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GOOD BYE, LENIN!

Movie Details

Post Author: Matt Ho August 2, 2013 0

OUR RATING 

DIRECTOR WOLFGANG BECKER

WRITER B. LICHTENBERG, W. BECKER 

US BOX OFFICE \$4M

RUN TIME 2 HR. 01 MIN. **RATED** R

YOUR RATING

GENRE COMEDY, DRAMA, INTERNATIONAL

WATCH THE TRAILER GOOD BYE, LENIN! TRAILER

STARS [Alexander Beyer](#) [Chulpan Khamatova](#) [Daniel Brühl](#) [Katrin Saß](#) [Maria Simon](#)

SYNOPSIS

During an anti-government demonstration, Alex Kerner's (Daniel Brühl) proud socialist mother Christiane (Katrin Saß) suffers a heart attack after watching him get arrested and falls into a coma. Eight months later she wakes up, and Alex is told by the doctor that another fatal shock could kill her. Realizing that the recent political changes could jeopardize her health, he has to prevent her from learning about what has happened to the country that she holds dear.

REVIEW

Good Bye, Lenin! is set in 1989 Berlin, a time of change in the city where the German reunification took place followed by the arrival of capitalism in the East. There's a ubiquitous political undertone in the story, and it certainly helps if you have a slight understanding of the history. That being said, we're never expected to walk in knowing everything. While this is very much a German film,

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| The Conjuring | \$22,208,389 |
| Despicable Me 2 | \$16,424,135 |
| Turbo | \$13,740,247 |
| Grown Ups 2 | \$11,600,811 |

Source: *The Numbers* - Movie Box Office

Advertising

director/writer Wolfgang Becker is gracious enough to fill in the basics for an international audience, and he does a fine job in doing so. Becker guides viewers through the time period by using Alex as our faithful narrator. What I love about this approach is that not only does the narration educate us on these historical events, but it also offers a perspective on how it has changed people's lives through the eyes of the main character and his peculiar situation.

While politics do play a large role, it's hardly the focus of *Good Bye, Lenin!* The film examines the importance of family, the preservation of happiness, societal change, but most interestingly as Becker once put it, "life in a totalitarian system." That's essentially what the faux East Berlin that Alex creates for Christiane is, and it's where the film gets its comedic tone. Much of the humor comes from how he has to shelter her from an outside world that could potentially put her back into shock, given the recent political changes she may not be able to handle. The funniest moments are always when we watch Alex struggle to keep up the illusion of a society his mother once knew within the confined space of her room; the way he searches for the last of Mocca Fix and Spreewald Gherkins pickles, how he convinces his sister to dress in outdated clothing, and to use plastic diapers for her baby, etc.

The film becomes even more humorous when Christiane begins to notice that nothing is what it seems, leading Alex and his aspiring filmmaker co-worker Denis to create fake broadcasts to explain the oddities of what she witnesses. It's the comedy that lends *Good Bye, Lenin!* its charm, and it is what makes the main character so admirable. Everything Alex does is to keep his mother together having lost her once when she sank into deep depression after his father left. There's also a romantic element that keeps things light with Russian actress Chulpan Khamatova who plays Alex's girlfriend Lara, the kind-hearted nurse he falls in love with who puts up with his antics.

The future lay in our hands. Uncertain, yet promising. – Alexander Kerner

In spite of the humor though, there is a sense of melancholy that maintains a presence throughout largely due to the Kerner's backstory. Christiane's husband's flight to West Germany is an emotional scar that she's never been able to get over, but more importantly, it's why she gained her strong political beliefs, the beliefs that Alex tries to preserve as he shields her from the new world. It's the past that's responsible for Christiane's strong, yet fragile state. The plot eventually dives into the truth of the family story and follows up on it in a powerful manner when the film takes its dramatic turn. It does take a bit of time for the second act to make its transition towards this point, but it's a solid build

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to a moment that beautifully ties the emotional narrative together.

Storyline aside, *Good Bye, Lenin!* has one of the best soundtracks I've heard, and it's part of what gives it a melancholic tone. In fact, it's actually how I discovered the film, as I was going through Yann Tiersen's discography. If that name rings a bell, it's likely because you've heard his work in director Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amélie*. The French composer offers an impressive number of piano-driven music, as well as other tracks that are reminiscent of what he delivered in Jeunet's whimsical film. It's absolutely worth listening to from start to finish.

VERDICT

Good Bye, Lenin! is one of those films that takes time and patience. But once it hits that one pivotal moment, you really start to see the whole picture and appreciate it for what it is. Becker and co-writer Bernd Lichtenberg have masterfully combined a playful plot with politics, drama and comedy that makes you laugh and think at the same time.

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