



OPENING FILM for PANORAMA SPECIAL at BERLINALE 2018

# STYX

OPENING FEBRUARY 27, 2019 at FILM FORUM

Directed by **Wolfgang Fischer**

Starring  
**Susanne Wolff**  
**Gedion Oduor Wekesa**



# SYNOPSIS

## LOGLINE

STYX depicts the transformation of a strong woman torn from her contented world during a sailing trip.

## SYNOPSIS

Premiering at the Berlinale, where it opened the Panorama Special section, STYX is a work of unrelenting intensity and technical brilliance. ER doctor Rike (Susanne Wolff) embarks on a one-woman solo sailing trip to Ascension Island in the Atlantic. When Rike comes across a sinking ship of refugees, she is quickly torn out of her contented world and must make a momentous decision. Aptly named after the mythological river that separates the living from the dead, STYX is an astute modern-day parable of Western indifference in the face of marginalized suffering. Carrying practically the entire film, Wolff is riveting as a woman pushed to her physical, psychological and moral limits.



# BIOGRAPHIES

## DIRECTOR

**Wolfgang Fischer** was born in 1970 in Vienna, Austria. He studied Psychology and Painting at the University of Vienna and then pursued Film at the Art Academy of Düsseldorf and at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne. During this time, he worked as an assistant for Paul Morrissey and Nan Hoover. He was awarded a scholarship by the Munich Screenplay Program and by Equinoxe Europe. His films include: IN TIME (1994), 9h11 (1999), REMAKE OF THE REMAKE (1999), DISK-DUSK (1999), SCHOEN 2000, GRAU (2001) WHAT YOU DON'T SEE (2009). He is now in pre-production for his upcoming feature THE BEAR The Bear and the television series THE HIGHWAY OF TEARS and DESERTED.

## ACTRESS

**Susanne Wolff** is a graduate of The Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media. From 1998 to 2016 she was ensemble member at Thalia Theater in Hamburg and Deutsches Theater in Berlin. For her work on stage, Wolff has won the Boy-Gobert Prize, the 3Sat Innovation Award and the Rolf Mares Prize. In front of the camera, Wolff has been honored with the Best Actress Award at the Sao Paulo International Film Festival and the Young German Cinema Award for Emily Atef's THE STRANGER IN ME (2008). In 2013, she won the German Television Award for Best Actress for MOBBING and in 2017 she received the Golden Camera for the television series TOMORROW I QUIT. Most recently, Susanne Wolff played a leading role in celebrated German filmmaker Volker Schlöndorff's feature RETURN TO MONTAUK (2017).

## PRODUCER

**Marcos Kantis** was born in 1968 in Rheinhausen. He studied Business at the Gerhard Mercator University in Duisburg, focusing on Film Marketing and Distribution. After interning at New Line Cinema, he worked for the Filmstiftung in North Rhine-Westphalia as Assistant to the Head of Production. He has also worked as a line producer on films such as GOOD BYE LENIN (2003), GO FOR ZUCKER! (2004), and LOVE LIFE (2007) for X Filme before joining Schiwago Film in 2007. Marcos has produced more than 10 feature films, including SHORT CUT TO HOLLYWOOD (2009), TRANSFER (2010) and KREIG (2017). His work on A COFFEE IN BERLIN (2012) received 6 German Film Awards and a European Film Award for Best Debut. Currently he is working with Jan-Ole Gerster on his second feature LARA and with Wolfgang Fischer on his upcoming projects.

## **DOP**

**Benedict Neuenfels** was born in 1966 in Bern to actress Elisabeth Trissenaar and director Hans Neuenfels. He began his career in 1982 and worked for several years as camera assistant and operator for Rainer Werner Fassbinder's former DP Xaver Schwarzenberger and Wim Wenders' close collaborator Robby Mueller. Since completing his degree at the German Film and Television School in Berlin, Neuenfels has worked on more than 60 features and documentaries well as working as a lighting de-signer for numerous stage plays and operas. Neuenfels is member of the German, Austrian and European Film Academies. He has won several awards for his work including six German Camera Awards for Outstanding Cinematography. In 2007, he photographed Stefan Ruzowitzky's *THE COUNTERFEITERS*, which won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film the following year. In 2011, he was honored by the German Academy of Arts for Outstanding Achievement in Cinematography. He is currently working with Ruzowitzky on the mini-series *8 DAYS*.

