

amnesia

A film by **BARBET SCHROEDER**



VEGA FILM and LES FILMS DU LOSANGE
present

MARTHE KELLER

MAX RIEMELT

amnesia

A FILM BY **BARBET SCHROEDER**

With the participation of
BRUNO GANZ



SWISS - FRANCE • 2015 • 1H30 • 1.85 - 2K • COLOR • SOUND 5.1

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Ibiza, the early nineties, Jo is a twenty-five-year-old music composer. He has come over from Berlin and wants to be part of the nascent electronic music revolution, ideally by getting a job first as a DJ in the new nightclub on the island, Amnesia. Martha has been living alone in her house facing the sea for forty years. One night Jo knocks on her door. Her solitude intrigues him. They become friends even as the mysteries around her accumulate: that cello in the corner she refuses to play, the German language she refuses to speak... As Jo draws her into his world of techno music, Martha puts everything she had previously lived by into question.

(The following are extracts from
a conversation with Emilie Bickerton)

martha's choice

How is it that a woman who never saw or experienced anything particularly terrible could take such a radical position against her country, and stick to it all her life?

Martha is not Jewish, nor is she a victim of Nazi Germany. Her love for Alex is not the reason she rejects Germany but it is this personal experience that guides her in her choice and has, in the end, deeper and more universal implications.

In 1936 when Martha was sixteen, she had already decided to never return to Germany. One adolescent girl against a whole regime... At this early stage she had the intuition there were much darker reasons for all the inexplicable things going on each day around her : the young Jewish girls in her class who disappeared from one day to the next, the public benches carrying signs : "No Jews Allowed". Martha does not want to carry on living in a place where such things are happening. Later, in Switzerland, when the revelations about the concentration camps begin to come out, reality confirms her terrible intuition. It is at this point she stops speaking German completely and cuts herself off from her country in what was perhaps a futile, solitary rebellion without any direct effect on others. But, it is all she feels she can do to fight it.

Martha's strength lies in having taken this decision without having been a victim. By showing a protagonist who makes a choice and sticks to it

we did not want to become moralizing or righteous. To try to avoid this with Martha we showed how she made exceptions to her rule for art and philosophy : Beethoven's chamber music, the German poets and philosophers. We also did not want to suggest there were simply good or bad choices, as the characters of Elfriede and Bruno also remind us.

This moral choice and the desire to stay true to one's principles and follow the path we have set out for ourselves comes out in other aesthetic and philosophical choices that Martha makes. The austere décor of her house reflects the "Philosophical Life" she has decided to live and is inspired by a simplicity and self-sufficiency from the age of antiquity that she discovered anew in the peasants of Ibiza. In that way Martha's vegetable garden becomes a kind of homage to Epicure.



"Nicht für Juden".

Photo © Hulton archive / Getty Images



the love story

From the start I had three ambitions that were very challenging for what is generally possible in movies:

— Make the act of refusing to speak a language the key dramatic element in a film.

— Tell a love story that develops without sex and instead through a succession of unsaid between two characters whose bond is purely spiritual and platonic.

— Introduce complexity through simplicity and naturalness: feeling life itself flowing day-by-day until we realize there is the drama of a country rising to the surface.

Martha finally realizes through her meeting with Jo that by leaving Germany she was able to avoid

asking herself a number of difficult questions. With Jo, as the days go by, her absolute rejection of Germany begins to waver. She starts to speak her mother tongue again. This process of change in Martha is the heart of the film for us, it captures the moment when, even after fifty years of head-strong and unquestioned rebellion, a woman concedes that yes, there are other ways of seeing things. She understands this from her meeting with another person through which the world seems different and new things are possible. We are never completely alone in our decisions and experiences. Other people can change us. Jo changes Martha, Martha changes Jo and he too will never be the same after the intense few months they share together.



Through her meeting with Jo, Martha opens her heart and progressively her many years of accumulated, stubborn rage begin to dissipate. As it does, Martha remembers the words of her cello teacher Alex, many years older than she had been when she was so in love with him, mirroring the situation between her and Jo now. Almost sixty years later she recalls, and finally understands, his wise words: "We have already been everything we needed to be for each other." Most of my films are about unusual love stories. I

think I have developed a kind of sixth sense for these situations. In *Our Lady of the Assassins* for example, the most important instruction I gave to the actor playing the role of the older writer was to never initiate any physical contact with the young boy in any of his scenes with him. Of course, I gave exactly the same direction to Marthe Keller for her role as Martha in *Amnesia*. But in this film the platonic nature of their love meant that even Jo's hand briefly touching Martha's back without warning in passing could turn into a beautiful moment.





nature

We feel the dramatic presence of nature in Ibiza from the beginning credits. Nature without mankind, totally untamed and independent of human time. The rock strata have accumulated forming successive layers that then progressively break away and crumble into the sea in a slow motion outside human time. This Mediterranean nature has also gone practically unchanged for thousands of years.

