

THE HORSE ON THE BALCONY

Running time: **90 minutes**

Format: **Digital**

Screen ratio: **1:1.85**

Sound: **Dolby Digital**

Language spoken: **German**

Year of production: **2012**

Cast

Mika	Enzo Gaier
Dana	Nataša Paunović
Lara	Nora Tschirner
Sascha	Andreas Kiendl
Hedi	Bibiana Zeller
Boris	Ernst Stankovski
Branko	Branko Samarovski
Bert	Murathan Muslu
Toni	Alexander Fennon
Bucephalus	Sir Jasper Command & Shock Bunny Command

Crew

Director	Hüseyin Tabak
Screenplay	Milan Dor
Cinematography	Peter von Haller (http://www.petervonhaller.de)
Art Direction	Julia Oberndorfinger, Attila Plangger
Editing	Fabian Rüdissler
Costumes	Monika Buttinger, Theresa Ebner-Lazek
Make-up Artist	Susanne Weichsmiller
Composer	Judit Varga (http://www.juditvarga.com)
Original Sound	Heinz K. Ebner
Sound Design	Philipp Mosser (http://voesd.at/philipp.mosser?PHPSESSID=3c047eafcbd789e923488dd6827b7122)
Master Mixer	Bernhard Maisch

Casting

Eva Roth

Animal Trainer

Herbert Pecher (<http://www.animalstars.at>)

Producer

Katja Dor-Helmer (www.minifilm.at)



SYNOPSIS

10-year-old Mika is different: he loves mathematics, he only ever tells the truth, and he notices things other people miss. Although he isn't so good with people, he really would like some friends. One night he hears a neighing - and discovers that there's a horse on the balcony of the next apartment. The horse belongs to Sascha, who's in big trouble. Mika spends all his spare time with the stallion, and the first time he sits on the animal's back he is completely transformed. His friend Dana, who likes to claim she is an Indian princess, decides to help Mika find a new home for the racehorse. But this means rescuing the horse not only from the slaughterhouse but also from two gangsters who are owed money by Sascha.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT by HÜSEYİN TABAK

When the producer, Katja Dor-Helmer, approached me with the script of a children's film I was quite sceptical at first. I thought I'd just look through it quickly and then politely refuse. I'd seen too many German children's films recently built around stories that didn't display any real warmth towards children. Productions that were designed to be striking but had dialogue clearly written by adults for children - and the worst thing of all was that there was no depth to the stories, there were no messages.

When I read *The Horse on the Balcony* it really came as a shock. I was blown away by Milan Dor's script, and I realised I'd regret it for the rest of my life if I didn't turn the story into a movie. So then I had countless discussions with Milan, I told him about my favourite children's films like *Momo* and *Ronja the Robber's Daughter*, and he rewrote the script a little based on my ideas. It was a unique experience for me to work with an old fox like Milan, someone who could usually find the simplest solutions to huge dramatic problems and implement them with the wink of an eye.

And then the point came when our ship set sail; the cast, the team, the shooting – everything was plain sailing, with amazingly few obstacles. Enzo Gaier, alias Mika, turned out to be a stroke of good luck; as well as acting professionally in front of the camera he also managed to motivate the whole team with his commitment to the project. There was nobody on the set who was more motivated to give his absolute best. On the other hand, Andreas Kiendl and Nora Tschirner were coolness personified. Once they got into their costumes and make-up they would act the scenes in front of the camera without any long discussions. Peter Haller just had to point his camera at them. I had discussed their characters with them both in great detail before we started shooting, and then I gave them the space they needed. So the shooting itself went smoothly, because they both knew what the story demanded from them. And our Natasa Paunovic, alias Dana, was simply the icing on the cake. Her natural, easy manner brought freshness and joy to the set.

All of this might sound a bit too harmonious, too good to be true, but it really was like that... thanks to some outstanding preparatory work. Peter Haller, my assistant director Kati Biro and I had spent weeks going through the whole shooting schedule together, answering questions from the individual departments and running through the shots step by step, so all I had to do on the set – as the famous Alfred Hitchcock once said - was to stay awake. But best of all, the production team surrounding the producer Katja Dor was able to read in my eyes everything I needed for the filming, and they threw themselves into the task of supplying it all, which is what made this film possible.

