

## **Toni Erdmann (2016) Ade**

P Michell, 2019

A one of a kind longish film. Notable for the unrestrained naturalistic acting from the two leads. Simple but strong story line with unexpected comedic moments – some of which work well. Much talk about an American re-make with Ade as Executive Producer. Initially Jack Nicholson sold the project to Paramount with his lead. However he has dropped out.

**Director** - Maren Ade

**Writer** - Maren Ade

**Stars** - Sandra Hüller, Peter Simonischek, Michael Wittenborn, Thomas Loibl, Trystan Pütter

**Running Time** - 2h 42m

### **Synopsis:**

*Winfried Conradi (Simonischek) is a divorced music teacher from Aachen with a passion for bizarre pranks involving several fake personas. Following the death of his beloved dog, he decides to reconnect with his daughter, Ines (Huller), who is pursuing a career in business consulting. Ines is working in Bucharest, Romania, on an outsourcing project in the oil industry. Consumed by her work, she seems to have little time for her family.*

### **Director/ Screenplay / Producer - Maren Ade:**

With only five credits as director – she now seems to have turned her attention to producing with some 33 credits - Five projects currently happening! Her third film.

Critics have generally described the film as a **comedy-drama**. Ade said she thought the story "always had both genres within it, because [Winfried is] playing a comedy for [Ines], but he's doing it out of desperation." In writing the script, Ade was interested in the film's comedic potential, though she had doubts during the filming. "Then, when we edited the film, I found that the comedy was even stronger because we took things so seriously. For example, in scenes like the naked party where the boss is standing at the door, it was really necessary in terms of comedy for it to be as existential as possible" with the "actor not thinking of it as a comedy."

**Sandra Huller** and **Peter Simonischek** are both accomplished stage actors with film experience. Both became quite famous due to their roles in Toni Erdmann. Sandra acted with Theatre Basel 2002-2006. Peter played title role in Jedermann, a modern passion play, for 7 years between 2002 – 2009 in Salzburg. Joining a list of famous performers, conceived by Max Reinhardt in 1911:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jedermann\\_\(play\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jedermann_(play))

### **Trivia:**

The film, which premiered in competition at the **Cannes Film Festival**,<sup>[5][6]</sup> was named the best film of 2016 by *Sight & Sound* and other respected cinema magazines.

Winfried Conradi is loosely based on [Maren Ade's](#) father who actually likes to put in fake teeth to joke with people.

Ade set the film in [Bucharest](#) in part because many German companies had begun to do business there at the end of the Communist era, with many foreign consultants sent to "change the system" and help businesses turn a profit. "And I like the new wave of Romanian films right now, too. So it'd be fun to work there."

[Toni Erdmann](#) (2016) was one of the the best-reviewed and most popular films at the 69th Cannes International Film Festival, but it didn't receive any awards by the 'Official Competition' jury. Major critics like Justin Chang, Manohla Dargis, Kenneth Turan, Peter Bradshaw and Guy Lodge wrote that the decisions of the jury were "baffling". There was nearly a consensus, that "Toni Erdmann" would have been a deserving Palme d'Or winner and that a rare opportunity to give the top award to a female filmmaker was missed at Cannes.

[Maren Ade](#) would typically do between 20 to 30 takes of each shot. If it was a scene that required multiple coverage of each actor the number of takes would double to between 40 to 60 so that each actor would get the coverage they needed.

Director [Maren Ade](#) spent over a year editing the film. During the process she gave birth to her second child.

After a limited release on only 98 screens in Germany, [Toni Erdmann](#) (2016) entered the box-office charts in the 5th position. It had the weekend's best per-screen average and the best per-screen average for a German film in 2016.

American remake muted since 2017. Lisa Cholodenko – Director. Starring Kristen Wig. Ade is Producer. Iniiially Jack Nicholson's pet project in 2017, a year later dropped out. No further info.

## Reviews:

### **Is this the end of our perfect world?**

[PeterAuer-Grumbach](#) 19 August 2016

Maren Ade has created an opus which may be regarded as a universal comment on our global system where everything seems to be fine as long as economical progress is ongoing. However, we should not forget that pure progress induces dark sides as well.

