

Stories from Berlin, before and after the wall

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German cinema got a big boost at this year's Academy Awards, when *The Lives of Others*, a superb drama about the Stasi secret police in the former German Democratic Republic, won the Oscar for best foreign-language film.

If you saw it in theatres or on the DVD released in August by Sony Pictures, you know the movie is set in Berlin, the divided city that was the epicentre of the Cold War until the infamous wall separating East from West was breached on Nov. 9, 1989.

The two Germanys became one republic on Oct. 3, 1990, and the event has been celebrated ever since as the Day of Germany Unity. Wednesday was the 17th anniversary – washed down with beer, of course, since it's also the week of Oktoberfest.

Here are five other films set in Berlin during and immediately after the Cold War, and available here on DVD

One, Two, Three (*U.S., 1961*) James Cagney plays a Coca-Cola executive in West Berlin who's told to look after his boss's lovely daughter, only to discover she's eloped with a firebrand communist from the East (Horst Buchholz). Shooting of Billy Wilder's black-and-white comedy was moved to Bavaria after the Berlin Wall went up (and cut right through the set). The MGM DVD is a flipper: original widescreen on one side and cropped for regular TVs on the other.

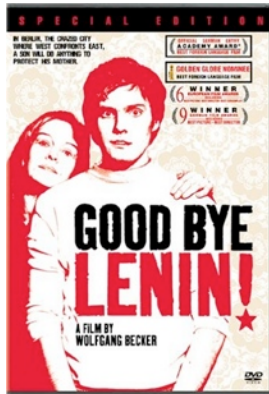


Born in '45 (*East Germany, 1965*) This *nouvelle-vague*-style drama about unhappy newlyweds in East Berlin's artsy Prenzlauer Berg district was so downbeat (and offhandedly sexual), the censors didn't allow director Jürgen Böttcher to finish it. His banned print sat in the vaults of DEFA, the state film monopoly, until its premiere at the 1990 Berlin Film Festival. First Run Features' DVD has a mini-doc on "forbidden films" of the GDR.

Wings of Desire (*West Germany/France, 1987*) An angel (Bruno Ganz) aches to be human again when he falls in love with a trapeze artist. The German title – *Der Himmel über Berlin* (*The Sky Over Berlin*) – suggests the real star is the immortal city itself. Wim Wenders directed, Peter Handke co-wrote. MGM's DVD

has audio commentaries, 30 minutes of deleted scenes, a 40-minute doc and a nifty interactive map of shooting locations.

The Tunnel (*Germany, 2001*) Harry Melchior (Heino Ferch) is an East German swimming champion who flees to the West and then plots with other escapees to burrow under the Berlin Wall to bring out friends and families. Long at 167 minutes and marred by an unrelenting musical score, the film is nonetheless well-acted. Available in Quebec on DVDs from Seville (with English subtitles) or K Films Amérique (with a choice of French dub or French subtitles).



Good Bye Lenin! (*Germany, 2003*) A hilarious and touching comedy. It's early 1990, and young East Berliner Alex (Daniel Brühl) must protect his ever-loyal communist mother from the truth: her workers' paradise is no more. Why doesn't she already know? She was in a coma when the wall came down. Shot mostly in the Mitte district of central Berlin, the film is distributed here on DVD by Seville, with informative and funny extras.

And coming in November: **Berlin Alexanderplatz** (*Germany, 1980*). Set in the 1920s, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 15½-hour epic TV series was released on DVD in Germany last February. It will get its North American release Nov. 14 in a seven-disc set from Criterion.

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