

Jochen Laube, Producer, Sommerhaus Filmproduktion



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IN FOCUS: VFX AND ANIMATION

HITS CREATED AFTER THE SHOOT

Emmys, BAFTAs and VFX Impact

By SUSANNE VON KESSEL



Emmy-winning effects in Stranger Things V—created by Accenture Song Content



"Gumball" returns with BAFTA nods, VFX by Ludwigsburg's Studio Soi

IN FOCUS: VFX AND ANIMATION A film begins to take shape on set, but its world is created in the VFX and animation studios of Southwest Germany. Baden-Württemberg has turned this into a business model. Its line producer funding has made the region an invisible control center for global visual worlds. You don't see them, yet without them many of these worlds would not exist: service producers, VFX studios, and animation companies that design and build visual universes as precise modular systems.

With its line producer funding, MFG Filmförderung Baden-Württemberg introduced an instrument in 2014 that responds precisely to the realities of global production. Funding is allocated where images are created, not necessarily where filming takes place. It is a logic that avoids "funding tourism" while anchoring value creation locally.

"Such large-scale productions are indispensable, particularly for the VFX hub in Baden-Württemberg," says MFG CEO CARL BERGENGRUEN. Reliability is the key factor: a quasi-automatic system that provides international clients with planning security and attracts projects to the region. "This is not something to rest on in 2026, but something to build upon—especially as international competitors are not standing still and are backing the sector with generous funding packages. Even so, a look at current projects in the region shows just how effective this model is.

"For The Wonderfully Weird World of Gumball," the revival of the cult series created by BEN BOCQUELET, Studio Soi, one of the key animation studios based in Ludwigsburg, plays a central role under the supervision of CARSTEN BUNTE and his team. The series has received two nominations at the BAFTA TV Awards 2026, in the categories 'Children's: Scripted' and 'Children's Craft Team,' marking a strong return to the international stage.

The global reach becomes even more visible with "Stranger Things". For the fifth and final season, MFG is once again supporting Accenture Song Content in Stuttgart, led by HEIKO BURKARDSMAIER and his team. The series, a multiple Emmy winner, including for visual effects, is one of the most successful streaming formats worldwide. Its visual effects are

also created in Baden-Württemberg, securing the region's international competitiveness.

This trend continues with Fallout (Season 2). At RISE FX, SVEN PANNICKE oversees the implementation, exemplifying the close integration of international content with regional expertise.

The funding also extends into cinema: for the thriller "Dead of Winter – Icy Silence," starring EMMA THOMPSON, Lavalabs Moving Images receives support, represented by MICHAEL BRINK. Filming took place in Minnesota, but the visual realization is being created in Southwest Germany.

A similar approach applies to "Mother Mary", a project situated between iconography and identity, which benefits from the same infrastructure. On May 5, the renowned California-based studio A24 celebrates its premiere in collaboration with Augenschein Filmproduktion in Cologne.

The figures behind this development may seem modest, but their impact is not: up to 20 percent subsidy on regional expenditure, capped at one million euros. What matters is the strategy. "The primary question is always what a film project brings to Baden-Württemberg as a location," says BERGENGRUEN. International productions generate regional effects of more than 500 percent.

Even setbacks change little. The announced closure of Pixomondo is a painful loss for the region. At the same time, it opens up new opportunities: funding can be strategically redirected to strengthen other studios, attract new projects, and above all help retain highly skilled professionals in the region. Because that is the core of the strategy, not only to attract international projects, but to anchor the people behind them in the long term.

The momentum is accordingly strong: according to Goldmedia, Baden-Württemberg is now Germany's leading hub for animation and VFX, with growth rates of up to 800 percent. A success built on a clear principle: funding where value is created.

This is how the region defines itself—not through locations, but through processes. "Made in Baden-Württemberg" has become a mark of quality, reliability, and international competitiveness.

IN FOCUS: DOKVILLE



DOKVILLE 2026 Discusses Strategies Against Populism and Loss of Trust

2026 DOKVILLE 2026 IN STUTTGART, JUNE 18-19

Joachim Gauck, Wim Wenders, Sebastian Krumbiegel among the speakers on democracy under pressure

By HAUS DES DOKUMENTARFILMS

IN FOCUS: DOKVILLE Which responses can institutions committed to democracy develop in the face of the radical questioning of our social order? How can our society continue to uphold the rule of law and fundamental rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of the press? These are the issues to be discussed in the panels at DOKVILLE in its 2026 edition.

Democracies and civil societies all around the world are increasingly coming under pressure. The result is a disturbing loss of trust in democratic institutions which can be observed in more and more countries. This erosion is driven by an aggressive populism

spread via new communication channels of communication, systematically destabilizing democratic norms. Targeted defamation and the manipulation of information via algorithms undermine the credibility of quality media and democratic discourse. The principles of multilateralism—once arduously developed—are being replaced by the right of the strong, resulting in a destabilization of almost every societal area.

Under the title "Democracy Under Pressure—is Our Civil Society Coming to an End?" the renowned industry meeting DOKVILLE at the Haus des Dokumentarfilms on June 18 and 19 is dedicated to these questions and the

multifaceted threats which our democracy faces increasingly faces in keynotes, panel talks and case studies. What responsibilities does quality media bear? Are they able to handle the aggressive populism that flourishes on digital platform battle grounds? What can they do to counter the systematic threats to democratic norms? How do they react in the face of targeted campaigns questioning their credibility and openly defame the democratic discourse?

Among this year's celebrity guests is the Federal President (ret.) JOACHIM GAUCK, who will deliver the opening address. He, like no other, is a strong

SPEED-DATING

In the framework of DOKVILLE, the Haus des Dokumentarfilms' successful pitching format Speed Dating will once again be offered—in cooperation with MFG and Film Commission Region Stuttgart.

Documentary projects of all formats—short, series, or feature film—are eligible for the pitch. A thematic relation to this year's DOKVILLE focus topic is not required.

In 2025, around 100 pitching participants presented their projects to commissioning editors of ARTE, BR, NDR, SWR, WDR, Radio Bremen, HR, MDR, ZDF, Deutsche Welle and Sky Deutschland in the Speed Dating sessions.



Impressions from DOKVILLE 2025, where high-profile panels discussed Germany's shift to the right: industry professionals and THOMAS STROBL (left) in conversation with CAMPINO, frontman of "Die Toten Hosen"; bottom right: publicist MICHEL FRIEDMAN, who delivered the keynote



advocate for democracy, pluralism, civil liberties, and civic commitment. Continuously and forcefully, he is pointing out that an "active civil society" is a vital pillar of our democracy.