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

## RESEARCH

Every day at Europe's external borders, people die in their quest for peace as they attempt to save themselves by crossing the sea to our continent. That these people, according to our research, can still rely on little support from official institutions was confirmed by our discussions with SEA WATCH, MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES, BORDERLINE EUROPE and MOAS, who are among the private aid organizations present.



Encounters in the middle of the ocean between pleasure boats and overloaded, stricken refugee boats are a nightmare scenario much-discussed among sailors, and such incidents are becoming increasingly common.

What happens if a solo sailor (a yachtswoman alone on a boat) finds herself in this situation?

Inspired by true events, STYX pursues this question in a fictional fashion, illustrating how economic interests compete with humanitarian principles, how excessive demand usurps compassion, and how indifference destroys all hope. The film deals with individual dreams of paradise, and revolves around central questions of identity: Who are we, who do we want to be, and who do we have to be?

## **CAST**

Our central character is a determined, successful woman with life experience, and is also a passionate water sports enthusiast. Award-winning actress Susanne Wolff – herself a blue-water sailor with an International Certificate of Competence – encapsulates the main character's central qualities.

Leading man Gedion Odour Wekesa is a schoolboy from Kibera/Nairobi. He takes acting classes as part of the ONE FINE DAY organisation's funding programme, and beat 40 other boys to win the role.

## **STYLE**

STYX documents, in a realistic fashion, the hero's journey of its female protagonist. She spends half the film alone on the high seas. Consequently, for the most part, dialogue plays little role. Instead, the sounds of extreme nature and of the technical measures employed to confront her, take over.

The majority of the film was shot in real-life conditions on the open sea. The set is confined to the actual unmodified surface area of an 11-meter yacht. Sound and noises are genuine. The camera focusses throughout on the female protagonist. Only at the beginning and end, in which she becomes a vanishing part of a larger whole, is her location contextualized. In the film's second half, a confusion of international languages complements the constant background noise, underlining the proverbial redundancy of language with such subject matter. Only at decisive turning points is there complete silence.

## **STRUCTURE**

The film's narrative is consistently linear, and divided into three main phases.

### **Phase 1**

We begin in Cologne, "on safe ground", where the heroine dominates the situation. Here, she can exercise her full capabilities, relying on the unconditional help of all involved as well as on the smooth running of failsafe systems.

### **Phase 2**

Now, as she sails without firm ground beneath her feet, the heroine remains mistress of the situation. Even in difficult conditions, she keeps her boat fully under control, staying connected via radio to her surrounding world, on whose cooperation she can count at any time. Expertly, she eliminates any smaller impediments alone.

### **Phase 3**

Only in the wake of her encounter with the shipwreck, and the subsequent lack of support from others, does our heroine gradually lose control of the situation.

## SELECT PRESS

“Like the small sailboat on which it is set, Wolfgang Fischer’s extraordinarily gripping account of a one-woman solo voyage across the Atlantic that is suddenly interrupted when she comes across a sinking trawler overloaded with refugees, is brisk, efficient and thrillingly dynamic. This is “All Is Lost” with a spinning moral compass and a topical dimension that proves even more gripping than its brilliantly achieved visceral action.”

–*Variety*

“Carrying practically the entire film, Wolff is never less than remarkable in a demanding role that’s 80 percent silence and 20 percent English-language dialogue. The fully inhabited turn should further help cement her international status as a star to be reckoned with.”

