



presents

EFFIGY - POISON AND THE CITY



A crime drama by **Udo Flohr**

With **Suzan Anbeh, Elisa Thiemann, Christoph Gottschalch,**
Uwe Bohm, Roland Jankowsky and many others.

Germany/USA 2020 | 85 min.

Theatrical Releases: 2020 (USA), 2022 (Germany)

PRESS KIT



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TRAILER

<https://vimeo.com/geekfrog/effigy-trailer> (English)

<https://vimeo.com/geekfrog/efigie-trailer> (Spanish)

<https://vimeo.com/geekfrog/effigie-trailer> (German)

TECHNICAL SPECS

Length/Format	85 minutes 4K 1.85 : 1 5.1
Country Of Origin	Germany/USA 2020
Budget	US\$ 450,000 Independently produced with no subsidies

CAST & CREW

CAST

Gesche Gottfried	Suzan Anbeh
Cato Böhmer	Elisa Thiemann
Senator Droste	Christoph Gottschalch
Captain Ehlers	Roland Jankowsky
Inspector Tonjes	Uwe Bohm
Dr. Luce	Eugen Daniel Krössner
Dr. Hoffschläger	Marc Ottiker
Mayor Smidt	Ulrich Sachsse

CREW

Directed By	Udo Flohr
Written By	Peer Meter, <i>inspired by his stage play</i> Udo Flohr Antonia Roeller
Cinematographer	Thomas Kist
Editor	Sven Pape
Production Design	Christina v. Ahlefeld Knut Splett-Henning
Props Master	Detlef Kappis
Original Score	Nic Raine <i>with the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra</i>
Sound Engineer	Tsvetelina Valkova
Sound Design	Moritz Busch
Costumes	Katja Pilgrim
Hair & Make-Up	Hjørdis Supplieth Sarah te Laak
SFX	Janine Kusche
Assistant Director	Max Gleschinski
Scientific Advisor	Ulrich Sachsse
Creative Producer	Henning Ahlers
Produced By	Patricia Ryan, Udo Flohr

SUMMARY

Bremen in 1828: Young Cato Böhmer (Elisa Thiemann) starts her new job as a temporary clerk for criminal court magistrate Senator Droste (Gottfried Gottschalch). Her dream is to be a lawyer – though she knows that women are not admitted at German universities. Against all odds, she becomes the senator's main support when suspicious deaths start piling up in Bremen's Pelzerstrasse. Traces of poison on food alert the criminal court, and it quickly transpires that the attractive widow Gesche Gottfried (Suzan Anbeh) is by no means in danger herself, as she claims. Rather, the apparent philanthropist is soon considered a prime suspect in the mysterious case, who may have murdered her own children, husbands, family members, friends and neighbors. In the course of the investigation, Cato and Gesche are two women who could not be more different. Although one represents the law and the other lives outside rules and regulations, both struggle in their own way for the same thing: their place in a world where women are considered second-class people. The interrogations must reveal whether Cato will succeed in wresting Gesche's dark secret from her and getting her to confess ...

PRESS RELEASE

She was considered the “Angel of Bremen”, but in truth Gesche Gottfried was Germany's first female serial killer ever to be identified. Her crimes have inspired stage plays (including Fassbinder's “Bremer Freiheit”), movies, radio plays, an opera and even a graphic novel. Now director Udo Flohr has taken up the story again with his debut feature **EFFIGY – POISON AND THE CITY**. Between 1813 and 1827, Gottfried is said to have murdered 15 people with “mouse butter” (a mixture of lard and arsenic). 20 of her victims survived. In 1831, she was executed at the age of 46 - the last public execution to take place in Bremen. The screenplay is based on original court records as well as a play by Peer Meter and paints an exciting picture of an era that is closer to us – especially in issue of feminism – than it first seems. The female leads **Suzan Anbeh** (“French Kiss”, “Elementarteilchen”) as Gesche Gottfried and **Elisa Thiemann** (“Gladbeck”) as court clerk Cato Böhmer engage in a complex duel between two strong women. The ensemble is completed by **Christoph Gottschalch** (“A Clear Felling”) as the investigating judge, **Uwe Bohm and Roland Jankowsky**. The original score was created in close collaboration between composer and conductor **Nic Raine** and the **Prague Philharmonic Orchestra** (“The Lives of Others”, “Hannibal”).

