



THE FILM

A film about confidence and friendship

Bern West, District V1 – 12,000 people live in high rise council blocks that stretch forever. Rushit and his friends are well-known rappers in their neighbourhood. Their band is called "Blockjunge". They write their own lyrics, sing about life on the margins and call the ghetto home.

The youth theatre club in Bern is to perform the story of Antigone as a modern day hip-hop musical. Rushit and his friends are taking part. Natalia, who came to Switzerland as a refugee after fleeing Kyrgyzstan all alone at the age of 16 dreams of landing the main role.

What binds all these young people together is the hope that they will make something of their lives, whether as a rapper or actor. What is key for them is that they don't end up doing a boring job for the next 40 years.

When they talk about their life, their failure to find an apprenticeship, their problems with the law, their domineering fathers or their first girlfriends, it is clear that they are constantly trying to find their place in society and forge a future for themselves.

During the long and draining rehearsals, daily life, work, life, art, friendship, family, trust, and responsibility all are mixed up together. They don't always agree. "I learnt not to trust anyone", says Natalia. Rushit says, "Either you have friends or you are a victim".

Who will make it to the opening night? Who will fall by the wayside? What will happen when the final curtain falls?

I AM WHAT I AM is a film about the power of friendship and the importance of being able always to remain true to oneself.

THE CHARACTERS

A FEW QUOTATIONS

■ Rushit Hajzeri

15 years old, Swiss (Origins: Swiss/Kosovo)

Before, we all wanted to be footballers. Then we realised that not everyone was going to make it. They are my best friends. They are like a family to me. I don't want us to work at the same job for 40 years like everyone else. That is throwing your life away. I want to do something different. I want to do something with my life and to help them too.

I simply got together a group, a rap group. I didn't even know if one of us could rap. I don't have to have that gangster rapper image. I don't have to have been in prison or to smoke to be cool. I don't want to pretend to be someone else just to please others. Me I am me.

Either you have a group of friends or you are a victim.

■ Natalia Bolkonskaia

17 years old, Kyrgyzstan (Origins: Russia)

I don't miss my family. For me friendship is more important than family. Friendship has given me more in my life. Sometimes people, "strangers" do more for you than your family.

In life, I learnt that you can not trust anyone. I never trust anyone 100 percent. Like that, you are never disappointed.

I have religious objects everywhere in my bedroom, for example a bible and a picture of Jesus Christ over my bed. I am not very religious but these objects protect me from the devil. Because in the night I often feel as if someone is coming towards me.

■ Velid Kurtanovic

15 years old. Swiss (Origins Serbia/Montenegro)

You can always learn something from your family. From my brother for example. My father is always there for my brothers. Even if my brother is studying business, he doesn't understand things as well as my father. And my mother is always there and always does everything for us.

The typical image of a man is that he sleeps around. But today it is not just boys that do this but also girls. That is why I would not like to have a daughter.

■ **Wissem Hamdi**

14 years old. Swiss (Origins Tunisia)

We ran right to Tscharnergut. Then I slept for a week at Rushit's. Right up to Bayram, the time of the festival of forgiveness. Then I went back home to talk things over. Since then I am back home.

Thanks to him (Rushit) we are all rappers. He organises everything. We write all the lyrics ourselves. We write and write. You could say that he uses his free time to help us. He is not making himself famous but he is making us famous, or at least a bit well known. It is only after that that he thinks about himself.

■ **Qendrim Ramadani**

15 years old. Swiss (Origins Kosovo)

My father said that if I did an apprenticeship as a cook, he would open a restaurant for me. He would run it but I could work there. Over time, it would belong to me. "If you become a car mechanic, I shall open a garage for you. Just do an apprenticeship", my father said.

Christoph doesn't want us to get left behind. He wants us to get involved. He wants the story to be ours. I think this is really good. There is not anyone who always plays the boss, for we are all bosses in our own small way. This creates a bond between the theatre, Rushit and our life.

■ **Marc Schär**

15 years old, Swiss

If he (Rushit) were not there it would fall apart. He is like a pillar that holds up the house.

■ **Christoph Hebing**

50. Swiss (Origins Swiss/German). Actor. Professor of Dramatic Art.
Director

You (Natalia) are not going to get any additional role in the rehearsals. You are not going to get any special treatment. That is something I can not accept. Even if you are a refugee, you don't have any more rights than the others. You are a human being and I shall treat you as a human being. You don't have any confidence. You know that very well. You are not confident that everyone will get a role and that you will get a lot of scenes.

You will live to around 80 and for a month you have to give a bit more of yourself. But what will you get in return? Think about it. You will appear on stage 8 times!

TECHNICAL INFO

genre documentary
length, color 94 min, color
shooting support HDV, HD Cam
ratio 16:9
language Swiss German, German, French, Russian
subtitles German, French, English
production country Switzerland
theater release february 2011

Gabriele Schärer original idea, script, direction
Catherine Ann Berger dramaturgical consulting
Ueli Grossenbacher director of photography
Balthasar Jucker sound, sound supervision
Mischa Hedinger editing
Thomas Bachmann editing supervision
Nadja Gubser sound editing, sound illustration
Masé / Denis Séchaud sound mix
atelier roma / Romano Manazza graphical design

Titra / Ronald Ducrest subtitles
Rec TV / Christoph Walter color grading, AVID support

BlockJunge songs
Balthasar Jucker musical direction, guitar
Peter von Siebenthal recording, bass
Gilbert Paeffgen drums, tympanon

