

Winner Audience Award Best Feature
VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

My Wonderful Wanda

A Film by Bettina Oberli



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MY WONDERFUL WANDA

SYNOPSIS

Winner of awards at Tribeca and Vancouver, MY WONDERFUL WANDA is a delightful satire of the haves and the have-nots set against the backdrop of a gorgeous lakeside villa in Switzerland. At the story's center is Wanda (Agnieszka Grochowska) a Polish caretaker who has left her own small children in Poland to look after Josef (André Jung) the stroke-ridden patriarch of the wealthy Wegmeister-Gloor dynasty. Wanda is adept in navigating the tricky family dynamics between the two grown (if still childish) offspring and the elegant if controlling matriarch Elsa (an amazing Marthe Keller), along with the sporadic intervention of animals stuffed or alive. But an unexpected turn of events turns everything upside down. While MY WONDERFUL WANDA exposes present-day realities of class injustice, thanks to writer-director Bettina Oberli's empathetic lens, it is never less than a very human comedy.

INTERVIEW WITH Bettina Oberli

Family – you can't live with them, you can't live without them...

Family is a motif I return to again and again in my films: what is it about this strange microcosm, this genetically random family unit in which you feel secure or maybe even restrained? Family is a very broad narrative field, and everyone can feel their way into it somehow because everyone has family. The Wegmeister-Gloors are put to the test, cracks appear, and unpleasant facts come to light. All its members are forced to be honest with each other. This is liberating, at times funny, yet also very painful on occasion. The family almost falls apart – but for me this is nonetheless a film about getting closer.

In *My Wonderful Wanda* you've thematized the current issue of care migration. Why precisely this topic?

The outpatient care market is booming in Switzerland. Agencies apply phrases like "... cheap, caring, warm-hearted, and there for you round the clock" when brokering staff from Eastern Europe to care for the elderly in their residences rather than in a home. Increasingly often, over-qualified women from Poland and Hungary are commuting monthly between their own families and Swiss households. I was interested in what happens when a complete stranger gains deep insight into a family's structure, and the inevitable intimacy that ensues.

The model is often referred to as a winwin situation: relatives in need of care don't have to be placed in a home, the family saves money, and the carers earn much more here than in their homelands. But this view is too one-sided. We're ignoring the fact that these women have private lives, their own families, a daily routine they have to give up, and that money nonetheless remains scarce back home. So the benefits are very one-sided. What has to happen for these parties to meet on equal footing and for these exchanges to become fair? That's the question we examined in *My Wonderful Wanda*.

How did you and co-author Cooky Ziesche approach the script?

It was important to us to research and deal with the topic seriously, but that there would also be room for funny or absurd moments. So not a classic social drama, but rather a "comédie très humaine." And the narrative tone was to be dry and sober to avoid moralizing.

I met Bozena Domanska while doing research – she's a former nurse who has been commuting between Poland and the West for 20 years. She acted as a specialist consultant and was closely involved with our work on both the script and the shoot. Bozena's knowledge and experience were extremely valuable to *My Wonderful Wanda*.

Cooky Ziesche and I discussed things a great deal prior to our work on the script, then she took the lead in the writing process. It was ideal that we knew from an early stage where precisely and with which cast we would be shooting. The script could thus be written with these features in mind.

Why do you tell the story from the perspective of the Wegmeister-Gloor family?

My Wonderful Wanda is an ensemble film, it's about parents and children and what members of a family can do to each other. It's not only Wanda who wants to be treated with respect and dignity – each member of the family longs for that as well. Wanda is the protagonist, she's the catalyst for the developments and changes in the other characters, but these are just as interesting: a prosperous family gets themselves a cheap carer for the head of their family, but everyone in the family avails of her assistance to their own ends. Telling this story in all its consequences allows for varying perspectives and surprising plot twists. In the end, Wanda has

indeed helped the family – but to a much greater extent than they had imagined. And her relationship with her own family in Poland has also benefited from these events.

What's remarkable is that you avoid portraying Wanda as a victim...

