

## The Audition (15) Germany/France 2019

6 March 2023

DIRECTOR: **Ina Weisse**

(German and French with English subtitles) Running time: 99 minutes

LEADING PLAYERS: **Nina Hoss** (Anna Bronsky), **Simon Abkarian** (Philippe Bronsky), **Serafin Mishiev** (Jonas Bronsky), **Ilja Monti** (Alexander Paraskevas), **Sophie Rois** (Frau Köhler), **Thoresten Merten** (Herr Schupelius), **Franziska Fauth** (Lehrerin), **Johannes Kittel** (Lehrer) **Paula Su Odenthal** (Schülerin Violine).

SCREENPLAY: **Ina Weisse and Daphne Charizani**. PHOTOGRAPHY: **Judith Kaufmann**. EDITING: **Hansjörg Weißbrich**. MUSIC DEPARTMENT: **Masoud Tosifyan**.

Films about music and musicians have rarely convinced. Sometimes it is the script (*Song without End*, anyone? *Lisztomania?*), but more often it has to do with the mechanics of an actor persuading us that he is actually playing a musical instrument: piano fingers can be masked, and wind instruments tend to be avoided, perhaps because they distort the face, but stringed instruments offer innumerable challenges, from bow-hold to left-hand fingering, and you'd need to have the dedication of a Ryan Gosling (*La La Land*) or Adrien Brody (*The Pianist*) to just learn the damn' thing. Not that common: Emily Watson took three months out for cello lessons before *Hilary and Jackie*, but Christopher Walken's bowing in *A Late Quartet* looked as though he was carving the Sunday roast; as for J-P Marielle and Depardieu (father and son) in *Tous les matins du monde*, don't get me started!

Ina Weisse's *Das Vorspiel* (lit. The Prelude) partially circumvents these problems by casting a young Russian violinist, Ilya Monti, as Alexander, while Serafin Mishiev, who plays the young Jonas, is an actor who also plays the violin. Nina Hoss, the magnetic presence of Christian Petzold's films *Barbara* and *Phoenix*, received lessons in playing but, because of the nature of her character's situation, is not required to play as much on screen. Every extra you see at the conservatoire was also a musician.

This is so important and has to work because the film is about a specific approach to sound. Anna hears in Alexander a quality that eludes her professional colleagues at the audition, and it might be as extreme as the way he plays a single note or phrase, but it is because she listens with her heart. 'You need to hear the sound you want to produce before you play', she says at one point to her pupil, whom she takes on to smooth out his rough edges and prepare him for the entrance exam. One

suspects this is all bound up with Anna's own truncated career, she having fallen victim to nerves, many a musician's bugbear. (You would be surprised how many are on beta blockers.)

At home, Anna has a loving relationship with her instrument maker husband - no accident there: the sensual link to the instrument is at one with the art of making it speak - and teaches their son, Jonas, a thing many musicians would probably advise against! He, it turns out, has passed the age of practising to please mummy and would rather be out playing hockey.

As if that were not enough in relationship terms, Anna is also allowing herself to be seduced by a colleague into resuming her professional career, albeit by small steps, and has begun an affair with him, perhaps because she needs a break from the earnestness of her domestic life.

Ultimately, Alexander finds himself cast as the mouthpiece through which Anna's muse can speak, and the competing pressures on her life - and his - reach critical mass. It is a superb ensemble effort, with painstaking input from the director to make ineffable ideas palpably real. And it all comes down to minutiae. Because an audience can tell.

**David Clare**

### **Fugue (2022) 22 mins.**

We present a short film about three generations of violinist. Directed by Will J. Wood, it is a riff on the idea of a fugue in film form. Tatiana Clarke (award-winning violinist Diana Galvydyte) is practising for an upcoming concert of J.S. Bach sonatas, while training her daughter and dealing with the lessons and difficulties acquired from her own mother, Dame Maria Clarke.