

Winner- Golden Bear (Top Prize)
54th International Film Festival Berlin
Winner – FIVE LOLAS (GERMAN ACADEMY AWARDS)

Mongrel Media presents

Head-On

German Title: GEGEN DIE WAND

A film by Fatih Akin

with

Sibel Kekilli, Birol Ünel, Catrin Striebeck, Güven Kiraç, Meltem Cumbul

Running Time: 118 mins
In German/Turkish with English subtitles

Distribution

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High res stills may be downloaded from <http://mongrelmedia.com/press.html>

THE CAST

Cahit	Birol Ünel
Sibel	Sibel Kekilli
Maren	Catrin Striebeck
Seref	Güven Kıraç
Selma	Meltem Cumbul
Yilmaz Güner	Cem Akin
Birsen Güner	Aysel Iscan
Yunus Güner	Demir Gökçöl
Nico	Stefan Gebelhoff
Dr. Schiller	Hermann Lause
Lukas	Adam Bousdoukos
Ammer	Ralph Misske
Hüseyin	Mehmet Kurtulu

THE CREW

Director/Script Producers	Fatih Akin Ralph Schwingel Stefan Schubert Wüste Filmproduktion
Coproducers	NDR / arte CORAZÓN International
Coproducers	Fatih Akin Mehmet Kurtulu
Story Editors	Andreas Thiel Jeanette Würfl, NDR Andreas Schreitmüller, arte
Production Manager	Ingrid Holzapfel
Director of Photography	Rainer Klausmann, bvk
Editor	Andrew Bird
Assistant Director & Artistic Director	Andreas Thiel
Unit Photographer	Kerstin Stelter
Gaffer	Torsten Lemke
Sound Engineer	Kai Lüde
Set Design	Tamo Kunz
Costumes	Katrin Aschendorf
Make-Up	Daniel Schröder & Nursen Balci
Casting	Mai Seck
Sound Mix	Richard Borowski
Music Consultant	Klaus Maeck

Synopsis

40-year-old Cahit (Birol Unel) is brought to a German psychiatric clinic after attempting suicide and sets out to start a new life, even as he longs for drugs and alcohol to numb his pain. Sibel (Sibel Kekilli) is young, pretty and, like Cahit, Turkish-German. She lives a lifestyle that is a bit too wild for her devout, conservative Muslim family and fakes a suicide attempt to try and escape them. But the incident brings shame upon her family, who insist that only marriage can save her. Sibel begs Cahit to marry her and he reluctantly agrees, perhaps in an effort to save her and to find meaning in his own life. Initially the two share an apartment and little else as Sibel sees other men and Cahit continues to have flings with his on-again, off-again girlfriend. Gradually, however, Cahit begins to fall in love with Sibel and she, in turn, comes to realize that she loves him—but not before an incident of jealous violence tests this fledgling romance. When Cahit is sent to jail and Sibel flees to Turkey, her heart, mind and soul remain with him—but for how long?

The winner of the top prize award (Golden Bear) at this year's Berlin Film Festival, Five Lola Awards (Germany's Oscars) including Best Film, Best Director, Best Actor and Best Actress, acclaimed filmmaker Fatih Akin's ***HEAD-ON*** delivers on the promise of his previous features with this raw, powerful love story that adroitly explores Turkish-German culture and the relationship of two people trying to find a middle ground between conflicting cultures.

Production Notes

The Idea

Director Fatih Akin had been contemplating the subject matter of **HEAD-ON** for several years before it was made into a film. The idea for the film came to him through a very personal experience: "I once had a Turkish girlfriend, a 'good buddy' type, who asked me to enter into a sham marriage with her." While he was researching his topic, Akin began to immerse himself in Turkish cinema. He states: "Turkish cinema has produced some genuine masterpieces. These are very serious, intense films, in which comedy and tragedy are closely bound to one another. This is truly great art." Akin's fascination with these cinematic gems permeates **HEAD-ON**. Akin and lead actor Birol Ünel had met at the time of Akin's multiple award-winning feature-film debut *Short Sharp Shock* and became friends over the years. "I admire him. He celebrates poetic self-destruction, like Kurt Cobain and Jim Morrison," says Akin, adding: "The role of the 'lost soul' Cahit was closely adapted to Birol – even though it contains many of my own longings and my desire to break through the norms."

