

# Barbara

Cert 12A Germany 2012 105 mins

## Crew

Director	Christian Petzold
Screenplay	Christian Petzold and Harun Farocki
Cinematography	Hans Fromm
Film Editing	Bettina Böhler
Original music	Stefan Will

## Cast

Nina Hoss	Barbara
Ronald Zehrfeld	Dr André Reiser
Mark Waschke	Jörg
Rainer Bock	Stasi Officer Klaus Schütz
Jasna Fritzi Bauer	Stella

## Synopsis

East Germany, the 1980's. Barbara, a young doctor, is transferred from Berlin to a small countryside hospital as punishment for applying for an exit visa from the GDR.

Planning to escape to Denmark with her boyfriend Jorg, Barbara keeps herself to herself, concentrating on her work and distancing herself from her new colleagues. But after her boss André covers for her when she helps a young runaway, Barbara becomes confused about what she wants from work, life and love.



- The film premiered at the Berlin Film Festival 2012 where Christian Petzold won the Silver Bear for Best Director. It was Germany's candidate for Best Foreign Language Oscar 2013.
- Nina Hoss has worked with Petzold on a number of previous films, including *Yella* (2007), for which she received the Silver Bear for Best Actress.
- Most of the filming was done in Kirchmöser near Brandenburg (in former DDR), where an abandoned hospital was partly restored for the shooting.
- Director Christian Petzold was born in West Germany, but his parents were East German refugees.



## Reviews

A lot of the German film *Barbara* is like a TV medical soap. The thirtysomething chief doctor (Ronald Zehrfeld) is a hunk with bedroom eyes. The new woman doctor (Nina Hoss), arriving at the rural hospital in 1980 East Germany, is a blonde bombshell, albeit of a certain age. (All the better for stories to tell of an eventful or beleaguered past.) Will they fall in love? What does Doc Barbara have to hide? Who will save and protect the pregnant teenage girl (Jasna Fritzi Bauer), escaped from a socialist work camp, who all but wears the sign "plot catalyst" around her neck?

The film came close to winning the Berlin Golden Bear, never mind its fleeting resemblances to an ex-DDR *ER*. Writer-director Christian Petzold (*Yella*) crafts sleek, thoughtful dramas about everyday peril.

*Barbara* would be less distinguished without its Barbara. Nina Hoss's cold, edgy beauty begrudges easy sympathy. She wears her taut-boned looks like a Hitchcock blonde moving in on more serious nightmares. East German life must have been like this – hour-to-hour scary – as the small-town Stasi pay their unannounced calls or the Berlin boyfriend drives down for a secret tryst, bringing a perilous package (escape money?) and a despairing farewell. A doctor who loves saving people must decide if the first call on her care is herself. The film is tensely watchable; I only wish, to reinvoke a master, there was more Hitchcock. In two brilliantly unsettling scenes at a windblown roadside planted with rocks and a cross – so surreally gusty that a wind-machine must have been used – the imagery leap ups, flame-like, to meet the intensity of the scripted drama.

*Nigel Andrews, Financial times, September 2012*

...Still unsung in Britain, [director] Petzold specialises in skeletal, teasing narratives that resonate all the more for their sparseness. There isn't a moment lost in *Barbara* – the last 20 minutes are a miracle of narrative economy – and Hans Fromm's photography is unfussily atmospheric, the dark-gold night scenes suggesting that all these people are bugs trapped in amber for observation. We repeatedly see Barbara on her bike: women on bicycles are a leitmotif of Second World War stories (think of Paul Verhoeven's *Black Book*), embodying female resistance and isolation. It's a reminder that, though belonging to a different period, *Barbara* is a war story too, as nerve-racking as the best.

*Jonathon Romney, The Independent, September 2012*