



## German Films Screenings Beijing

**Film:** *The Lives of Others (Das Leben der Anderen)*

**Director:** Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck

**Time:** 23 April, 2009, 7:30pm

**Venue:** German Embassy School Beijing, Auditorium  
Jia 49, Liangmaqiao Road, Chaoyang District

**Duration:** 137 mins

**Awards:** Won Oscar. Another 59 wins & 21 nominations

- Australian Film Critics Association 2007 Film Awards
  - Best Overseas Film (commendation)
- 79th Academy Awards
  - Best Foreign Language Film winner
- 64th Golden Globe Awards
  - Best Foreign Language Film nomination
- César Awards 2007
  - Best Foreign Film winner
- Independent Spirit Awards 2007
  - Best Foreign Language Film
- International Film Festival Rotterdam 2007 audience award[28]
- Los Angeles Film Critics Association Awards 2006
  - Best Foreign-Language Film
- European Film Awards 2006
  - Best Film

- Best Actor: Ulrich Mühe
  - Best Screenwriter: Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck
- German Film Awards 2006
  - Best Film
  - Best Actor
  - Best Supporting Actor
  - Best Director
  - Best Cinematography
  - Best Production Design
  - Best Screenplay
- Palm Springs International Film Festival 2007 Audience Choice Award
- Vancouver International Film Festival 2006 People's Choice Award
- Montreal Festival du Nouveau Cinéma 2006 People's Choice Award
- London Film Festival 2006 Satyajit Ray Award
- Zagreb Film Festival 2006
  - Best Film
  - Audience Award
- Copenhagen International Film Festival 2006
  - Best Male Actor
  - Audience Award
- Seville Film Festival 2006 Silver Giralddillo
- Locarno International Film Festival 2006 Audience Award
- Warsaw International Film Festival 2006 Audience Award
- Bavarian Film Awards 2006
  - Best Actor: Ulrich Mühe
  - Best Newcomer Director: Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck
  - Best Screenplay: Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck
  - VGF Producer Prize: Wiedemann & Berg

## Plot

In the [East Germany](#) (GDR) of 1984, [Stasi](#) captain Wiesler is shown interrogating a prisoner suspected of helping an acquaintance defect to the West. The scene of the interrogation is intercut with Wiesler using the recording of the interrogation to instruct a class on methods of interrogation. He points out several ways the Stasi can tell a liar or an innocent person, such as their behaviour at being kept up late and answers to questions. Eventually the prisoner provides a name.

Wiesler's old classmate, now his superior, Lt. Colonel Grubitz, assigns him to spy on playwright Georg Dreyman, who is suspected of pro-[Western](#) sympathies. Stasi agents secretly enter Dreyman's flat, install [small microphones](#) and then monitor activity from the attic space above. When he realizes that a neighbor had observed them, Wiesler

threatens to have her daughter's place at the university revoked if she exposes the microphones' presence.

Wiesler soon finds out that the real reason behind the surveillance is that a minister named Hempf desires Dreyman's girlfriend, actress Christa-Maria Sieland. Dreyman's arrest would rid Hempf of a rival. Wiesler, a true believer in the [socialist regime](#), is disillusioned by a minister abusing his powers for personal interests.



Wiesler listens in on Dreyman and Christa-Maria's conversations.

Christa-Maria lives with Dreyman but secretly also sees Hempf, fearing the consequences of refusing such a powerful man. She also apparently relies on Hempf to get illegal prescription drugs. Due to Wiesler's secret intervention, Dreyman discovers the liaison and a week later confronts Christa-Maria, asking her not to see Hempf. Christa-Maria defends her behaviour, arguing that they are both in bed with the regime in order to be allowed to continue their artistic careers, and leaves. At a pub, Wiesler approaches her, pretending to be a fan, and insinuates that her talent is great enough that she doesn't have to give herself to Hempf. Christa-Maria leaves, seemingly to see the minister. Later, Wiesler learns from the surveillance report that Christa-Maria immediately returned to Dreyman.