The Casting

Whereas it was clear from the start for director Fatih Akin that Birol Ünel would be the anti-hero of **HEAD-ON**, the search for the right lead actress proved much more difficult. A casting agent finally discovered the then 22-year-old Sibel Kekilli in a Cologne shopping center. "We tried to tell her how her life would change," recounts Akin, and Sibel's answer was typical of her: "If I do something, I do it right." After holding her own against 350 competitors during four casting sessions, the young German-Turkish woman finally won the lead role. "Obviously, it is always a challenge on the set when some of the actors are professionals and others are amateurs," says Akin. "But it is also very exciting to bring together actors like Birol Ünel and Catrin Striebeck with someone like Sibel Kekilli."

The Production

Producers Stefan Schubert and Ralph Schwingel (WÜSTE Filmproduktion GmbH) describe the preparation of **HEAD-ON** as a focused collaboration. "Even the first version of the script had enormous power," recalls Stefan Schubert. The producers have produced all of the filmmaker's projects since his award winning *Sensin-You're The One!* in 1995. "We just have faith in Fatih," assert the two men unanimously.

Fatih Akin shot his drama **HEAD-ON** in chronological order. This allowed him to develop his characters more clearly and authentically, claims Akin. "The script is very closely oriented on the development of the actors," he comments. When, in the course of the shooting, he had the impression that the story had profoundly transformed his two lead actors in a physical and emotional way, he simply wrote a new ending to his drama befitting the change in the characters brought on by the collaborative process. "At first, the two were supposed to fall

back into their original situation. But after the development they went through, this would no longer have been believable. In retrospect, I am very happy with this change."

One complication which arose before the start of the shoot was that lead actor Birol Ünel was not allowed to enter Turkey. "He would have been taken into custody immediately at the airport because he never did his military service in Turkey," explains Akin, adding: "We had already worked out a Plan B – interior shots in Hamburg, outdoor shots in Istanbul with a double. But then while we were shooting, the Turkish government announced a change in the law."

The Culture Clash

In *HEAD-ON* a young Turkish woman tries to escape from her conservative family by entering into a sham marriage. In the light of the current head-scarf controversy in Germany and the attempts of orthodox Muslims to have their daughters excluded from sexual education and swimming, the story reflects a topic that is both up-to-date and explosive. In order to portray this German-Turkish culture clash on screen convincingly and without clichés, director Fatih Akin sought to grasp his subject from three perspectives: German-German, German-Turkish and Turkish. "I tried to create a certain amount of intersecting perspectives from these three very different standpoints." Director Akin felt even more confident that he had captured the right nuances in his portrayal of the characters when he viewed the casting videos of several candidates for the lead actress. "Among them were women with incredibly tragic lives. These tapes alone would be worth turning into a documentary. They gave me additional encouragement in my project," recalls Akin.

The Music

In the first draft of the script, Fatih Akin had already envisioned the subdivision of his film into musical acts – a stylistic element suggested by classical stage tragedies. His choice of the Romany musician Selim Sesler and his band goes back to a fortunate coincidence and an alcohol-drenched night: "Years ago, I heard Selim Sesler play in an Istanbul punk dive at 3 o'clock in the morning," remembers Akin. The melancholy songs, mainly Turkish traditionals, are interpreted by the actress and director Idil Üner. Akin explains why he chose her: "Idil has a great voice. And besides, she is my good-luck charm and has to be in each of my projects."

The Film Crew

Fatih Akin – Director & Scriptwriter

Born in Hamburg in 1973, the director, author and actor made his successful short-film debut with *Sensin–You’re The One!* in 1995. This film won the Audience Award at the International Short Film Festival in Hamburg, Germany. Akin's first feature film, the dark drama *Short Sharp Shock* was given an enthusiastic reception by audiences and press alike, and garnered nine awards altogether, including the Bronze Leopard at Locarno Film Festival. Fatih Akin later confirmed his versatility as a filmmaker with the romantic road movie *In July*, the documentary *Wir haben vergessen zurückzukehren* and *Solino*. The son of Turkish parents asserts that his latest film, the raw drama **HEAD-ON**, is his most personal work. **HEAD-ON** won the Golden Bear (Top Prize) at The 54th International Berlin Film Festival in 2004, and has won 5 German Academy Awards including best director and best film. He founded his own production company, Corazón International in 2003.

