

Mr Bachmann and his Class

(Herr Bachmann und seine Klasse)

A film by Maria Speth



217 min/Germany/German with English subtitles/2021/Cert tbc/World Premiere and Winner of the Silver Bear and Audience Award – Berlin International Film Festival 2021

Release December 9th 2022

FOR ALL UK PRESS ENQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT:

Sue Porter/Lizzie Frith – Porter Frith Ltd

Tel. 07940 584066/07825 603705 porterfrith@hotmail.com

FOR ALL OTHER ENQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT

Robert Beeson – robert@newwavefilms.co.uk

Dena Blakeman – dena@newwavefilms.co.uk



info@newwavefilms.co.uk

Mr Bachmann is a 64-year-old comprehensive school teacher for class 6b at the Georg-Büchner-Gesamtschule in Stadtallendorf, North Hesse. The class comprises a group of 12 to 14 year old students from nine different countries with varying levels of aptitude. The multiculturalism the children experience causes mild clashes due to largely religious, linguistic and ethical differences. The group is aware of societal pressure to succeed and they grapple with emotions ranging from pride to arrogance or anxiety. Mr Bachmann is determined to prove each child's value and ensure they are equipped for high school. (The next in the German education system).

They are simultaneously trying to balance their individualism with their national identity. The school has a big responsibility to eradicate exclusion and marginalization, whilst being sensitive to the divides along cultural and academic lines. Mr Bachmann's intimate, holistic and progressive approach to teaching elevates the bond between teacher and pupil and gives this story hope. Yet his unconventional methods are tested by the complexities of the social realities inherent in the provincial German industrial town.

CONTEXT

The cultural make-up of Mr Bachmann's class reflects the population mix of the town. There are roughly 21,000 people of which 25% don't have German citizenship and 70% have an immigrant background. About 5,000 inhabitants are Muslim. Stadtallendorf is a small town with a large industrial base. The iron foundry, Fritz Winter, was founded in 1951 and today supplies 2,800 jobs. In 1956, Ferrero established its biggest plant worldwide in the town, employing 3,400 people. The first foreign workers arrived in the early sixties from Italy and Greece, and from Turkey in 1963. But the town's history of employing foreign workers goes back even further to the Nazi Regime. During WWII, Stadtallendorf was the largest European production site for arms and munitions. The major part of the workforce was not there voluntarily. Many were forced labourers from the Münchmühle sub-concentration camp.

Further information and downloads [here](#)
Photo set for download – [jpg](#) or [tiff](#)



CREW

| | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Director | Maria Speth |
| Script | Maria Speth, Reinhold Vorschneider |
| Director of Photography | Reinhold Vorschneider |
| Production Manager | Brigit Mulders |
| Original Sound | Oliver Göbel |
| Sound Mix | Adrian Baumeister |
| Sound Design | Niklas Kammertöns |
| Editor | Maria Speth |
| Producer | Maria Speth |
| Production Company | Madonnen Film GmbH |

A MADONNEN FILM PRODUCTION WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF DIETER BACHMANN,
AYNUR BAL, ÖNDER CAVDAR & THE STUDENTS FROM THE 6B & 6F.

217 min/Germany/German with English subtitles/2021/2.35:1



MARIA SPETH

Maria Speth is a writer, director and producer of features and documentaries. Her graduate thesis film and debut feature *THE DAYS BETWEEN* premiered at the Rotterdam International Film Festival in 2001, where it won the VPRO Tiger Award. It was also honoured with the Grand Jury Award at the Créteil International Women's Film Festival and the MFG-Star Award for emerging directors in Germany in 2001. Her second feature *MADONNAS* (2007) won the Hessian Film Prize in 2007. The lead actress Sandra Hüller won the Silver Astor award for best actress at the Festival Internacional de Cine in Mar del Plata. In 2009, Maria founded Madonnen Film and produced her first documentary, *9 LIVES*, which she wrote, directed and edited and for which she received the DEFA Foundation Award at the 2010 International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film. In 2011, she was awarded the Incentive Prize for Film and Media Arts from the Academy of Arts in Berlin. In 2012, Maria received the German Metropolis Award for best director of a documentary. Her feature, *DAUGHTERS* (2014), premiered at the Berlinale and was released theatrically in Germany. In 2015, Maria received script development funding from the German National Film Fund FFA for her project *STADT ALLEN DORF* that she shot as *MR BACHMAN AND HIS CLASS* until July 2017.

She is currently working on a feature film *FOR KATE* and *ONE LIVES BECAUSE ONE IS BORN*, both of which are supported with funds from the German Federal Government.

