

75 Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Forum

IF YOU ARE AFRAID YOU PUT YOUR HEART INTO YOUR MOUTH AND SMILE

A FILM BY MARIE LUISE LEHNER

CAST: SIENA POPOVIĆ, MARIVA MENNER, JESSICA PAAR, ALESSANDRO SCHEIDNER, ALPEREN KÖSE, KATHRIN RESEKATIS, DANIEL SER
MARKUS SCHRAMM, CHARLOTTE ROHART, EMMA UTTLBACHER, VALENTINA WILLIAMS, KATERINA JÄSCHKE, SHALOM MULOMBE, LIA LENA LÜDESCHER
WRITTEN BY: MARIE LUISE LEHNER, DIRECTED BY: SIMONE HART, PRODUCED BY: INES VORREITER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: JULIA LIBISSELLER, GERALD FREEMUTH, COSTUME DESIGNER: MARLENE AUER-PIEHL
EDITED BY: NOBA CONRADT, MUSIC BY: ALEX SPRENGER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: JANA LIBNIK, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: LENJA GATHMANN, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: CATRIN FREUNDLINGER, VERONIKA HRABY
PRODUCTION DESIGNER: KATHARINA POSCH, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: MICHAEL KITZBERGER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: WOLFGANG WILDBERGER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: MARKUS GLÄNGER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: NIKOLAUS GEVHALTER
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IF YOU ARE AFRAID YOU PUT YOUR HEART INTO YOUR MOUTH AND SMILE

Austria 2025 | 87 min

Director & Script
Marie Luise Lehner



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WORLD PREMIERE: Feb 19, 2025

BERLINALE FORUM

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Cast & Crew

CAST

Anna	Siena Popović
Isolde	Mariya Menner
Mara	Jessica Paar
Paul	Alessandro Scheibner
Fahred	Alperen Köse
Lehrerin Iris Lust	Kathrin Resetarits
Maras Vater	Daniel Sea
Atila	Markus Schramm
Elsa	Charlotte Rohart
Tanja	Emma Dittlbacher
Sandra	Valentina Williams
Clara	Katerina Jaschke
Melis	Shalom Mulombe
Isoldes Mutter	Zeynep Salkök
Hibat	Lia Lena Ludescher

CREW

Director & Script	Marie Luise Lehner
Production	<i>NGF Geyrhalterfilm</i> Katharina Posch, Michael Kitzberger, Wolfgang Widerhofer, Markus Glaser, Nikolaus Geyrhalter
Cinematography	Simone Hart
Editing	Jana Libnik, Joana Scrinzi, Alexandra Schneider
Sound	Ines Vorreiter
Set Design	Julia Libiseller, Gerald Freimuth
Costume Design	Marlene Auer-Pleyl
Makeup Design	Nora Conradi

A production by
NGF Geyrhalterfilm (A)

With support of
**Österreichisches Filminstitut, ÖFI plus, Filmfonds Wien, ORF Film/Fernseh-
Abkommen**

Technical Data

First feature film by Marie Luise Lehner

Original title: Wenn du Angst hast nimmst du dein Herz in den Mund und lächelst
International title: If You Are Afraid You Put Your Heart Into Your Mouth and Smile
Running time: 87 min
Country: Austria, 2025
Languages: German, German Sign Language, English
Format: 1:1,85
Image: Flat
Sound: 5.1

Links:

[Website](#)

[Press Downloads](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Berlinale](#)



Synopsis

Marie Luise Lehner's debut film tells the story of Anna and her deaf mother Isolde and is about what it is like to transform the shame of one's own origins into pride, about affection, care, and solidarity.

"Anna, 12, lives with her deaf mother in a loving bond, yet under humble conditions, that are a source of social shame when she begins high school. Staying close to its heroines, this refreshing debut blends solidarity, feminism and tons of melodies."
Berlinale Forum

Twelve-year-old Anna switches from middle school to high school. Things are quite different here: the children in the new school come from a completely other social class. Anna feels ashamed of her background and her deaf mother.

During the ski week, Anna must pretend to be sick. The money set aside for the ski course is spent on buying a sofa bed, which should enable her mother to have a sexual relationship, but also provide the daughter with a bit more privacy.

Mara, a friend in class, becomes an ally when it turns out that she also is hiding a secret.

"If You Are Afraid You Put Your Heart Into Your Mouth and Smile" tells of a journey from shame to pride and examines what it's like to learn to stand up for yourself.

A narrative of hope, affection, mutual care, and solidarity.

Director's statement

"If You Are Afraid You Put Your Heart Into Your Mouth and Smile" is a movie about class differences. A film about closeness between a mother and a child, but also about closeness between people in general. It is about deafness and about finding yourself. Where you want to belong. To your own desire. About gender identity. From shame to pride.

