



# HEAD-ON

**A FILM BY FATIH AKIN**

**WITH**

**BIROL ÜNEL, SIBEL KEKILLI, CATRIN STRIEBECK, GÜVEN KIRAÇ, MELTEM CUMBUL A.O.**

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# THE CAST

Cahit	Birol Ünel
Sibel	Sibel Kekilli
Maren	Catrin Striebeck
Seref	Güven Kıraç
Selma	Meltem Cumbul
Yilmaz Güner	Cem Akin
Birsen Güner	Aysel Iscan
Yunus Güner	Demir Gököl
Nico	Stefan Gebelhoff
Dr. Schiller	Hermann Lause
Lukas	Adam Bousdoukos
Ammer	Ralph Misske
Hüseyin	Mehmet Kurtuluş

BAVARIA FILM INTERNATIONAL presents a WÜSTE FILM PRODUCTION in co-production with CORAZÓN INTERNATIONAL and NDR/ARTE  
with BIROL ÜNEL SIBEL KEKILLI CATRIN STRIEBECK GÜVEN KIRAC and MELTEM CUMBUL director of photography RAINER KLAUSMANN bvk production design TAMO KUNZ costumes KATRIN ASCHENDORF  
make-up DANIEL SCHRÖDER and NURSEN BALCI casting MAI SECK sound KAI LÜDE editor ANDREW BIRD sound mix RICHARD BOROWSKI music consultant KLAUS MAECK production manager INGRID HOLZAPFEL  
commissioning editor JEANETTE WÜRL and ANDREAS SCHREITMÜLLER co-producers FATİH AKIN ANDREAS THIEL and MEHMET KURTULUŞ producers RALPH SCHWINGEL and STEFAN SCHUBERT screenplay and director FATİH AKIN



# THE CREW

Director/Script	Fatih Akin
Producers	Ralph Schwingel Stefan Schubert Wüste Filmproduktion
Coproducers	NDR / arte CORAZÓN International
Coproducers	Fatih Akin Mehmet Kurtuluş Andreas Thiel
Story Editors	Jeanette Würfl, NDR Andreas Schreitmüller, arte
Production Manager	Ingrid Holzapfel
Director of Photography	Rainer Klausmann, bvk
Editor	Andrew Bird
Assistant Director & Artistic Director	Andreas Thiel
Unit Photographer	Kerstin Stelter
Gaffer	Torsten Lemke
Sound Engineer	Kai Lüde
Set Design	Tamo Kunz
Costumes	Katrin Aschendorf
Make-Up	Daniel Schröder & Nursen Balci
Casting	Mai Seck
Sound Mix	Richard Borowski
Music Consultant	Klaus Maeck

# SYNOPSIS

'You can put an end to your life without killing yourself', whispers the doctor. And Cahit, 40, whose suicide attempt has brought him to the psychiatric clinic, knows what he means: by starting a new life. Yet the anguish in his soul continues to cry out for drugs and alcohol to numb his pain. Sibel – young, pretty and, like Cahit, Turkish-German – loves life too much for a proper Muslim girl. To escape from the prison of her devout, conservative family, she fakes a suicide attempt. But it brings shame, not freedom; only marriage can save her. And so she begs Cahit to marry her. Reluctantly, he agrees. Perhaps to save her. Perhaps to do one meaningful thing in his life. They share an apartment, but little else. She savors her freedom; he has his occasional fling with his sometime girlfriend. Until love enters his life on tip-toes. As he falls in love with Sibel, he finds a new joy in life, the strength to go on. Sibel continues to see other men. Until she, too, realizes that she loves Cahit. But by now it is too late: an explosion of jealousy ends in a violent death. Cahit is sent to jail and Sibel flees to Turkey. Her heart, her mind, her soul are still with Cahit – but for how long?



With this raw and uncompromising drama, Fatih Akin returns to his filmmaking roots that won him, amongst others, the Bronze Leopard at the Locarno Int. Film Festival for his striking directorial debut 'Short Sharp Shock'. Birol Ünel and Sibel Kekilli's electrifying performances reflect the filmmaker's energy as well as the urgency of the subject matter arising from their Turkish-German descent.