EFFIGY – POISON AND THE CITY had its world premiere at Filmfest Bremen in 2019 – the city where the incredible story originated. Subsequently delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic, Udo Flohr's remarkable directorial debut nonetheless screened at numerous festivals around the world and released in U.S. and German theaters. It received outstanding reviews – including from the New York Times and the Hollywood Reporter – and won 30 international awards. The feature was also selected for the Golden Globes and the Oscars in 2021.



BACKGROUND: GERMANY'S FIRST FEMALE SERIAL KILLER

Was she mentally ill, cold-blooded and calculating, or a victim of social circumstances who fought back – admittedly in an inconceivably drastic way? It will probably never be fully clarified what drove Gesche Gottfried, born in 1785 as the daughter of a Bremen tailor, to commit her crimes. She went down in criminal history as Germany's first documented serial killer. Gottfried allegedly murdered 15 people until she was arrested in 1828. Her first victim was her first husband, a master saddler whom she had married when she was 21. He soon turned out to be a drinker who beat her and consistently treated her as if she were his serf. Nonetheless she bore him six children in six years of marriage. When he died in the seventh year – and “in great agony” according to court records – no one could have guessed that it was the inconsolable widow who had poisoned him with so-called mouse butter, a mixture of lard and arsenic that was used to get rid of rats and other vermin.

For many years, the attractive “Angel of Bremen” was considered a benefactress, a woman who lovingly cared for the city's poorest. She married two other men who, in turn, soon passed away – in addition to Gottfried's three children, her parents, twin brother, her best friend, neighbors and acquaintances. No one was surprised about the many deaths surrounding her, nobody suspected anything. At least that's how it seemed. That Gesche Gottfried – practically the devil in human shape – was able to pursue her murderous business undetected for so long was also due to Bremen's bourgeoisie turning a blind eye. After her arrest it turned out that many

victims could have survived if the physicians had worked properly, autopsies had been carried out professionally and warnings had not been ignored.

Was the woman – whom **EFFIGY** director Udo Flohr imagines “in some ways almost like a female version of Hannibal Lecter” – simply “evil at heart”, according to contemporary sources? Was she a cold, power-seeking, unrepentant person who lied and deceived and killed because she enjoyed it? Or did she, as Flohr suspects, not rather suffer from a so-called ego-state disorder and Munchausen By Proxy syndrome? The case leaves a lot of room for speculation. To identify the cause or motivation for Gottfried's series of murders – 180 years after the fact – with certainty is almost impossible. Legendary director Rainer Werner Fassbinder, who wrote his stage play “Bremer Freiheit” at 25, considered Gesche Gottfried a victim of circumstances and has her say that a woman is “a human being”, not “a man's pet”. Of course her rampage against the institutions of marriage and family had to remain unsuccessful, as – according to Fassbinder – “the right consciousness at the wrong time is of no use at all”.

35,000 people watched Gottfried's execution on Bremen's Domshof in 1831. When the executioner cut off her head with the sword, the murderess was 46 years old. It was to be the last public execution in the Hanseatic city.

INTERVIEW WITH UDO FLOHR – DIRECTOR | CO-WRITER | CO-PRODUCER

Why did you choose Bremen's serial killer Gesche Gottfried as the subject for your directorial debut?

Initially I was looking for material that would be suitable for a chamber play. If you're making your first film and don't really have any money, a chamber play is a good way of not completely ruining yourself. That's where Peer Meter's stage play came in handy, because it all takes place in one interrogation room. On the other hand, I found it intriguing that Rainer Werner Fassbinder had made a film about Gottfried and came to a different interpretation than I did. Fassbinder interpreted her deeds primarily as an act of emancipation. Regarding the first murder of her violent husband, I was still able to go along with that. But later, for example, she killed her best friend Beta, as well as Beta's three-year-old daughter, with no discernible motive. Fighting for freedom doesn't work as the only explanation there anymore. Together with Ulrich Sachsse, a professor of psychiatry who advised me, I came to the conclusion that Gesche suffered from a disorder that probably triggered Munchausen by Proxy Syndrome in her. While working on the screenplay I became aware of something else at some point: When I was nine years old, my mother died completely unexpectedly, and there were clear signs of either a diabetes coma or poisoning. I was alone with her when she died. A somewhat traumatic experience, especially at that age. For many years, that was always on my mind. Still, we can only speculate whether there was an unconscious reason why I took up this subject.

