

Hollywood was here

A journey through Berlin on the blockbuster trail | By Klaus Grimberg

No other German city has provided the backdrop for German and international films more often than Berlin. A bus tour takes in some of these locations – the relevant scenes included.

The big screen in the bus shows a scene from Billy Wilder's 1948 post-war comedy, "A Foreign Affair." In it, Jean Arthur plays Congresswoman Phoebe Frost from Iowa, a member of a delegation charged with investigating the moral standards of U.S. troops in bombed-

film set. Since the invention of moving pictures, filmmakers from all over the world have used the unmistakable streets, squares and buildings of the German capital as a backdrop. So an excursion into the cinema of the distant and recent past is always a journey into Berlin's history, too.

At one point, the bus turns suddenly into a small side street in the Friedrichshain district. Here, time has stood still: the gray façades of the buildings, the bumpy road, the rusty steel streetlamps – just like many street corners in East Berlin during communist times. At number 20, Stasi officer Gerd Wiesler sneaked in to observe a writer and his actress girlfriend

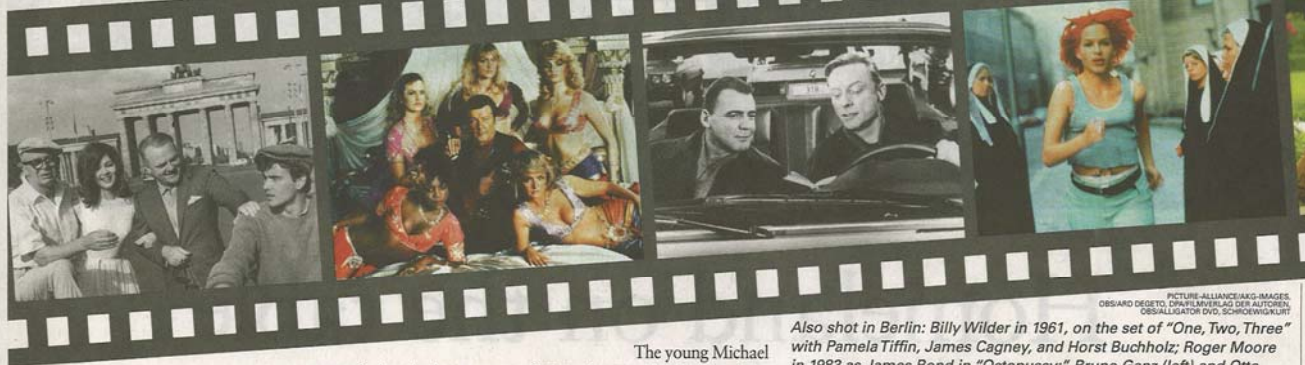
dered across the then empty spaces next to the Berlin Wall. Twenty years later, the new Berlin reaches toward the sky.

Berlin was always a favorite location for international cinema, too, especially for spy thrillers set during the Cold War. Even the secret agent's secret agent, James Bond, flexed his license to thrill in the divided city. In "Octopussy" (1983), Roger Moore, alias 007, was smuggled into the East via Checkpoint Charlie. The journey through the city made no sense geographically, but at least the Gedächtniskirche (Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church) near Zoo Station can be seen clearly.

the Russian capital, Moscow. The movie's most gripping car chase was filmed in the winter of 2003-04 in the just-completed tunnel under the Tiergarten. Particularly amusing was another scene that shows a Russian Mafioso right in front of the Café Moscow, a classy restaurant in East German times, today one of the city's hippest clubs.

In the past century, the city's attitude toward life changed over and over again, most recently with the fall of the Berlin Wall. While that monstrosity still stood, West Berlin's Kreuzberg district developed into an Eldorado for

The video bus snakes its way through districts and locations, the real and the fake, the past and the present Berlin. Scenes from well known and lesser-known films flicker across the screen – and it is the same with the locations, too, which pass by the windows outside. Even native Berliners can discover new corners of their city on this tour. Without the tricks of set designers, lighting crews and directors of photography, it is difficult to recognize many a hidden actual location in the city – even if one has seen that particular film any number of times.



out Berlin. She drives through the wrecked city in a car with the top down – past ruins and rubble. While the limousine rolls through Tiergarten toward the Brandenburg Gate, Phoebe Frost feverishly scribbles her impressions in a small notebook. And by the side of the road, everywhere, American soldiers and German Fräuleins fraternize!