The opening panel will explore the focus topic in an international context, talk about the threats of the democracy in Germany set against the varying situations abroad—in Eastern Europe, in the USA, or the Middle East. The panelists are DÜZEN TEKKAL (journalist and human rights activist), KATHARINA WILLINGER (Head of ARD's Istanbul bureau [also covering Tehran]), NATHALIE WAPPLER (Head of the German Media Council), STEPHAN LAMBY (director) and PAUL

RONZHEIMER deputy editor-in-chief of the Bild newspaper. WIM WENDERS, one of the most distinguished international directors, will be attending as special guest.

Furthermore, filmmakers will introduce their films in case studies, among them the documentary "Elon Musk Uncovered: The Tesla Experiment" by ANDREAS PICHLER.

"It is not just 'politics' in general, but all institutions committed to the principles of our democracy that must find answers to the radical challenge to our societal model. The media, in particular, have a significant degree of responsi-

bility. The efforts made by undemocratic forces to discredit the credibility of independent media are immense, and they do not shy away from targeted defamation," said HDF Managing Director ERIC FRIEDLER.

DOKVILLE 2026 cooperation partners are MFG Medien- und Filmgesellschaft Baden-Württemberg, broadcasters SWR, ARTE and the Grimme Institute.

**REGISTRATION AND PROGRAM AT:
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WHAT'S PLAYING?

"FOUR MINUS THREE" A FAMILY DRAMA BY ADRIAN GOINGER

Clowning Through Loss and Silence

By CHRIS SCHINKE

WHAT'S PLAYING? With "Four Minus Three", ADRIAN GOINGER crafts a deeply affecting portrait of loss and the fragile resilience that follows. Set between the art of clowning and profound grief, the film explores whether humour can endure where life has broken apart—quietly powerful, un sentimental, and lingering long after the final frame fades.

IN CINEMAS

ADRIAN GOINGER's fifth feature, »Four Minus Three«, has been playing in German cinemas since 16 April 2026, distributed by Alamode Film. At its world premiere in the Panorama section of the 76th Berlinale, the intense drama about a mother's loss received both the Europa Cinemas Label and second place in the Audience Award. In Austria, the film opened on 6 March 2026 through Polyfilm and quickly drew large audiences. International sales are handled by Beta Cinema. Screenwriter SENAD HALILBAŠIĆ distilled his motivation for the project—an adaptation of a bestselling memoir—into a simple yet apt phrase: "Art can save lives."

A CLOWN'S GRIEF

Barbara (VALERIE PACHNER) and her partner Heli (ROBERT STADLOBER) both work as clowns. Together with their children Fini and Thimo, they have built a life in which laughter is meant to be the default setting. When an accident robs Barbara of everything in a single moment, she is confronted with the question of whether clowning—her philosophy of always looking at things from the other side—can carry her through the darkest chapter of her life. The source material is the bestselling memoir of the same name by Austrian author BARBARA PACHL-EBERHART, who lost her family in 2008 and turned her experience into a widely acclaimed book. PACHL-EBERHART accompanied the adaptation from script development through to the set. To inhabit the world of clowning convincingly, PACHNER and STADLOBER trained in juggling, improvisation and stage presence under the guidance of clown coach JEAN-PAUL LEDUN. The ensemble also features STEFANIE REINSPERGER, HANNO KOFFLER and RONALD ZEHRFELD. The emotionally gripping score was composed by ARASH SAFAIAN.



Released in theaters on April 16: "Four Minus Three" with VALERIE PACHNER and ROBERT STADLOBER

A CO-PRODUCTION ROOTED IN BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG

The foundations for the project were laid at the 2020 Berlinale, where GOINGER joined forces with producers PETER WILDLING (2010 Entertainment, Austria) and GERRIT KLEIN (Giganten Film) to set the co-production in motion. Giganten Film, founded by KLEIN and GOINGER in 2017, is based in Ludwigsburg. Cinematographer PAUL SPRINZ has been part of GOINGER's creative team since their student days together at the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg. Principal photography took place in autumn 2024 in Styria, Vienna, Salzburg and Karlsruhe. Funding partners include MFG Baden-Württemberg, FFF Bayern, the Bavarian State Chancellery, the German Federal Film Fund (DFFF), the German Federal Film Board (FFA), the Austrian Film Institute and ÖFI+. Broadcasting partners are ORF, BR, SWR and ARTE.

FROM THOMAS STRITTMATTER PRIZE TO BIG SCREEN

A Teen Navigates Secrets and Family Fault Lines

By CHRIS SCHINKE

WHAT'S PLAYING? MICHAEL BAUMANN's patchwork family drama "Missing*Link" has been in German cinemas since 16 April 2026, distributed by missingFILMs. The film premiered in the New German Cinema competition at the 42nd Munich Film Festival, where BAUMANN was nominated for Best Director, the screenplay co-written with SABINE WESTERMAIER for the Screenwriting Award, and newcomer LUCA BRÜGGEMANN for Best Acting Performance.

A patchwork family on a summer holiday—yet the film, "not about the cliché of warring exes, but about two people who have managed to preserve

a friendly closeness." At its centre is thirteen-year-old Mia (LUCA BRÜGGEMANN), who lives with a heart defect and whose mother Tine (SUSANNE WOLFF) has surrounded her with over-protective care since a complicated birth. What Mia doesn't know: she had a twin brother who didn't survive—a hidden trauma. Director BAUMANN: "We took the concept of the missing link and applied it to family. It's about blind spots, about things that are not supposed to surface. And when Mia disappears, she herself becomes the missing link." In the woods, Mia encounters a mysterious boy with whom she doesn't

LUCA BRÜGGEMANN as Mia

exchange a single word, yet experiences a closeness the adult world cannot offer. The screenplay was developed with funding from the Thomas Strittmatter Screenwriting Prize, awarded by MFG. The film was produced by AREK GIELNIK and HOLM TADDIKEN for Stuttgart-based INDI FILM in co-production with Neufilm Leipzig.



WHAT'S PLAYING?

"ALLEGRO PASTELL" and the Art of Literary Adaption

By KATHARINA DOCKHORN

WHAT'S PLAYING? Cannes, Toronto, Berlin, Munich, Hof—Walker+Worm's festival track record speaks to their quality. When selecting their projects, TOBIAS WALKER and PHILIPP WORM often focus on literary adaptations, and they also give opportunities to emerging talents like director ANNA ROLLER.

Their adaptation of LEIF RANDT's shimmering love story "Allegro Pastell" premiered in the Berlinale's Panorama section and was released in theaters by DCM on April 16. This was followed on April 30 by their company's co-production "Rose". SANDRA HÜLLER won the Silver Bear for her impressive performance.

"We believe that festivals are an important component in the distribution of a film," says TOBIAS WALKER. "Our films strike a chord with programmers as they reflect the spirit of the times and offer thought-provoking perspectives on relevant themes."