Marie Luise Lehner



World Premiere

Berlinale Forum

Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin 13.-23.02.2025



Arsenal 2 (Press Screening)	17.02.2025	20:30	
Zoo Palast 2 (Premiere)	19.02.2025	19:00	Q&A with director
Arsenal 1	20.02.2025	16:00	Q&A with director
Cubix 8	21.02.2025	12:45	Q&A with director
Delphi Filmpalast	22.02.2025	21:00	Q&A with director
European Film Market Screening: Cinemaxx 12	18.02.2025	12:45	

<https://www.berlinale.de/en/2025/programme/202510379.html>

Nominations:

Berlinale Generation: Recommendation

Teddy Award: Selection

Fipresci Jury: Selection

Amnesty Film Award Berlinale: Selection

MIA Market 2024: C EU Soon Rough Cut Selection

Interview with Marie Luise Lehner

Anna, the protagonist, has just started at a prestigious high school which is supposed to open the doors for social advancement. She is also twelve, in the middle of a phase of inner and outer transformation. Is the aspect of transition in many ways the central theme of your first feature film?

MARIE LUISE LEHNER: Transformation is a fine, important topic. Many films depict a character who resolves independently to do something, defying the (perhaps repressive) circumstances in order to achieve a goal, a personal ambition. The narrative that dominates here is: You just have to want it, and then you can do it. Social conditions often aren't portrayed in any detail. My film is less about a character's journey to a destination and more about circumstances. Recognizing your own position. The characters each have a different status in society. They are depicted and taken seriously within that.

In Anna's new environment, social disparities are quite evident. But your film doesn't feature oppressive relationships of dominance or pronounced antagonists. Why is that?

MARIE LUISE LEHNER: There are power relations but no clear good and evil. Everyone acts within the scope of their possibilities. The rich children invite Anna to a birthday party, so she could become a member of their group, but that doesn't happen. Because she brings a home-made present instead of one bought in a shop, for example. Because in the apartment she sees how long the dining table is, that there are sophisticated dimmer switches the lighting, and she feel the difference to her own home. She feels alien. That's how it is with class differences; people who don't belong in a certain circle feel very strongly that they don't belong. The children are all sweet. In my film, social difference isn't a personal problem; it's a social one.

Social shame is a crucial element here, even though you portray Anna as a very self-confident girl.

MARIE LUISE LEHNER: I wanted the story to show that she starts the film proudly and ends up proudly. The shame she is confronted with in the course of the narrative doesn't so much come from inside her: it's more imposed upon her. She stumbles but does find a way to regain her self-confidence, thanks to the lovely relationship she has with her self-confident mother. I was interested in a story about people who do everything as well as they can, with the means at their disposal. But Social conditions get in the way. Anna, with her single, deaf mother, is not a member of a socially brutalized lower class; she's a person who is excluded because of circumstances. Is it class? Is it ableism? Is it racism? For people like Anna's mother, access to education is a question of language, not intellectual ability. Social conditions often result in people not achieving what they could, even though they are smart, competent and loving people.

Why did you largely omit the performance aspect of school life?

MARIE LUISE LEHNER: I was more interested in everything that takes place outside of school hours. But Anna reaches a point where she can no longer keep up in maths lessons, and that's when the first rift between her and her mother emerges. It's not only the school's standards of performance that cause an estrangement between mother and daughter. Anna also encounters other realities of life and other living situations. Moving up the class hierarchy is one of the many transitions that my film depicts. The transition to becoming an adult is another. Anna and her mother have a very loving relationship, but we can foresee a time when they will become estranged from each other.

IF YOU'RE AFRAID YOU PUT YOUR HEART INTO YOUR MOUTH AND SMILE is a very encouraging title, slightly absurd and definitely long. Is this title based on a literary source?

MARIE LUISE LEHNER: The title is a quote from Aglaia Veteranyi's novel *Why the Child is Cooking in the Polenta*. It was a very important book for me. It's about growing up from a child's perspective. Aglaia Veteranyi fled the Ceausescu regime in Romania with her family and wrote this semi-autobiographic novel in simple, very precise, touching language that meanders into the lyrical.

How did you manage, during the screenwriting process, to access the life and language of people who are 12-13 years old today?

MARIE LUISE LEHNER: I'm lucky enough to have three much younger sisters. The two youngest are now just ten and fourteen years old. They were an important source during the writing process. I also worked with the young people who appear in the film. They all go to the school where we filmed. I cast them in groups of friends, because I wanted them to know each other, to feel comfortable and safe with each other. I thought that approach made a lot of sense. Filming is 90% hanging around, so if you're with friends, the atmosphere is more relaxed. In fact, I myself and the whole team benefited enormously from having such a respectful working atmosphere.

How did you choose Siena Popović to play Anna? How did you prepare the young people for filming?

MARIE LUISE LEHNER: Siena became our protagonist because she was so smart. During an improvisation exercise in auditions, she had to explain to a classmate that her mother was going to have an abortion, which the classmate couldn't really relate to. When we did that exercise, Siena was the only child to argue that it's a financial issue. I thought it was very clever for a twelve-year-old to appreciate that having another child is also a class question. Siena is extremely ambitious and a good student; she speaks several languages, and she's an achiever. We had shorter shooting days with the children on set, and we voluntarily implemented the new child protection concept. The general feedback from the team was that they'd never experienced a set like that before, even though with 20 children, just getting the right children in the right outfit in the right place at the right time is a real challenge.

How did you find Mariya Menner, the actress who plays Anna's mother?