That's is an important point: Wanda is being exploited, of course. But she also goes along with it even to the extent that she secretly sleeps with her patient for money. So she can't view herself as a victim. And this was also Agnieszka's attitude towards her role: Wanda is exploiting the family, too. And what's more, she gets along well with Josef. It's simply a deal that brings her added value. Her conscious trading of "sex for money" paradoxically lends Wanda power. Portraying her as a victim would've been too easy and also would've made it impossible to show her contradictory and strong aspects. Wanda thus turns the tables on the exploitation/subservience, above/below issues.

You found yourself a top-class cast for *My Wonderful Wanda*. How did working with the ensemble develop?

The pleasure the actors took in acting was really contagious. No one played the diva. On the contrary, we all got along really well and developed a lot of affection for each other that lasted even beyond the shoot. It was a pleasure for me to work with this top-class cast. Almost all of them also act in large theaters and are genuine lovers of the stage. Working with them is inspiring because they're passionate about their profession. We cinematically realized many scenes together. There was room for their imagination and suggestions, and I was happy to accept much of what they created.

You shot the story chronologically and almost entirely at one location. What did that mean for the shoot?

Often we were all together on set since there are numerous ensemble scenes. At times it was like being in a beehive. We took our time for rehearsals. It was important to me that the family appear credible. You have to sense that these people have known each other their whole lives. And here it was a great help that we spent a lot of time together in the villa. The actors made the house their own, and at some stage truly felt it was their home.

The focus on essentially one location made many demands on set-designer Marion Schramm. The house had to display the family's prosperity without seeming ostentatious or off-putting. Furthermore, the film plays in three seasons but was shot with an interval of merely three weeks. So again and again, the surroundings had to be adjusted to the respective time of year. This presented us with numerous logistical challenges.

The advantage of this was that we shot chronologically for the most part. This has a different effect both for the production and for the actors, and affords a greater dynamism in play-acting because scenes build one upon another, as in the theater, rather than having been shot piecemeal. A chronological shoot was also advantageous to the work of camerawoman Judith Kaufmann. We were able to develop a visual language that traverses, and at the same time, separates, the three narrative parts in terms of atmosphere. Furthermore, we had to assure that the film remain visually exciting though it depicts only one location. Content-wise we saw the location as an island, a metaphor – the story could take place anywhere where people are wealthy and able to isolate themselves.

The score is by the Grandbrothers duo – how did that collaboration work?

The music was to sound very warm on the one hand, but also to have a modern, electronic element. My very musical editor Kaya Inan worked with Grandbrothers' music a lot during editing. Pianist Erol Sarp plays a classical grand piano, the sound of which Lukas Vogel modifies by computer and then adds to the piano music again. The two of them mounted

hundreds of electrodes and hammers on the grand to create a unique sound that suits *My Wonderful Wanda*.

For the modern reinterpretation of Nancy Sinatra's *Bang Bang*, we called in the band AETNA. This is also how the final number, composed and sung by the same singer, was created.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Bettina Oberli grew up in Samoa and Meiringen in Switzerland and lives as a writer/director in Zurich. She graduated from the Zurich University of the Arts. This was followed by various assistantships in New York and Berlin. Her short and long feature films have been shown at festivals around the world and have been shown in cinemas in various countries. Her well recognized debut film IM NORDWIND premiered 2004 at the San Sebastian international Filmfestival and has been awarded with several prizes. Her most successful film to date was LATE BLOOMERS (2006) which still remains among the top 3 Swiss feature films of all time. 2018 she premiered her first french-speaking film LE VENT TOURNE at the Locarno Film Festival. Bettina Oberli also makes music videos and short films. In 2013 she showed her first stage production at the Theater Basel with "Anna Karenina". She is also an Opera Director. MY WONDERFUL WANDA (2020) is her sixth feature film.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY:

