

Miroirs No.3

A film by Christian Petzold



86 mins / Germany 2025 / In German / Ratio: 1.85:1 / Sound 5.1

Cannes Film Festival Directors' Fortnight 2025

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Synopsis

On a weekend trip to the countryside, Laura, a piano student from Berlin, miraculously survives a car crash. Physically unhurt but deeply shaken, she is taken in by a local woman who witnessed the accident and now cares for Laura with motherly devotion.

When her husband and adult son also give up their initial resistance to Laura's presence, the four of them slowly build up some family-like routine and spend some days of happiness together. But soon they can no longer ignore their past, and Laura has to come to terms with her own life.

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CAST

Laura
Betty
Richard
Max
Jakob
Debbi
Roger
Emergency doctor
Policeman
Laura's Father
Garage customers

Stand up paddler
Recital pianists
Stage Manager

Paula Beer
Barbara Auer
Matthias Brandt
Enno Trebs
Philip Froissant
Victoire Laly
Marcel Heuperman
Hendrik Heutmann
Christoph Glaubacker
Christian Koerner
Lukas Elszel, Sascha Eichenauer,
Mehmet Kucak, Katrin Gajndr
Sebastian Gäbel
Yee Him Wong, Aaliyah Lynch
Patrick Reu

CREW

Written and directed by
Cinematography
Editor
Production Design
Costumes
Casting
Sound
Sound design
Mix
Make-up
Casting
Assistant directors
Production director
For ZDF and ARTE

Producers
Production
Co-production
With the support of

Germany 2025
86 mins / 1:1.85 / 5.1
In German

Christian Petzold
Hans Fromm bvk
Bettina Böhler
K.D. Gruber
Katharina Ost
Alexandra Montag
Andreas Mücke-Niesytka
Dominik Schleier, Marek Forreiter, Bettina Böhler
Lars Ginzler
Hannah Fischleder, Hanna Hackbeil
Alexandra Montag
Ires Jung, Shawn Bäumer
Elisa Hengen
Caroline von Senden ZDF, Claudia Tronnier ARTE,
Julius Windhorst ZDF/ARTE
Florian Koerner von Gustorf, Michael Weber, Anton Kaiser
Schramm Film - Koerner Weber Kaiser
ZDF, ARTE
Medienboard Berlin Brandenburg,
Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien
Filmförderungsanstalt, Deutscher Filmförderfonds

Christian Petzold

Christian Petzold was born in Hilden in 1960. After studying German and theatre at the Free University of Berlin, he studied film at the German Film and Television Academy Berlin (DFFB) from 1988 to 1994. He directed his first feature film in 1995.

Made in 2000, his film *The State I Am In* won Gold at the German Film Awards; he was awarded the Berlinale Silver Bear for Best Director for *Barbara* in 2012. His last film *Afire* won the Berlinale Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize in 2023.

FILMOGRAPHY

2025 Miroirs No. 3

2023 Afire

2020 Undine

2018 Transit

2015 Phoenix

2012 Barbara

2011 Dreileben: Beats Being Dead

2008 Jerichow

2007 Yella

2005 Ghosts

2003 Wolfsburg

2002 Something to Remind Me (Toter Mann)

2000 The State I Am In

1998 Die Beischlafdiebin

1996 Cuba Libre

1995 Pilotinnen

INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTIAN PETZOLD



(FALLING STONES)

How did the idea for your film come about?

The idea for this film came about during the filming of *Afire*, when we shot the scene at the table outside, with the poem by Heinrich Heine. Somehow, we felt a sense of lightness that day, but also some pressure, because a lot happens while Paula recites the poem. To loosen up the actors a bit, I talked about Heine and Heinrich von Kleist, who appear in the dialogue. I mentioned Kleist's letter, in which he describes how he spent the night in Würzburg and couldn't sleep. It's hot, his body is boiling hot, he walks through the streets and wants to get out of the city gate. Under the city gate, he looks up and sees that all that's holding this large stone gate together are individual stones that want to fall but, in that act, hold each other up. That is to say, the vaults in which we as human beings can live are created by the very act of falling, of collapse. And Kleist says that he felt tremendous comfort at that moment. I told this story to the actors, and we talked about how it's a beautiful image for cinema. That cinema, or fiction in general, is about something always on the brink of collapsing and vaults, structures, groups are formed in the process of barely averted collapse. And that's where the idea arose, at that table: There is a young woman who meets a devastated family that through her is put back together again. That was the first metaphor.