FILMOGRAPHY

TBC FOR KATE (feature)
TBC ONE LIVES BECAUSE ONE IS BORN
2021 MR BACHMANN AND HIS CLASS (documentary)
2014 DAUGHTERS (feature)
2010 9 LIVES (documentary)
2007 MADONNAS (feature)
2001 THE DAYS BETWEEN (feature)
1999 BAREFOOT (short)



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Dieter Bachmann and I have known each other for decades. After he had started to work in Stadallendorf as a teacher, he kept telling me for years about this town and the students of Georg Büchner School and how I should really take a look myself.

Approaching this town deep in the German hinterland from one of the surrounding hills, you see a silhouette of smoking factory chimneys in the haze over the plain. From afar, it looks like one big industrial complex, surrounded by blocks of housing on one side and an old timber-framed village on the other.

Driving through town, you see roadside signs. They point to a DAG and a WASAG, a Documentation and information Center and an Intermediary Deposit for TNT contaminated soil. Between them, there are older buildings whose low roofs are overgrown with greenery – gnarly pines, young birches and brushwood. Inquiring into the history of these traces, one finds that Allendorf was a small farming village until 1938, when the Nazi Regime built the biggest production plant for explosives. Leaving your car on the main street, you smell a mix of metal and hazelnut cream. Since the factories for explosives were not destroyed in the war, new industries moved to Stadallendorf during the post-war Economic Miracle. The foundry Fritz Winter and the Ferrero chocolate factory became the new centre of the town.

By visiting Dieter Bachmann in his class, you will experience a teacher who builds a personal, emotional rapport with his students – someone who does not merely impart knowledge but who involves his full personality with all his weaknesses and strengths, has no taboos and engages his students without prejudice, not in the service of political correctness but as lived, emotional openness without any hidden resentment. He creates an open atmosphere without fear in which his students feel safe, where they can show themselves and develop. School becomes their living room, a trusted space where they can talk about anything they have on their minds, with a teacher who in conversation challenges, provokes, encourages, strengthens, promotes solidarity and empathy. Dieter is someone who knows that strengthening self-worth can be more important than the Pythagorean theorem. He throws all his abilities in the balance so non-academic skills can develop as well – juggling, shaping stones, building tables, dancing and making music. These are important activities to foster communication among the students and help overcome social, cultural and linguistic barriers.



The point of departure for this project wasn't a thesis about the reality of the Federal Republic as an immigration country or the presentation of an alternative pedagogic model, but the open-ended observation and the unprejudiced encounter with these people.

My love for these children germinated during the shoot but only fully unfolded during the edit – a love that was encouraged through their direct emotional openness and their emergent potential. In a certain sense, this love became a leitmotif for my editing work.

The children in Bachmann's class mostly have an industrial working class background, independently of their Turkish, Russian, Bulgarian or German roots. One can rightly say that their lives are precarious and their opportunities for education and social advancement are limited. But just as Teacher Bachmann offers these young people a chance to develop skills, beauty and dignity, I wanted to give them the same in my edit: to be stars for 217 minutes.

Mr Bachmann would like to add a few things:

"It was a snowy winter's day when I first crossed the school yard of Georg Büchner School. And it hit me somewhat unprepared. I knew this is not really where I wanted to be. No! Rap music blared from somewhere, everything was in commotion and the children ran and shouted. From a distance, I saw two young boys take my measure. "Hey, who are you looking for? What are you doing here?" They laughed, not unkindly. "Well, I think I am supposed to become a teacher here," I joked.



The boys' eyes widened: "Oh yes! Then you should become our teacher! What's your name?" I almost replied "Dieter", but managed to say: "I am Mr Bachmann!", and they took my hand and brought me to the school administration office. And so, Teacher Bachmann was born!

I often ask myself how I ended up becoming a teacher. I think the students at Georg Büchner Comprehensive in Stadtallendorf showed me unmistakably what kind of teacher they wanted – one who feeds them apples and cereal and doner kebab, who plays soccer with them, makes music and draws; someone who deciphers with them what the world looks like and what there is to discover; someone they can ask whatever they want, but most of all someone who doesn't put them down with grades and their own faults. They

want a teacher who is as happy to go to school as they are, with whom they can laugh and sing and scream; someone who also puts them back on track when fists fly, or they insult queer or handicapped people. At its core it really is a perfectly normal relationship between children or youths and an adult, with an attitude of: “I know you can do this, that is something you better not do, this is out of bounds, but I trust you, I know you have it in you, I like you.”

Interview with Maria Speth and Oliver Johnston in [The Upcoming](#)

What came first – the desire to make a documentary about the educational process, or meeting Mr Bachmann himself?