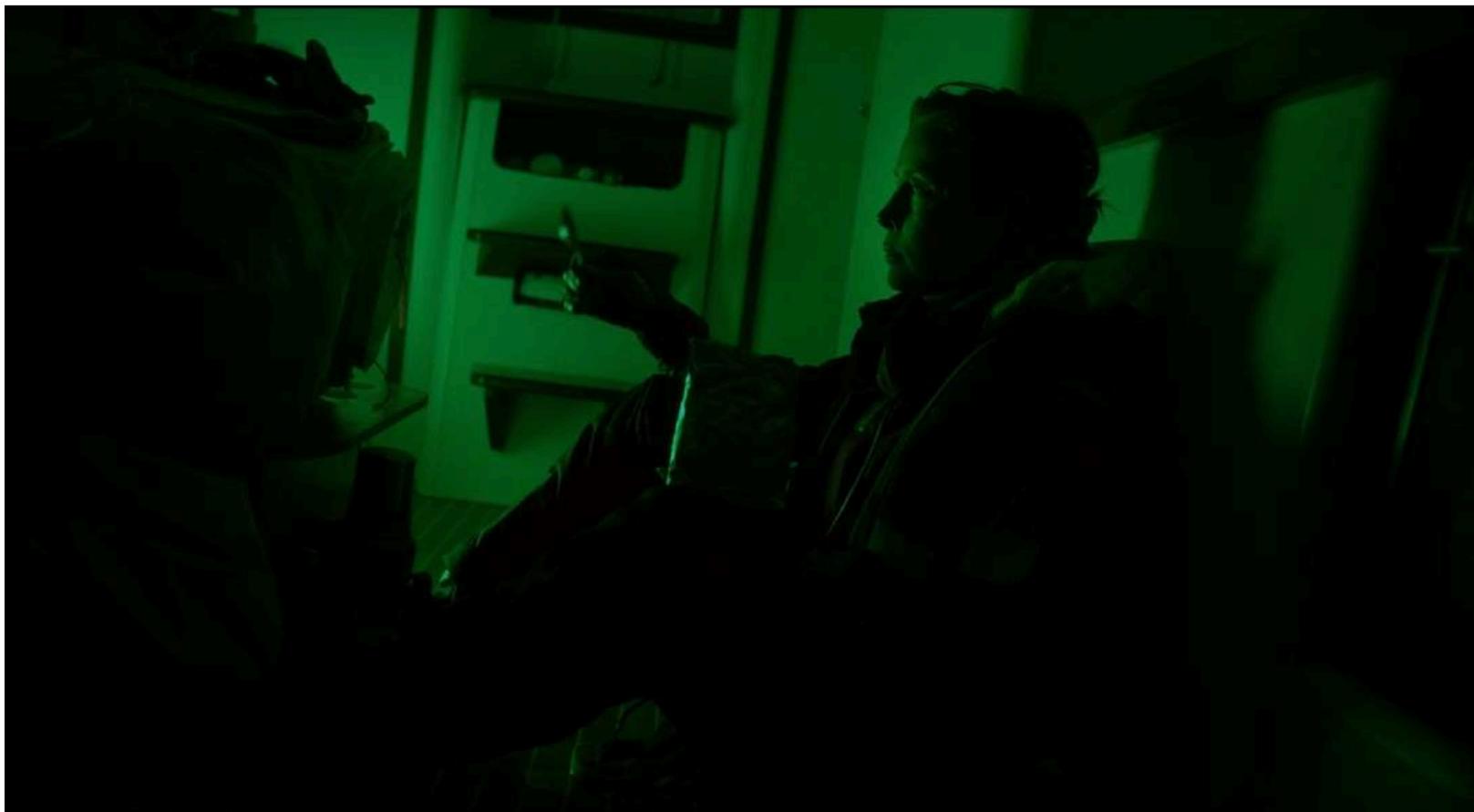
–*The Hollywood Reporter*

“Effective, precise performances on both sides of the camera – making tension a constant in the changing inflection of physical and moral jeopardy.”

–*The Georgia Straight*

"Impresses with its clean, purposeful direction even in its elliptical opening scenes, before the plot narrows to a laser focus."

–*MUBI*



# THREE QUESTIONS FOR DIRECTOR WOLFGANG FISCHER

## **How do you shoot a film at sea?**

Everyone I asked advised us against it. It can't work, it'll be hell, a nightmare. You can't control the sea, it does whatever it wants. And that's truly the way it was. It was dreadful. We filmed near Malta – and it was the worst autumn in a decade. There were nothing but hurricane winds. Then we sailed for sixteen hours between Malta and Sicily in one go and really, truly told the story while we were sailing. This was ultimately the most important decision. The project succeeded because we all subjected ourselves to this world. It was like making a documentary. There were eight people on the boat, and everyone had to hide in order not to show up in the film. The storm scenes were the only part we shot in a tank in Malta – with frightfully loud wave machines and water cannons that hurled 600 liters of water onto the boat.

The idea was for the takes to be as long as possible in order not to manipulate things with editing, and to show this bodily dance accomplished by the main character as a physical feat.