# PRODUCTION NOTES

## THE IDEA

Director Fatih Akin had been contemplating the subject of HEAD-ON for several years already. Indeed, the idea came to him through a very personal experience: 'I once had a Turkish girlfriend, a 'good buddy' type, who asked me to enter into a sham marriage with her'. The Hamburg filmmaker had originally envisioned a comedy. If HEAD-ON ultimately became a harrowing love story, it was not only because the basic idea evolved in a new direction as time passed. While he was researching his topic, Akin began to confront himself with the new Turkish cinema. 'Turkish neo-realism has produced some genuine masterpieces. These are very serious, intense films, in which comedy and tragedy are closely bound to one another. This is truly great art'. Akin's fascination with these cinematic gems permeates HEAD-ON. But there is another reason for the story's turn to darker regions: lead actor Birol Ünel. Akin and Ünel had met at the time of Akin's multiple award-winning feature-film debut 'Short Sharp Shock' (1997) and became friends over the years. 'I admire him. He celebrates poetic self-destruction, like Kurt Cobain and Jim Morrison', says Akin, adding: 'The role of the 'lost soul' Cahit was closely adapted to Birol – even though it contains many of my own longings and my desire to break through the norms'.

## THE CASTING

Whereas it was clear from the start for director Fatih Akin that Birol Ünel would be the tragic hero of HEAD-ON, the search for the right lead actress proved much more difficult. The producers Ralph Schwingel and Stefan Schubert soon realized that 'there aren't that many young women who speak Turkish fluently and are ready to get undressed in front of the camera'. A casting agent finally discovered the then 22-year-old Sibel Kekilli, an administrative employee, in a Cologne shopping center. 'We tried to tell her how her life would change', recounts Akin, and Sibel's answer was typical of her: 'If I do something, I do it right'. After holding her own against 350 competitors during four casting sessions, the young German-Turkish woman finally won the lead role. 'Obviously, it is always a challenge on the set when some of the actors are professionals and others are amateurs', says Akin, who had already made similar experiences in his feature film debut 'Short Sharp Shock' and 'Solino', the feature that preceded HEAD-ON. 'But it is also very exciting to bring together actors like Birol Ünel and Catrin Striebeck with someone like Sibel Kekilli'.

## THE PRODUCTION

Quick, smooth, uncomplicated – that's how the Hamburg producers Stefan Schubert and Ralph Schwingel (WÜSTE Filmproduktion GmbH) describe the preparation of HEAD-ON. 'Even the first version of the script had enormous power', recalls Ralph Schwingel. A number of problems did crop up in the course of the production, however, such as interruptions of the shooting caused by illness. Happily, every problem was successfully mastered. The producers, who have always shown a strong interest in promoting young talents, had already launched Fatih Akin's film career with his debut short 'Sensin ... You're the one!' in 1995 and have produced all of the filmmaker's projects since then. 'We just have faith in Fatih', assert the two men unanimously, while Schwingel adds: 'We regard the film as the conclusion and climax of our years-long association with Fatih.' The director has since formed a partnership with Andreas Thiel, with whom he set up his own production company, Corazón International. HEAD-ON will be brought to the theaters by timebandits films GmbH, a film distribution company founded in Berlin in November 2003 and formed of the Hamburg WÜSTE Filmproduktion GmbH, Egoli Tossel Film AG and timebandits Medien.

## THE SHOOTING

Fatih Akin shot his drama HEAD ON in chronological order. This allowed him to develop his characters more clearly and authentically, claims Akin in justifying this rarely used procedure. This particularly suited the acting newcomer Sibel Kekilli. 'The script is very closely oriented on the development of the actors', comments Akin. And when, in the course of the shooting, he had the impression that the story had profoundly transformed his two lead actors in a physical and emotional way, he simply wrote a new ending to his drama. 'At first, the two were supposed to fall back into their original situation. But after the development they went through, this would no longer have been believable. In retrospect, I am very happy with this change'. Producer Stefan Schubert recalls: 'It wasn't the chronological shoot that caused us any particular problems; more stressful was the sudden illness of the two lead actors.' Due to these interruptions, the 35 scheduled shooting days stretched over three months, from March to May 2003. 'It was incredibly demanding', says Fatih Akin. Sibel Kekilli suffered acute appendicitis and had to go to the hospital, and Birol Ünel also fell ill. And just as the team was shooting in Turkey, the war in Iraq broke out. 'We spent weeks worrying that Turkey would declare martial law, which would have jeopardized our shooting permit', says Schwingel, while Akin adds: 'The project itself often came close to a 'head-on' crash. But at the last minute, everything turned out OK'.

Another major problem arose before the start of the shoot: lead actor Birol Ünel was not allowed to enter Turkey. 'He would have been taken into custody immediately at the airport since he never did his military service in Turkey', explains Akin, adding: 'We had already worked out a Plan B – interior shots in Hamburg, outdoor shots in Istanbul with a double. But then while we were shooting, the Turkish government announced a change in the law'. Recalling the hectic atmosphere behind the scenes, producer Stefan Schubert relates that 'many people were permanently busy making inquiries at the highest level as to when the minister would sign the new law'. In the meantime, the countdown had begun for the shooting in Turkey. With a delay of only two days, and the ink still wet on the new law text, Birol was finally able to arrive safely in Istanbul.

