

# German Gems Films at the Castro

By Rink

The German Gems Films were presented at the Castro Theatre on Feb. 28, and the one day of new German cinema drew large, appreciative crowds. Even the noon screening on a Sunday filled most of the seats. A series of unfortunate happenings brought about the collapse of the annual ethnic German film festival, known as the Berlin and Beyond Film Festival. So Ingrid Eggers, the resourceful director of San Francisco's German cultural center, which is known as the Goethe Institut, stepped in to coordinate a one-day celluloid festival.

San Francisco is internationally known for possessing a large and vibrant ethnic German community, and the Goethe Institut, the German Consulate and diverse German restaurants present creative events that are unique and a charming escape from mass taste American Let's Make a Deal kitsch culture around us.

The first film was *Tender Parasites*, a genuinely frightening character study about two young people played by Robert Stadlober and Maja Schone, who live in the woods and venture out to into the homes of lonely people and attempt to assume of roles of their missing children. Stadlober was superb; he is famous in Germany and highly regarded for his role in the gay coming-out masterpiece *Summer Storm*. His emotional performance strongly affected fans worldwide, and especially at LGBT Centers and film festivals. He played a conflicted, closeted gay youth who was in love with his straight best friend and JO buddy. That film was a work of art, and the urgent and subtle mating scene on a



PHOTO BY RINK  
**Tender Parasites producer Juliane Thevissen on stage with festival director Ingrid Eggers.**

dock surpassed the homoeroticism of dozens of other well meaning but ultimately lesser gay-themed movies.

The festival's opening film producer Juliane Thevissen joined Eggers onstage for the Q&A after the film ended, and applause spread across the theater. The large number of women producers in Germany was discussed, as was the talent and popularity of actor Stadlober.

The reception for the films featured wonderfully aromatic carrot soup from Schmid's Restaurant, distinctive German beer, and satisfying earthy pizza. The pizza was a conversation piece, and guests wondered how deeply the South Bavarian border intrudes into Northern Italy.

The most highly anticipated film, *Vision*, which was directed by exalted director Margarethe von Trotta, and starring impressive actress Barbara Sukowa as Hildegarde von

Bingen, a nun who lived 900 years ago, greatly exceeded its PR buildup. Sukowa exquisitely portrayed the sainthood candidate who challenged the church's overwhelming male dominance to establish her own convent, consistently supported democracy and women's equality, and became the first woman composer and writer about female sexuality. And with her writings were an inspiration for the enlightenment, which ended the medieval era. Sukowa's performance was phe-

nomenal and breathtaking.

Festival coordinator Eggers deserves high praise for her promethean efforts, and public relations icon Karen Larsen of Karen Larsen Associates again did a fine job of drawing large audiences, even on a sunny day in the Castro, an area teeming with distractions that could lure guests away from a dark theater. Champion volunteer coordinator Ninfa Dawson achieved another seamlessly-run event, which is important since festivals in the U.S. depend on the work of volunteers. In Germany the city, state, and federal governments support the arts and most of the workers are paid.

Coordinator Eggers was careful to say that the German Gems Films were not meant to compete with the Berlin and Beyond Film Festival. Hopefully that festival will be revived and there will be a plethora of fine ethnic German films shown over a couple days in the Fall. ▼