Filmography (as a director):

1995	<i>Sensin... You’re the one!</i> - Short Film
1996	<i>Weed</i> – Short Film
1997	<i>Short Sharp Shock</i>
2000	<i>In July</i>
2000	<i>Wir haben vergessen zurückzukehren</i>
2002	<i>Solino</i>
2003	Head-On

Selected Filmography (as an actor):

2001	<i>The Experiment</i>
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Rainer Klausmann – Director of Photography

It would be difficult to find a spot on this planet where Rainer Klausmann has not filmed. He beat a path through the South American jungle with director Werner Herzog and larger-than-life screen star Klaus Kinski for *Fitzcarraldo*, and went on to work with Herzog on projects including *Scream Of Stone* and *Lessons of Darkness*. He was also honored with the Bavarian Film Prize in 2000 for his work on the Oliver Hirschbiegel's anguishing psycho-thriller *The Experiment*. **HEAD-ON** is his second collaboration with Fatih Akin, having worked on the director's *Solino* in 2002.

Andrew Bird – Editor

Fatih Akin has found a long-term collaborator in editor Andrew Bird. The London born, Hamburg native has been editing the works of the German-Turkish director since the very beginning – from Akin's short-film debut *Sensin – You're The One!* to *Solino*, and now this project. Akin elaborates his reasons for such a long working relationship in stating: "This man can work wonders! I have never worked with another editor and feel no necessity to do so."

The Actors

Birol Ünel (Cahit)

"Birol is a little like a crazy brother to me. I admire him as a fan," comments Fatih Akin describing his relationship with lead actor Birol Ünel. Akin met the charismatic Turkish actor while shooting his first feature film *Short Sharp Shock* in 1997. Ünel also starred in Akin's warm-hearted, romantic road movie *In July* in 1999. In 2000, Ünel starred in Jean-Jacques Annaud's World War II drama *Enemy at the Gates*. He began his career in Germany as a stage actor, and recently, the actor appeared on stage as Siegfried in Frank Castorf's production *Die Nibelungen – Born Bad* in Berlin.

Sibel Kekilli (Sibel)

Born in Heilbronn, Germany, in 1980 to Turkish parents, Sibel Kekilli was discovered in a shopping center. The 23-year-old, who was then an administrative employee at the Essen City Hall, was practically swept off the street and into her first feature-film role. "She is talented and an absolute perfectionist," says producer Ralph Schwingel. Director Fatih Akin is also full of praise for her: "What Sibel begins, she carries it through." The young German-Turkish woman has since moved to Hamburg and is currently working on her acting career.

Catrin Stiebeck (Maren)

Catrin Stiebeck comes from a theatrical family, all of whom are actors. Born in Vienna in 1966, Catrin first made a name for herself as a stage actress in the mid 1980s in Germany. The 37-year-old actress also appears at the Volksbühne in Berlin and made her movie debut in Jürgen Schrader's *Mau Mau* of 1991. She later appeared in Lars Becker's *Schattenboxer* and *Bunte Hunde* as well as in Edward Berger's *Frau2 sucht Happy End*

Meltem Cumbul (Selma)

Born in Izmir, in 1970, Meltem Cumbul is one of the most popular actresses in Turkey today. In 1994 she was seen on the big screen for the first time, in *Mr. E* by Sinan Cetin, with whom she also shot the successful film *Propaganda* in 1999. Meltem was honored as best actress at the Antalya Film Festival in 2002 for *Abdulhamid Düserken*. Hollywood has also shown its admiration of the beautiful Turkish actress who lent her voice to the heroines in the Turkish versions of the Disney animated films *Hercules* and *Sindbad*.

Güven Kiraç (Uncle Seref)

Güven Kiraç won international acclaim for his first leading role in *Masumiyet* (1997): The multi-faceted actor, who also appears on stage, has played in several popular TV series, most recently in *Hayat Baglari* (2000-2002) in his native Turkey.