## THE CULTURE CLASH

In *HEAD-ON* a young Turkish woman tries to escape from her conservative family by entering into a sham marriage. In the light of the current head-scarf controversy in Germany and the attempts of orthodox Muslims to have their daughters excluded from sexual education and swimming, the story reflects a topic that is both up-to-date and explosive. In order to portray this German-Turkish culture clash on screen convincingly and without clichés, director Fatih Akin sought to grasp his subject from three perspectives: German-German, German-Turkish and Turkish. 'I tried to create a certain amount of intersecting perspectives from these three very different standpoints'. This was particularly important in the depiction of the tradition-bound parents. 'Obviously there is a strong respect for tradition in these characters, otherwise the story would not function', explains producer Stefan Schubert and summarizes the process as 'a tightrope walk that came out very well'. Director Akin felt even more confident that he had captured the right nuances in his portrayal of the characters when he viewed the casting videos of several candidates for the lead actress. 'Among them were women with incredibly tragic lives. These tapes alone would be worth turning into a documentary. They gave me additional encouragement in my project', recalls Akin.



## THE MUSIC

In the first draft of the script, Fatih Akin had already envisioned the subdivision of his film into musical acts – a stylistic element suggested by classical stage tragedies. His choice of the Romany musician Selim Sesler and his band goes back to a fortunate coincidence and an alcohol-drenched night: 'Years ago, I heard Selim Sesler play in an Istanbul punk dive at 3 o'clock in the morning', remembers Akin. The melancholy songs, mainly Turkish traditionals, are interpreted by the actress and director Idil Üner. Akin explains why he chose her: 'Idil has a great voice. And besides, she is my good-luck charm and has to be in each of my projects'.

# THE FILM CREW

## FATIH AKIN – DIRECTOR & SCRIPTWRITER

Born in Hamburg in 1973, the director, author and actor Fatih Akin studied at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste of his native city before making his successful short-film debut with 'Sensin ... You're the one!' in 1995. His first work won the Audience Award at the International Short Film Festival in Hamburg. Akin's first feature film, the dark milieu drama 'Short Sharp Shock' (1997), was given an enthusiastic reception by audiences and press alike, and altogether garnered nine awards, including the Bronze Leopard (Locarno), the Adolf Grimme Prize and the Bavarian Film Prize. Fatih Akin later confirmed his versatility as a filmmaker in the romantic road movie 'In July', the documentary 'Wir haben vergessen zurückzukehren' (both 2000) and 'Solino' (2002). The latter film, the story of an Italian family that has come to work in Germany's Ruhr District, was the first film that Fatih Akin shot from a script that he did not write himself. The son of Turkish parents asserts that his latest film, the raw drama HEAD-ON, is his most personal work. HEAD-ON is a competition entry at the 54th International Berlin Film Festival in 2004; Akin himself was a member of the jury in 2001. The 30-year-old film director has been working with the Hamburg WÜSTE Filmproduktion since the beginning of his career. In 2003 he founded his own production company, Corazón International. Fatih Akin was awarded the DEFA Young Talent Award 2002 for the films he has produced to date.

### Filmography (as a director)

1995 Sensin ... You're the one! – Short Film  
1996 Weed – Short Film  
1997 Short Sharp Shock  
2000 In July  
2000 Wir haben vergessen zurückzukehren  
2002 Solino  
2003 Head-On

# FERIDUN ZAIMOGLU SPEAKS WITH FATIH AKIN ABOUT HEAD-ON

**Let me say right off that I think your latest film, HEAD-ON, is truly fantastic. It really blew me away. It just wouldn't let me go, even though I saw it four times. How could a film like this come about, and what kind of crazy story is this anyway?**

The film has accompanied me for a very long time now. I once had a Turkish girlfriend who asked me if I felt like entering into a sham marriage with her. I told her I wouldn't, but the idea never let go of me. I thought it would make a cool plot for a story. In the first concept I wrote years ago, it was a comedy. The point of departure is a classical comedy situation, with someone pulling the wool over someone else's eyes.

