

# FAMILY REUNION

## Marthaler's Drama in a Grand Hotel

A Film by Sarah Derendinger



### Award for the best Newcomer-Film 2009

George Foundation, Cinema Suisse at the Intern. Documentaryfilmfestival  
Visions du réel, Nyon, Switzerland

### Statement of the Jury

It is an invitation to a strange family celebration. In a magic and worrying decor, we participate in a ritual that will never take place again. The poetry of film blends with that of theatre and singing. It is not a personal account of the preparation of a show, but a creation in itself, driven by that of Marthaler and his ensemble.

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Documentary, Switzerland 2009  
60 minutes / 52 minutes, digital video, colour  
Original version: German  
Subtitles: English

A production by  
freihändler

In coproduction with  
Schweizer Fernsehen  
ZDF Theaterkanal

## Synopsis

As carpets are rolled and furniture covered, a grand hotel in the Swiss alps ushers in the off season. Melancholy song floods the empty halls as director Christoph Marthaler and his theatrical family rob the hotel of its sleep with endless choir practices – for six long weeks, right up until opening night. But one person is missing from the rehearsals: Jürg Kienberger, scion of the hotel family and veteran musician-member of Marthaler’s ensemble, is recovering from an operation on his knees, killing time with a one-man show at the rehab clinic. Aloof from the goings-on, Kienberger reflects with subtle irony on the evolution of a Marthaler production, airing the secret of the cult phenomenon without giving it away. Meanwhile, the troupe are raising ghosts from 100 years of the hotel’s history. Both jovial and saturnine, the quirky loners are united when they sing. The film escorts its viewers to a feast of music and poetry, and invites them to join a theatrical family.

## Credits

Writer and director	Sarah Derendinger
Script consultant	Christoph Kohler
Cinematography	Matthias Kälin, Sarah Derendinger
Boom operator	Balthasar Jucker
Assistant director	Annette Carle
Editing	Ruth Schläpfer
Sound design	Knut Jensen
English subtitles	Raphaël Newman
Producers	Stella Händler, Claudia Frei
Commissioning editors	Thomas Beck, Urs Augstburger SF, Dieter Schneider, ZDF
With the support of	Teleproduktions-Fonds GmbH Ernst Göhner Stiftung Kanton Graubünden Dr. Adolf Streuli-Stiftung Succès passage antenne Succès cinéma Waldhaus Sils-Maria

## With appearances by

Director	Christoph Marthaler
Narrator	Jürg Kienberger
Actors, Musicians	Claudia Carigiet, Raphael Clamer, Jan Czajkowski, Bendix Dethleffsen, Olivia Grigolli, Rosemary Hardy, Christoph Homberger, Ueli Jäggi, Josef Ostendorf, Sasha Rau, Nic Rosat, Bettina Stucky, Graham Valentine, Trio Farkas: Jurai Farkas, Eugen Bitto, Robert Cibula
Hotel management	Urs Kienberger, Maria and Felix Dietrich-Kienberger

## Sarah Derendinger – Director

1981 – 1985 Training as a photographer at the Bern School of Design

1985 – 1988 Training at the Theaterschool in Amsterdam

1988 – 1993 Studies at the Audiovisual Design Department of the Basel School of Design

Until 1997, in addition to her creative activities in theatre and the visual arts Sarah Derendinger also worked as a camerawoman for such institutions as SF, 3Sat, Arte and BBC, collaborating on documentary films with Edith Jud, May B. Broda and Luzia Schmid, among others. In 1993 she was awarded the Panasonic Germany Prize for Best Camera.

In 2001 Derendinger began to direct feature films for television while studying screenwriting and direction in the EKLAN international training programme offered by MEDIA in Warsaw.

### Filmography

- 2009        **Familientreffen – Marthalers Theater im Grand Hotel**  
(Family Reunion – Marthaler's Drama in a Grand Hotel) documentary, 59 min.
- 2009        **Blumenzimmer (The Flower Chamber)** experimental dance-film, 20 min.
- 2001–2005   **Café-Bâle** TV series (2 seasons)
- 2001–2005   **Lüthi & Blanc** TV series (2 seasons)
- 2001        **Die Beule (The Boil)** short film, video, 18 min.
- 1992        **Fahrt ins Grüne (A Ride in the Country)** short film, video, 15 min.
- 1990        **Splitsch Splatsch Rosengewitter (Splish Splash A Storm of Roses)**  
experimental video, 9 min. (Young talent prize of both Basels)

### Films in Progress

- 2008/09     **Herzschlag (Heartbeat)** short film, 6 min. (in production)
- 2009/10     **Uferlos (Boundless)** feature film (script in progress)

### Video Installations for the Theatre

- 2003        **Vanitas** musical with Björn Jensen, Gare du Nord Basel
- 2002        **Winter** play directed by Jossi Wieler, Schauspielhaus ZH
- 2001        **idiot** opera directed by Björn Jensen, Theater Basel
- 2000        **Surrogate Cities** opera by Heiner Goebbels, Pocketopera Nürnberg
- 2000        **ADA** Video opera for the opening of the Viper Video and Film Festival in Basel
- 1999        **Yuhi No Mimi** Japanese opera with Björn Jensen, Theater Basel
- 1999        **Ballo in Maschera** opera directed by Jürgen Flimm, Opernhaus Zürich

## Director's statement

In *Family Reunion* I go in search of Marthaler's secret. At the same time, however, I am careful not to explain that secret, but simply to display it, and to let the viewers get as close as possible to his process - to let them become members of the «Marthaler family».

When I heard that Christoph Marthaler and his theatre troupe were working on a performance at the Hotel Waldhaus in Sils Maria during the off season, I was seized by the urge to capture their rehearsals on film. I also learned that Jürg Kienberger, a key member of the Marthaler family as well as a scion of the hotel dynasty, was unable to take part in the preparations, which allowed me to use him, from his position at a remove from events, as a narrator in my film.

The biggest hurdle, I believed, would be getting Christoph Marthaler on board, because he had famously never before permitted an outsider to attend his rehearsals. So I was amazed when the celebrated director immediately and enthusiastically agreed to my request! His sole condition was that I film the rehearsals as camerawoman myself; and since I actually do have the requisite experience, I was able to agree to this stipulation, not with reluctance, but in anticipation of a welcome challenge.

In *Family Reunion*, spectators sense the spirit of complete openness in which the Marthaler family enters the blank space of the creative process. It's wonderfully exciting to observe the evolution of a new Marthaler theatrical production – despite the glacial pace at which it proceeds – and to notice the way the many songs they use help the members to bear the emptiness out of which a finished work is born. I am delighted to be able to take all those who watch my film on a timeless musical journey into the splendid isolation of Sils Maria.

Sarah Derendinger