



THE
SOUND
OF STONES

A POST-WAR MUSICAL

Against the backdrop of the destroyed Berlin 1945 - 1949, the series THE SOUND OF STONES is a portrait of four Trümmerfrauen – rubble women who cleared war debris – and the emancipation of a whole generation of women in post-war Germany: in the form of a musical.

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SETTING

The city lies in ashes and rubble. There is no normality in everyday life. Pragmatism and the struggle for survival are the order of the day. The circumstances force everyone to think little about tomorrow and less about yesterday. Things are in a state of suspension in which nothing is for certain and everything is in flux. It is a time of change and reform (including monetary), in which women are finding their way into positions and professions which had previously been occupied by men, many of whom have not yet returned home. It is a time of involuntary emancipation, when opportunities lie within reach but often go unused because – well, because it's not easy to reinvent yourself, especially with an empty stomach. It is a time when German misery and German guilt lie side by side. And a time when a struggle is already raging as to what this Germany is supposed to look like in the future. An enormous amount seems to happen in the four years between 1945 and 1949. And an enormous amount of stone needs to be freed from the mortar, piled up, and moved by wagon. This is a truly Sisyphean task, still not finished after three years of work. It is an activity of great symbolic significance, since it is from these stones that have seen terrible times that the walls of the new era are to be built.



STORY LINE

Amid the ruins, life begins to pulsate again. The people crawl out of their holes and scour through the debris for food and anything useable. The defeat has brought fear of the victors. It is not until the Western Allies join the Russians in Berlin that something resembling a new equilibrium is established: the first signs of the Cold War.

The lives of four women, Else, Hanna, Dorit and Louise, develop in parallel; minor characters emerge and disappear. The transformations they experience show the passage of time, together comprising a portrait of the city of Berlin and its partition. While the political sphere tries to find what a future of Germany and particularly Berlin may look like, the common people of Berlin fight for mere survival and take little notice of the political process. However, by the time the checkpoints can no longer be crossed without complication, it becomes clear to them that the political systems have altered their reality.





MUSICAL

At first glance the approach might be surprising, but this genre of a film musical is being presented as a way of giving a form to the complex and contradictory quality of the post-war years. The intertwining of yesterday and today, of decor and backdrop, of the struggle for survival co-existing with newfound freedom, of displacement and rehabilitation, all of these lead to a reality that is continually new and baffling. Since I am concerned with the process of remembrance, and not with showing the past as it was, the genre of the film musical constitutes a corrective in this respect. In addition to big dance numbers and chorus-line choreography, the form of a musical will also be used in intimate moments. Everyday gestures and movements will be assembled into dances without being motivated by music. In conversation with Louise, the future mayor Ernst Reuter will literally hit the ceiling and evoke Fred Astaire's famous ceiling dance from "Royal Wedding". Else, wracked with hunger, argues with her own stomach, who wants to get her to steal, while two bricks with animated faces discuss whether this will actually happen – before they are grabbed by the hands of Trümmerfrauen and placed on the adjacent pile of bricks. This musical aspect can be present everywhere. Whimsical humor and deep emotions exist side by side.



Protagonists

ELSE

Else (35) is a working-class Berliner with a heart of gold. She knows only one thing: how to get by. She is tough, most of all with her eight-year-old son Wölfchen, for whom she would do anything. Else lives in the East sector of the city and will stay there. She takes in Clarissa (25) and her two small children; in no time the women become a team, complemented by Grandma Apelt (in her early 70s), who takes care of the children while the mothers are at work. Else longs for her husband Heinrich – but when he finally returns, happiness is short-lived. Soon Else no longer asks herself whether she wants to split up with him, but only how she can get him out of the apartment ...

HANNA

Hanna (26) comes from a well-to-do merchant family. Although she married at a young age, her husband Rainer disappeared in the Resistance, so for years she has been on her own. Now after the end of the war he turns up as a member of the Ulbricht Group, back from Moscow in order to convert Germany to Communism. Again he leaves Hanna on her own. First she finds shelter at the home of her friend Roswitha (48) and the only thing that remains for her is to go with Roswitha to clear rubble. By means of a marriage of convenience Hanna relocates to the West sector. But soon, also her second husband leaves her. Hanna meets young Andrea (18), who is pregnant, on the verge of starvation, and who loses the baby in the dead of winter. Hanna takes in Andrea and her orphaned half sister Inge (10) and half brother Fabian (6). Thus, Hanna loses two men, but gains a family.





DORIT

Dorit (41) comes from an intellectual background. Until the end of the war she was hidden away in a cellar, terrified. While out in the evening darkness foraging for food however, she is picked up by an American soldier and taken to the commander's headquarters. The officer on duty gives her an address where she can stay in the West sector. The landlord there, Herr Struck (70) lends her an old suit of clothing and, outfitted in this way, disguised as a man, she reports for her first day of clearing rubble. Dorit falls in love with the much younger Albert (24), one of the few men there. When she gets pregnant she's finds herself facing a decision: shall she marry a man this young, who was himself cheated out of his youth by the now-defeated regime? Dorit decides in favor of a family but against marriage.



LOUISE

Louise (58) is a gentle, fragile woman who is in poor health. The war years have taken their toll, but as soon as the possibility arises, she resumes her work as a socialist politician. Before long she is pulled into conflicts regarding the forced merger of the Socialist party and the Communist party, which reflects the larger political situation – namely, the threat of co-optation by the Soviet Union. When the mayor has to resign, Louise accepts the post of acting mayor – and continues to serve throughout the turbulent time of the Berlin airlift. Berliners have affectionately given her the title “Mother of the Trümmerfrauen”, or simply “the Mother of Berlin”. – To this day she remains the only woman to have held the post of mayor.

THE SOUND OF STONES

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