Did you make a lot of changes relative to the play that inspired EFFIGY?

Eventually, yes. The work on the screenplay was lengthy. In the end it took three years. A stage play is not as easy to adapt as one might think. Cinematic storytelling often requires very different means. Thus the idea of simply adapting the play proved to be a bit of a trap. Starting out we stayed too close to the original – after all, it's a true story! You want to condense, you want to fictionalize, you want to dramatize – and at the same time you think you mustn't cross certain red lines, in order to stick to the truth and verified events. Most of Gesche Gottfried's statements you hear in EFFIGY are taken verbatim from the court transcripts. But the written account of the interrogations was already paraphrased. There is a total of around 2,000 pages of court records. From the many statements we ended up making a selection which fit my directorial idea: I developed the opinion that Gottfried, who had artistic ambitions and also danced ballet, always played a role in public. She would never show remorse in front of others, not beg for mercy or break down. She would always present this somewhat aloof persona. She was also a kind of seductress who went through several husbands and lovers. From her own letters and other written material that has survived, it is clear that she was eloquent and capable of considerable reflection.

Did you have to modernize the language?

That was somewhere in the middle; we didn't change anything brute-force. Overall I would consider the court records written in a relatively modern language. Peer Meter even recognizes a Kleistian linguistic style in it. Of course we don't know whether Gesche really spoke like that ... or whether the court reporter wrote like Kleist. (*laughs*) But it really doesn't sound particularly ancient.

Even though you observed certain red lines, you turned that court assessor, who was a man, into a young woman. Why?

True, in reality he was a 49-year-old male lawyer with a doctorate. I liked the idea of a woman chasing a woman. And that a woman perhaps understands another better than a man. Both experience the oppression of women during their time. When I was writing, I sometimes wondered whether they considered it quite normal, that they didn't even notice they were being oppressed – but I don't think that was the case. There are, after all, female authors from that era who addressed this. For example, the so-called Göttingen Universitätsmamsellen (university maids) – who served as my model for Cato Böhmer, so to speak. They were daughters and wives of professors who completed a kind of unofficial course program. Seven of this group stood out, mostly in the arts. One of them was Caroline Böhmer. One of her husband was August Schlegel, the renowned Shakespeare translator. Today it is almost certain that Caroline helped him a great deal with the translations. She also maintained a salon in Göttingen where Goethe and Schiller came and went. She was a real celebrity of her time. For me, Cato Böhmer is her daughter.

Having a sympathetic identification figure in the film alongside the murderer was probably also important?

Yes, it would have been difficult to present the audience with a negative figure to identify with. Cato is a heroine with a positive connotation, who also shows us the social constraints to which women were subjected.

Since you consider Gesche Gottfried somewhat similar to Hannibal Lecter in the movie “Silence of the Lambs”, Cato would then be your Clarice Starling?

Oh, yes! (*laughs*) Of course, I don't want to compare my film with Jonathan Demme's. But in preparation for the shoot, I had professional actors perform the prison scene from “Silence of the Lambs” with reversed gender roles at a workshop in New York City. Like Hannibal Lecter, Gesche shows no remorse, at least while she is not alone. Incidentally, another model for my production was the character of Alice Morgan, played by Ruth Wilson, from the BBC series “Luther” with Idris Elba. She famously shoots her parents in the first episode and also shows no remorse at all. Alice Morgan is a bit like Gesche.

When filming finally got underway, what proved to be the biggest challenge for you on set?