A sensual engagement and attention to nature imposes itself on the characters who are sometimes

even lured by the beauty into a false sense of security and protection from the external world.

Playing on the role of nature between Martha and Jo was also very important as a way of showing how their relationship could develop and deepen without any physical contact. Ibiza's nature as a powerful link and source of shared happiness. They both listen to the same little screech owl and take pleasure in it in their own ways. When Jo improvises a composition for Martha, the bird sound returns and brings them much closer.





• Walter Benjamin residing in Sant Antoni, visited by Jean Setz •

Photo © Weltbildarchiv - Museum der Dinge, Berlin, Walter Benjamin Sammlung

the "more" house

THE GERMAN AVANT GARDE IN IBIZA IN THE 1930s:
WALTER BENJAMIN and RAOUL HAUSMANN

This film in the most part was shot in the house my mother bought in Ibiza in 1951. We lived there without a fridge, using the petrol lamps for light and drank the rain water collected in the well. At first we stayed there during holidays and then, over time, my mother settled there permanently. This is where I shot my first film *More* in 1968. Even today in the summertime you can hear the loudspeakers from the tourist boats that pass from time to time announcing: "This is where the movie *More* was made, with music by Pink Floyd".

The architect Raoul Hausmann was the inspiration behind the house that was built in 1935, faithfully respecting the local architectural traditions. Hausmann

lived in Ibiza from 1932 to 1935. He was stunned by the peasant houses of the island, all shaped like white cubes. He went on to write articles on the houses that were published in major architecture journals and magazines, along with photographs and plans of the architectural layout.

Shortly after Hausmann, Benjamin, Jean Selz and others arrived in Ibiza. For this community the island represented their ideal of a harmonious life in total accord with the elements of nature. They saw the life of the peasants as an image of aesthetic and human perfection. The house of the movie is nearby to San Antoni, where Walter Benjamin lived.

The following text written by Walter Benjamin in 1932 when he was in Ibiza served as our 'bible' for the VISUAL AND DECORATIVE CHOICES of AMNESIA.

"The first images of San Antoni that give cause for reflection: the interiors we discover through open doors when the wood pearl curtains are drawn to one side. The radiant white of the walls, even when they are in the shadows, leaps out at us. And in front of the wall at the back of the room there are usually two or four chairs perfectly aligned and symmetrical. These chairs speak volumes, simply by the way they are set out, by the modesty of their appearance, the incredible beauty of their wickerwork and their simple presence. No collector in the world would exhibit on their walls their valuable rugs or paintings with as much confidence as a peasant displays these chairs inside a naked room. But these are not just chairs; from one moment to the next their function has changed: a hat has been placed on the back of the chair, and with this new arrangement the straw hat seems suddenly to have acquired the same value as the chair. It turns out that in our own well-organized homes full of all kinds of commodities there is no space to bring out the real value of objects. Here, chairs can be precious, so too an item of clothing, a key lock, a carpet, earthenware jars or a carpenter's plane. The authentic secret of their value resides in this sobriety, in the spareness of the vital space in which an object can visibly occupy a place that is its own and it is given sufficient space in which it can satisfy the great number of occult functions, each time surprising, in virtue of which the thing becomes precious."

(Walter Benjamin, Carnets d'Ibiza, 1932)





personal and biographical details

A phrase Jacques Lacan said in his 1971 Tokyo speech sticks in my mind: *"What is the nature of the knowledge that a man has in speaking his own language? Just asking this question generates all the questions. What is it to know Japanese? This is something that contains in itself a world of things we cannot say we know so long as we do not succeed in articulating it."*

I do not speak German and yet it is my mother tongue. I am Swiss and my maternal grandfather is the German philosopher and psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn, famous for his studies on the art produced by the clinically insane. My mother always categorically refused to speak to me in the language. Therefore, the subject of the film is very close to me but I did not want to make a movie about my mother. Rather, I was interested in showing, via a succession of unsaid between the two characters, the emotional experience of rediscovering love as well as reuniting with one's homeland and especially one's mother tongue. A film, in other words, on Martha's reunification and Jo's life education.

I spent much of my childhood in Geneva and some years in Colombia, all with a mother who refused to speak to me in what should have been my first language. Paradoxically, German culture was everywhere at home and present in all the reference points I had as I grew up: the country's painting, its poetry and its music, including my

mother's cello that would fill the house with its beautiful sound when she played alone pieces by Bach or Schubert.