With "Rose", the graduates of the University of Television and Film Munich (HFF) had already generated strong festival interest, thanks to the director's reputation and SANDRA HÜLLER's involvement. With "Allegro Pastell", their courage in trusting young filmmakers was once again rewarded—as with "Picco" and "Finsterworld".

"We are looking for directors who have demonstrated courage, an artistic signature, and talent in their early work," says TOBIAS WALKER. "Together, we help them develop further."

Following the classics "Chess Story" and "Stiller", the passionate readers produced "Allegro Pastell", a contemporary novel adaptation that captures the insecurity of the millennial generation in shaping their relationships. Author LEIF RANDT wrote the screenplay himself. "Our experience with this team has been very positive," says TOBIAS WALKER. "LEIF has a deep connection to and love for film. The same goes



© Felix Pflieger / Walker+Worm

Released in theaters on April 16: "Allegro Pastell"

for CHRISTIAN KRACHT, who actually studied film." Walker+Worm has already completed shooting the adaptation of his "Eurotrash".

For the production of "Allegro Pastell", the company collaborated for the third time with Bewegte Bilder Medien GmbH from Tübingen, following "Stiller" and "What Marielle Knows". Walker has a home-field advantage, having grown up in the city. ARD Degeto and Bayerischer Rundfunk joined the project. Production and distribution were funded by Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, MFG, FFF Bayern, DFFF, FFA, and HessenFilm. ■■■

"LIVING ONE'S TRUE SELF"

Wolfesperger's Intimate Portrait of Transformation

By KATHARINA DOCKHORN

WHAT'S PLAYING? Biberach holds a special place in Douglas Wolfesperger's heart. It was at the festival there that he first felt the urge to move from documentaries into feature films. He has served as the festival's artistic director. On April 13, his new film "Denn dieses Leben lebst nur du" celebrated its Baden-Württemberg premiere in Biberach after its acclaimed world premiere in Hof.

SWR supported the production with 35,000 euros; MFG and Hessen Film und Medien funded production and distribution. WOLFSPERGER is bringing the film

to theaters through his Wilder Süden Filmverleih, with support from Camino Filmverleih GmbH. Fifteen to twenty copies are planned for nationwide release, supported by a theater tour; Filmpresse Meuser handled press relations. Based in Konstanz and Berlin, the director sensitively portrays four people from his Swabian homeland who have transformed their lives. Gabriel, Elisabeth, Melina, and Dunja now live as a different gender than the one assigned at birth. They opened up to the camera, offering insight into their daily lives. They have grown accustomed to both rejection and curiosity, yet remain optimistic about having chosen the right path. In terms of content, the filmmaker never wanted to follow a supposed LGBTQ trend. The idea emerged during the filming of "Die Blutritter," combining Catholic tradition with portraits of gay clergy. The decisive impetus came in 2015 from debates in Baden-Württemberg over sexual diversity in school curricula.

Douglas Wolfesperger



© Wilder Süden

Four people's lives of transition, resilience and determination, captured with quiet striking intimacy

The topic struck a chord with WOLFSPERGER. "I have a soft spot for people outside mainstream society." He approaches them with warmth and on equal footing. They reciprocate this, sharing their thoughts with complete trust. His documentary debut, "Bellaria—As Long as We Live!", already captivated audiences with sensitive lightness. The 68-year-old self-taught filmmaker has remained true to the genre. He has not ruled out feature films and can imagine returning to this format. ■■■



© Joachim Gern

WHAT'S PLAYING?

"OZI: VOICE OF THE FOREST"

Tom Harper's Adventure Between Loss and Nature finds a Voice for the Voiceless

By CHRIS SCHINKE



The young orangutan Ozi and her quick-witted companion Chance set the tone for a lively jungle adventure

WHAT'S PLAYING? With "Ozi: Voice of the Forest", TIM HARPER combines classic family adventure with a distinct ecological perspective. The story of a young orangutan navigating loss and survival translates complex issues such as environmental destruction into an accessible, visually ambitious narrative—engaging younger audiences while resonating beyond its core demographic.

IN CINEMAS

The imaginative and ecologically minded animated feature "OZI: Voice of the Forest" has been showing in German cinemas since 16 April, distributed by Stuttgart-based Camino Film. The feature is an international co-production by GCI Films and Appian Way Productions—the company of LEONARDO DICAPRIO, whose dedication to conservation is reflected in this project aimed at children and families alike. Co-producer of the colourful production is veteran Hollywood producer MIKE MEDAVOY. The jungle adventure, whose protagonist is a young orangutan, was directed by TIM HARPER, with a screenplay by RICKY ROXBURGH and a score by RICHARD HARVEY and ELWIN HENDRIJANTO. With a budget of approximately 40 million euros, the visually

stunning film ranks among the more ambitious animated productions of recent years.

ADVENTURE WITH AN ECOLOGICAL CONSCIENCE

A devastating wildfire tears the young orangutan Ozi from the life she knows with her parents in the rainforest. She finds refuge in an animal sanctuary, where she learns to communicate with humans through sign language—an unusual narrative device that both highlights and bridges the divide between the animal and human worlds. When

Ozi discovers clues that her parents may still be alive, she sets out on a perilous journey alongside the nimble monkey Chance and the good-natured, slightly clumsy rhinoceros Honka.

The German voice of Ozi is provided by LINA LARISSA STRAHL, known from the "Bibi & Tina" film series. The film deliberately avoids reducing its animal characters to simple human stand-ins, instead telling the story consistently from Ozi's point of view. As the producers of this lively animated adventure put it, the aim is "to give a voice to those who have none of their own."

MFG SUPPORTS DISTRIBUTION

The German theatrical release through Camino Filmverleih GmbH in Stuttgart is supported by MFG Baden-Württemberg with a distribution grant of 50,000 euros. The film has a running time of 87 minutes and is rated suitable for ages six and up. The producers' guiding principle is clear: "Stories are at their most powerful when they move you before they teach you," say the producers. Rather than treating deforestation and climate change as abstract issues, the film makes their consequences tangible through the personal fate of an animal character. The result is a touching family adventure that works across generations and invites audiences to reflect on our relationship with the natural world. ■■■■■

Ozi—voiced in the German version by LINA LARISSA STRAHL



WHAT'S PLAYING?

"MY FRIEND BARRY"

Inspired by the legend of the world's most famous St. Bernard Markus Welter crafts a sweeping Alpine family adventure.

By CHRIS SCHINKE

WHAT'S PLAYING? With "My Friend Barry", MARKUS WELTER tells of an extraordinary bond forged in the harsh beauty of the Alps. Amid snow, danger and quiet hope unfolds an adventure shaped by courage, loyalty and trust—an emotionally rich, visually striking family film that speaks to the enduring power of companionship across all ages.