Production Maat Film / Gabriele Schärer

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BACKGROUND

Bern West

Kuno Lauener sang in 1989 that Casablanca sounds better than Bümpliz. With 30 thousand inhabitants, Bümpliz-Bethlehem is almost the same size as Thun and is the fourth biggest town in the canton of Bern. The neighbourhood has increasingly become part of the suburbs of the Bern. A southern and northern neighbourhood has sprung up. In the 50's the first council tower blocks were built on agricultural land in places like Tscharnergut. One block after another went up. In the 60's Gäbelbach, a working class neighbourhood, inspired by the architect Corbusier and his housing unit design principle was built. At the same time, Bern West developed into a commercial and industrial area. Nearly 15,000 people work in Bümpliz Bethlehem, making it an important economic region in the canton of Bern. Foreigners account for more than 27 percent of the population – far above the Swiss average. The urban landscape in West Bern closely resembles that of many other North European suburbs.

Christoph Hebing

The Hip Hop musical is well established. People talk about it and they know that they can get involved. You could of course say that we are all foreigners. But there are people who are hoping that we will come back, and they are ready to accept and help us. The children first and foremost. We try of course to include those who fit in as much as possible. My dream is that the Hip Hop musical becomes part of the daily life of the neighbourhood. I have helped to build it up but one day I shall get out, that is very clear to me.

Interview 2007

The Bern Hip Hop Musical

In spring, 2008 theatre in education expert Christoph Hebing held auditions for the fifth Bern hip-hop musical. The actors and actresses were young people between the ages of 14 and 22. They were either at secondary school, in tenth grade, at grammar school, out of work or following an apprenticeship. Most were second-generation immigrants. Many had Swiss passports. Their involvement in the musical project was voluntary. The young people were encouraged not just to get involved once but also to come back the year after. The result was a heterogeneous team in which the younger members learn from those who are older and more experienced.

Production: Youth Theatre Bern. Director: Christoph Hebing. Musical Director: Edi Modespacher. Coaching: Azad Süsem. With the participation of Anne-Sophie Mentha, Elise Blöchlinger, Kim Loa Le, Maxamed Hadji Cabdi, Riccardo Licitra, Rushit Haijzeri, Valentin Hebing, Wissem Hamdi, Luca Marbacher, Cilia Locher, Qendrim Ramadan, Freddy Kanyere. Deputy Director: Nicholas Streit, Milena Keller: Graphics: Raphael Sollberger. Production Director: Michael Röhrenbach.

The play is called ANTI.GONE. It is a family drama. The heroine wants to get her brother out of prison and will do everything possible to achieve this, which causes friction within the family. 2,450 years after it was written, the theatre club of Bern transposes the story of Antigone, of ISmène, Étéocle, of Polynice and of Hémon of Thebes to Berne-Gäbelbach.

Here the main characters are called Anti, Easy, Eto'o, Nike and Hemu. Their colleagues form the choir. It is the story of four brothers and sisters and their friends. A history of right and wrong, of order and disorder, of life and living.

A project by the Bern Youth Theatre: <http://www.junge-buehne-bern.ch>

GABRIELE SCHÄRER

DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER

Gabriele Schärer was born 1957 in Bern. After an apprenticeship as a bookseller in Bern she began her studies at the Academy of Applied Arts (Hochschule für Bildende Kunst) in Hamburg. Parallel to her studies Gabriele worked at the Centre for media pedagogy in Hamburg. In 1995 Gabriele graduated in Visual Communication (Diplom für Visuelle Kommunikation). In 1997 she obtained her Master from Professor Michael Heller.

ACTIVITIES

1999–2003	Member of the film commission of the city of Bern
001	„Regiewerkbeitrag“ from the canton of Bern
2004	Award of the Swiss Society for Senology
2008	EBCC Nathwani Prize
Seit 2000	Professor at the School for visual Arts Bern-Bienne

FILMS

2012	Rope of Solidarity, 14 Min., Script, directing, production
2011	Moi c'est Moi – Ich bin Ich. feature documentary 94 min Script, directing, production, www.moicestmoi-ichbinich.ch
2008	Ernst Fehr – Ökonom der Fairness, 12 min Script, directing and production manager. Production: SCIENCEsuisse SF
2004	Busenfreundinnen. Fiction short film, 5 min Script, directing, production
2003	Arm trotz Job. Tv documentary, 48 min Script and directing
2002	Maat. Videoessai, 2'05 min Script, directing, production
2001	Der Wert der Arbeit. Gewerkschaftsvideo des SEV, 15 min Script and directing. Container TV Bern,
2001	Sottosopra. Feature documentary, 35mm, 90 min Script and directing, Carac Film SA Bern,
1999	Migration in der Schweiz. Dok, 5 min, Script and directing. DEZA, Container TV Bern
1996–2007	kulturzeit. Tv report for 3sat
1995	Unterwegs. Feature documentary, 16mm, 50 min Script and directing. Carac Film SA Bern
1994	St. Pauli Hafenstr. Nr. 7. Video doc, mpz Hamburg, 60 min
1991	Verhandelte Frauen – handelnde Frauen. Video doc, mpz Hamburg, 47 min Verhandelte Frauen – Frauenhandel. Video essai, mpz Hamburg, 27 min
1987	Alles Schöne ist verboten. Video doc, mpz Hamburg, 55 min
1986	Zwischen Dachziegeln und Pflasterstrand. Video doc, mpz Hamburg, 50 min all: www.maat.ch