(ON THE BRIDGE)

At the beginning of your film, we see Paula Beer, who plays Laura, standing on a bridge and looking down. The scene is not explained.

We don't know anything at the beginning. We have signs and try to read these signs. We hear a city that is very loud, traffic rushes by, snatches of music emerge from cars. We see a young woman on an ugly bridge near a highway. It's almost a romantic image when you stand there and look into the water, it made Paula think of Undine. And this young woman there doesn't talk, she doesn't have a specific speed, she's just by herself. What I love in cinema is when films are on their own and don't need us as viewers. It is we who must approach the image; we must start seeing and understanding it, reading it, feeling it. Then the young woman goes down to the water, and for the first time she now perceives sounds, trees, leaves in the wind, a paddle stroke in the water. She looks up and sees a standup paddler, an image reminiscent of Arnold Böcklin's painting, "The Isle of the Dead." There is this upright ferryman who brings the dead to the Isle of the Dead. That is the first thing she perceives, death.

(MEETING)

This feeling that Laura is separated from the world runs through the whole beginning, in her apartment, on the journey in the car, at the port.

Laura is not really present in this world. She sits in a car, the others have music and conversations and goals, but she can't participate in these conversations. And then they drive past a house, and the gaze of a complete stranger, dressed in black, painting a fence, homes in on her. Not on the others, the gaze lies only on her alone. There is some sort of contact. She is chosen, like in a fairy tale. This woman with a brush in her hand brings a princess into a haunted house.

There is a second encounter before Laura has the accident.

The weekend outing of these young people could be beautiful. But Laura can no longer participate in this world. When the music producer says to Laura's boyfriend: "Drive the drama queen to the train station, and later we'll start again here" – at that moment she is basically no longer there. It was important to me that you realize how quickly you can get lost. And when they pass this house a second time, you have the feeling that Betty is now literally stopping the car. The first time it was a passing, now it's a confrontation. They look at each other. And at that moment, something like a contract has been concluded between the two.

(THE RED CONVERTIBLE)

The accident that brings Laura together with Betty is not seen.

You only hear the accident. The road is empty, you can hear bird calls, nature is startled. And then there's the red convertible. This is another fairy tale sign, this red convertible of film history, just like Laura's lost shoe after the accident. The red convertible also comes from the world of fairy tales. But the prince here is different, the prince is death.

What the accident does to Laura is only hinted at. At one point she says: I should be sad, but I'm not. That's a motif that comes up again and again in your films, a separation.

Yes, she can only survive if she isolates herself from the accident completely. That turns her cold towards her past. In the film, she is basically reborn through the accident. She is brought home by Betty, she is put to bed, she is told a story, she is shown how a fence is painted, herbs are explained to her and her senses awakened, she gets her first bicycle... Very elementary things. Basically, she experiences a whole biography again in a few days, but one that has nothing to do with her life before. As if she experiences a completely new start.



(THE WORKSHOP)

Father and son appear relatively late in the film. First Betty tells us about them, then we see them in the workshop, then they accept the invitation to dinner without knowing what to expect.

The two men are eating a Serbian bean soup in front of the workshop, drinking their beer, customers are coming, something not quite legal is obviously taking place. In the background, there are rudiments of the GDR, an old tractor, with all the junk cars there, but there is also something American about it. They apparently can't keep up with the repairs,

maybe no one needs them anymore, because in capitalism what is broken is thrown away. The two of them can repair everything. And repairing an object means understanding what is broken about it. They also want to understand what is broken in this family. But they don't manage to do that. They can't fix what happened here. And they live in a temporary building, like in a trailer park, in two rooms next to the workshop. You can see it when they come home in the evening after dinner, the son goes to his cubicle, there is still a drying rack in front of it, and the father smokes a cigarette in the evening light. To show this temporary solution, a curtain and a drying rack are enough. Cinema is what we don't see, it is imagination. Just as we never see the dead daughter's room in the film. But we assume and suspect, and that is something much richer.

(CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE)

We see the arrival of the men at the family house from Laura's perspective.