Dreyman, though a faithful socialist, disapproves of the way dissidents are treated, and quietly stands up for those he thinks unfairly treated. One friend, Jerska, is a director who has been [blacklisted](#). At Dreyman's birthday party, Jerska gives Dreyman a sheet of music to a piece titled "Sonata for a Good Man", and shortly afterwards commits [suicide](#). This finally spurs Dreyman into speaking out against the regime. He arranges to anonymously publish an article on carefully concealed suicide rates in the GDR in the [West German](#) magazine [Der Spiegel](#). Because all [typewriters](#) are registered, Dreyman uses a typewriter smuggled in from the west with a red ribbon to write the article, which he hides under the threshold between two rooms of his apartment. Before discussing sensitive issues in the flat, Dreyman and his friends try to test whether the flat is bugged by a feigned attempt at smuggling. However, out of compassion, Wiesler fails to pass on the information, making the conspirators think that the flat is not bugged.

Though Wiesler intended his inactivity to be a one-off move, his compassion for the couple grows and he continues to lie in his reports to protect Dreyman, and also reduces surveillance hours, so that he no longer has to share the work with an assistant. Wiesler is also upset when even a hired prostitute has no time for him as she merely moves on to her next "appointment". He starts to steal books off Dreyman's desk and reads them

himself. Eventually, Dreyman and his friends finish the article and it is published, upsetting the East German government, which is unable to identify the typewriter used.

Meanwhile, the minister, angered by Christa-Maria's refusal, orders Grubitz to destroy her. Grubitz and his men catch her red-handed in the act of illegally purchasing prescription drugs. She is arrested and, under pressure, reveals Dreyman's authorship of the suicide article. The house is searched by security officials, but fail to find the typewriter, as Christa-Maria had concealed the hiding-place under the threshold. After this failure, Grubitz calls in Wiesler to [interrogate](#) Christa-Maria but warns him that a failure to produce results will cost them both.

Wiesler interrogates Christa-Maria (with Grubitz watching through a two-way mirror) with the same flawlessness that characterized him for years. She breaks down and tells him where the typewriter is hidden. During a second search, the secret hiding-place is opened, but is found empty. Wiesler, in his determination to protect the couple, has rushed to the flat in advance of the Stasi search team, removed the typewriter and hidden it in his car. During the search, Christa-Maria storms out of the flat in shame, runs into the street and is hit by a truck. Wiesler, who is waiting outside the building, is unable to help her and tries to tell her that he has removed the typewriter. Dreyman arrives at the scene and Christa-Maria dies in his arms.

After Christa-Maria's death, the surveillance is called off. Wiesler is demoted to Department M, to tediously steam-open letters all day with no chance for promotion until he retires. Four years and seven months later, Wiesler is in the middle of opening letters when a co-worker with a radio notifies him of the fall of the [Berlin Wall](#). Upon hearing the news, Wiesler and his co-workers leave their workplace.

After [German reunification](#), Dreyman learns from Hempf (who is now a successful businessman) that he was under intensive surveillance. Probing into his Stasi file, he finds out that, while agent "HGW XX/7" had heard Dreyman's activity against the regime, such as the publication of the suicide article, he had fabricated stories that had prevented Dreyman from being found out. At the final page, a smudge of red ink reveals the agent's contact with the hidden typewriter. Dreyman asks for the agent's identity. Dreyman succeeds in locating Wiesler, and he watches for a few minutes from a distance as Wiesler goes about his new job delivering advertising leaflets.

Two years later, Dreyman publishes a novel, *The Sonata of Good Men*. Wiesler sees the book advertised in a bookstore, and finds that it is dedicated "To HGW XX/7, with gratitude". He goes to buy the book and, when asked if he wants it gift wrapped, he responds: "No, it's for me."