Then Birol Ünel entered my life. That was with 'Short Sharp Shock'. I was totally fascinated by the guy, like when you're spellbound by guys like Kurt Cobain, James Dean or Brando. Guys who destroy themselves, who are so brilliant and talented that nothing else matters to them in life. And on top of all that, here's a guy who's Turkish, who's got the same background as me, and he doesn't give a damn about tradition. That was a huge inspiration for the film. The third major element was Turkish cinema and the city of Istanbul. I began spending more and more time in Istanbul, I met people there, discovered the scene, the music and Turkish cinema. They've produced masterpieces that no one knows here, where tragedy and comedy are so close to each other. Tragedy is much more painful when comedy runs through it. Then I also developed a fascination with all the Turkish girls you see around here. I find them much sexier than many German women. And I wanted to know how that worked, with tradition on one side and on the other ...

**In many German movies the woman is like a cocktail cherry. You need her to tell a kind of love story. I had just the opposite impression in your film: that the woman is very strong. What I'd like to know is where this woman comes from? I think she's really excellent and gave the impression that she wasn't just playing a role, but was really very, very present.**

It was a major undertaking to find Sibel Kekilli, who is also called Sibel in the film. To have to find a woman with the balls to stand up to the eccentric Birol, who has the same power as he does and whose acting skills are on a par with his. We were looking quite simply for the needle in the haystack. When we realized that we wouldn't find such an actress, we started looking for her on the street. Sibel was one of those whom we casted. I invited her along with 350 other candidates, and she's the one who made it. She had the balls to take on Birol, and the ambition to do it. Very early on she made a remark: 'If I do something, I do it right'. And I thought, sure, that's just talk, just posturing. Today I know it wasn't just talk. She did it right, very straight. I always said that she was a godsend – that's how I see her.

**What I see is a crazy love story. But as soon as I say this, it's too little. It's just a phrase. The film is more than that. I asked myself why it pulls me in like that, why I feel like it's been intravenously injected. It isn't a coded film. Is it a love story, a Turkish movie, a punk film? It's a very authentic film. Do you want to strengthen me in my opinion that in the face of all the misfortunes in the world, the only really big alternative is love?**

Well, ultimately, it is a love movie, or part of the trilogy of love, death and the devil. Love not only as something constructive, but also as something destructive. It also involves death in the sense of a metamorphosis. It also deals with the devil, with the evil that's within us, the demon, desire, the shifting sands of good and evil. The film is my interpretation of good and evil. Many people show us what is supposed to be good and bad, especially where religion is involved. So I asked myself when is something truly evil and when is something truly good. I think that love has a dark side as well as a bright side. And that the dark side of love can make us very destructive.

At the beginning of the film, Birol is a dead man, a zombie. Later he's awakened to life when Sibel kisses him free – that gives him enormous strength. But every form of energy that has something positive about it also has something negative, possessive. Wars have been fought for this. To me, war is always pointless. But I think that if there were some kind of meaningful war, then it would be love. This may sound corny and saccharine, but I really do believe it. Love is simply a force that comes toward you, and this film is about this force. And that's why it's a love story.

**Let's get back to Istanbul. What does this city stand for? You mentioned earlier that you found it very exciting to film in this city. Does this have anything to do with the love story between the two protagonists, and if so, why?**

Since so many personal things were treated in this film, it was always clear to me that I would shoot a large part of the film there. After all, Istanbul is taking a bigger and bigger place in my life. To me, it's the Holy City and Babylon at the same time. It's a city full of contradictions, a wild place, a dangerous and very exhausting city. It is THE city for me. At all events, the ultimate setting for such a story.

**The film has no happy end. How I would have loved to have the fairy-tale conclusion! They've suffered so much and still don't come together. He throws his life at her feet. And what does she do? Why doesn't she travel with him to his hometown, why does she stay with her family?**

There must be about fifty different reasons why she doesn't go with him at the end. If she had gone, I think this wouldn't have been honest. The war is over for Sibel. She tried to find peace. She got her punishment, God punished her, but she survived. She's now someone who understands that maybe reason is healthier than passion. Sometimes maybe you have to accept compromises. Maybe it's not always right to follow passion.

**It is a very spiritual, archaic film. What do they undergo? Is it hell? In order to truly live, do we really have to go through so many hells? What does her love look like, and how does it develop?**

They both begin as an 'I' and fuse into a 'we'. This 'we' is ultimately destructive. But it is also constructive, since they no longer have this longing for death. They give each other strength mutually, but then they are separated and become 'I's' once again. At the end, though, they are different 'I's' than at the beginning. This is development, this is life. An excerpt from their biography. I was chiefly concerned that the dramaturgy should result from the development of the characters. I did not want a classical arc of tension with the usual obstacles. We shot the film chronologically, which gave both of them time to develop, both as characters and as actors. When Sibel comes across as an insecure young woman at the beginning, then it's because she really is that in a way, and also because of uncertainty. But then she gains confidence with every day of shooting. And this is also what happens to her character.