While the film scenes are playing out on the screen, the bus is driving down the exact same stretch of road as that in the film. The viewer's gaze switches time and again from the monitor to the bus windows: 60 years later, the eyes look for traces of the past against the real backdrop. The wide boulevard, the Brandenburg Gate – the scars of war have vanished, but it is still possible to recognize the location immediately. Yet the soldiers and their girlfriends are absent.

This video-bus tour is an exciting journey into film history, a new attraction among the unusual city tours through Berlin. That's because no other German city has been used more often as a

around the clock as portrayed in director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's Oscar-winning drama, "Das Leben der Anderen" (The Lives of Others). The director filmed the film on this actual street: the remarkable melancholy, which crouches in between the buildings, is something not found often in Berlin as the eastern part of the city is undergoing renovation. But the movie has captured it forever.

The locations of other successful movies from Germany, both East and West, can be seen today only in the mind's eye. In 1973, the East German director Heiner Carow filmed "The Legend of Paul and Paula," a popular favorite even today, in which he defiantly questioned the rigid conventions of love and partnership under socialism. The old apartment block, in which Paula (Angelica Domröse) lived, was demolished right after the filming ended – it is now a shopping mall.

Potsdamer Platz, too, where Wim Wenders set his "Der Himmel über Berlin" (Wings of Desire), looks quite different today. In 1987, Curt Bois, as the aging poet, wan-

The young Michael Caine also wandered as a British spy through the walled city in the 1966 "Funeral in Berlin," reconnoitering Checkpoint Charlie. Rarely has Berlin been portrayed in a gloomier and more sinister way.

Time after time, the city on the Spree River has also lent its face to other cities. In the summer of 2003, the picturesque Gendarmenmarkt was transformed into the City of London. Jackie Chan, as the daredevil servant Passepartout, began and ended his adventurous journey in "Around the World in Eighty Days" here. It was a journey that took him, among other places, to Paris and Turkey – these scenes were filmed in the Schloss Charlottenburg and Potsdam's Schloss Sanssouci.

In Matt Damon's "The Bourne Supremacy," Berlin stood in for

Also shot in Berlin: Billy Wilder in 1961, on the set of "One, Two, Three" with Pamela Tiffin, James Cagney, and Horst Buchholz; Roger Moore in 1983 as James Bond in "Octopussy"; Bruno Ganz (left) and Otto Sander in 1987 in Wim Wenders' "Wings of Desire"; Franka Potente in "Run Lola Run" (1998); Jackie Chan in the Charlottenburg Palace with Cecile de France in "Around the World in 80 Days."

artists of all stripes, into a playground for alternative lifestyles. Leander Haussmann's "Herr Lehmann" (Berlin Blues, 2003) depicts this biotope of drifting between self-determination and self-delusion like no other film. The most important location is the "Markthalle" bar. Since the movie was released, the famous pork steaks in this final anchorage of the stranded have been selling better than ever before.

"Lola rennt" (Run, Lola, Run, 1998) also catches the rhythm of the city – after the fall of the Berlin Wall. During her breathless, long-distance run through the city, Franka Potente, as Lola, passes quite a few well-known sites. However, director Tom Tykwer also allows himself a great deal of artistic license in constructing her route: in reality, even if Lola had been the world's best marathon runner, she would never have completed the fast-paced, zigzag course through Berlin's streets that she did in the film.

Meanwhile, Billy Wilder, the master of profound comedy, came to Berlin for a film once again in 1961: in the ludicrous East-West farce, "One, Two, Three," key scenes take place at the Brandenburg Gate, that symbol-drenched interface between capitalism and socialism. But Wilder received filming permission for only the Western side. So the landmark had to be rebuilt at Munich's Bavaria Film Studios for the scenes on the Eastern side. In doing this, Wilder was a step ahead of history: during the filming of the movie, East Germany closed the city's borders on Aug. 13, 1961, and built the Berlin Wall. From then on, the journey through the Brandenburg Gate that can still be seen in "One, Two, Three" became impossible for 28 long years.

Klaus Grimberg is a Berlin-based journalist.

Information on the "Filmstadt Berlin" video bus-tour can be found at www.videobustour.de
Book tip: "Drehort Berlin. Wo berühmte Filme entstanden" by Markus Münch; Berlin edition im be.bra verlag, 2007 (in German only).