



Barbara

Director: Christian Petzold

Country: Germany

Date: 2012



This season is supported by Film Hub North West Central, proud to be part of the BFI Film Audience Network.

A review by Jordan Mintzer for *The Hollywood Reporter*:

A slow-burning Cold War drama that will reward patient viewers with its ultimate emotional payoff, *Barbara* reps a skillfully mannered, meticulously acted Berlin Competition entry from homeland writer-director Christian Petzold (*Yella*, *Jerichow*). Set in a secluded East German village during the summer of 1980, the film portrays the stifling day-to-day grind of a country doctor (Nina Hoss, in a terrifically restrained performance) torn between her desire to flee to the West and her growing attachment to a fellow physician. Further Euro fest bids and distribution are assured, with the possibility of Stateside art house play on a small scale.

After being banished from Berlin for trying to obtain a travel visa, *Barbara* (Hoss) finds herself isolated in a gloomy Northern town where she works at the local medical clinic. Subject to constant supervision and searches by a menacing GDR officer (Rainer Bock, *The White Ribbon*) and unable to take so much as an evening stroll without looking over her shoulder, she quickly searches for a way to leave the Eastern bloc once and for all. But her yearnings are gradually transformed as she grows closer to the clinic's head doctor, Andre (Ronald Zehrfeld), a gentle loner who's forced to keep tabs on *Barbara* and whose intentions are never quite clear, though they appear to be good-natured. Their bond is further enhanced by a love of the profession that has them working overtime to care for two troubled patients: a rebellious teenage runaway, Stella (Jasna Fritzi Bauer), and a young man (Jannik Schumann) who attempted suicide for reasons we will learn about later on.



Building a stolid and claustrophobic atmosphere in the early reels, Petzold and regular cinematographer Hans Fromm present *Barbara*'s newfound existence through a canvas of muted colors and crisp, stationary medium shots as if she were a prisoner serving out an implicit life sentence. The carefully designed decors by K.D. Gruber, filled with outdated cars, appliances and medical equipment, reveal to what extent inhabitants of the East, including intelligent, well-trained doctors, are compelled to scrape by with what they have.

Such details slowly – a tad too slowly in the film's midsection – retreat to the background as *Barbara* begins to grow attached to Andre and their patients, and she's eventually thrown into a dilemma where her need for freedom is challenged by the warmth and gratitude she receives from others. When her West German b.f., Jorg (Mark Waschke) swings by after a few trysts to offer a sure-fire way out, the stage is set for a denouement where *Barbara*'s conflicting impulses come to a surprising head.

In her fifth collaboration with Petzold, Hoss (who won best actress in Berlin for *Yella*) offers up a discreet and carefully balanced turn that subdues most emotion until the final minutes, yet she still manages to paint a full portrait of her character's inner turmoil. This may throw off audiences seeking lively drama, but it's very much Petzold's m.o. to have feelings boil beneath the surface until they're about to blow. As the stoical Andre, Zehrfeld likewise keeps things to a minimum, and it takes a while for both *Barbara* and the audience to make him out. Even when he proffers a gruesome story to explain how he wound up exiled to the clinic, it's never quite clear if he's telling the truth. In such places like these, even the nice guys can't be trusted.

From: <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/barbara-berlin-film-review-289528>