IN CINEMAS

The family film "My Friend Barry" has been showing in German cinemas since 19 March 2026, distributed by Wild Bunch Germany. Director MARKUS WELTER, who co-directed the acclaimed Swiss series "Der Bestatter" ("The Undertaker"), tells the story—inspired by true events—of what is perhaps the world's most famous St. Bernard. The screenplay was written by JAN POLDERVAART. In Switzerland, the film was released on 14 January 2026 and was also screened at the 61st Solothurn Film Days.

A LEGEND FROM THE ALPS

At the end of the 18th century, war orphans Georg (PACO VON WYSS) and his older brother Alfons (ORELL BERGKRAUT) find themselves stranded in a hospice high up in the snow-covered Alps on their arduous journey to Italy. Twelve-year-old Georg befriends Resi (ALMA BÜCHENBACHER), the spirited daughter

PACO VON WYSS as Georg



Georg and the young St. Bernard Barry begin to form an unlikely bond in the heart of the Alps

of avalanche dog handler Julien (YOUSEF SWEID), and secretly nurses the frail St. Bernard puppy Barry back to health. Between the shy boy, painfully made to feel his humble origins and lack of schooling, and the weakling pup that no one expects to survive, a touching friendship between two lovable outsiders begins to grow. But the novice Célestin (MAEL GALLATI) betrays him to Prior Anselm (ULRICH TUKUR). The cast also features MAX HUBACHER, CARLOS LEAL and CHRISTOPH GAUGLER. Inspired by true events—the real Barry lived from 1800 to 1812 at the hospice on the Great St. Bernard Pass and is said to have saved over 40 lives—the film takes audiences on a visually stunning journey into the Alps. The elaborate shoot began in February 2025 at over 2,000 metres above sea level in the Valais Alps, continued in Ticino and wrapped in Cologne in April 2025.

A SWISS-GERMAN CO-PRODUCTION

Producer MARCEL WOLFISBERG—who founded Lucerne-based Atlantis Pictures in 2005 and gained international recognition with the science fiction film "Cargo"—made the film in collaboration with Cologne-based MMC Zodiac. Co-production partners include Swiss Radio and Television SRF, SRG SSR, Centauri Media, Senator Film and Blue Entertainment. The project was supported by the Swiss Federal Office of Culture, the Zurich Film Foundation, Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, the German Federal Film Fund (DFFF), the German Federal Film Board (FFA), the Canton of Lucerne, the Valais and Ticino Film Commissions, Suissimage and MFG Baden-Württemberg. Cinematography was by MARCO BARBERI, the score by FABIAN RÖMER and the editing by CÉCILE WELTER.

This film about an extraordinary bond between a boy and his dog has a running time of 100 minutes and is rated suitable for all ages.

WHO WINS?

REZA MEMARI NAMED "DIRECTOR OF THE YEAR"



Director of the Year REZA MEMARI (r.) for "The Last Whale Singer" with the Producers of the Year A. CHEF, A.-L. GUÉGAN, A. DEGYSE; S. ONOMO for »Allah is not obliged«, and the Distributor of the Year E. CHEVALIER by Les Films du Préreau (from left)

WHO WINS? A huge acknowledgment for an animation project with MFG support: REZA MEMARI was named Director of the Year at the European Animation Forum in Bordeaux. He was honored for his animated film "The Last Whale Singer".

Every year, the award is granted by the attending industry experts, honoring outstanding achievements in the European animation industry. The awards ceremony took place at the Palais des Congrès in Bordeaux as the closure event of the 28th International Pitching and Coproduction Forum Cartoon Movie.

Following his work "Richard the Stork", "The Last Whale Singer" is MEMARI's second animated feature. The family-oriented fantasy movie tells the story of an orphan boy named Vincent, son of the last whale singer. To save the ocean, he must face his fears and find his own voice.

The German, Czech, and Canadian coproduction has been presented at Cartoon Movie over the years—from conception to production—and has already sold globally in more than 30 regions. The MFG supported the film's production in 2021 and congratulates REZA MEMARI and his team for this special acknowledgement!

THREE MFG-FUNDED PRODUCTIONS WIN GRIMME AWARDS: "Lena's Farm", "Elbow" and "The Empty Grave"

WHO WINS? Great recognition for the film and TV location Baden-Württemberg: three productions funded by the MFG received prizes at this year's Grimme Award Event: "The Empty Grave", "Elbow", and "Lena's Farm". Furthermore, two other MFG-funded projects, "The Fine Line" and "Nila's Dream in the Garden of Eden" received nominations for the renowned TV award.

On April 24th, 16 Grimme Awards as well as three special prizes were awarded at the Marl Theatre. Once again, the film and media hub Baden-Württemberg had a strong presence at the 62nd Grimme Award event.

"The awards represent the creative range and high standards of film and TV productions from Baden-Württemberg—from documentary via animation to series" states CARL BERGENGRUEN, CEO of the MFG Film Funding Baden-Württemberg.

"The fact that several MFG-funded films received the Grimme Award and other films were nominated underlines the strength of the location and the great potential of creative people in Germany's southwest".

The documentary "The Empty Grave" (Kurhaus Production and Kijiweni Pro-

ductions for ZDF – Das kleine Fernsehspiel) received one of the prestigious awards in the Information & Culture competition. The film follows two Tanzanian families looking for the human remains of their ancestors brought to Germany during colonial times thus impressively highlighting the consequences of colonial violence as well as questions of memories, accountability, and restitution.

In the Children and Youth competition, the feature film "Elbow" (Production: achtung panda!, Tripode Productions, Istos Film and jip film & verleih for ZDF – Das kleine Fernsehspiel) received an award. It is based on the eponymous novel by FATMA AYDEMIR and tells the story of 17-year-old Hazal from Berlin who is craving the notion of belonging. After a night that went out of control, her life is turned upside down—a vivid tale of identity, anger, and the search for a place in society.

The Audience Award of the Marl Group went to the animated series "Lena's Farm" (Studio FILM BILDER, Minya Film for ZDF). The series takes a humorous look at the daily business on a farm, where humans and animals have to face all sorts of challenges together. The child-friendly production combines topics like sustainability, social cohesion, and responsibility for nature and environment.

The Grimme Award is one of the most prestigious awards for high standard television in German-speaking countries. The prizes are awarded annually by the Grimme Institute, honoring outstanding productions and achievements in TV and streaming.

With these awarded and nominated productions, Baden-Württemberg reinforces once again its role as a strong media hub, where innovative projects are created from story development to production. (lk)

Awarded film project: "Elbow", "The Empty Grave" and "Lena's Farm"



WHO WINS?