I have often asked my mother to tell me about Berlin in the 1930s when she was there as a girl, to tell me about her school, her Jewish friends who disappeared from one day to the next, about the public benches that were marked "No Jews allowed" and so on. I asked her about how she managed after her father had died to convince her mother, a theatre actress in Berlin, to take a one-way ticket to Zurich in 1936. She settled there, did her studies and met my father, a man from Geneva who did not speak a word of German. He was a geologist and had to leave for work in Iran. She could not stand their separation and so she left Switzerland as the Second World War raged in Europe, and crossed a dozen countries on the train and bus to join him. And so I was born in Teheran.

the film shoot

To get the best performances possible and never miss a moment from a 'magic take' I used two or three cameras crossing each other. It was something new that I had wanted to explore when making the very first feature film shot in HD Video in 1999, *Lady of the Assassins* with the cameras still shooting at 30 frames per second.

Subsequently with Luciano Tovoli we employed three cameras shooting technique in 2001 in Hollywood for *Muder by Numbers*, and then on all our other movies after that until *Amnesia*, which is our eighth collaboration. Luciano managed to find solutions, without ever sacrificing the quality of the image, to the seemingly insurmountable problems of light that that kind of set up creates. But by using this system it meant every actor in every scene was always looking and reacting to the other in front of one of the cameras, so we could not miss any "magic moment".

In 2014, fifteen years after *Our Lady of the Assassins*, 35mm is more or less history, but I found myself again exploring things that were even more revolutionary than the beginning of HD VIDEO. *Amnesia* is the first European film shot in 6K. This is so exciting not because of the quality of the image—6K provides three times more image definition than 35mm—but rather for the unlimited editing possibilities 6K allows within the image itself. So I had the pleasure and exhilaration of discovering and exploring anew the most modern possibilities in cinema. This shooting system was

essential for being able to capture many of the situations in *Amnesia* that were often full of subtle reactions and unsaid between the characters.

■ Night lighting.

With Tovoli we refused the easy use of "pretty" candlelight for interior night scenes. Instead we took great care to 'glorify' otherwise ordinary petrol lamps that were much harder to use as a source of lighting, less impressive on the screen but truer to Martha's frugal way of living.

■ HDR (High Dynamic Range).

Two years ago this technology would have been unthinkable for movies. For the first time in cinema HDR allows you to combine two different exposures in the same shot: one for the interior light and another for the exterior light, which of course is ideal when you are working in a place like Ibiza that has such great contrasts in light.

■ A nineties period film.

For reasons that are too long to go into, I have always refused to make period movies, or going any further than twenty years back in time. That's what I did on *Reversal of Fortune*. In *Amnesia* it was even simpler. The action happens in an isolated location and the house has changed very little over the years. We decided not to get bogged down in period details and concentrate instead on bringing out only the key historical elements for the story: the fall of the



Photo © Jean-Paul Mugel

Berlin Wall, German reunification, the emergence of a new style of music. Our aesthetic choices related to the period were generally limited to a dozen or so car models, the electronic music equipment of the time and the big battery-operated cassette player.

■ Set.

In the austere and beautiful context of the house,

the strategic placement of certain items in full-view—the orange gas canister, the brightly-coloured fly swatter, the white plastic bag on the wall—allowed us, as with the choice against candlelight, to protect ourselves from creating an overly-aestheticized décor.

Instead, we let in traces of daily life, both authentic and surprising.



casting

Marthe Keller (*Martha*)

I had crossed paths with Marthe Keller many times over the years in New York and elsewhere. We always got on very well. I had been struck by her ability to capture a truth in all her characters, and by her daring beauty. I knew that after many years of the Actor's Studio she would not, just like Faye Dunaway in *Barfly*, shy away from appearing on screen with the clothes, hairstyle and make-up of someone with such an apparently austere way of living.

I say apparently because we always agreed Martha's

character should also have an iconoclastic, ironic side, a lightness that would be very attractive to a young person like Jo. During the shooting of *Amnesia* I also discovered a side to Marthe I was not aware of: she had an incredible capacity for work and high levels of concentration. Very soon she was on top of her text and had studied it so closely she could spot even the smallest inconsistency in the screenplay.

Marthe was totally invested in her character and carried on this way during the two years before the shooting. She went so far as to buy certain dresses

in kilo shops that we would use in the film. For Marthe Keller the character of Martha was incredibly close to her own life: half her German family exiled itself in Zurich before the war, the other half stayed. As a child after the war she heard arguments when the two branches of her family met in Switzerland that were very similar to those we see taking place between Martha and Elfriede in the film.



