

PHANTOMS OF JULY



Locarno Film Festival
CONCORSO INTERNAZIONALE
OFFICIAL SELECTION

A FILM BY
JULIAN RADLMAIER



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Original Title	Sehnsucht in Sangerhausen
International Title	Phantoms of July
Year of Production	2025
Nationality	Germany
Language	German
Genre	Dramedy
Duration	90 min
Aspect Ratio	1.78:1
Sound	5.1

CAST

Ursula	Clara Schwinning
Neda	Maral Keshavarz
Zulima	Henriette Confurius
Lotte	Paula Schindler
Marjam	Ghazal Shojaei
Sung-Nam	Kyung-Taek Lie
Buk	Buksori Lie

CREW

Director	Julian Radlmaier
Screenplay	Julian Radlmaier
Producer	Kirill Krasovski
Executive Producer	Frank Tönsmann
Production Company	Blue Monticola Film GmbH
Co-production	Westdeutscher Rundfunk WDR
Cinematography	Faraz Fesharaki
Art Director	Anna Brotánková
Production Designer	Anita Grey
Set Designer	Federica Menegatti
Hair/Make-up	Sada Leigh Sherrin
Costume Design	Marie-Luise Wolf
Editing	Julian Radlmaier
Sound	Rainer Gerlach



SYNOPSIS

Ursula and Neda, an East German waitress with a broken heart and an Iranian YouTuber with a broken arm, both feel trapped and lonely in their precarious lives. One summer evening, Ursula falls for a mysterious musician from the city, while Neda is convinced that she recognized an old friend from Tehran in an equally enigmatic street sweeper. The winding paths of chance draw the two women together on an unexpected ghost hunt in the mountains... A romantic adventure film about an unlikely friendship and the longing for another life.

JULIAN RADLMAIER ON PHANTOMS OF JULY

One summer day, chance led me to Sangerhausen. Half rectangular blocks, half medieval maze of alleys, this small East-German town lies between a vast rose garden and a mountain-like mining spoil heap that looms over the landscape like an Egyptian pyramid. One could almost think that this relic of socialist mining industry sprang from the romantic imagination of the poet Novalis, who was born in a nearby village and worked in mining himself. He is best known for the image of the “blue flower,” through which he expressed the vague longing for that elusive something we sometimes glimpse in daydreams or passing clouds but can never quite grasp – the call of another life. The protagonists of my film, though, are not Romantic poets, but precarious workers and migrants. For them, the question of longing becomes a deeply political one, as those busy with surviving are denied even the right to ask what life is for: first, the rent must be paid, the residence permit renewed. And yet, they search for the blue flower– though they sometimes look in dubious places... Perhaps it’s

already something when a few lonely souls form an unlikely community, if only for an afternoon? Against the backdrop of a societal climate shifting threateningly to the right, *Phantoms of July* brings together people who are often set against each other in public discourse. It’s a film about the alchemy of encounter. Or, one could say more precisely that the film contrasts two encounters: the first (the romantic love affair between the proletarian waitress Ursula and the bourgeois violinist Zulima), fails dramatically, while the second (the strange friendship between Ursula, the Iranian wanna-be influencer Neda, and the Korean tour guide Sung-Nam) succeeds comically. This reflects my conviction that the deeper divide between people runs not horizontally between nations and cultures, but vertically between social classes. In the end, the characters even connect with the ghosts of the past, as they find out that the dreams they share are actually very old... Both in content and form, I trust in the joyful resistance of cinema.





INTERVIEW WITH JULIAN RADLMAIER

What inspired you to tell this story?

It started with a photo of the small town of Sangerhausen, showing the spoil tip, an artificial mountain that rises behind the town as enigmatically as Mount Fuji in Hokusai's woodcuts or Mont Saint-Victoire in Cézanne's paintings. I travelled there for a few days and was fascinated by the many peculiar places and historical layers which I encountered. It was like a condensation of Germany's past and present, including its darkest facets, and at the same time, full of surprising poetic details.

There are different worlds and realities clashing, ancient and modern, working and middle class, urban and rural etc. What is their common denominator? Is there a binding element?

I like to explore points of intersection between people from very different backgrounds. In this case, not just from different countries and social strata, but also different

centuries. What unites the characters on an individual level is maybe some kind of precarity, of loneliness, and a vague longing for another life. But in the film, this is reflected from a broader historical and politic angle.

What conflicts do the protagonist face?

The story revolves around two women both secretly unhappy with their life. Ursula's existence is suffocated by two low-paid, very exhausting, jobs and the narrow-mindedness of her surroundings. Neda is living in exile, difficultly trying to balance visa requirements, the absurdities of self-entrepreneurship in the digital age, and the pitiful remains of a buried artistic ambition. I'm not so much thinking of conflict in terms of dramaturgy, but you could say the conflict lies between the life they live and the life they might have imagined.

In what way do their individual challenges reflect society in general?

The facts that determine our current time are all present in the film: neoliberal capitalism with its economic pressure and poor working conditions, its psychological and social effects; the rise of nationalism and racism; war and exile. First of all, this is what stands in the way of living a fulfilling life, on an individual and on a planetary level. They are external obstacles, but they have also invaded our inner selves. So when my protagonists look for solutions, they try to find them in rather illusionary places. What opens up new perspectives, even hope, is the encounter with others, the possibility to create new, albeit fragile, collectives.

The reference to famous German poet Novalis, what does it signify?

Novalis is a key figure of early German Romanticism, the inventor of the “blue flower“, a symbol of longing for an elusive elsewhere. As he was born in a castle next to Sangerhausen, he just had to be in the film. Novalis was also a geologist, and stones play a huge role in the film. He wrote in a very eclectic and fragmentary form, which resonates with me. But I preferred to use an oblique angle on him and instead of centering on the longing of Novalis, the elitist young aristocrat, I imagined his maid, dreaming of the French Revolution while emptying the poet’s chamber pot.

What is striking about the film are the visual and aesthetic decisions. How did you come up with the concept?

I’m obsessed with the question of form in cinema, the way it can sharpen our senses, numbed by so many stereotypical images. Together with DoP Faraz Fesharaki, we tried to find surprising solutions for the script, but also letting ourselves be surprised by what we discover while shooting. Therefore, the film is a mix of carefully planned visual choreographies and chance images we filmed without knowing where they would end up in the editing. One key formal element we wanted to explore was the ghostlike, yearning movement of the zoom, and another, the poetic lightness of the pan. We also looked back in the history of cinema: the early films of Kira Muratova have been a major influence for us, for example.



JULIAN RADLMAIER BIOGRAPHY

Born in Nuremberg in 1984, French-German director Julian Radlmaier studied at the German Film and Television Academy Berlin and worked as an assistant to New-German-Cinema-legend Werner Schroeter. He has also edited and translated several writings of French philosopher Jacques Rancière. Since his first short and medium length films, his work gained acclaim at major international festivals. His first feature *Self-Criticism of a Bourgeois Dog* (2017) premiered in Rotterdam and won the German Film Critics Award for best debut of the year. His second feature *Bloodsuckers* (2021), premiered in the Berlinale Encounters competition and received the German Screenplay Award. In 2025, his third feature *Phantoms of July* was invited to the International Competition of the Locarno Film Festival. He lives in Berlin.

Filmography:

2013 A Spectre is Haunting Europe (short)
2014 A Proletarian Winter's Tale (middle-length)
2017 Self-criticism of a Bourgeois Dog (feature)
2021 Bloodsuckers - A Marxist Vampire Comedy (feature)
2025 Phantoms of July (feature)





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