THOMAS STRITTMATTER AWARD 2026

for Duc-Thi Bui and Philipp Lutz

WHO WINS? DUC-THI BUI and PHILIPP LUTZ win the Thomas Strittmatter Award 2026 for their drama script "Malibu". The award was handed over by ARNE BRAUN, State Secretary of the Department of Science, Research and Art Baden-Württemberg and MFG-CEO CARL BERGENGRUEN. With 20.000 euros, the MFG-sponsored Thomas Strittmatter Award is one of the highest endowed prizes for a script.

The drama revolves around the characters Jonas and David, both 17 years old and suffering from cancer, who meet in the oncology ward and develop a close friendship which eventually develops into closeness and love.

The writer DUC-THI BUI—born in Vietnam and raised in Stuttgart, Germany—has established himself as a strong voice of up-and-coming German films. His co-writer PHILIPP LUTZ, lawyer and graduate of the ifs Cologne, has been successfully working as a producer, writer, and director for movie productions but also public broadcasters. The three-member jury consisting of director and scriptwriter LAILA STIELER, director and writer GÜZIN KAR and media researcher ANNA KOKENGE honored all three nominated scripts with laudations. LAILA STIELER, head of the jury said about the winning script "Malibu":

"In an impressive way, we come to understand how special, how different, the perception of these two fatally ill boys is. They have their own world. There is an inside and an outside. For this, the writers create imaginary spaces, weaving them into the plot in order to reflect the youthful impartiality of the protagonists and add lightness and magic to the narrative. However, what really makes this work top-notch is the writers' attitude towards their characters. This makes 'Malibu' an outstanding script."

The awards ceremony was held with a reception at the Baden-Württemberg State Representation offices during the 76th Berlinale. The actor ANNE RATTE-POLLE, connected to the MFG through her roles in the productions "Matröshki" and "Nukki", read from the "Malibu"



The winners of the 2026 Thomas Strittmatter Award DUC-THI BUI (4th from left) and PHILIPP LUTZ (3rd from left) with MFG-CEO Carl Bergengruen, reader ANNE RATTE-POLLE, jury members LAILA STIELER, ANNA KOKENGE, GÜZIN KAR and Baden-Württemberg State Secretary for the Arts ARNE BRAUN at the award ceremony (from left)

script, which created a happy surprise for the winners.

The other nominees for the Strittmatter Award 2026, STEPHANIE FIES and ROMINA KÜPER, received 2,500 euros each for their respective scripts "Running High" and "Hyperbaby".

The State Secretary for Art, ARNE BRAUN stated: "In film it's only a good story that makes the grade and this is why a script is always decisive for the quality. And therefore, it is only consequential we're awarding the best scripts because in doing this we support writers on their way to a filmic work. After the phenomenal success of 'Sound of Falling' ('In die Sonne schauen') winning the Thomas Strittmatter Award 2023 with its script by MASCHA SCHILINSKI and LOUISE PETER, I am looking forward to where this year's winning script is heading. Congratulations to DUC-THI BUI and PHILIPP LUTZ, who were able to convince the jury with a powerful, original story and great filmic vision which we'll find on the big screen soon." MFG-CEO CARL BERGENGRUEN congratulates both writers: "All the best to both of the script writers, whose script was

selected from over 60 submissions. The Thomas Strittmatter Award is an ideal trailblazer for good stories. Almost all of the winners were successfully adapted into films and this, by all means, is what we also wish for 'Malibu'!"

With vibrance and knowledge, KNUT ELSTERMANN of the public broadcaster rbb presented the awards ceremony featuring the introduction of a series of current MFG-sponsored productions: "Allegro Pastell", "Four Minus Three", "House of Yang", "The Penguin", "Das NEINHorn", "Keep Her Quiet", "Monster Mia", "Life is Yours", "Night & Day" and "Missing Link".

Following the ceremony, more than 700 invited guests celebrated at the MFG reception in the spaces of the State Representation Baden-Württemberg until late in the evening with film celebrities such as NATALIA WÖRNER, LOUISE PETER, BAYAN LAYLA, SYL FALIGANT, MICHAEL BARAL, ANNE RATTE-POLLE, SUSANNE WOLFF, MARC-UWE KLING, PURNIMA GRÄTZ, ANDREA GUO, EMMA BADING, HELGE MARK among many others. (lk)

WHERE IT HAPPENS

AT THE EDGE OF CALM

"Mordufer" finds tension beneath the surface of Lake Constance

WHERE IT HAPPENS Überlingen on Lake Constance becomes the atmospheric centre of the new ZDF Friday crime series "Mordufer". Moving beyond the urban conventions of the genre, the series anchors its stories in a landscape where water, borders and hidden depths shape both mood and narrative.

AVAILABLE ON THE ZDF MEDIATHEK

The new ZDF Friday crime series "Mordufer" has been available to stream on ZDF Mediathek since 27 February 2026, with linear broadcast of the four sixty-minute episodes following from 6 March 2026, Fridays at 20:15. The series adds a location beyond the metropolis to a prime-time slot otherwise dominated by urban crime formats: filming took place in the summer of 2025 in and around Überlingen on Lake Constance. The Bavaria Fiction production was commissioned by ZDF, SRF and ORF, with funding from MFG Baden-Württemberg. All four episodes were directed by CHRISTOPH ISCHINGER, with atmospheric cinematography by CONSTANTIN CAMPEAN and a score by JENS LANGBEIN and ROBERT SCHULTE HEMMING.

TWO WOMEN, ONE MORAL COMPASS

Doro Beitinger (FRANZISKA WEISZ), early forties, returns to the criminal investigation department after years of caring for her family. Her new superior, Chiara Locatelli (MARIA WÖRDEMANN), late



MAXIMILIANE PROKOP (producer), MARIA WÖRDEMANN (actress), JAN ZEITLER (Mayor of Überlingen), ARNE BRAUN (State Secretary), FRANZISKA WEISZ (actress), JAN S. KAISER (Managing Director, Bavaria Fiction), CHRISTOPH ISCHINGER (director), ROBERT GEHRING (MFG) at the preview of "Mordufer" in Überlingen

twenties and of Italian heritage, is a step ahead of her on the career ladder. What unites them despite their differences is summed up by producer MAXIMILIANE PROKOP: "They are characters with rough edges, contradictions, humour and doubt—but also with a strong inner compass." The border region where Germany, Austria and Switzerland meet regularly brings the detectives together with customs officers Florian Jäger (LUCAS PRISOR) and Nico Arnold (PAUL AHRENS). The recurring ensemble also includes RONALD KUKULIES, ANNA GESA-RAIJA LAPPE, RALF BAUER and MICHAEL BARAL. The series deliberately weaves in themes that rarely find such a natural place in sixty-minute crime episodes: gender roles, women in the workplace, and what it means to juggle care work with a demanding career.