Oh, new hurdles arose almost daily even before shooting began. The start of principal photography was in September 2018, but until then we already had to postpone it three times. Among other things, the manor house where we originally wanted to shoot was suddenly no longer available, because the owner went bankrupt. So we had to look for a new location. As a result, the production designer, among others, dropped out. The cinematographer I'd known for years also left – though today I'm very glad I made the film with Thomas Kist.

So it was mostly logistics that caused problems? Did you breeze through work on set with aplomb?

In my dreams. (*laughs*) I certainly had weak knees on the first day. For example, I was somewhat apprehensive of working with children, which I imagined would be difficult. Funnily enough, it turned out to be a lot easier and more pleasant than I had feared. In general I can say that working with actors is the most beautiful and interesting part of filmmaking for me. And I was lucky that this love was returned by my actors. Or at least they said they would love to work with me again, and that was not a matter of course. So I asked if they told that to every director. (*laughs*) But they assured me that some shoots are quite different. I think it helped a lot that we rehearsed in Berlin three or four weeks before shooting began and then spent several more rehearsal days on location at the Behren-Lübchin manor house, where our production designers Christina von Ahlefeld and Knut Splett-Hennig had set up 17 different sets.

Did you already have the montage in your head, so to speak, or was EFFIGY to some extent created in the editing room?

If you have very rigid ideas about the end result, you forego too many chances to make a better film. Because you shut out the creative input of all the other people involved. That goes for editing, but also for camera work and all the other trades, of course also for the actors and the many, many offers they make. We already edited during the shoot; our assistant editor Andreas Farr had his own room on the set. If necessary we could see scenes in the evening which we had shot in the morning. Later he created a rough cut with me. It was two hours long and resembled what I had in mind as a film. We sent it to Sven Pape, my principal editor, who lives and works in Hollywood. He took note of it (*laughs*), then sat down and thoroughly went through all the raw material. He wasn't present during the shoot, which can be an advantage. We first discussed in broad strokes what was important to me psychologically and structurally. Then he created his own version without me sitting next to him – and really rearranged some elements in the process. Subsequently we went through that version together with a very fine comb. In the end, a synthesis emerged.

Hand on heart: Did you expect the phenomenal response – at international festivals, where EFFIGY won awards by the dozen, as well as theatrically?

Dreamed maybe – but no, I never expected that. There are things you can't anticipate. Such as the "New York Times" reviewing your little debut film. Friends from L.A. called me: "How in the world are they covering it at all, and they didn't kill you – there's really no such thing!" (*laughs*) Such recognition is wonderful, of course. All along, I didn't make this just to prove something to myself, but with the goal of creating a product that would interest viewers. But that some theaters would run it for up to twelve weeks: beyond my wildest imagination.

Other aspects also turned out better than expected. Such as recording the soundtrack with the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra. Starting out I thought we'd never be able to afford something like that. Then of course, getting Suzan Anbeh – an international star – for the lead role. Or indeed working with Uwe Bohm – an actor I have always, one could almost say: adored. Ever since he, at 14, played a lead in "Nordsee ist Mordsee". That he would skip a "Tatort" for my film after reading our script is something I could never have dreamed up either.

Are you eager to make your second film?

I'm already in the middle of it! At the moment, I have almost weekly script meetings. Once again, unfortunately, the book is not yet ready for shooting. If it hadn't been for the pandemic, we might already be further along.

BIOGRAPHIES

Suzan Anbeh (Gesche Gottfried)

Born in Oberhausen on March 18, 1970, Suzan Anbeh is the daughter of a German mother and a father from Iran who worked as a physician in Germany. At the age of 17 she enjoyed her first successes as a model and theater actress in Paris. After appearances on French TV, she launched her international movie career with a bang in 1995: a role alongside Meg Ryan and Kevin Kline in the Hollywood production "French Kiss" by Lawrence Kasdan. Since then, she has alternated between major international crowd-pleasers such as "One Fine Day" (with George Clooney and Michelle Pfeiffer) and independent productions like "Elementarteilchen" by Oskar Roehler or Hal Hartley's "Fay Grim". Anbeh also established herself on German television in the early 2000s. For almost 50 episodes, she joined the ensemble of the ZDF series "Der Kriminalist" (with Christian Berkel), played alongside Henning Baum in "Der letzte Bulle," took on lead roles in TV movies such as "Und Jimmy ging zum Regenbogen," "Der Mann auf dem Baum" or "Nur nicht aufregen" and appeared in guest roles in many series from "SOKO Leipzig" and "Tatort" to Rosamunde Pilcher and Inga Lindström adaptations. Anbeh has a son and now lives in Berlin.