That's always the case in this film: we see people through the lens, father and son at the table in front of the workshop, and then we see them with the gaze of someone else. Now we see with Laura's gaze how they get out of the car, how they examine the painted fence. And that makes the two of them different characters. I had discussed this as a basic principle with Hans Fromm. There is always an objective and a subjective viewpoint, because any family is made up of objective truths and subjective feelings. And that has to have a rhythm. Now, when all four come together for the first time, we start with Laura's gaze. But afterwards we don't see her cooking, and there is no shot from the kitchen to the waiting family. Because what happens there, the waiting, the place setting that doesn't belong there, the son tossing up the plate, the food, the looks, all this happens only within the triangle of this family, never from Laura's perspective. Laura is the object of the family here.

(THE ROAD)

The road between the workshop and the house, with these two lanes, marks both the distance and the connection between the two worlds.

When we discovered the house with this road in front of it, I was totally thrilled. This road has only two paved tracks, and through these two tracks there is a wonderful depth in the picture. This road also became important for the bicycle scenes later, because everyone rides on their own track, and it is already important for the beginning when the young people leave the city and come to what's a glorified dirt road. We will come to areas where the navigation system probably fails, where fairy tales are possible. We lose our way. And when you stray from the path, the story begins. Our shooting locations were very close to each other; we found everything there. I think it's important that we don't just paste together random places. We must show a world that truly exists in an image and find its

magic, not conjure up a world from the outside with money. Because the locations were so close to each other and because we shot chronologically, we were able to use everything that is there, and we could also use everything that nature created: the summer, the winds, the change in the weather in the transition to autumn or this wonderful sky before the rain, the storm.

(LIES AND LAUGHTER)

Max, the son, in particular, has difficulty coming to terms with Laura's presence.

There is the scene where Max comes to the house, and we notice that he wants to know what is really going on here. Who is this young woman? She works there in the kitchen garden; she offers him coffee as if this world already belonged to her. That makes him completely furious. In the background, the piano is tuned, and we learn that she is a piano student. And then she says: "I think your parents want some time alone..." At this moment we feel that Laura has arrived in this pretend life. Max feels this too, and he refuses it. And at the same time, he realizes that he likes her despite everything. That's also something I like about cinema. The son senses the lie; he knows that this lie will lead to disaster. But he can't destroy the lie because he doesn't want to destroy these few days of happiness for his parents.

One of the most beautiful scenes in the film is when Max and Laura suddenly start laughing at the same time.

They sit together at the table in front of the workshop, and they listen to the song by Frankie Valli ... This is a moment when the actors don't know how to go on. They are in the situation of their characters, they know what is happening, but there is not enough in the character to be filmed listening to music together for five minutes. You can't really perform that. And the two notice that at the same moment, they look at each other and start laughing. At this moment, however, they are no longer Laura and Max, but they are Paula and Enno. And this laughter is just the right laugh for the scene, because both are completely themselves at this moment. He is no longer the son who misses his life, and she is no longer the surrogate daughter. This moment was important to me, to film them until they laugh on their own.

(THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER)

The loss of a child is a motif that already exists in *Ghosts* and *Wolfsburg*.

You can tell a story of lost children or of the parents who lost a child. These are the two stories, Hansel and Gretel and The Shroud by the Brothers Grimm. These two stories have always interested me. When you're still a child yourself, the biggest fear is that of getting

lost. And when you have children of your own, it's the fear of losing the child. There are terrible things that happen to you, but they also bring you together. But the loss of the child is something that the parents can hardly manage together. Whether the child has been kidnapped or has had an accident, you find a narrative of guilt to impose order on this world of loss, and over time it is almost always directed against the other person or against oneself. And as a result, the marriage falls apart. But in our film, there is nothing at all about Jelena, the lost child. Nor does anybody ask about her. There are only hints.

For us, the situation is clear the moment Betty accidentally calls Laura Jelena.

Laura knows that something is off. She knows that someone must have lived in this room once, that someone once played this piano, that someone rode that bicycle. But now it's all for her. The shoes fit her, she likes the T-shirt, she even likes being mothered. This is good for her, even if it is wrong. But the film is not about uncovering a secret behind the story. The film's interest is in how these people cope with their traumas, losses and expectations. Basically, there is an agreement when Laura goes to the window at night and sees Betty down on the street in front of the house. She always stands right there in front of the house. This is where she has painted the fence, and at night, when she can't sleep, she's always in the place where she expects her daughter to return. It's like a horror movie. And Laura observes her from above, and suddenly Betty turns around and looks up at her. Something happens, some kind of understanding: "I know that I'm playing the daughter here for you. Let's not talk about it, let's enjoy the time, every second." And at this moment, Betty no longer looks at her dead daughter, but at the princess. Such moments, such glances appear again and again in the film.