CRIME & NATURE IN ÜBERLINGEN ON LAKE CONSTANCE

The screenplays were written by REGINE BIELEFELDT, MARIANN KAISER and BORIS DENNULAT. The series was produced by MAXIMILIANE PROKOP with producers FRANK WALTER and MELANIE ZEMMLER. The ZDF commissioning editors are DIRK RADEMACHER and FLORIAN WEBER. In its themes, »Mordufer« casts a wide net—from cosmetic surgery clinics to arms manufacturers, from vineyards to cross-border crime. What connects the individual cases is the tension between the landscape and what lies beneath the surface. PROKOP describes Überlingen on Lake Constance as a setting that is not merely a picturesque place of longing but one that exudes its own beguiling, at times unsettling force. (cs)

FILM COMMISSION Region Stuttgart



Stuttgart-West: authentic, diverse, and full of stories

WHERE IT HAPPENS The new postcard set by the Film Commissions Region Stuttgart and Neckar-Alb is released under the motto "Typically Regional"—a visual portrait of regional identity aimed at making potential filming locations visible to filmmakers and creatives.

The focus is on tradition, customs, history, and distinctive architecture from the Stuttgart and Neckar-Alb regions. The atmospheric images were taken by Göppingen-based photographer

LEA THEWELEIT, who, with a keen sense of perspective and mood, has staged locations that are far more than mere backdrops. Whether historic sites, hidden gems, or picturesque buildings, the diversity of filming locations in Stuttgart and Neckar-Alb is impressive and underscores the cinematic relevance of these regions.

The current postcard set can be ordered via email at film@region-stuttgart.de.

WHERE IT HAPPENS

SMALL TOWN, STRONG NETWORK

A Clear Signal from Albstadt

WHERE IT HAPPENS The Film Commission Region Neckar-Alb hosted its second networking event of the year in March—following a January gathering at the Kamino cinema in Reutlingen, this time convening in Albstadt at the Capitol, hosted by RALF MERKEL.

Industry professionals engaged in lively exchanges on a range of current topics, with MFG Baden-Württemberg also in attendance. Filmmaker and Albstadt native MATTHIAS WISSMANN presented his independently produced psychological thriller "Vexier", offering insights into the challenges of bringing the project to life—entirely "Made in Albstadt." As one participant summed it up: "I'm not usually a fan of networking events, but this one was genuinely great—I felt completely at ease." With that spirit, the Film Commission Region Neckar-Alb is already looking ahead to its next gathering in July, welcoming both new and familiar faces.



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Networking event hosted by the Neckar-Alb Region Film Commission at the Capitol Albstadt—where encounters turn into projects

IN MEMORIAM Jens Merkel

MFG Baden-Württemberg mourns the passing of JENS MERKEL, who died unexpectedly at the age of 59. With him, the regional cinema landscape loses a deeply committed figure who, over many years, championed film culture in rural areas with remarkable dedication.

JENS MERKEL played a defining role in shaping the Merkur-Film-Center in Ottenau, which he took over with his family and continuously developed. As a cinema operator, he combined economic responsibility with a passion for film and a keen understanding of his audience.

Beyond his work in exhibition, MERKEL was widely engaged in his region. His work was marked by reliability, pragmatism and a strong connection to the local community—embodying the vital role that municipal cinemas play as social and cultural anchors.

MFG Baden-Württemberg will remember JENS MERKEL as a dedicated cinema professional. His commitment to preserving and strengthening cinema in rural areas will remain a lasting example.



© Ines Merkel

WHAT'S NEXT?

"HOUSE OF YANG"

Mystery Bridges Black Forest and Chinese Heritage **By CHRIS SCHINKE**



© Wood + Water Films (2)

The only German series in the Berlinale Special Series 2026

WHAT'S NEXT? With "House of Yang", STEFANIE REN delivers an atmospheric mystery series bridging the Black Forest and Chinese heritage. Premiering at the Berlinale, the production blends personal experience with supernatural storytelling, exploring generations, loss and identity—while highlighting the creative strength and international appeal of Baden-Württemberg as a film and production hub.

WORLD PREMIERE AT THE BERLINALE
The six-part mystery series "House of Yang" (6 × 30 min.) celebrated its world premiere in a theatrical cut at the Berlinale Special Series of the 76th Berlin International Film Festival on 19 February 2026, where three episodes screened to a sold-out Zoo Palast. Told in German and Mandarin, the SWR-produced haunted house tale is set for release on ARD Mediathek in autumn 2026. Creator, showrunner and writer STEFANIE REN is a German-Chinese author from the Black Forest and a graduate of the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg, who previously served as head writer on "A Thin Line" for Paramount+.

Director MIA SPENGLER came on board, bringing her trusted cinematographer ZAMARIN WAHDAT with her. The score is by LINDA BOSCH and MARC FRAGSTEIN, with KATHARINA DUFNER as commissioning editor for SWR.

THE HOUSE AS A LIVING BEING
A remote house in the Black Forest, three generations, two vanished girls: in 1949, Daiyu, a refugee from China, finds shelter in the house with her daughters—but her elder daughter disappears without a trace. In 1999, Yang, Daiyu's younger daughter, lives there with her husband Achim and their daughters Jessie and Isabel, until one night Isabel too is gone. In the

present day, Jessie (ELISA HOFMANN) returns with her teenage daughter Mila (PURNIMA GRÄTZ) to sell the inherited property — only to encounter her mother Yang (LINDA CHANG), whom she believed to be dead. "As a German-Chinese writer from the Black Forest, STEFANIE REN draws on many of her own experiences in the series, including everyday racism and what it means to grow up between two cultures. Elevating these experiences through mystery elements and making them accessible to a broad audience seemed to her the best way to capture the dark feeling of this place and everything that comes with it," say the producers at Wood Water Films in Mannheim.

FROM A THREE-PAGE PITCH TO THE BERLINALE

REN's three-page concept prevailed against 180 submissions in the SWR competition "Tief im Südwesten" ("Deep in the Southwest"). She then approached Wood Water Films in Mannheim, founded by Filmakademie graduates KAROLINE HENKEL, JASPER MIELKE and ARTO SEBASTIAN. Together they won first place and with it the production commission. As the producers note, the allocated budget was not quite sufficient for such an ambitious undertaking, so MFG Baden-Württemberg was brought on board as an additional funder, and SWR also increased its contribution. Principal photography took place from February to April 2025 in Esslingen.



"House of Yang": A visually rich mystery unfolds between the Black Forest and Chinese heritage, exploring memory, loss and identity

WHAT'S NEXT?

"DON'T BE A STRANGER"

Thalheim Shoots Neo-Western in Black Forest **By CHRIS SCHINKE**

WHAT'S NEXT? Since spring 2026, director ROBERT THALHEIM and his team have been shooting the feature film "Don't Be a Stranger" in Enzklösterle in the Northern Black Forest. THALHEIM has conceived his new film as a neo-western.