I hope children will still enjoy watching this film when they grow up, and that each time they'll discover something new for themselves in the story. It's a film that doesn't

rely on slapstick, or the tension as you wait for a huge, expensive explosion that is forgotten one scene later. But it's also a film where adults who accompany kids to the cinema don't have to sit round feeling bored and becoming engrossed in their cell phones. It's a film that provides a lot of fun and encourages children to ask questions, and grown-ups have to think pretty carefully before they give the answers to those questions. It's intended to prompt children to be interested in subjects that aren't exactly everyday matters, so for a change they have the opportunity to expand their horizons. Why is it that Mika always has to have lunch at exactly 14:17? Why can't he tell lies, and why does Sascha keep on gambling? But of course the most important question still remains: just how did that horse get on the balcony?

PRODUCER'S STATEMENT BY KATJA DOR-HELMER

Milo Dor's children's book from the 1970s, *The Horse on the Balcony*, is about someone who keeps a horse on the little balcony of his apartment. What an original idea! One day, months before shooting began, I was sitting in a café in the centre of Vienna when I saw through the window a solitary horse trudging through the snow. It was an image that stuck in my mind, and it strengthened my desire to develop a film about a horse in the middle of the city. I commissioned Milan Dor to come up with a treatment containing the elements horse, city and Christmas. And of course the story had to revolve around children, because it was to be a children's film. Children do feature in the original novel by Milo Dor, the father of Milan Dor, but the leading character there is an adult who is addicted to gambling, and the story is told from his perspective.

Milan Dor surprised me with a completely new idea; the hero of film would be a child with Asperger's syndrome, a mild form of autism. These children have problems interacting socially with other people, but their thinking is very precise, and they perceive their environment in great detail. They are generally very talented in one sphere and pretty much at a loss in everyday life. I liked our character Mika right away: a mathematical genius who has great difficulty dealing with people, always tells the truth and sticks to firm rules in an attempt to cope with the world. Mika's companion is Dana, a lively, switched-on Roma girl. They have a fine adventure with the horse Bucephalus - and my adventure developing the project was just beginning. I set out to find a suitable director. When I saw Hüseyin Tabak's documentary film *Kick Off*, I knew that I wanted to make our film with him. What convinced me was his ability to put himself in other people's shoes, and to conjure up emotionality on the cinema screen. Without thinking much more about it, I simply approached him. He read the script, liked it immensely, and in no time at all we were a closely-knit team.

It was obvious that we wouldn't be able to raise a large budget for a project that was a director's first feature film, so I decided to use what is known as the workshop model, where people who haven't had much experience in various areas are brought together with seasoned professionals. It didn't take us long to get the adult cast together: Nora Tschirner liked the script and immediately agreed to take the part, as did Andreas Kiendl and Bibiana Zeller. In contrast, casting the children was a long process that took several months. In the end good luck came to our aid. When we saw Natasa we knew immediately that we wouldn't find anyone better for Dana; she plays herself, in a very convincing, natural manner. But taking the part of a boy with Asperger's syndrome would involve real acting. Even for experienced actors it must be a huge challenge to depict emotions in a character who is incapable of showing emotions. After a huge number of auditions and scores of candidates we finally found Enzo Gaier, our Mika.

I didn't fully realise exactly how much of an adventure I had let myself in for until I talked to the horse trainer. We needed two virtually identical sibling horses for the shooting, and they would have to be trained over a period of six months. For insurance reasons we actually had to buy the horses. So for about a year I was the proud owner of two racehorses, and this involved all the decisions, both major and minor, people in that position have to make.

I'm absolutely delighted that it has been possible to produce this film, with the support

of a large number of people – ranging from the subsidy organisations to a fantastic team. It corresponds to a large extent with my ideas of what an Austrian children's film can and should achieve: by depicting the world in all its facets, it helps make people more comprehensible. We shouldn't leave this task entirely to North American mainstream productions; instead, we should offer children films that reflect the world they are familiar with.

The Horse on the Balcony

A Text by Andrea Ackerer

Speech therapist, mentor for school-children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), equine therapist

I had the great good fortune to be able to read the script before shooting began, and I was very keen on it. Everything that provides more information about Asperger's syndrome will lead to a better understanding of the people with this condition and those around them. I think this is very important, because I hear again and again from parents that not even paediatricians know enough about the syndrome – let alone society as a whole...