**HEAD-ON is radical and highly infectious. It will stir up a lot of controversy in Germany, but I already see the critics declaring you insane. Why does it seem that all these German cultural pundits are so intimidated? Do you share this opinion with me, or do you think I'm exaggerating?**

I'm trying to free myself from this as much as possible. I can't allow myself to care about how the reviews will be. There is a mentality here that I can't really identify with. It's the 'maybe' mentality in Germany. This is especially strong in the German film industry. I'm thirty, I've made four feature films and a lot of shorter ones. You can't do this with a 'maybe' attitude. You've just got to do it.

**In closing, I'd like to ask you: what do you do after a film like this? I know you a little, and you're not the kind to disappear for weeks or months. What happens next?**

HEAD-ON was the most exhausting film I've ever made. It's the first time that I didn't have a follow-up project, since I had put all my concentration and strength into this film. But there's a very pragmatic reason why I'm not taking a break now: I was broke after the film wrapped. So I began working right away on three or four new projects at the same time. In particular, I founded my own production company, Corazón International, and want to build up a decent structure for myself with this, since this structure means freedom, also for my future productions. The next film that I will make will be a much smaller, more harmless one. I feel it's dangerous to try to top yourself after such a film. That will come when the time is ripe, or it won't come at all! But I shouldn't – I can't – rest on my laurels. That would be fatal.

**Fatih Akin, thanks. That was really cool. Stay with us.**

*Feridun Zaimoglu is a leading Turkish-German author and painter. His novel 'Abschaum' was transposed to the big screen as 'Kanak Attak', which enjoyed a successful run in German theaters. Zaimoglu has made a name for himself as a cultural spokesman for Germany's Turkish population.*

# **RAINER KLAUSMANN – DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

It would be difficult to find a spot on this planet where Rainer Klausmann has not filmed. He beat a path through the South American jungle with director Werner Herzog and larger-than-life screen star Klaus Kinski for 'Fitzcarraldo'. He shot in India, Asia, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Australia ... For his cinematography in 'Ausgerechnet Zoé' (director: Markus Imboden) he was awarded the prestigious Adolf Grimme Prize in 1995. In 1998 Klausmann won the German Television Award, the Golden Lion, for the TV movies 'Trickser' and 'Das Urteil' (both directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel). He took home the Bavarian Film Prize in 2000 for his work on the tense psycho-thriller 'The Experiment' (director: Oliver Hirschbiegel). Other features he has filmed include 'Bride of the Orient', 'Scream of Stone', 'Katzendiebe' and 'Comedian'. Born in 1949, Rainer Klausmann worked with the director of HEAD-ON, Fatih Akin, on 'Solino' in 2002.

## **Filmography (selection)**

- 1982 Fitzcarraldo (Director: Werner Herzog)
- 1985 Cold in Columbia (Director: Dieter Schidor)
- 1988 Bride of the Orient (Director: Urs Odermatt)
- 1991 Scream of Stone (Director: Werner Herzog)
- 1992 Lessons of Darkness (Director: Werner Herzog)
- 1996 Katzendiebe (Director: Markus Imboden)
- 1997 Trickser (Director: Oliver Hirschbiegel)
- 1997 Das Urteil (Director: Oliver Hirschbiegel)
- 1997 Ausgerechnet Zoé (Director: Markus Imboden)
- 2000 Comedian (Director: Markus Imboden)
- 2000 The Experiment (Director: Oliver Hirschbiegel)
- 2002 Solino (Director: Fatih Akin)
- 2002 Mein letzter Film (Director: Oliver Hirschbiegel)
- 2003 Head-On (Director: Fatih Akin)

## ANDREW BIRD – EDITOR

No Fatih Akin film without Andrew Bird! The London native has been editing the works of the German-Turkish director since the very beginning – from Akin's short-film debut 'Sensin ... You're the one!' (1995) and first feature 'Short Sharp Shock' (1998) to 'Solino' (2002). Akin raves about his editor: 'This man can work wonders! I have never worked with another editor and feel no necessity to do so'. Born in 1956, Bird has also edited such hit films as 'Gigantic' (director: Sebastian Schipper) and Paul Harather's 'Adam & Eve'. In addition to his work as film editor, the Hamburg resident is also active as a translator.