(HARBINGERS)

When Laura plays the Chopin piece on the piano for the family, it is a bit as if a door to Jelena were opening, as if the truth were asserting itself against the false for a moment. It's Laura who plays for the first time in a long time.

The way Paula acted in this scene was vital. The way Betty says: "Can you play for me?" is terrifying, it sends a shiver down your spine. And Paula, Laura, takes a few seconds, stands up and simply says: "Yes." She does not comment on the inappropriateness but ignores it. I'm playing now. I'm not doing it for your sake. I do it for myself. And in that moment, she achieved something. This basically corresponds to the final scene. I'm here now, I'm saved. And the parents and brother only see her back as she plays, and maybe they see someone else playing there, the lost daughter or sister. We let the scene run for a long time during the shoot, the emotion of the family, the tears. But in the editing suite, we decided to go out much earlier. It was important to give the scene the opportunity to create aftershocks.



It almost seems like a farewell to Jelena.

Something has happened at this moment. But no one can yet name what. The parents go down to the river together, pick plums, and the son runs off as quickly as possible. You have just seen the dead sister, daughter. I think there is a detachment that has happened here without Laura knowing it. Laura gets a coffee, sits down on the veranda and is in a good mood. She's doing well, she was able to play the piano again, that's also a liberation. And then the dishwasher explodes.

(A BARGE ON THE OCEAN)

Even though it is not shown in the film, we feel how much this family, these three people, have fought and continue to fight to somehow stay together after the catastrophe.

When I write, I always imagine that the film is the dream of one of the protagonists. With *Phoenix*, I had imagined that Nelly in Auschwitz would dream of a life in which the wound that the Shoah tears forever does not exist at all, that she can make up for lost time. And here I imagined that a young piano student would play a piece of music by Ravel, *Miroirs No. 3*, and go on an imaginary journey, to a family where she could be happy. The subtitle of the piece is "A barge on the ocean". When you hear this music, you understand that there are storms, that the barge could sink. And this family here has gone down with the death of the daughter. Now the wreckage is floating on the surface of the ocean, and these three survivors are trying to build a life raft out of the debris. That's the story of the film. The three castaways swim towards each other and try to connect the parts to form a life raft and reach the shore. That's the metaphor.

And a fourth castaway, who is washed up from somewhere else, is also building this raft.

Yes, all the parts are needed for this survival raft that will eventually carry them ashore. Maybe it's the case that all movies basically tell stories of people trying to build a survival situation out of the rubble. Cinema deals with how to survive. Not how we live, but how we survive.

(ENSEMBLE)

You have already worked with all your leading actors repeatedly. How important is this continuity to you?

I like the fact that you have ensembles and shoot something with them and then think about the next project. When we talked about *Miroirs No. 3* during the shoot of *Afire*, I was only able to do so because we were able to develop something out of the context of working together and trusting one another. For example, I think that Richard in this film and Helmut in *Afire*, both played by Matthias Brandt, have something to do with each other, Laura and Nadja and the characters of Enno Trebs in the last two films also have something to do with each other. Actors don't enact just anything there is in this world, but they work with something that they also develop from the previous character they have played. In *The State I Am In*, Barbara Auer played a mother who had to be very strict to organize life in the underground. And she basically had to replace her daughter's life, the world, school, which then leads to disaster. Barbara has now taken something from this character into our film. The fact that I like to continue working with the actors has not only to do with the fact that they are all great, but also with the richness they have gained in earlier films that they can use for the new stories.

(DREAMED LIFE)

The dreamed life is perhaps a theme in all your films in a certain way. In *Yella*, in the end, it was more the audience who didn't want to leave this dream life. Here, like the mother in *Ghosts*, it's the protagonists.