For example, one problem is that children with Asperger's syndrome often behave in an inexplicable way (screaming in the subway, licking the walls of buildings, etc), and this is mistakenly interpreted as a sign of bad upbringing on the part of their parents. So before their condition is correctly diagnosed, the children have been deeply hurt by reproaches from people all around them.

For many years I have been involved with two similarly challenging and appealing living beings: people with Asperger's syndrome and horses. I am a mentor for schoolchildren with autistic spectrum disorder with the Vienna Education Board and an equine therapist specialising in people with communication and perception difficulties, so I have found the best way of integrating my work and my personal fascination with horses.

It was 25 years ago, while working as a speech therapist with the Vienna School for Children with Speech Defects, that I first encountered people with autistic spectrum disorder (which includes Asperger's syndrome).

What particularly fascinated me was that I suddenly found myself at my wits end as regards pedagogic strategies, and these schoolchildren (predominantly boys) were so varied that I couldn't find any rules for this work. Up until then I had suffered from the prejudice that autistic people are very withdrawn, don't like to be touched and avoid eye contact as well as conversation. However, I encountered schoolchildren who actively enjoyed being embraced and cuddled, or even hugged tight, and who chatted all the time. And they were supposed to be "autistic"? I also found it virtually impossible to see similarities between children with Asperger's syndrome... apart from one thing: they all seemed to be more or less lonely, in their own way. I think people feel alone if they can't find anybody who seems to feel remotely the same way they do. Those affected by Asperger's also know it as "wrong planet syndrome".

The main difference between people with autistic spectrum disorder and neuro-typical people (which is how "aspis" call us "normals") is concerned with modes of attention and different types of perception. Somebody with Asperger's syndrome may feel very little but at the same time have an extremely sensitive sense of hearing. Since these special characteristics can vary from one day to the next, there are frequently problems with communication. These people often find it difficult to recognise social rules and structures, and consequently they feel more comfortable with objects, especially machines like trains, subways and robots, than with fellow human beings. It's much easier to evaluate these things. Machines don't show emotions, and communicating with them is simple and clear. A machine generally

does what is expected of it, which makes it far easier to evaluate what's going on, so someone with Asperger's syndrome may devote a great deal of attention to objects like that. We neuro-typical people constantly behave differently, and we say incomprehensible things like: "I'm wracking my brains! Fire away! I'm on the wrong track!", while meaning something completely different from what we seem to be saying. A lot of people with Asperger's syndrome understand idioms like that literally, and therefore they find it hard to display an appropriate response.

Another phenomenon which makes it incredibly difficult for people with Asperger's syndrome to get on with other people is that they often don't recognise faces. Parents or acquaintances are recognised purely on the basis of their characteristics or associated objects or sounds. A person with Asperger's might recognise his mother only by her size and the shoes she wears, or use words for machines with motors for the people around him: his grandfather is the lawnmower, his granny is the blender, and his mother is the hairdryer.

If somebody with autistic spectrum disorder acts unusually because of an inability to recognise a familiar person, other people might think he or she is mentally retarded. The tragic consequence is that the person is treated in a very hurtful and offensive way.

It can happen that focusing on objects rather than people affects modes of perception. A child with Asperger's may prefer to look at a toy clock rather than his mother's face. But it is by paying attention to the mother's face that the baby learns how to read gestures, evaluate emotions and understand spoken utterances. So all these important aspects of communication are underdeveloped.

What I particularly value about people with Asperger's syndrome is their honesty and straightforwardness. A colleague of mine from the team of mentors for children with autistic spectrum disorder told me a nice story. When a teacher was leaving her class one boy said to her: "Although nobody here likes you, I'm going to miss you!" We neuro-typicals aren't used to so much honesty, and it can be hard to stand!

What role does the horse play?

Anybody who has seen *The Horse Whisperer*, read the book or perhaps even attended a course on horsemanship (equine communication) will know that horses have very clear, unambiguous body language. They aren't emotional, either. If a horse wants to attract the attention of other horses, it tenses its muscles. Even small alterations are recognised and "read" by horses nearby. But tension doesn't mean that the horse is agitated – only that it is requesting attention. Once it gets that attention, it uses body language to suggest or demand action, such as "Come on, we'll move to the next meadow," or "Out of my way, I want to get past."

The body language that horses use is clear and easy to recognise because it isn't strengthened or weakened by emotions. It remains constant and explicit. Horses are also very curious and interested in communication with people. And as flight animals, they are incredibly quick to recognise situations, moods and changes in behaviour – and to react at lightning speed. These are characteristics that make them brilliant co-therapists for communication training. As well as all this, they are warm, they move steadily, they're soft, and all over their bodies they have different hair structures: on the tail, the mane and the rest of the coat. It's a wonderful range of sensations.

Another attractive attribute of these animals is that they can also carry adults. "Being carried" is a fantastic experience for young people – and also for grown-ups, who otherwise seldom have the chance to enjoy this feeling.

Horses don't bear grudges. If they are startled because somebody moves too quickly or makes too much noise, it generally doesn't take long before they come back to make contact again.

With all my experience, I was able to see *The Horse on the Balcony* in advance. I was delighted to witness such beautiful scenes between people and horses. The touching sequences between the boy with Asperger's syndrome and the girl who becomes his friend also help combat the prejudice that these people can't make friends. Friendships like these need more tolerant and openness - and it's wonderful when that works out.

And the most important thing about the film for me was that we all laughed a lot!

Andrea Ackerer
aackerer@therapie-am-pferd.at
www.integration-autismus.at
www.therapie-am-pferd.at

INTERVIEWS

NORA TSCHIRNER

What part do you play?

I'm Lara, the mother of the leading character, Mika. Lara is a single mother who has to work hard just to pay the rent, and she looks after her son – which is quite a challenge – with the help of her neighbour Hedi (Bibiana Zeller), who's a sort of granny substitute.

What's special about Mika?

Mika finds it hard to communicate with other people, he has problems with touching, he doesn't understand jokes because he takes them literally, he suffers from claustrophobia, and he's very sensitive to noises. But he's also really smart and a mathematical genius.

Is this the first time you've worked with children?

No, this isn't the first film I've acted with children. The last time I was a nursery school teacher, so we always had a whole crowd of kids on the set.

What's it like for you to work with children?

Children don't have a certain kind of self-control, for example when you have to film a scene the 80th time without batting an eyelid. Although by the 80th time it really does get boring. You have to adjust to the children and think really carefully about how to explain things to them. It's funny and exhausting in a good way. It's lots of fun for me, almost like an activity holiday. You always have your hands full.

ANDREAS KIENDL

What part do you play?

I play Sascha, who becomes a friend and ally of Mika, the hero of the film. Sascha is addicted to gambling, so he doesn't exactly have an easy life. He feels immediately drawn to Mika, who's an outsider like himself, and he also recognises that the boy is extremely talented.

Why did you decide to take part in this film?

This is my first children's film, and what I particularly liked when I read the book was that there wasn't any attempt to make things easy for kids; instead, it really is a fine, realistic tale. It's a story about Mika, who isn't always an easy character. About what goes on in his head, what makes him different from other kids, what makes him special, how it's hard to be different in that way - but also how he manages to be a hero despite all that, because of his self-confidence and energy. The characters have plenty of depth, and they're really plausible. I think it'll be an exciting story for kids.

What's it like for you to work with children?

Just like my character in the film, I don't have any problem at all with kids; I treat them like adults. Enzo and I did a lot of filming together, and we were always colleagues on the same footing. It was a really great experience for me. You can't overwhelm kids with concepts or logic; they're just not interested. And that's fine with me, because I'm also someone who likes acting from the gut.

What was the biggest challenge you faced in making this film?

The animals on the set were a real challenge, especially the horses. For a start, horses are really big, and they are herd animals by nature, flight animals, so they don't always want to do what we want them to. Apart from this, I've worked with a black cat, a white cockatoo, a snail and a spider. It was easiest with the snail.

BIOGRAPHIES

ENZO GAIER

Born on 5th June 2002 in Vienna, the oldest of five children. In his spare time he plays violin at music school with varying degrees of enthusiasm and is a member of the ensemble there. He also enjoys singing with the children's choir at the Vienna Volksoper. He balances this with sport in the form of football, training three times a week and playing matches at weekends. Other things Enzo enjoys include spending time with his family and friends, fun and games outdoors on a skateboard and with diabolo, cycling, swimming and diving, snorkelling in the sea, skiing and snowboarding, ice-skating, and... best of all, trying out everything. At home he likes to read and play, see films now and then or watch football on TV, go wild and then chill out - and sometimes not do anything at all. And sleep.

NATASA PAUNOVIC

I was born on 6th November 2000, and my sign of the zodiac is Scorpio. My hobbies are singing, acting, playing games and reading a little. I like lots of things: riding, talking, laughing, learning. I don't like arguing, being cheeky, posing a lot, getting hurt, being sick and letting myself be used.

How did I come along to the audition?? WELL, I got a note saying there would be a children's film called *The Horse on the Balcony*, and I really wanted to go. I came through the door, and I waited for a minute. And then I started saying my lines.

It was a great feeling for me, and I was nervous too, but then it was all over. They called me back for more auditions, and in the end they took me as Dana. And of course I went completely wild, because I felt like giving the whole world a hug, and that moment was really the very best of all!!

NORA TSCHIRNER

Nora Tschirner was born in Berlin in 1981. She did some acting in theatre while still at school, and her first TV work was in the series **ACHTERBAHN – DER FERIENJOB**. Her first feature film was **WIE FEUER UND FLAMME** (2000). A year later she was given a leading part in the ARD series **DIE STERNERNFÄNGER**, and at the same time she started to work for MTV, where she was a regular presenter until 2007.

Her fresh approach to acting secured a variety of film roles for the actress with the unmistakable Berlin wit, and she has had plenty of opportunity to demonstrate her comic talents. Thus she played the girlfriend of Denis Moschitto in Anno Saul's German-Turkish comedy **KEBAB CONNECTION**. In **FC VENUS – ELF PAARE MÜSST IHR SEIN** she appeared in an exciting football match against Christian Ulmen. In 2007 she played nursery-school teacher and Til Schweiger's adversary Anna Gotzowski in the romantic comedy **KEINOHRHASEN**, which won numerous awards and was extremely successful at the box office. For this performance she and Til Schweiger won a Bambi and a Comedy Award. Two years later this was followed by the hit sequel **ZWEIOHRKÜKEN** along with several other parts in the two film versions of **VORSTADTKROKODILE**, the new version of the movie bestseller **HIER KOMMT LOLA** and the short film **NULLPUNKT**. Last year she appeared in **IJON TICHY: RAUMPILOT**, based on the **STERNENTAGEBÜCHERN** by cult author Stanislaw Lem, as well as making a guest appearance in **DOCTOR'S DIARY**. She also featured in the television movie **DAS LETZTE STÜCK HIMMEL**.

For her part in the European coproduction BON APPÉTIT, which has won numerous awards, Nora Tschirner was presented with a special leading actress award at the 13th Malaga Spanish Film Festival. During 2012 she could be seen in the cinema in the film OFFROAD, while she provided the voice for the main character in the Disney Pixar Film MERIDA. At present she is on tour with the band PRAG, who release their first album in January.

ANDREAS KIENDL

Born in Graz in 1975.

Filmography (cinema and TV, selected):

2012

JUNUS, TV series, directed by Andreas Kopriva □

DIE WERKSTÜRMER, feature film, directed by Andreas Schmied

STEIRERBLUT, TV movie, directed by Wolfgang Murnberger □

DIE AUSLÖSCHUNG, TV movie, directed by Nikolaus Leytner □

2011

THE HORSE ON THE BALCONY, feature film, directed by Hüseyin Tabak

VIER FRAUEN UND EIN TODESFALL, TV series, directed by Andreas Prochaska

2010

DIE VATERLOSEN, feature film, directed by Marie Kreutzer

BOLLYWOOD, TV movie, directed by Holger Haase

2009

DIE UNABSICHTLICHE ENTFÜHRUNG DER FRAU ELFRIEDE OTT, feature film, directed by Andreas Prochaska

FURCHT UND ZITTERN, feature film, directed by Reinhard Schwabenitzky

SACHEN GIBT'S, TV movie, directed by Wolfgang Murnberger □

2008

IN 3 TAGEN BIST DU TOT 2, feature film, directed by Andreas Prochaska

SOKO KITZBÜHEL/ 3.SEASON, TV series/leading role, various directors

2007

SOKO KITZBÜHEL/ 2.SEASON, TV series/leading role, various directors

2006

SOKO KITZBÜHEL/1.SEASON, TV series/leading role, various directors

2005

IN 3 TAGEN BIST DU TOT, feature film, directed by Andreas Prochaska

TATORT, TV movie, directed by Holger Barthel

SLUMMING, feature film, directed by Michael Glawogger

And many others.

Theater: Landestheater Linz, Theater im Bahnhof Graz, Steirischer Herbst

HÜSEYIN TABAK (director)

Hüseyin Tabak, who is German-Kurdish, was born in 1981 in the small town of Bad Salzuflen, in North Rhine-Westphalia, the son of guest workers from Turkey. He started out in the movies in 2003 in Hamburg, working his way up from intern to assistant director during the course of 20 feature films. During this period he made a dozen short films with friends and family.

From 2006 to 2012 Tabak studied directing and scriptwriting at the Vienna Film Academy under Peter Patzak and Michael Haneke. He completed his studies with the full-length film **DEINE SCHÖNHEIT IST NICHTS WERT**. During winter 2011/2012 he shot his next feature film, THE HORSE ON THE BALCONY.

Filmography:

- 2012 **DEINE SCHÖNHEIT IST NICHTS WERT**, feature film
- 2011/2012 THE HORSE ON THE BALCONY, feature film
- 2010 KICK OFF, documentary
- 2010 **HEIM**, short film
- 2009 CHEEESE, short film

KATJA DOR-HELMER (producer)

Katja Dor-Helmer has a masters degree in Business Studies, specialising in corporate management and group pedagogy, from the Vienna University of Economic Sciences.

- 1985 to 1987: grant from the Ministry of Science and Research to study in Paris (thesis on the French film subsidy system)
- 1987 to 1990: executive position with the Austrian Film Commission
- 1996 public relations work for the Vienna Film Finance Fund
- 2000 founded Prokids Film, followed by MINI Film
- EAVE training program, script workshops

MINIFILM

MINI Film was established with the aim of developing, producing and promoting audiovisual programs for children and young people.

Our audience should have the opportunity to experience their own stories, to see films that represent and mirror their culture and history.

Our goal is to reach children and families who love watching films which inspire their imagination, films which are humorous and full of fantasy.

MINI Film is one of the few production companies in Europe which focuses exclusively on this niche market.

MINI Film is looking for partners throughout Europe who share their intention of producing films of high quality in order to create a network of kindred souls.

Filmography:

- 2011/12 THE HORSE ON THE BALCONY
- 2009 **DIE KLEINEN BANKRÄUBER** (director: Armands Zvirbulis)
- 2006 **KARO UND DER LIEBE GOTT** (director: Danielle Proskar)
- 2004 VILLA HENRIETTE (director: Peter Payer)

Milan Dor

Das Pferd auf dem Balkon (The Horse on the Balcony)

Currently only available in German



144 pages with 16 pages of film photographs
€ 12.95 / sFr 18.90

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Recommended for children aged 10 +

Published: 17th September 2012

A wonderful new version of the classic children's book by Milo Dor

Mika is different: he loves mathematics, he only ever tells the truth, and he notices things other people miss. Although he isn't so good with people, he really would like some friends. One night he hears a neighing - and discovers a horse on the balcony of his neighbour, Sascha! Mika makes friends with Sascha and the horse, because he's the only person the independent animal will listen to. The first time Mika sits on the horse's back he is completely transformed. His friend Dana, who likes to claim she is an Indian princess, decides to help Mika with his big plan to find a new home for the racehorse. But first they have to rescue the horse from the slaughterhouse...

Milan Dor, born in Vienna in 1947, is a scriptwriter, director and film producer. He graduated from the Vienna Film and TV School and has been involved in numerous film and TV productions. *The Horse on the Balcony* is his first children's book, which he has written based on the screenplay of the feature film of the same name.

The Book of the Film featuring Nora Tschirner.