## **What was at the origin of this film, what did you have in mind?**

We were certain that we wanted to make a very physical, bodily film with little dialogue. A person who sets out into a hostile nature that can never be completely controlled, where it is necessary to be an expert. This was the point of departure: someone sets out into this world, confronts these elements, and tries to master the ensuing challenges. Bearing solitude is an important theme: who is capable of this today? She sets out without a cell phone, without internet access in order to be alone on this boat for weeks – and she loves it. This intrigued us. Rike doesn't need anyone else in order to experience joy. But she is a very sensual person. We see her swimming in the open sea, and when she feels the first rays of the sun on her face, or when the wind blows into the sails, we see her smile. Or when she talks about her dream, the paradise she wants to travel to.

## **Your film presents a moral dilemma . . . could we all find ourselves in the same situation as the protagonist?**

I absolutely believe we could. To take an everyday example: suppose someone is attacked next to us in the subway. We didn't choose this situation, but we need to act. Looking away is also a form of action. We need to decide. This can happen to every one of us. It is something universal. It changes one's life. As an emergency physician, Rike knows the rule: to first protect your own life. She follows this rule. But of course the question remains whether she made the right decision.

## **AWARDS & FESTIVALS**

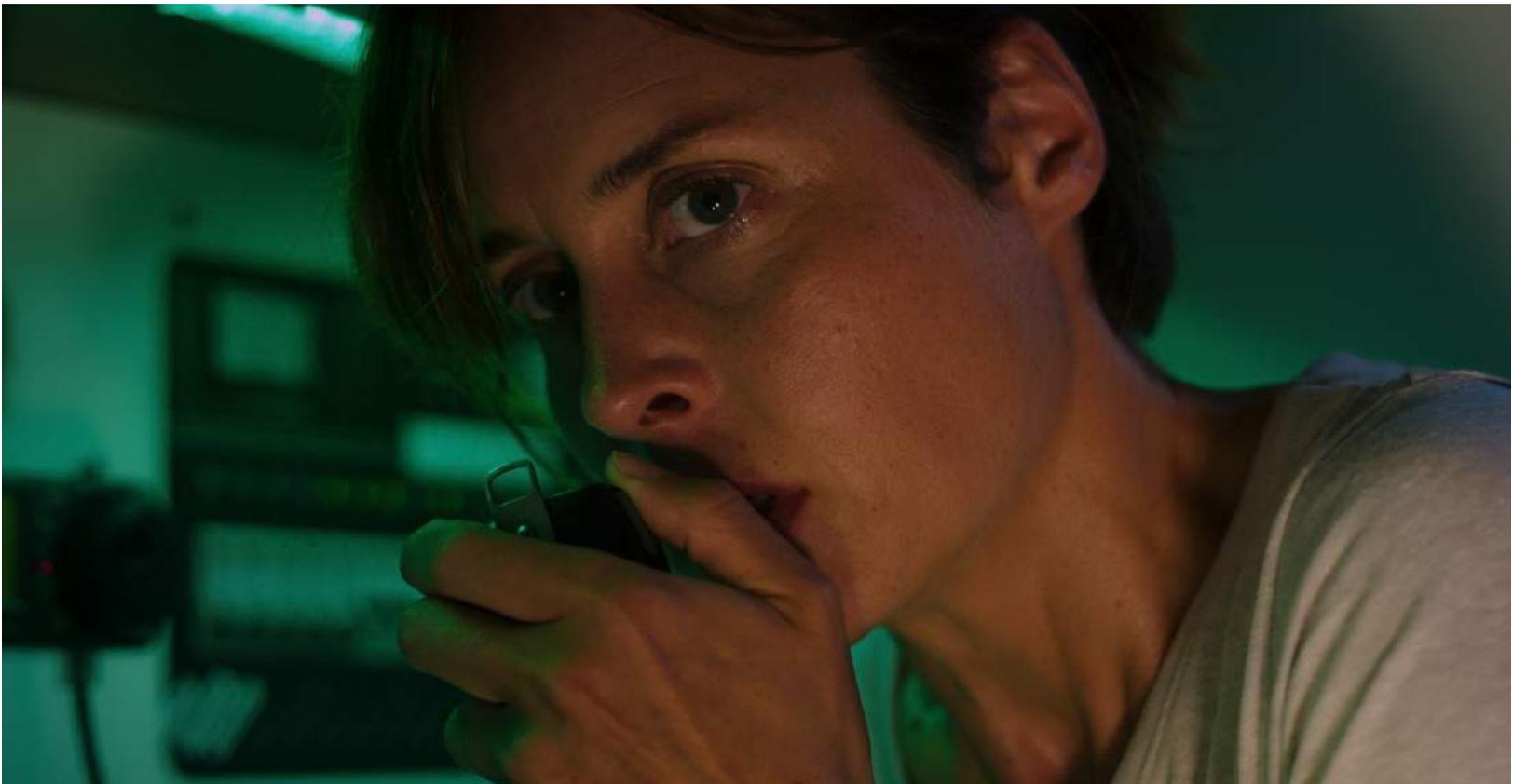
Winner – Best Director – Austrian Film Awards  
Winner – Best Screenplay – Austrian Film Awards  
Winner – Best Film Editing – Austrian Film Awards  
Winner – Best Cinematographer – Bavarian Film Awards  
Winner – Heiner Carow Prize – Berlin Int'l Film Festival  
Winner – Ecumenical Jury Prize – Berlin Int'l Film Festival  
Winner – Label Europa Cinemas – Berlin Int'l Film Festival  
Winner – Best Actress – Valletta Film Festival  
Winner – Best Cinematographer – Valletta Film Festival  
Winner – Flying Ox – Schwerin Art of Film Festival  
Winner – Audience Award – Schwerin Art of Film Festival  
Official Selection – Toronto Int'l Film Festival  
Official Selection – Vancouver Int'l Film Festival  
Official Selection – Chicago Int'l Film Festival  
Official Selection – Palm Springs Int'l Film Festival  
Official Selection – Montreal Festival du Nouveau Cinema  
Official Selection – Hamptons Int'l Film Festival  
Official Selection – Philadelphia Film Festival  
Official Selection – Denver Film Festival