Max Riemelt (*Jo*)

Early on in the casting I met Max Riemelt and loved him instantly. We did some tests with scenes between him and Marthe. The chemistry was obvious from the start and breathtaking. They made a unique couple. Very quickly I decided I would only make this film with them or not at all.

In Germany, Max is considered one of the finest actors of his generation. Immediately after *Amnesia* he began shooting all over the world a major new US series by Lana and Andy Wachowski—the partnership behind the *The Matrix*—produced and distributed by Netflix in 2015. Given Max's incredible talent the series should turn him into a world star.



Bruno Ganz (*Bruno, Jo's grandfather*)

was our ideal choice from the earliest stage of writing the screenplay. The Bruno character brings together many themes in dramatic fashion, from Martha's memories of Germany and her rebellion to the new generation's relationship with the past through Jo. I was very happy when Ganz agreed to play this essential role in the movie.



Corinna Kirchhoff (*Elfriede, Jo's mother*)

is one of the greatest living German theatre actresses. She worked with the famous Berliner Ensemble from 1983 to 2000 and was often on stage with Bruno Ganz. Each year she also works in cinema and television. In 1996 she was nominated for 'Actress of the Year' by the prestigious *Theater heute* and won the O.E. Hasse prize in 1986. ■

select filmographies

Marthe Keller

1969 - **The Devil by the Tail** by Philippe De Broca
1970 - **Give Her the Moon** by Philippe De Broca
1972 - **La demoiselle d'Avignon** (TV) - **The Suburbs Are Everywhere** by Gérard Pirès • 1974 - **And Now My Love** by Claude Lelouch • 1976 - **Marathon Man** by John Schlesinger • 1977 - **Bobby Deerfield** by Sydney Pollack - **Black Sunday** by John Frankenheimer • 1978 - **Fedora** by Billy Wilder • 1980 - **The Formula** by John G. Avildsen
1984 - **Nobody's Women** by Christopher Frank
1985 - **Red Kiss** by Véra Belmont • 1987 - **Dark Eyes** by Nikita Mikhalkov • 1998 - **The School of Flesh** by Benoît Jacquot • 1999 - **From Behind** by Valérie Lemercier • 2010 - **Hereafter** by Clint Eastwood
2012 - **In a Rush** by Louis-Do De Lencquesaing
2014 - **La vie à l'envers** by Anne Giafferi

Max Riemelt

2008 - **The Wave** by Dennis Gansel - **The Red Cockatoo** by Dominik Graf • 2010 - **In Face of the Crime** by Dominik Graf, Rolf Basedow (TV) • 2012 **Playoff** by Eran Riklis • 2014 - **The Year of the Snake** by Dennis Gansel - **Free fall** by Stephan Lacant • 2015 - **Sense8** by Lana et Andy Wachowski (TV)

Corinna Kirchhoff

1989 - **Spider's Web** by Bernhard Wicki • 2010 - **The City Below** by Christoph Hochhäusler

Bruno Ganz

1976 - **The Marquise of O** by Eric Rohmer • 1977 - **The American Friend** by Wim Wenders • 1979 - **Nosferatu the Vampyre** by Werner Herzog • 1980 **Lady of the Camelias** by Mauro Bolognini • 1981 **Circle of Deceit** by Volker Schlöndorff • 1983 - **In the White City** by Alain Tanner • 1987 - **Wings of Desire** by Wim Wenders • 1992 - **The Absence** by Peter Handke • 1993 - **Faraway, So Close!** by Wim Wenders • 1999 - **Eternity and a Day** by Théo Angelopoulos • 2004 - **Downfall** by Oliver Hirschbiegel • 2008 - **The Dust of Time** by Théo Angelopoulos - **The reader** by Stephen Daldry
The Baader Meinhof Complex by Uli Edel • 2012 **Sport de filles** by Patricia Mazuy • 2013 - **Michael Kohlhaas** by Arnaud des Pallières - **Night train to Lisbon** by Bille August

Joël Basman

2011 - **Hanna** by Joe Wright • 2014 - **Monument men** by George Clooney

Fermi Reixach

1989 - **The Dark Night of the Soul** by Carlos Saura • 2002 - **Darkness** by Jaume Balagueró

Marie Leuenberger

2013 - **Summer Outside** by Fiederike Jehn • 2014 - **The Circle** by Stefan Haupt

credits

Martha : **Marthe Keller** • Jo : **Max Riemelt** • Bruno, Jo's grandfather : **Bruno Ganz** • Elfriede, Jo's mother : **Corinna Kirchhoff** • Rudolfo : **Joël Basman** • Sabater : **Fermi Reixach** • Clarissa : **Marie Leuenberger**
Costa : **Félix Pons** • Otto : **Florentin Groll** • Paquita : **Eva Barcelo** • Petrov : **Lluis Altes** • Café owner : **Rick Zingale** • Mrs. Smith : **Kate Ashcroft** • Mr. Smith : **Joël Rice** • Jo's son : **Alfie Davies Mari** • Photo of Alex : **Fabian Krüger**

■ Screenplay :

Emilie Bickerton-Third collaboration with Barbet Schroeder (*Home Care* in production).