<i>My Wonderful Wanda (Wanda, Mein Wunder)</i>	feature film, 2020
<i>With The Wind (Le Vent Tourne)</i>	feature film, 2018
<i>Private Banking</i>	tv-mini-serie, 2017
<i>Lovely Louise</i>	feature film, 2013
<i>The Murder Farm (Tannöd)</i>	feature film 2009
<i>Late Bloomers (Die Herbstzeitlosen)</i>	feature film 2006
<i>Im Nordwind</i>	feature film 2004

MAIN CAST BIOGRAPHY

Agnieszka Grochowska studied acting at the Akademia Teatralna Warsaw and graduated in 2002. After graduation she became a member of the ensemble of the Studio Theatre in Warsaw, where she was awarded for the best debut of the season in her first season for the role of Constanze in Peter Shaffer's *AMADEUS* alongside Zbigniew Zapasiewicz. In the same year she also made her film debut under the direction of Dariusz Gajewski. For the leading role in the film *PRĘGI* she was nominated for the Polish Film Prize and the European Film Prize in 2005. At the Berlinale 2007 she was awarded the European Film Prize Shooting Star.

Marthe Keller began her film career in France after several roles on German television. In *WENN MARIE NUR NICHT SO LAUNISCHE WÄR'* (1970) she played her first leading role. In 1975 she left France and went to Hollywood. In 1976 she played alongside Dustin Hoffman in *MARATHON MAN*, for which she received a Golden Globe nomination for Best Supporting Actress. Among further roles in Hollywood are at Al Pacino's side in *BOBBY DEERFIELD* (1977), her role in *FEDORA* (1978) and *IN THE FORMULA* (1980) with Marlon Brando. She has been playing mainly theatre roles since the 1980s. In 2001 she was nominated for the us Theatre Prize Tony for her role of Madame Berthold in the Broadway production of *JUDGEMENT AT NUREMBERG* as Best Actress. In 2004 she directed the opera "Don Giovanni" at the Metropolitan Opera, N.Y. In 2006 she received the Swiss Film Prize as Best Supporting Actress for her role in *FRAGILE*. In 2012 she was awarded the Knight of the French Legion of Honor and in 2015 with the Lifetime Achievement of the Swiss Society in New York.

André Jung attended the Stuttgart University of Music and Performing Arts. Afterwards he was engaged at various theatres from 1988 to 2015. Jung regularly embodies television and film roles. He has appeared in over 50 radio plays. In addition, he speaks the Chief Commissioner Michel Paquet in the episodes of ARD Radio Tatort produced by SR and played in the literary film adaptation *THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK* (2016). Jung was voted Actor of the Year by Theater heute in 1981 and 2002 and received the Rita Tanck Glaser Acting Prize of the Hamburg Cultural Foundation in 2000. Among other awards are the Austrian Nestroy Theatre Prize in 2009 and in 2018, the Gertrud-Eysoldt-Ring.

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CAST

Agnieszka Grochowska — Wanda

Marthe Keller — Elsa

André Jung — Josef

Birgit Minichmayr — Sophie

Jacob Matschenz — Gregi

Anatole Taubman — Manfred

Cezary Pazura — Pawel

Agata Rzeszewsk — Irene

Bruno Rajski — Jacob

Iwo Rajski — Tomasz

CREW

director: Bettina Oberli

scriptwriter: Cooky Ziesche, Bettina Oberli

director of photography: Judith Kaufmann

editor: Kaya Inan

sound: Hugo Poletti

music: Grandbrothers (Erol Sarp & Lukas Vogel)

production designer: Marion Schramm

costume designer: Laura Locher

make-up: Adrienne Chauliac

casting: Corinna Glaus, Magdalena Szwarcbart

production manager: Florian Widmeier

line producer: Aminta Iseppi

producers: Lukas Hobi, Reto Schaerli

TECHNICAL DETAILS

original title: *Wanda, Mein Wunder*

international title: *My Wonderful Wanda*

duration: 110 min

aspect ratio: 2.35:1

format: 4K

sound: 5.1

year: 2020

original language: German, Polish

country of production: Switzerland

production companies: Zodiac Pictures

co-production companies: Swiss Radio and Television srf & Teleclub