# DOP'S STATEMENT

## **BENEDICT NEUENFELS, DOP**

STYX is one of the most exceptional projects I have been involved in. Years of preparation were necessary before we had the know-how and courage to shoot a film on the open sea. We developed special equipment in order to maneuver and stabilize the camera – our narrative standpoint – which was positioned according to the movement of the boat, the ocean waves, the calm sky, or the actors. Each of these decisions brings with it a different perception. In order to avoid a classic smug Mediterranean look and to be able to create different atmospheres to tell the story of Rike's journey, we decided to shoot in autumn, the time when the harsh weather begins. The wind, waves, and ocean swells became our "brothers in mind," and seasickness our common foe. The scenery of the ocean itself is reduced to its essence, does not allow for any distractions, and feels archaic – what a unique stage for telling such a story.



# CAST & CREW

<b>Starring</b>	Susanne Wolff Gedion Oduor Weseka
<b>Directed by</b>	Wolfgang Fischer
<b>Written by</b>	Wolfgang Fischer Ika Künzel
<b>Director of Photography</b>	Benedict Neuenfels aac/bvk
<b>Editor</b>	Monika Willi, aea
<b>Music</b>	Dirk von Lowtzow
<b>Sound Recordist</b>	Andreas Turnwald, Bvft
<b>Costume Design</b>	Nicole Fischnaller
<b>Hair &amp; Make Up Design</b>	Elke Hahn
<b>Sound Design</b>	Uwe Dresch Andre Zimmermann
<b>Re-Recording Mixer</b>	Tobias Fleig, Bvft
<b>Post Production Supervisor</b>	Niko Remus
<b>1st Assistant Director</b>	Kai Siggelkow
<b>Unit Production Manager</b>	Dirk Seibert
<b>Line Producer</b>	Charles E. Breitzkreuz
<b>Co-Producer</b>	Alexander Dumreicher-Ivanceanu Bady Minck
<b>Produced by</b>	Marcos Kantis Martin Lehwald Michal Pokorny
<b>Supported by</b>	<b>Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, Eurimages - Council of Europe, Austrian Film Institute, Malta Film Commission, German Federal Film Fund, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, German Federal Film Board, Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media</b>

## TECHNICAL DETAILS

Shooting Locations:	Malta & Köln
Shooting Time:	October 19th 2016 – December 18th 2016
Running Time:	94 minutes
Screen Ratio :	1.85:1
Format:	DCP