

MODERN

## Fair Helen – or: the fabrication of the film star during shooting

It is 2004. Wolfgang Petersen's sword and sandal epic "Troy" is already showing in US cinemas, and Diane Kruger has to listen to a raspy-voiced television talk show host ask her if she is a model or an actress by profession. Her answer is clear and friendly, but explicit: Actress. Although Kruger's Helen is dismissed by many as being "beautiful, but dull", now international movie critics generally laugh with the cool blond from Germany instead of at her. She performs just as well in popcorn films alongside Nicolas Cage as in more serious films such as "The Hunting Party" with Richard Gere and "Goodbye Bafana". In 2007 she had the rare honor of opening the 60th Cannes Film Festival as "Maitresse de C eremonie" and, in addition, of appearing on the Festival screen in the final film, Denys Arcand's comedy "L'Age des t n bres". In February 2008 she was a member of the Berlinale jury alongside the legendary director Costa-Gavras, among others, and in the fall she will again be in Berlin for a while to shoot Quentin Tarantino's "Inglorious Bastards" – with co-stars Brad Pitt, Christoph Waltz, Til Schweiger and Daniel Br hl. Even the toughest sceptics now admit that Diane Kruger has more than earned her place on the A list of the transatlantic film industry. As a new ambassador for *Hear the World*, she is now also working for better hearing alongside numerous stars from the world of film and music.

Diane Heidkr ger was born on July 15, 1976 in Algermissen near Hildesheim in Lower Saxony. She grew up with her brother in a middle class household. Her mother was a bank clerk. Her father, a printer by trade, had an alcohol problem and left the family. Diane started learning ballet at a young age, but an accident put paid to her hopes of a successful dancing career. At the age of 15 she was discovered in a modeling competition. At the start of her career she modeled in advertisements, such as for the perfume "Loulou" by Cacharel, which served typically French clich s, then for companies including Dolce & Gabbana. She became bored with modeling, and when she met the director and producer Luc Besson, he recommended she take acting lessons in Paris. The rest is history.

She did not have to wait too long for smaller roles to come along, but it was her then-husband Guillaume Canet who really discovered her, on screen so to speak, for the cinema, in the black comedy "Mon Idole". She completed the transformation from model to actress in full public view. In the chic and at the same time exceedingly bizarre film, the protagonist, played by director Canet himself, initially sees her just as an unapproachable beauty in the office and then in a little backless, glittery dress dancing seductively on a coffee table in a trendy bar. A few minutes later the two of them end up in bed, and only then does the action really get going. The film is no masterpiece, but significant in that here Kruger is able to demonstrate her talent as a comedy actress for the first time, as well as her flawless body. As the bored wife of the unscrupulous TV producer Broustal, she is allowed to run around with plaits and a Heidi costume and come out with lines such as: "TV stars have to be tanned, it's a question of self-respect". And because a particularly tanned specimen of this category gets a little too close to her under the influence of illegal substances, she almost accidentally kills him. Even when she herself gets hit in the face with a garden spade, she is still certainly worth seeing and incidentally the role would also have been worthy of a better-known comedy actress such as Cameron Diaz.

In "Wicker Park", Kruger plays a mysterious dancer who at first competently steals the heart of her leading man Josh Hartnett and then suddenly disappears. The former ballerina was interested in the role "primarily because of the dance scenes", and not necessarily because of Josh Hartnett.

Photo: Bryan Adams



*“HER UTTERLY CONVINCING PERFORMANCE AS THE FANATICAL RACIST, (...), IS ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF HER CAREER TO DATE, ...”*

While she was still shooting in Canada, casting had already begun elsewhere for “Troy”. As she did not yet have an agent in the USA, Kruger simply sent in a video, which a friend shot for her in the hotel in Montreal. Because the casting team could not see her properly in the video, she was asked to send in a professional video. They liked it and she was invited to a casting session in London, and then to the movie studio in Los Angeles. She ultimately landed the role of the fair Helen, holding her own for the first time against a whole host of far more well-known stars. On one condition however: She had to put on ten pounds, because the studio bosses found her too thin. Ambition triumphed over vanity, and Kruger gained the weight with the help of a few protein shakes and lots of cups of hot chocolate with whipped cream. A further reason for the high regard she was soon to enjoy in the movie industry is the secondary virtue of reliability, dismissed as “typically German”, as she told an interviewer: “Wolfgang Petersen and I were of course always the first on set in the morning”.

After the spectacular sword and sandal film, Kruger starred in “National Treasure”, a light treasure hunt/mystery/slapstick comedy with Nicolas Cage, which was to be followed three years later by a very successful sequel. As Abigail Chase, she is the perfect jeans-clad pal for the always worried looking Cage. And in the film “The Target” (also known as “The Piano Player”) in South Africa with Christopher Lambert and Dennis Hopper, she was indeed just that. In this hardcore thriller she is taken hostage by a gangster, who follows the Voodoo cult. Not exactly the sort of material that produces Oscar winners, but exciting all the same. “Goodbye Bafana”, which gave Kruger plays a more sophisticated role and took her back to South Africa for filming, had better chances of winning an Oscar. In this historical drama, magnificently directed by Bille August, she plays the wife of the white prison guard James Gregory, who guarded none other than the imprisoned Nelson Mandela, and who increasingly became friends with him over the years. In order to get a feel for the role Kruger got to know the real Gloria Gregory and spent much time talking with here. Her utterly convincing performance as the fanatical racist, for whom all black South Africans were “terrorists”, is one of the highlights of her career to date, even if the interplay between Dennis Haysbert as Mandela and Joseph Fiennes as Gregory is the clear focus of attention.

In “Copying Beethoven”, Kruger plays the (fictional) music student Anna Holtz, who is meant to help Ludwig van Beethoven write the score for his Ninth Symphony. The film was directed by Agnieszka Holland and once again Kruger came in for heavy criticism for her performance, especially in Germany, although to a certain extent this should have been leveled at the script and director. It maintained that alongside the brilliant Ed Harris, who plays a hot-tempered, explosive and distraught Beethoven, Kruger was once again “nice to look at”, but her character was “dull”. She, however, declined to challenge the brutal attacks. Although the movie was no great success, it clearly heightened some relatively important American critics’ awareness of Diane Kruger. On the one hand the New York Times described her as “the young German actress Diane Kruger, who had the misfortune to play Helen in Wolfgang Petersen’s ‘Troy’ and looks too beautiful to play a role of any substance”, but on the other emphasized that Kruger also looks stunning when she is on her knees scrubbing the floor of Beethoven’s house.

Just as her role in “Copying Beethoven” is a hybrid of several figures which do not really exist in that form, it sometimes seems as if Diane Kruger herself is also a hybrid of several intelligent and very attractive women: a dash of Sharon Stone and a trace of Nicole Kidman, a touch of Grace Kelly and a good dose of Romy Schneider – and there you have the new star, to whom people are slightly more well-disposed on the western side of the Atlantic, despite the fact that she neither denies nor renounces her European identity. But how does that old saying go? “Absence makes the heart grow fonder.”

Christian Arndt