"My personal starting point for this story is my own experience as an exchange student from the big city of Berlin who ended up on a ranch in the American Midwest, in Rockville, Indiana," says THALHEIM. The screenplay was written by NICOLE ARMBRUSTER and THALHEIM. The film is a production of Kundschafter Filmproduktion in co-production with SWR and ARTE. It is funded by MFG Baden-Württemberg as well as by the German Federal Film Board (FFA) and the German Federal Film Fund (DFFF). Theatrical distribution is planned through Port au Prince Pictures.



On set in the Black Forest, MFG film unit head ROBERT GEHRING met with cast and crew of "Don't Be a Stranger" in Enzklösterle

THE WILD WEST IN THE BLACK FOREST

Seventeen-year-old New Yorker Charles (SALI-MOU THIAM, in his first leading role in a feature film) is supposed to go on an exchange trip to Berlin at the behest of his two mothers—but instead ends up on a remote cattle farm in the Black Forest. There, western enthusiast Fränk (SASCHA GERSAK) is living out his very own American dream. For Charles, the stay becomes a culture shock:

the image of America he encounters is deeply alien to him, and all he wants is out. Behind it lies a question that reaches beyond the plot: "How do we deal with a situation in which America is no longer the reliable partner at our side?" asks THALHEIM. The tone and aesthetic draw on American independent films such as "The Holdovers", "Little Miss Sunshine" and "The Kids Are Alright".

"TAMIM" A Romantic Comedy on Love, Identity and Belonging

By CHRIS SCHINKE

WHAT'S NEXT? "Tamim" (6×30 min.) is a romantic comedy with a socially critical edge, set in sun-drenched Freiburg im Breisgau.

Creator and head writer ANNA-LENA THEOBALD developed the material from personal experience: "'Tamim' is loosely based on my relationship with a Syrian electrical engineer," she writes. Director CHRISTINA TOURNATZÉS brings her own connection to the subject—her father came to Germany from Greece in the 1980s—adding a further layer of perspective. The series is produced by JANA LOTZE and JAMILA WENSKE (Achtung Panda!) together with ERKAN TASKIRAN (GustavFilm) and FRAUKE KOLBMÜLLER (Oma Inge Film, Leipzig). Broadcasters are SWR and ARTE. The project is funded by MFG Baden-Württemberg and FFF Bayern.

LOVE IN TIMES OF MIGRATION

After endless failed Tinder dates, hopeless romantic and electrical engineer Tamim (AZIZ DYAB) finally finds true

love in the quick-witted Laura (JAËLA PROBST). But while Tamim wants to get married, have children and finally change his tax bracket, Laura longs for independence. Then Tamim's former fiancée from Syria turns up. The writers' room—which alongside THEOBALD includes YASHI FREITAG, FATIMA REMLI, SIMON SCHNECKENBURGER, JARED FRYER and the two leads DYAB and PROBST themselves—ensures that both worlds are authentically woven into the storytelling.

The makers place "Tamim" in the spirit of "Ramy", "Master of None" and "Nobody Wants This". The tone oscillates between warmth and disenchantment, between laughter and quiet pain. Behind the love story, the series addresses everyday racism, female autonomy and the question of what belonging means in a society that constantly draws lines.

Director TOURNATZÉS: "'Tamim' is not an integration story in the conventional sense. It is a story about love. And about what it truly means to belong." With Achtung Panda!—whose co-productions include "Compartment No. 6" (Grand Prix, Cannes 2021)—the project has an internationally experienced production company behind it.



On set in Freiburg, MFG production funding head MARIAN B. METZNER THORN met with the team

ON THE HORIZON

FUNDING DECISIONS January through April 2026

As of April 2026

PRODUCTION FUNDING

Title / Genre / Total / SCRIPT;
DIRECTOR / Applicant

Petronella Apffelmus – Der Film (AT) /
Animated film, cinema / 580.000 € /
SERAINA NYIKOS, CLAUDIO WINTER; UTE
VON MÜNCHOW-POHL, FELIX SCHICHL /
SERU Animation GmbH & Co. KG,
Ludwigsburg

Muffelspaß im Olchipark / Animated
Series, TV / 510.000 € / ECKART FING-
BERG, RAPHAELA DEININGER, SARAH
KEMPEN; REGINA WELKER / Gretels
Gold GmbH, Reutlingen

Jacob beschließt zu lieben / Literature
Adaptation, Cinema / 450.000 € /
YILMAZ ARSLAN / MaxMa Film GmbH,
Mannheim

Ungeheuer / Horror movie, cinema /
400.000 € / MARIO SCHUSTER; DANIEL
VOGELMANN / kurhaus production
Film & Medien GmbH, Baden-Baden

Helikopter / Drama, Series, VoD /
350.000 € / EUGEN MERHER, MIRIAM
BÜHLER, ANNIKA SOISSON, ANDREJ
SORIN; EUGEN MERHER / Kojoten
Filmproduktion GmbH, Stuttgart

Der Gute Deutsche / Historical film,
cinema / 300.000 € / LISA C.
FRIEDERICH / Schiwago Film, Stuttgart

FISH / Drama, cinema / 200.000 € /
CARLO HINTERMANN, MARCO SAURA,
TANIA PEDRONI; CARLO HINTERMANN /
AMOUR FOU Germany, Stuttgart

Pestizid / Drama, Kino / 200.000 € /
CHRISTIAN ZIPFEL / Niama-Film,
Stuttgart

HYPERBABY / Tragicomedy, cinema /
200.000 € / ROMINA KÜPER / LiseLotte
Films GmbH, Ludwigsburg

Thousand Yard Stare / Drama, cinema /
150.000 € / ARI FOLMAN / 70 STEPS –
Baker, Tenné GbR, Stuttgart

Beneath the Plastic Sky / Documen-
tary, cinema / 150.000 € / JENNIFER
MALLMANN / JENNIFER MALLMANN /
FFL Film- & Fernseh-Labor Ludwigsburg
GmbH & Co KG, Ludwigsburg

Lieferung um jeden Preis / Documen-
tary, TV / 100.000 € / ANDREAS
PICHLER / eikon Media GmbH, Stuttgart

ANNA SEGHERS – TRANSIT NACH

MEXIKO / Documentary, TV /
50.000 € / HEDWIG SCHMUTTE;
HEDWIG SCHMUTTE, ROLF LAMBERT /
Along Mekong Productions, Heidelberg

Marlene – Der eiserne Engel /
Documentary, TV / 50.000 € / GERO
VON BOEHM, ERIC FRIEDLER / GERO
VON BOEHM, ERIC FRIEDLER / intersci-
ence film gmbh, Heidelberg

