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Published on *San Francisco Bay Guardian* (<http://www.sfbg.com>)

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## Déjà who?

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Created 09/26/2012 - 9:20am

Berlin and Beyond showcases top German talents more than once



Skateboarding doc *This Ain't California* reveals radness behind the Iron Curtain

PHOTO BY WILDFREMD PRODUCTION GMBH

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**FILM** An unmistakable sense of déjà vu (or its German-language equivalent) permeates the program for the 17th annual Berlin and Beyond Festival. From a tribute retrospective of the films of Swiss-born actor Mario Adorf, to twin appearances by rising stars Nina Hoss, Lars Eidinger, and Ronald Zehrfeld in an array of contemporary features, to a docu-drama of East German skater youth which builds on a world introduced by a previous documentary about Eastern Bloc break dancing, there emerges a not unpleasant feeling of familiarity. But for long-time aficionados and new fans of German cinema alike, the opportunity to spend twice the amount of time with some of that country's most versatile talent is a welcome one, and further provides a pretty good snapshot of the key players in German cinema right now.

Nina Hoss's starring turn in Hendrik Handloegten's *Summer Window* won't just inspire déjà vu in attendees of Christian Petzold's *Barbara* (which also stars Hoss) — she herself plays

a woman plagued by it. Trapped in a chain of events she's already lived through, Hoss' sympathetic yet scattered Juliane tries desperately to recreate the past exactly as she remembers it in order to (re) connect with her future boyfriend August (Mark Waschke), until she realizes she must alter her actions in order to save the life of her best friend Emily (an effervescent Fritzi Haberlandt).

Lars Eidinger (also starring in *Home for Weekend*) plays the unenviable role of Juliane's current boyfriend, Phillip, a visibly frustrated cuckold to a future possibility. Overall *Summer Window* (whose director co-wrote 2003's *Goodbye Lenin!*) holds its own in the nebulous category of "what if" films that hinge directly on the choices made by their protagonists. It's a genuine pleasure to watch Hoss play a character considerably less chilly than her usual roles, exemplified this year by her performance in *Barbara* as an embattled, disgraced physician trapped in a small East German village.

Closing down the festival on October 4, the exuberant skater doc *This Ain't California*, directed by Marten Persiel, details the rise of a rebellious skateboarding subculture in the heart of the GDR. Featuring a goodly amount of footage purportedly shot by the adolescent skaters themselves on a rare Super-8 camera borrowed from a parent, it beautifully captures the iridescent essence of a youth culture on the move. (A matter of some controversy, some of the footage used was apparently recreated by the filmmakers rather than strictly archival, a decision they defended in an interview in Germany by asserting that it nonetheless documents the "emotional truth" of its subjects.)

Reminiscent of the quietly remarkable Nico Raschick break dancing documentary *Here We Come* (which screened at Berlin and Beyond in 2007), *California* follows its youthful protagonists as they build their first skateboards using reclaimed wood and roller-skate wheels, improvise their own freestyle tricks and "branded" sportswear, and tap into a freedom of expression that belies the oppressive nature of the totalitarian state that surrounds them.

As with the break dancing kids in Raschick's documentary, the Communist regime tries first to suppress and then to co-opt the skate scene in Persiel's tale, offering the most talented skaters sponsorships, coaching positions, and even a trip to Prague in 1988 to compete in the Euroskate Championships. But despite their best efforts, officials find it impossible to completely repress the tight camaraderie coalescing around the "concrete playground" of East Berlin's Alexanderplatz and the key figures in the scene, including a bleached blonde spitfire named Denis Paraceck, a.k.a. "Panik," whose fearless disdain for authority made him something of a legend among his circle of friends.

Interspersed with present-day scenes — as friends gather together in adulthood to celebrate Panik's memory and reminisce about their skating glory days — and infused with a jubilantly aggressive soundtrack, heavy on the Lars Damm and Claus Grabke, *This Ain't California* does indeed document a certain emotional truth. It moves beyond mere *ostalgie* to capture the passionate lust for autonomy that defines adolescent rites of passage everywhere. \*

## BERLIN AND BEYOND FILM FESTIVAL

**Sept. 27-Oct. 4, most shows \$10-18**

**Castro Theatre**

**429 Castro, SF**

**Goethe-Institut**

**530 Bush, SF**

**[www.facebook.com/berlinbeyondfilmfestival](http://www.facebook.com/berlinbeyondfilmfestival)** <sup>[2]</sup>

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