MARIE LUISE LEHNER: We put out a call to associations for deaf people. Finding a deaf person who knows spoken and sign language isn't so easy. Mariya can do both. She is a very charismatic and funny, a cool, beautiful woman who has four children of her own. To facilitate working together, we always had a sign language interpreter with us on set and at rehearsals.

Sign language is one of many elements of physicality in your film. How important is the body in your narratives?

MARIE LUISE LEHNER: The body is very important to me. There are different bodies in different life situations, and that also applies when people are denied control over their own bodies for social reasons. In patriarchal society, a mother often doesn't have control over her own body. With the shift to the right evident around the world, dealing with the topic of abortion in a film has become even more political than it was when I wrote the screenplay. Gender transition is completely under attack right now. Trans people in my environment are very scared at the moment. It's crazy how much antagonism there is to the idea that people should be allowed to dispose of their own bodies. This is a very important feminist issue. I have to be the only person who is allowed to make decisions about my body.

Anna feels attracted to a girl and to a boy. How important was it to you to bring in gender fluidity?

MARIE LUISE LEHNER: At the end, Anna says: I don't like Paul; I want to be Paul. That can mean a lot of things. Paul comes from a different kind of family and has no financial problems. He's a blond boy who gets a lot of attention: he sits on the floor before choir rehearsal and burps. We don't know why she wants to be Paul, but there are several possible ways it might be desirable for her to be him. The nature of her true, innermost wish remains undefined.

How did Daniel Sea come to be part of your cast?

MARIE LUISE LEHNER: I watched *The L World* as a teenager, which was somehow identity-building. At that time (and even today) there was very little lesbian and queer representation. This series, with Daniel Sea as a trans man, was a first on television. It was a great honour for me to have him in our cast. We know each other because we both studied with Ashley Hans Scheirl at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. So it's not just me as a teenage fan; we also share a connection to New Queer Cinema.

Explicit antagonists don't feature in your film, and neither do exclusionary mechanisms. There is solidarity... Are you depicting a utopia – a desire for social change or the possibility of a different society?

MARIE LUISE LEHNER: Film always offers the opportunity to show utopias. On the other hand, I also show a realistic idea of how a society can be and sometimes is. There are no simple answers to complicated questions in the world. There are only more complicated answers. Everything in the world is ambivalent. I could have shown Anna being bullied more;

children in the real world are probably more merciless than in my film. I didn't want to convey the feeling that blame should be assigned on the basis of bad behaviour by individuals. I didn't want to set the stage for simple conclusions to be drawn. Any violence I showed would perpetuate that violence. It's enough to hint at violence without showing it. I want to adopt a certain attitude with the film that is on an equal footing with the characters, rather than creating an opportunity for the film to look down on the characters. I want to show them in their subjectivity. I don't want to portray any victims.

Interview: Karin Schiefer, February 2025



Biographies

Marie Luise Lehner

Marie Luise Lehner was born in 1995 and lives in Vienna. A filmmaker, author and punk musician. After studying at the Institut für Sprachkunst at the University of Applied Arts, she studied screenwriting at the Film Academy Vienna. She is pursuing master's degrees in directing at the Film Academy and in contextual painting at the Academy of Fine Arts. She has written scripts, prose and two novels. Her short films have been shown at various international film festivals and her literary works have received many prizes. Since 2012, she has caused a furore with her feminist punk band Schapka.

Filmography (selection):

Kaugummizigaretten (Candy Cigarettes) (2016)

Geh Vau (Sexual Intercourse), (2018) World Sales: sixpackfilm

Zwischenräume (Gaps), (2020)

Mein Hosenschlitz ist offen. Wie mein Herz (The zip of my pants is open: Like my heart) (2022) WS: sixpackfilm

Im Traum sind alle Quallen feucht. (In their dreams all jellyfish are wet) (2023) World Sales: Lemonade Films

Nikolaus Geyrhalter Filmproduktion

Vienna-based NGF Geyrhalterfilm has over 25 years of experience and 100+ feature films and documentaries to its name. NGF's works have premiered at top festivals like Cannes (MICHAEL by Markus Schleiner, 2011), Venice (PEACOCK by Bernhard Wenger, 2024), Toronto (MADEMOISELLE PARADIS by Barbara Albert, 2017), and Berlin (THE ROBBER by Benjamin Heisenberg, 2010) focused on arthouse co-productions, female-driven narratives and family entertainment (e.g., TALES OF FRANZ by Johannes Schmid, 2022). They've won major awards, including the European Film Award (MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE by Marc Bauder, 2014) and the Pardo Verde in Locarno (MATTER OUT OF PLACE by Nikolaus Geyrhalter, 2022).

NGF at the Berlinale:

[SHIT HAPPENS](#)

developed by Head Writers Magda Woitzuck and Calle Fuhr, Series of 6 x 45 min.
is selected for the [Pitching Forum Co-Pro Series at the Berlinale](#)

[IF YOU ARE AFRAID YOU PUT YOUR HEART INTO YOUR MOUTH AND SMILE](#)

by Marie Luise Lehner

will have its [World Premiere](#) at the [Berlinale Forum](#)