“The whole project really started more from the town of Stadtallendorf – and really, I see that town as one of the protagonists in my film. I was made aware of this town through Mr Bachmann, who I knew, but the story of this small provincial village in the middle of Germany that was turned into a major munitions plant – the biggest munitions plant in Europe during the war, by the Nazis, probably because it had great infrastructure – it was in the middle of Germany, it was somewhat out of the way and hidden, but you could still get stuff in and out easily. I found that fascinating, also because when I visited the town, you can still see this strata of history throughout the town. For example, you will still see all these buildings, these factory buildings, that weren’t demolished after the war – you can see them with these trees on their roofs in order to make them invisible from the air, and that I found fascinating.”

So the town itself was as important to the film as any of the people in it?

“To me, the importance of Stadtallendorf as a protagonist was a given, because also with its importance as a Nazi munitions plant; this was the main reason for the town’s diversity – its incredibly interesting makeup – because firstly, this was a village. They brought in forced labour, thousands of people doing forced labour in the plants, including a thousand Jewish women who were brought in from a nearby concentration camp. Then after the war, displaced persons moved in from the ex-German eastern areas, and then after a while, Germans didn’t want to do the dirty work in these factories, and so a huge wave of guest workers came in, starting in the 60s. There were all these different migration waves that Germany has gone through over the past decades, and they are very visible in the town, in its ethnic makeup, which I find particularly interesting because we tend to think of this as a big-city issue. Stadtallendorf is really a very small town, but just as diverse as many other places.”

How did Mr Bachmann himself eventually become the focus?

“After all this interest in the town, I visited Mr Bachmann at his school, and it became clear to me that the school really was a culmination point for all the different movements I wanted to show, because you could see the demography of the town reflected in the school, and at that point it was more a project about the school, then Bachmann took over at some point as the other protagonist – I focussed more on him because he was such a special person.”

How did you get the school to agree to having a documentary filmed on the premises?

“Originally, I had a different approach to my film, even though Mr Bachmann’s class was a big part of this. I originally had an idea about a theatre project I thought I would do at the school with 15-year-olds about their first love, and for many reasons that became very complicated. I pursued that for about a year or two, so I was already very much present at the school, and during this time, I hit upon the fact that the sixth grade was a particularly interesting topic for my film, because it’s the final year of this school before students are distributed to other schools – you know, sort of sifted for achievement – so there were a lot of interesting aspects there. I think the headteacher at the time was easily convinced: I received permission without too much of an issue because there was already this trust, because I had been working there for a while. Even after that decision, we originally filmed in three different classes, including a class run by one of Mr Bachmann’s ex-students – who is now a teacher himself – and another class. But the more we prepared this, the clearer it became to me that it was still too broad, and I focussed on the particular microcosm of Mr Bachmann’s class. I have to add that we had seven shooting periods in which we took all our footage and of course, we ended up with a lot of material – over 200 hours – and what you see now is only three hours of this wealth of material, with this focus that I described earlier.

The film depicts all these different children from different backgrounds, all together within a shared environment. Do you think that your film makes an important point about the nature of inclusion?

MS: My intention wasn’t to start an educational debate or propose a new educational model. It really came from the specifics of this particular township, Stadtallendorf; its history, and more importantly, what this history did, and does, to its people. So mostly, we were very observational – we just went in and looked. But in a way, school is such an important place because it’s a place you can reach young people, and contribute to or stunt their personalities and their personal development. It’s vital to the people we become; all of our lives are strongly influenced by our experiences at school. To me, this school is especially a place where people meet. I’m not a politician, and I’m not an expert, and I don’t really want to be

prescriptive here, but what I wanted to do was pose the question that everyone should ask of themselves: what kind of human beings do we want to be, and how to create spaces where all sorts of positive things can happen. At school, you will only be able to learn when you have space for that, when you trust yourself – when there's that feeling of security. When I was a kid at school, I always asked myself what my teachers were really like as human beings – not just their school personality. And what is striking about Herr Bachmann is that he is willing to be open, to lay that open, with all his strengths, and also his weaknesses. He always lets his soul shine through, and to me, that is perhaps the most important thing about the film.

Have Mr Bachmann or any of the students in the film had an opportunity to watch the finished product?

MS: The fact is that really nobody has seen it yet, including anyone depicted, because I barely finished it in time for Berlinale. Even Herr Bachmann hasn't seen it, but with Herr Bachmann and the other teachers, we always discussed that we would rent a cinema as soon as the pandemic allows and show it to them, because it's important to me to see it together with them. I think it's going to be very special. The children I depict in the film have almost become adults – it was almost four years ago, so they must have changed. And not everybody is still in Stadtallendorf; particularly one of the girls I depict from Bulgaria – I know she has moved back to Bulgaria, so there's going to be quite the research phase to make sure we find as many as possible, and hopefully make it possible for them to see the film. I'm looking very much forward to that, and I hope that they will like it.