EAST GERMAN CINEMA
This page intentionally left blank
East German Cinema
DEFA and Film History

Sebastian Heiduschke
# Contents

*List of Figures*  
vii  

*Acknowledgments*  
ix  

Introduction  
1  

**Part I  East German Cinema**  
7  

1 East German Cinema as State Institution  
9  

2 Reciprocities and Tensions: DEFA and the East German Entertainment Industry  
19  

3 A Cultural Legacy: DEFA’s Afterlife  
31  

**Part II  Freezes and Thaws: Canonizing DEFA**  
41  

4 The Rubble Film, Wolfgang Staudte, and Postwar German Cinema: *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (*The Murderers Are among Us*, Wolfgang Staudte, 1946)  
45  

5 Fairy Tales and Children’s Films as Eternal Blockbusters:  
*Die Geschichte vom Kleinen Muck* (*The Story of Little Mook*, Wolfgang Staudte, 1953)  
53  

6 The *Gegenwartsfilm*, West Berlin as Hostile Other, and East Germany as Homeland: The Rebel Film *Berlin—Ecke Schönhauser* (*Berlin Schönhauser Corner*, Gerhard Klein, 1957)  
61  

7 The Birth of DEFA Genre Cinema, East German Sci-fi Films, New Technologies, and Coproduction with Eastern Europe:  
*Der schweigende Stern* (*Silent Star*, Kurt Maetzig, 1960)  
69  

8 Film Censorship, the East German *Nouvelle Vague*, and the “Rabbit Films”:  
*Das Kaninchen bin ich* (*The Rabbit Is Me*, Kurt Maetzig, 1965)  
77  

9 Renegade Films, DEFA Musicals, and the Genre Cinema:  
*Heißer Sommer* (*Hot Summer*, Joachim Hasler, 1968)  
85
Contents

10 More Genre Cinema, the “Red Western,” and Stardom in East Germany: Apachen (Apachos, Gottfried Kolditz, 1973) 93


12 DEFA and the Holocaust, the Antifascist Legacy, and International Acclaim: Jakob der Lügner (Jacob the Liar, Frank Beyer, 1974) 107

13 The Women’s Film, Konrad Wolf, and DEFA after the “Biermann Affair”: Solo Sunny (Konrad Wolf, 1980) 115

14 Passed by History: Dystopia, Parable, and Bookend: Die Architekten (The Architects, Peter Kahane, 1990) 123

15 The Wendeflicks, Jörg Foth, and DEFA after Censorship: Letztes aus der Da-Da-eR (Latest from the Da-Da-eR, Jörg Foth, 1990) 131

Appendix 139

Notes 141

Bibliography 165

Filmography 185

Index 191
Figures

4.1 The well-dressed, well-lit couple, Susanne and Hans 50
5.1 Extravagant sets indicate the large budget spent on DEFA fairy tales and children’s films 57
6.1 Light and shadow as tools to exemplify a peaceful, socialist East Berlin 65
7.1 Agfacolor, gizmos, expensive props, and special effects in DEFA’s first sci-fi film 73
8.1 Freezing the action in a tableau vivant of Mrs. Deister and Maria 82
9.1 Hitchhiking to the beach in a modern East Germany 90
10.1 The exotic body of the “DEFA Chief Indian,” played by Gojko Mitic 95
11.1 Blindfolded agents of East Germany’s secret police during the love act 102
12.1 Flashback sequences as tools to provide a multidimensional picture of a new antifascist hero 111
13.1 A stark depiction of living conditions in East Germany 116
14.1 Perplexed architects on location 127
15.1 The clowns Meh and Weh symbolically trying to rescue the lost utopia East Germany 135
This page intentionally left blank
Acknowledgments

Writing this book was by no means a solitary endeavor. Granted, putting my prose on paper took place mostly at my desk, but even at those times I was accompanied by two loyal Chihuahuas making sure I stayed on task while I was overlooking the Oregon fauna (aka deer) eating the Oregon flora (tulips and other plants) in our front yard.

I also do have to extend sincere thanks to many members of the human species who all contributed to this book in one way or another.

For feedback on drafts at various stages of completion I thank the members of my writing group at Oregon State University, Rebecca Olson, Kara Ritzheimer, and Bradley Boovy, as well as my online writing group and its members April Eisman and Thomas Maulucci. For engaging discussions about East German cinema and probing questions at a variety of conferences and film institutes I thank Seán Allan, Benita Blessing, Skyler Arndt-Briggs, Barton Byg, Victoria Lenshyn, Hiltrud Schulz, Evan Torner, and many more. I also need to thank the two reviewers who commented on the original manuscript. Your remarks made this book better.

For her diligent and stellar editing work fixing my prose over the past years I would like to thank Melissa Weintraub. If there was a reason not to recommend her it would be the fact that she may not have time anymore to un-Germanize my grammar, fix my citations, and polish up my manuscripts. She has done an outstanding job.

Working with Robyn Curtis and her editorial assistants at Palgrave was a pleasure from the very beginning. I enjoyed the quick turnaround and the professionalism all along. I could not have asked for a better publishing venue for my first book.

Money matters. Research and writing for this book was made possible by grants from the Oregon State University Valley Library, the Center for the Humanities at Oregon State University, and the Faculty Research Office at Oregon State University. The DEFA-Stiftung in Berlin supplied the cover art for this book free of charge. Thank you very much.

A book about film would not be possible without the actual films. For recording literally hundreds of DEFA films broadcast on German television and mailing them to me, I would like to thank my father, Bernd Heiduschke; and my mother, Marianne Heiduschke, for providing me with a quiet place to work, babysitting while in Germany, and allowing me to block the digital video recorder for endless hours.
Acknowledgments

My students over the past years have had to listen to me talk about East German cinema probably more than they ever expected. I am sure that they were hoping more than once that DEFA had never existed. Their discussions and questions, however, were valuable guides in the writing process.

There is nothing like a good mentor for a junior faculty member. I believe I had one of the best. Thanks, Jon Lewis, for helping me navigate the waters of the publication process, for talking with me about films (and soccer), and for being an inspiration in the way you do your scholarship.

I certainly could not have even attempted to write a book without the support of the two most important people in my life, Victoria and Max. While Max did not always understand why I occupied my time with DEFA instead of dedicating it to our shared passion LEGO, he accepted the fact that his father watches movies for a living and then writes about them. Or something similar to that. Victoria, I am sure, will be happy to see me more often again than in the past year, when the four letters of DEFA pushed the other, more important four letters in our life out of the way. Saying thank you would not nearly be enough for your patience, the time you took out of your day to run errands, to be the parent-taxi and the volunteer at school, and to pick up the films and books that had come in for me at the library. I will do it anyway—and I am ready to load the dishwasher again.