### Filmography (selection)

- 1995 Sensin ... You're the one! (Director: Fatih Akin)
- 1996 Weed (Director: Fatih Akin)
- 1997 Back in Trouble (Director: Andy Bausch)
- 1997 Short Sharp Shock (Director: Fatih Akin)
- 1999 Gigantic (Director: Sebastian Schipper)
- 2000 In July (Director: Fatih Akin)
- 2001 Wir haben vergessen zurückzukehren (Director: Fatih Akin)
- 2002 Solino (Director: Fatih Akin)
- 2002 Mein letzter Film (Director: Oliver Hirschbiegel)
- 2003 Cowboys & Angels (Director: David Gleeson)
- 2003 Head-On (Director: Fatih Akin)

# STEFAN SCHUBERT, RALPH SCHWINGEL – WÜSTE FILMPRODUKTION

WÜSTE Filmproduktion was founded in Hamburg in 1989. Producers Stefan Schubert and Ralph Schwingel are managing partners. Stefan Schubert has overseen the production of over 30 films in a variety of genres since 1986. He has gathered a great deal of experience in the financing of coproductions for cinema and television.

Ralph Schwingel is a producer, author and dramaturge. As a producer he concentrates chiefly on project development and international coproductions. In 1998 Ralph Schwingel and Stefan Schubert founded the Wüste Film West GmbH in Cologne with the publisher Hejo Emons. With Thomas Tielsch, they founded filmtank hamburg GmbH in 2001, a company dedicated to the production of documentary films and non-fiction programs. In 2003 they joined Egoli Tossel Film AG and timebandits Medien GmbH to form the film distributor timebandits films GmbH.

WÜSTE has produced 13 feature films to date, either as in-house productions or coproductions. Among them are Lars Becker's 'Schattenboxer' and Fatih Akin's 'Short Sharp Shock'. The latter, Akin's debut film, was awarded the Bronze Leopard for its three lead actors at the 1998 Locarno Film Festival, in addition to garnering the Bavarian Film Prize in 1999 for Fatih Akin as Young Director and the Adolf Grimme Award in 2001. 'Short Sharp Shock' was also nominated for the German Film Prize in the categories 'Best Film' and 'Best Direction'. The film was released in theaters throughout Germany in fall 1998. After its Swiss and Austrian releases, the film was also shown in France and Greece in 1999. Fatih Akin's second feature 'In July', which was shot in Germany, Hungary, Romania and Turkey, was launched in cinemas in August 2000 and drew nearly 600,000 viewers to the theaters, making it one of the top-grossing German films of the year. The film won audience awards at the German Film Festival in Paris as well as in Los Angeles, Viareggio and Tromsø, Norway. Thorsten Wettcke's first full-length feature film 'A Goddamn Job' began its theatrical run in April 2001.

Fatih Akin's third feature, 'Solino' (based on a script by Ruth Thoma), opened in German theaters in fall 2002 and went on to win the international jury award of the Biberach Film Festival and the Bavarian Film Prize for Best Script and Best Young Actor (Barnaby Metschurat) in 2002. It was also nominated for the German Film Award as Best Film in 2003 and took home the film prize in silver of the Guild of German Repertory Cinemas. To date the viewer tally has surpassed the half-million mark by far.

Among the shorts and documentaries produced by WÜSTE Film are the short feature 'Sensin ... You're the one!' and 'Weed' by Fatih Akin, as well as Thorsten Wettcke's 'Die Rosenfalle'. Andrei Schwartz's documentary 'Wasteland' was honored as Best Film at the international festivals of Amsterdam (Joris Ivens Award) and Toronto in 1998, and won the Echo Television Award of the European Union in 1998 as well as the Civis Film and TV Award 1999. Andrei Schwartz's second documentary, 'Geschichten aus dem Lepratal', was first screened at the International Forum of Young Filmmakers at the Berlinale 2002, and opened nationwide in German repertory theaters in April 2002.



WÜSTE Film also served as line producers for the Hamburg shooting of Dutch director Mike van Diem's feature film 'Character'. Van Diem won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 1998.

In addition to carrying out international coproductions, WÜSTE Filmproduktion also pursues the discovery and development of promising new talents as one of its main objectives. WÜSTE collaborates, for example, with the Turkish author and director Büket Alakus, whose debut film 'Anam' was rewarded with the Audience Award of the film festivals in Oldenburg and Braunschweig, and won the Geneva Europe Grand Prize 2001 for the best script of the European Broadcasting Union, the Otto Sprenger Award 2002, the first prize at the International Independent Film Festival in Brussels and the ARD Civis Television Award 2003. It was released in German cinemas in April 2002. The graduation film of dffb graduate Felix Randau, 'Northern Star', was shot in fall 2002 and will be seen in the 'German Cinema' section at the Berlinale.