Mein Freund, der Arm / Docu-fiction
Live-action/Animation Short film,
cinema / 30.000 € / JULIUS GINTARAS
BLUM / JULIUS GINTARAS BLUM /
Harms & Unger GbR, Ludwigsburg

PRE-PRODUCTION FUNDING

Title / Genre / Total / SCRIPT;
DIRECTOR / Applicant

Klima Kleber / Romantic comedy /
30.000€ / JULIA WALTER, JAKOB
VOGT / East End Film GmbH

SCREENPLAY AND CONTENT DEVELOPMENT FUNDING

Title / Genre / Total / SCRIPT /
Applicant

3 Kapitäne / Series, Animation /
50.000 € / JULIA OCKER, LION DURST /
Studio FILM BILDER GmbH, Stuttgart

Die längste Zeit / Feature film,
Mystery Drama / 30.000 € / SVEN
GIELNIK / Third Picture GbR, Stuttgart

Einfach kann ja jeder! / Feature film,
Romantic comedy / 27.300 € / REGINE
BIELEFELDT / TB easy media GmbH,
Berlin

Évian 1938 / Documentary /
14.934 € / URSULA HOCKER, PROF.
PETER GOTTSCHALK / fechnerMEDIA
GmbH, Tuttlingen

DISTRIBUTION, SALES AND ADVERTISING FUNDING

Title / Genre / Release Date / Total /
Director / Applicant

Babystar / Drama / April 23, 2026 /
40.000 € / JOSCHA BONGARD / Across
Nations Filmverleih GmbH, Stuttgart

Girls don't cry / Documentary /
May 14, 2026 / 30.000 € / SIGRID
KLAUSMANN-SITTLER / Farbfilm Verleih
GmbH, Berlin

Mira / Children's movie / May 28,
2026 / 27.785 € / MARIE LIMKILDE /
Der Filmverleih GmbH, Stuttgart

Das Los des Fremden / Drama /
June/July 2026 / 25.000 € / BRANDT
ANDERSEN / Kinostar Filmverleih GmbH,
Stuttgart

CINEMA FUNDING

Cinema / Total / Applicant

Cinecity, Crailsheim / 50.000 € /
Wagner-Entertainment GmbH,
Crailsheim

Schauburg, Karlsruhe / 42.287 € /
Herbert Born, Karlsruhe

Central Kino, Rottweil / 40.661 € /
Central Kino Rottweil GmbH, Alpirsbach

Bali-Kino-Palast, Balingen / 30.900 € /
Hans Müller, Balingen

Capitol Lichtspiele, Kornwestheim /
25.873 € / Michail Toronidis, Affalter-
bach

Subiaco – Kino im Kloster, Alpirsbach /
6.422 € / Subiaco Kinos e.V., Alpirsbach

SUCCESS LOAN

Title / Genre / Date / Total /
Author / Applicant

Mein Freund Barry / Children's movie /
March 19, 2026 / 15.000 € / MARKUS
WELTER / Wildbunch Germany GmbH,
Berlin

Night & Day / Drama / May 14, 2026 /
7.012 € / TINA GHARAVI / Wildbunch
Germany GmbH, Berlin

LINE-PRODUCER FUNDING

Title / Genre / Total / Director /
Applicant

Dead of Winter – Eisige Stille (AT: The
Fisherwoman) / Thriller / 140.000 € /
BRIAN KIRK / LAVA Labs Moving Images
GmbH & Co. KG, Stuttgart

JOUR FIXE/PRE FIXE

Dates

ON THE HORIZON The traditional MFG networking event for filmmakers from Baden-Württemberg takes place every second Monday of the month at the Merlin cultural center in Stuttgart West.

The Jour Fixe of MFG Baden-Württemberg offers filmmakers and creatives in the southwest a unique opportunity for informal exchange about their projects. Representatives of MFG Film Funding are also present.

■ DATES 2026

■ Jour Fixe / 7-10 p.m.

11.05. / 08.06. / 13.07. / 14.09. / 12.10. / 09.11. / 14.12.

■ Pre Fixe and Animation Lounge / 7-10 p.m.

13.07. / 09.11.

■ Location

Merlin, Augustenstr. 72, Stuttgart

■ Dates subject to change.

For current information, see:

film.mfg.de/veranstaltungen/jour-fixe

APPLICATION DEADLINES

ON THE HORIZON MFG recommends a consultation before submitting an application. For first-time applications and/or more complex cases, a personal appointment is recommended at least 14 days before the submission deadline.

Applications must be submitted to MFG Film Funding by the specified deadlines. Please check the exact dates of the jury meetings on the MFG website: film.mfg.de/service/einreichfristen/

■ Screenplay development, pre-production, production

30.06.2026 / 03.11.

■ Line Producer Funding

year-round

■ Distribution, sales and advertising

03.06.2026 / 01.10.

■ Cinema investment funding

23.09.2026

■ Cinema Awards 2026

18.05.2026

■ Institutional funding for municipal cinemass

31.12.2026

■ Promotion year-round

■ Ongoing incentive funding - subprojectse

04.05.2026 / 18.08.

■ Thomas Strittmatter Award 2027

tba / film.mfg.de/preise/thomas-strittmatter-preis/richtlinien/

MONDAY SEMINARS May 2026

ON THE HORIZON The Film Commission Region Stuttgart, together with MFG, offers a comprehensive continuing education program for filmmakers in Baden-Württemberg through its Monday seminars. Once a month, experts from the film industry give presentations.

■ REGISTRATION AND FEES

film.region-stuttgart.de/termine
Fee: 15 euros / online via Zoom

■ CURRENT INFORMATION

Film Commission Region Stuttgart
film@region-stuttgart.de
film.region-stuttgart.de/termine

■ NEW SEMINAR TIMES

4-6 p.m.

■ 18 May 2026 4-6 p.m. / online Writing Comedy for Film and Series

Speaker: CHRISTIAN EISERT, screenwriter & comedy coach
mehr-erfolg-mit-humor.de

Humor is far more than a stylistic device: it creates proximity, attention, and emotional impact—in film and series as well as in advertising or social media. TV writer and comedy coach CHRISTIAN EISERT demonstrates how punchlines are created, how comedic characters are developed, and how humor works even under time pressure. He also provides insights into how editorial teams and productions assess and improve comedic content—practically oriented and application-driven.

EISERT has been writing gags, sketches, and screenplays for years. As a coach, he teaches how to systematically develop humor—and genuinely make people laugh.

IMPRINT

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BRING YOUR SWIMWEAR.

EARLY BIRD ACCREDITATION MAY 29

ACCREDITATION DEADLINE JUNE 12

**43 FILMFEST
MÜNCHEN 26**

26.6.-5.7.26

MORE INFORMATION:

