

A MARTIN JENLE FILM

HEXENMILCH

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FILMPRODUKTION

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SYNOPSIS

Peter runs over Susanna's cat with his car. Feeling guilty he helps her bury the cat in the backyard. They form a close emotional bond, which soon leads to a romantic relationship and subsequent pregnancy. But there is no bliss for this couple, as there is something very strange about this pregnancy...

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Martin Jehle (*1983) lives and works as an academic and filmmaker in Hildesheim, Germany. As a director, writer and editor, he

works for the company Anachrom Filmproduktion. As a film teacher, he runs courses in film theory, aesthetics and practice at the University of Hildesheim.

CAST AND CREW

Susanna	Lena Ehlers
Peter	Aaron Thiesse
Director	Martin Jehle
Producer	Dominik Wiedenmann
Director of Photography	Olaf Markmann
Gaffer	Marco Minwegen
Set Designer	Katharina Laage
Costumes	Bettina Pommer
Editor	Freya Herrmann
Writer	Niklas Kammermeier
Composer	Martin Jehle
Production Company	Martin Hofstetter
Associate Producers	Martin Kohlstedt
	Anachrom
	Filmproduktion
	Film Fatale
	Universität Hildesheim

FILM DETAILS

Duration	22'
Genre	Horror, Drama
Year	2017
Aspect ratio	16:9
Shooting format	4K
Exhibition format	HD
Color	Color
Sound	Stereo
Country	Germany
World Premiere	Motel/X Lisbon

CONTACT

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Answered by
Dominik Wiedenmann
producer

Q1: What is Hexenmilch (Witch's Milk)?

A: Hexenmilch is a strange phenomenon that is most often found in newborn babies, but it can occur in adults as well. A few years ago, the then-girlfriend of our director called on the phone and told him that all of a sudden her breast was releasing milk. Pregnancy was the first explanation that came to their minds, but when she went to the doctor, he explained to her that witch's milk was usually related to stress or changes in hormonal balance. The incident had such a big impact on them that Martin decided to make a film about it, a body horror movie that deals with relationship issues and sexuality – Hexenmilch.

Q2: How long did you work on the project?

A: This film is what you would call a long burner. The story described in question one took place in 2009, and the first draft of the screenplay was written shortly afterwards. We set the draft aside as we worked on many other projects and studied abroad. After that, we worked on several drafts of the script with Nisi Masa in Zagreb and Luxemburg, an organization for European co-productions of short films. We finally shot the film in 2015, but it took another one and a half years until post production was finished, mainly because we were asking for a lot of unpaid favors and

also because editing long takes is not as simple as you would think. So we ended up being committed to the project for roughly eight years by now.

Q3: What does the cat stand for?

A: It represents an actual cat. It is Susanna's only friend. She loves it more than anything else.

Q4: It is a movie about a very strange pregnancy. Do you have children yourself?

A: We were asked that very question when we applied for funding in Germany. Due to the fact that we had a very young crew, there was hardly any experience with pregnancy... The actress who plays Susanna was pregnant when we shot the film and had also given birth to a boy before. Besides Lena, the team had about as much experience with pregnancy as Steven Spielberg had with sharks when he directed Jaws. We didn't get the funding and produced the film with the support of around 10,000 Euros from local cultural funding and heaps of unpaid working hours from everyone involved in the shoot and post production.

Q5: Why is your film that dark? We can't see everything that's going on.

A: The cat is run over early in the film, but maybe it's hiding in the shadows the whole film through? We painted the walls dark colors and decided quite early that it would help the atmosphere of the film if the viewer isn't able to see what's going on in the corners of the frame. It also helped to highlight one of the main themes of the film –piecing together what is happening to Susanna. We wanted the mystery to reveal itself gradually and give the audience the feeling that there is more going on than meets the eye – which exactly is Peter's view on Susanna.

The color grading was completed with a friend who is a colorist for ARRI in Munich. We saw the picture on the big screen and were able to go for extreme dark colors and a look that only works in the movie theatre. We also have a lighter version ready for computer and television screens. In our next film we might allow our characters to switch on the light in their home when it gets dark outside.

Q6: How was your experience working with the cat?

A: We were lucky to have two black cats that were trained for film work, so they were able to relax on a crowded set. It's impossible to make cats act unless you make them go after food – that's how we got the shots you see in the film. The animal trainers said that one of the cats is easy going and the other one gets quite aggressive when you hold her in your hands. We used the nice one for Lena and the aggressive one for the interaction with Aaron. Everyone was very curious to see how that would turn out. Unfortunately the cat wasn't aggressive at all and when Aaron grabbed the cat it just looked at him silently and then started licking his hands.

Q7: Is Hexenmilch a film for cat lovers?

A: Most people on set were cat lovers. We had an argument in pre-production about whether our story would only make sense to cat lovers, because the audience would need to understand the emotional impact on Susanna, of losing the cat. But of course there is a fair point about hating the cat as well, if you look at it from Peter's perspective. So finally we agreed it would be a film for everyone who is open to a twisted tale like the one we tell.

Q8: Your film is a co-production with a university. How did that come about?

A: All the members of our production company Anachrom Filmproduktion studied at the University of Hildesheim. The university offers cultural studies with a hands-on approach; we had a large studio and a lot of film equipment while studying, so it felt a bit like a film school really. We finished studying a few years ago, but the director of our film went back for a PhD and to teach film courses himself. The next logical step was to get his students and our friends from the university involved in the project; in the end, we had a very good mix of film professionals and students. There were about 50 people on set helping us out. Sometimes it felt like a master class or as if the hands-on film courses were extended over the spring holiday period.

Q9: It seems the whole film was shot at night. Did you have 50 people on a night shift and did they turn into Zombies at some point?

A: We had eight shooting days and they all happened at night. We only used daylight for the breakfast scenes, which were scheduled for late afternoon at the start of another night shift. Our team was fantastic and accepted

"lunch" around 11 pm or midnight and shooting days that went until 5 am. The best thing about shooting at night: you can't extend your working hours. We knew we had to stop shooting before dawn and everyone was aware of the pressure, so we were focused and pulled it off every single night.

Q10: Almost the whole film is set in this old horror house. Is it a real property or a studio set?

A: It's a real house, but of course it didn't look as spooky when we first entered it. But then again it belonged to a German family for many decades and was filled with old black and white photographs of people that had

been dead for ages while their belongings were still sitting on the shelves gathering dust. The whole place radiated a sense of history and there were many tragic stories that you could feel and almost touch. We painted the walls, changed some of the furniture and that's about it. Another good thing about the house was that it had three floors so we could easily shoot on the ground floor, install the catering on the second floor and have a place for data wrangling and a recreation room on the third floor. Since then, the house has been sold to the village and hosts refugees. We are happy that we were able to sneak in and shoot our film while it was not in use, and are happy that today it is filled with happy people and looks much brighter than it did during the shoot.

CONTACT

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