Shooting on Fatih Akin's latest film HEAD-ON was completed in Hamburg and Istanbul in May 2003. The film is being shown in the official competition of the Berlinale 2004 and begins its run in German theaters in April 2004.

# THE ACTORS

## BIROL ÜNEL (CAHIT)

'Birol is a little like a crazy brother to me. I am a big fan of his'. This is how Fatih Akin describes his relationship with his lead actor. Akin met the charismatic Turkish actor while shooting his first feature film 'Short Sharp Shock' (1997). Ünel also starred in Akin's warm-hearted, romantic road movie 'In July' in 1999. He took on further roles in Dany Levi's 'Ohne mich' (1994), 'Unknown Friend' (director: Anne Hoegh Krohn), 'Planet Alex' (director: Uli M. Schüppel), both 1999, Ivan Fila's 'King of Thieves' and Büket Alakus's 'Anam' (both 2000). Ünel also shot the World War II drama 'Enemy at the Gates' under the direction of Jean-Jacques Annaud in 2000. Ünel began his career as a stage actor. In 1992/93, he not only staged the plays 'Caligula' and 'Bericht an die Akademie', but also played the lead role. Recently Birol Ünel appeared on stage as Siegfried in Frank Castorf's production 'Die Nibelungen – Born Bad' in Berlin.



### Filmography (selection)

- 1988 The Passenger – Welcome to Germany (Director: Thomas Brasch)
- 1989 A Wopbopaoobop (Director: Andy Bausch)
- 1994 Ohne mich (Director: Dani Levy)
- 1999 Planet Alex (Director: Ulli Schüppel)
- 1999 In July (Director: Fatih Akin)
- 1999 Unknown Friend (Director: Anne Hoegh Krohn)
- 2000 Anam, (Director: Buket Alakus)
- 2000 King of Thieves (Director: Ivan Fila)
- 2000 Enemy At The Gates (Director: Jean-Jacques Annaud)
- 2001 Blackberry (Director: Oliver Rihs)
- 2003 Head-On (Director: Fatih Akin)

## SIBEL KEKILLI (SIBEL)

Born in Heilbronn, Germany, in 1980 to Turkish parents, Sibel Kekilli was discovered in a shopping center. The 23-year-old, who was then an administrative employee at the Essen City Hall, was practically swept off the street and into her first feature-film role. 'She is talented and an absolute perfectionist', says producer Ralph Schwingel. Director Fatih Akin is also full of praise for her: 'What Sibel begins, she carries through'. The young German-Turkish woman has since moved to Hamburg with her companion and her Rottweiler, and is currently working on her acting career.



## CATRIN STRIEBECK (MAREN)

It's easy to guess one's line of work in the Striebeck family: they're all actors, whether it's Catrin Striebeck's father Peter, a renowned stage star and theater director or Catrin's grandfather Karl, uncle Jochen or sister Jana. Born in Vienna in 1966, Catrin Striebeck studied at the Max Reinhardt Seminar and first made a name for herself as a stage actress in the mid 1980s. Following engagements in Mannheim and Stuttgart, she joined the ensemble of the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg in 1990. There she fascinated the audiences as Gretchen in Christoph Marthaler's production of 'Goethes Faust Wurzel aus 1 + 2' and in Franz Xaver Kroetz's staging of 'Woyzeck'. The 37-year-old actress also appears at the Volksbühne in Berlin and made her movie debut in Jürgen Schrader's 'Mau Mau' of 1991. She later appeared in Lars Becker's 'Schattenboxer' and 'Bunte Hunde' as well as in 'Female2 seeks HappyEnd' (director: Edward Berger).

### Filmography (selection)

- 1991 Mau Mau (Director: Uwe Schrader)
- 1992 Schattenboxer (Director: Lars Becker)
- 1995 Bunte Hunde (Director: Lars Becker)
- 1998 Das gelbe vom Ei (Director: Lars Becker)
- 2000 Ein Vater zu Weihnachten (Director: Thomas Louis Präve)
- 2001 Female2 seeks HappyEnd (Director: Edward Berger)
- 2002 Das ABC des Lebens (Director: Titus Selge)