Peter Steinbach-Previous screenplays include the first series of *Heimat* by Edgar Reitz.

Susan Hoffman-Creative Producer of all American films by Barbet Schroeder.

■ Cinematography :

Luciano Tovoli (ACIASC)-Cinematographer for all films by Barbet Schroeder since *Reversal of Fortune* (1990) with the exception of *Our Lady of the Assassins* (2000) and *Devil's Advocate* (2007); numerous collaborations with Michelangelo Antonioni, Maurice Pialat, Dario Argento, Ettore Scola and Francis Veber.

■ Music :

Lucien Nicolet aka. Luciano-World famous DJ and creative composer, key figure on the Ibiza music scene; on all four corners of the globe he attracts massive crowds every time he gives a concert.

■ Editing :

Nelly Quettier-Editor of most films by Claire Denis and Leos Carax; editor of *Devil's Advocate* by Barbet Schroeder (2007).

■ Set and Costums :

Franckie Diago-Has worked with Francis Ford Coppola, Roman Polanski, Dean Tavoularis, Fatah Akin among many others.

■ Sound and Mix :

Jean-Paul Mugel-Sound engineer on most recent films by Barbet Schroeder as well as previous work with directors including Wim Wenders, Claire Denis, Agnès Varda, Jean-Stéphane Bron, etc.

François Musy-Mixer on many films by Jean-Luc Godard, Philippe Garrel, Benoît Jacquot, etc.

■ Production :

Ruth Waldburger / Vega Film

Margaret Menegoz / Les Films du Losange

barbet schroeder

Swiss, born in Teheran.

1958-1963 : takes part in *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Air de Paris*

Assistant to Jean-Luc Godard on *Les Carabiniers*

In 1963 he establishes the production company *Les Films du Losange*

DIRECTOR

1969-**More** with Mimsy Farmer, Klaus Grunberg
(*Quinzaine des Réalisateurs de Cannes*)

1972-**The Valley, Obscured by Clouds** with Bulle
Ogier, Jean-Pierre Kalfon (*Official Selection, Venice*)

1974-**General Idi Amin Dada** (*Quinzaine des
Réalisateurs à Cannes*)

1975-**Maitresse** with Bulle Ogier and Gérard
Depardieu

1977-**Koko, a Talking Gorilla** (*Official Selection
Un Certain Regard, Cannes*)

1982/84-**Charles Bukowski** (50 videos of 4
minutes)

1984-**Cheaters** with Bulle Ogier, Jacques Dutronc

1987-**Barfly** with Mickey Rourke, Faye Dunaway
(*Official Selection, Cannes*)

1990-**Reversal of Fortune** with Glenn Close, Ron
Silver and Jeremy Irons (*Oscar, Best Actor, Oscar
and Golden Globe Nominations for Best Director*)

1992-**Single White Female** with Bridget Fonda,
Jennifer Jason Leigh

1994-**Kiss of death** with David Caruso, Nicholas
Cage, Samuel Jackson (*Official Selection, Out of
Competition, Cannes*)

1995-**Before and After** with Meryl Streep, Liam
Neeson

1997-**Desperate Measures** with Andy Garcia,
Michael Keaton

2001-**Our Lady of the Assassins** with Germán
Jaramillo (*Official Selection, Venice*)

2002-**Murder by Murders** with Sandra Bullock,
Ben Chaplin (*Official Selection, Out of Competition,
Cannes*)

2007-**Devil's Advocate** (*Official Selection, Un Certain
Regard, Cannes, César for Best Documentary,
Etoile d'Or for Best Documentary, DGA Nomination*)

2008-**Inju** with Benoît Magimel (*Official Selection,
Venice*)

2009-**Mad Men**—Season 3/Episode12— **The Grown-
ups (Kennedy assassination)**

crew

Screenplay

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Director of photography

Sound

Mix

.....

Editing

Music

Set design

1st Assistant director

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Production

A Swiss-french coproduction

Executive producer

In coproduction with

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Distribution France & International sales

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