Filmography (selection):

2019	EFFIGY – POISON AND THE CITY ; Director: Udo Flohr
2018	RONNY & KLAID; Director: Erkan Acar
2018	MAYA; Director: Mia Hansen-Løve
2012	MANN TUT WAS MANN KANN; Director: Marc Rothemund
2009	THE DOOR; Director: Anno Saul
2006	COMME TOUT LE MONDE; Director: Pierre-Paul Renders
2006	FAY GRIM; Director: Hal Hartley
2004	AGNES AND HIS BROTHERS; Director: Oscar Roehler
1996	ONE FINE DAY; Director: Michael Hoffmann
1995	FRENCH KISS; Director: Lawrence Kasdan

Elisa Thiemann (Cato Böhmer)

The Hamburg native was born on May 25, 1985. She came to acting rather by chance at the age of 15, when casting agents discovered her on the street. Her very first appearance in the socially impactful TV film "Mit dem Rücken zur Wand" was a resounding success, and the production won the Hamburg Television Award in 2002, among other awards. After passing her Abitur, Thiemann studied at the Studio of Young Artists in her hometown from 2006. She then launched her career with appearances in TV series such as "Notruf Hafenkante" and the daily soap "Rote Rosen." She has since been able to establish herself on German television, appearing in films such as "Eine Nacht im Grandhotel," "Gladbeck" and "Die Getriebenen", as well as in Germany's oldest soap opera "Gute Zeiten schlechte Zeiten" and in quite a few episodes of

the popular "Usedom-Krimis." Most recently, she starred alongside Daniel Donskoy and Lisa Bitter in Christian Twente's science fiction drama "KI – Die letzte Erfindung" in the fall of 2021.

Christoph Gottschalch (Senator Droste)

Christoph Gottschalch was born in Hamburg in 1969. He trained as an actor from 1993 to 1995 and initially went into theater. He was discovered for television in "Loriot's Dramatic Works" and made his debut in 1997 as one of the main actors in "Wir vom Revier," Sat 1's first self-produced comedy series. Guest appearances in well-known series followed. At the same time, he began directing at the theater, writing and working with children, young people and drama students. In 2010, he joined the Rostock Compagnie de Comédie, which became his professional center for ten years. He met Udo Flohr in 2014 and was EFFIGY's first cast member.

Filmography (selection):

2019	EFFIGY – POISON AND THE CITY ; Director: Udo Flohr
2018	A CLEAR FELLING; Director: Max Gleschinski
2015	CALVIN FRAGMENTI; Director: Manuel Osterwald, Philipp Westerfeld, Andre Kowalewski

Udo Flohr (Director | Co-Writer | Co-Producer)

Udo Flohr was born in Hannover on May 3, 1959. He studied linguistics, psychology, and geography at Leibniz University, earning a master's degree. For ten years he worked as CEO and co-founder of Focus Computer GmbH, a systems software company. He then changed professions and has since been writing as a science journalist, including for Der Spiegel, Deutschlandfunk and MIT Technology Review. In addition to his day job, Flohr attended film-related seminars and workshops for several years, including at filmArche Berlin, Medienakademie Wetzlar, Adrienne Weiss School New York and the Baltimore Film Factory. He had also worked on film shoots but never even made a short when, at a birthday party, he found himself talking to the agent of Bremen author Peer Meter, a renowned Gesche Gottfried researcher. Eventually, that conversation led to Flohr's first film. With **EFFIGY – POISON AND THE CITY**, he enjoyed great success at international festivals – including in North America, Cyprus, Spain, Italy, and Bulgaria – where his debut received a total of 30 awards, including several as Best Feature.

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PRODUCTION & BTS IMAGES

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File names reflect who is shown (left to right).

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