## MELTEM CUMBUL (SELMA)

Born in Izmir in 1970, Meltem Cumbul is one of the most popular actresses in Turkey today. She gained widespread celebrity above all in the tragicomical TV series 'Yılan Hikayesi' (1999/2001), in which she played a rough-hewn country girl forced to find her way in the big city after an arranged marriage. She is currently playing in the series 'Gurbet Kadini'. The versatile star began her career as a DJ on 'Power FM' radio and as host of the 'Genç çizgi' King Kong Show and Card Sharks. She made her TV debut in the soap opera 'Fake Words' in 1994. That same year she was also seen on the big screen for the first time, in 'Mr. E' by Sinan Cetin, with whom she also shot the successful film 'Propaganda' in 1999. The following year she starred in 'Born in Absurdistan' (director: Emine Dönmez). Meltem was honored as best actress at the Antalya Film Festival in 2002 for 'Abdulhamid Düserken'. She is also a sought-after stage star, who recently appeared in 'The Taming of the Shrew' in 2003. Hollywood has also shown its admiration of the beautiful Turkish actress who lent her voice to the heroines in the Turkish synchronizations of the Disney animated films 'Hercules' (1997) and 'Sinbad' (2003).

### Filmography (selection)

- 1994 Mr. E (Director: Sinan Çetin)
- 1995 The Insect (Director: Umit Elçi)
- 1995 Sawdust Tales (Director: Barış Pirhasan)
- 1997 Mixed Pizza (Director: Umur Turagay)
- 1998 Propaganda (Director: Sinan Cetin)
- 1999 Born in Absurdistan (Director: Houcheng Allahyari)
- 1999 The Trial (Director: Yalçın Yelence)
- 2002 Abdulhamid Düserken (Director: Ziya Öztan)
- 2003 Head-On (Director: Fatih Akin)

## GÜVEN KIRAÇ (UNCLE SEREF)

Güven Kiraç already has four awards to his credit as best lead actor for his film debut in 'Innocence' (1997): that of the International Istanbul Film Festival and the International Israel Film Festival, and that of the Modern Actors Film Association and Turkish Press Association. He worked with Meltem Cumbul (Selma in HEAD-ON) as DJ at 'Power FM' radio in 1994 and shot the successful theatrical film 'Abdulhamid Düserken' with her in 2002. Kiraç first started working in broadcasting at 'Radyotek' in 1992. The multi-faceted actor, who also appears on stage, has played in several popular TV series, most recently in 'Hayat Baglari' (2000-2002).

### Filmography (selection)

- 1997 Innocence (Director: Zeki Demirkubuz)
- 1998 Azizi (Director: Kudret Sabanci)
- 1999 Mr Salkim's Diamonds (Director: Tomris Giritlioglu)
- 1999 The Trial (Director: Yalçın Yelence)
- 2002 Abdulhamid Düserken (Director: Ziya Öztan)
- 2003 Head-On (Director: Fatih Akin)

caya iner gezerim aman aman  
cayda balik izlerim  
balikta degil efkarim  
sancak sacli saniyem  
beyhude gözlerin  
balikta degil efkarim  
sancak sacli saniyem  
beyhude gözlerin

Penceresi yola karsi  
Penceresi yola karsi  
Gelen gecer atar tasi  
Gelen gecer atar tasi  
Benim yarim kalem kasli  
Benim yarim kalem kasli  
Bak ara esini  
Say sari liralari

Ne aglarsin benim zülfü siyahim  
Ne aglarsin benim zülfü siyahim  
Bu da gelir bu da gecer aglama  
Göklere eristi feryadim ahim  
Bu da gelir bu da gecer aglama  
Ne de olsa kisin sonu bahardir  
Bu da gelir bu da gecer aglama  
Ne de olsa kisin sonu bahardir  
Bu da gelir bu da gecer aglama

Su karsiki dagda bir fener yanar  
fenerin savkına efendim aman sahinler konar  
herkes sevdigine böyle mi yanar?  
ah ben yarsiz kaldim  
düsmanlar kör olsun  
ben perisan oldum efendim aman  
daglar sen olsun

Alas, I descend to stroll by the brook  
And watch the fish in the mournful waters  
But it is for you that I am mournful  
My beloved Saniye, with your flowing hair  
It is your eyes which grieve me  
Leaving my love unanswered

Her window looked onto the street  
Admirers would pass  
Desiring to glimpse her but once  
As would I, too, my beloved  
She of the finest eyebrows  
Seek your beloved, make her your wife  
And consider delighting your true-love

My raven-haired love  
Why do you weep so?  
Whatever comes will yet go  
Even if your anguished cries  
Should pierce the heavens  
Do not weep  
Whatever comes will yet go  
Every winter, after all  
Is succeeded by spring  
Do not weep

A beacon blazes on the hill yonder  
Falcons are lured to its dazzling glow  
Is every man so stricken  
When he pines for his beloved?  
Alas, I am so eternally wretched  
My foes should delight  
As the mountains delight at the beacon's glow