We originally even had a different ending with which we would have stayed in this dreamed life: The family sits on the porch and sees Laura, who comes back and opens the garden gate. But that was wrong. That was driven by my need for harmony and not by the logic of the film. When we filmed *Miroirs*, the war against Ukraine was in its third year, Trump's election victory was looming, fascist tendencies were spreading almost everywhere in the world. And I had the desire to be with this family out there in the Uckermark, in this beautiful house, with these great people, until the world was alright again. And this need for harmony engendered the thought, Laura will come back at the end, and there they are now sitting on the veranda and eating plum cake. Like in fairy tales. But it was clear that this was not true, that it did not work. We don't need a fairy tale at the end, but an insight. So that these three can continue to live as a family and above all as individuals, so that Laura can step back into her own life. The life raft puts the castaways ashore at different points. And they don't have to dream of a life anymore. These four people no longer had access to the world, they were no longer interested in how it felt to smell, taste, see. And they have succeeded, as a group, to reawaken their senses. They have learned to be human again.

They can separate again.

Betty, Richard and Max see in the concert hall that the person who was in their care can get along now without them. That may be painful, but it is also the whole goal. The three of them can sit on the porch again and be together. That's why I find the film so comforting at the end, when I see Laura in her apartment, looking at herself, not at us, but all by herself, and then a very faint smile flits across her face ... That makes Paula Beer so great. Laura knows that all this time has been her salvation. And that's why it's beautiful. Even if it was all a lie. It's beautiful.



PAULA BEER

Paula Beer, born in 1995, began her career as an actress in Chris Kraus' *The Poll Diaries* in 2009, for which she received the Bavarian Film Prize in 2011. Further roles immediately followed, including collaborations with directors such as Volker Schlöndorff, Andreas Prochaska, Theresa von Eltz and Sherry Hormann. For her performance in François Ozon's *Frantz* she received the Marcello Mastroianni Award at the Venice Film Festival 2016. After her leading role in the multi-award-winning ZDF mini-series *Bad Banks* (2017) she collaborated with Christian Petzold for the first time for *Transit* in 2018. For their next collaboration *Undine* (2020) she received the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival and the European Film Award as Best Actress. After *Afire* (2023), *Miroirs No. 3* is her fourth collaboration with Christian Petzold.

BARBARA AUER

Barbara Auer was born in Konstanz and studied at the Hamburg University of Music and Performing Arts. She is a widely recognized and multiple award-winning stage and film actress and has been engaged by various theatres such as Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen, Burgtheater Vienna and Hamburg's St. Pauli Theater. On screen, she appeared in award-winning cinema and television films such as Alexander Kluge's *The Power of Emotion*, Dominik Graf's *Journey to Weimar*, Margarethe von Trotta's *I Am The Other Woman*, and in *The Book Thief* by Brian Percival. With Christian Petzold she has worked for many years, beginning in 2001 with *The State I Am In*, continuing with *Transit* (2018) and *Miroirs No. 3*.

MATTHIAS BRANDT

Matthias Brandt is one of the most distinguished German actors and voice actors. The multiple award-winning Berliner embodied the role of Chief Inspector Hanns von Meuffels in the popular German crime series *Polizeiruf 110* for seven years. In 2016, his first book “Raumpatrouille” was published, followed by the novel “Blackbird” in 2019. At the Berliner Ensemble he has been on stage with *My Name be Gantenbein* (2022) and *Waiting for Godot* (2025) and appeared on the Netflix series *King of Stunks*, which is inspired by the biggest economic scandal in German history. Since 2022, he has starred together with Anke Engelke in the New Year’s Eve series *Kurzschluss*. *Miroirs No. 3* is his third cinema collaboration with Christian Petzold after *Transit* (2018) and *Afire* (2023).

ENNO TREBS

Enno Trebs, born in Berlin in 1995, attended the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts from 2016 to 2020 and was then a permanent ensemble member at the German Theatre Berlin until 2023. Already as a child, he appeared in front of the camera for film and television productions, such as in 2008 for *The White Ribbon* by Michael Haneke and the following year in Chris Kraus’ *The Poll Diaries*. In 2017 and 2018, he received invitations to the Berlinale for the films *Tiger Girl* (2015) by Jakob Lass and *Lost Ones* (2017) by Felix Hassenfratz in the categories Panorama and German Cinema Perspectives. This was followed by collaborations with directors such as Hans-Christian Schmid for *We Are Next of Kin* (2022), Burhan Qurbani for *No Beast So Fierce* (2024) and Ido Fluk for *Köln 75* (2024). *Miroirs No. 3* is his third collaboration with Christian Petzold after *Undine* (2020) and *Afire* (2023).