"Toni Erdmann" has a great screenplay. Basically, it tells a father-daughter-story, but every sign of empathy seems to be frozen. Ines Conradi (Sandra Hüller) shows a great performance as she already did in "Amour Fou". She only lives for working and does not

care much about family or emotional matters. All that counts is the progress of her career. Winfried Conradi (Peter Simonischek) interprets a loving father who only wants to spend some time with his daughter. As Ines facade cannot be broken, he starts disturbing her perfect world of rules and manners by becoming Toni Erdmann.

The screenplay does not contain many big plot points but convinces the viewer by the development of its great characters and the intelligent and often embarrassing dialogues. The audience is trapped by the society rules of this business world. Consequently, we are feeling with Ines who is more and more irritated by her father – now transformed to Toni Erdmann. He starts to shatter the stability of the system by his strange, unconventional character and jokes. The dialogues with excellent acting are so trenchant that moments of great humor are coming up.

Everybody of the business world looks strangely at Toni Erdmann when he appears but we start thinking about who is weird and crazy in reality. Is it Toni Erdmann as he is not behaving like everybody else would expect of a supposed business man? Or is it this whole community of economists which takes drugs and which feigns emotions? Maybe Eugène Ionesco can help us to find an answer.

The film itself, most of the time taking place in Romania, only rarely shows poor people as one would assume. Most of the time we just hear about the problems of a German enterprise which has to do some outsourcing. In many scenes we can see that Ines does not really care about the people around her. She is just a representative person of the company and keeps distance. Her father, on the other hand, does not care about society rules and is able to communicate in a simple, affective way with the people of this country.

Gradually Ines is influenced by the spirit of life and the philosophy of her father as she gradually throws off her mask. What does it mean to have a life where one does not have any emotional link to his colleagues? What does it mean to see progress only but to forget that man is a social being? Even when Ines is in front of her secret lover and colleague Tim, she is not able to show any emotions.

With Patrick Orth, director Maren Ade creates a light visual style which is ideally coordinated with the actor's play. We are in a world where we cannot foresee what happens next. When Toni Erdmann appears, everything seems to start trembling. The stability of our conformist and capitalistic system is threatened by the presence of only one "strange" character.

### **Toni Erdmann review –**

Mark Kerode, Guardian, 5 Feb 2017

Maren Ade's German comedy-drama finds excruciating humour and great pathos in a surreal collision between father and daughter

Be honest, when was the last time you can remember a German comedy feature film making international headlines and garnering global awards? The bittersweet *Good Bye Lenin!*, perhaps, which picked up nominations at the Baftas and Golden Globes in 2004? Or 1992's Oscar-nominated *Schtonk!*, the Hitler diaries farce that became a huge domestic hit while prompting international critical snipes about German comedy being no laughing matter.

Now, writer/director Maren Ade's melancholy *Toni Erdmann*, a 162-minute black comedy about father-daughter estrangement, looks set to take the Academy Award for foreign language film. Having cleaned up at the European film awards and topped *Sight & Sound*'s prestigious best of 2016 poll of more than 150 critics and curators, *Toni Erdmann* is provoking grins and grimaces wherever it plays, balancing laugh-out-loud absurdity with excruciatingly understated tragedy. "This will not be a comedy," Ade reportedly told her co-producer. "This will be a very long and sad film." In fact, it is both and more.

Sandra Hüller, who mesmerised as a young woman troubled by inner demons in Hans-Christian Schmid's *Requiem*, is simply breathtaking as Ines Conradi, a brittle careerist working her way up the consultancy ladder. Distanced from her perennial-joker father Winfried (a splendidly bedraggled Peter Simonischek), Ines presents a prickly facade, although she's secretly sickened by the realities of her job; taking the blame for the cost-cutting cowardice of her clients.

While on business in Bucharest, Ines's dealings with an oil company are sideswiped by the unexpected appearance of her dad, apparently to deliver a birthday present and spend time with his daughter. She humours him briefly, and mourns the death of his beloved dog, but when it's time to leave, Winfried refuses to play ball. Instead, to her horror, he dons a shaggy wig and buck teeth (think Ken Dodd meets Gérard Depardieu) and starts introducing himself to her colleagues as "Toni Erdmann", a gregarious, entrepreneurial "life coach" whose company Ines cannot avoid. As Winfried's baby-boomer hippy ideals clash with Ines's 21st-century cynicism, dysfunctional family wounds are reopened, with increasingly disruptive consequences.

On one level, *Toni Erdmann* can be read as scathing satire on Europe, and a warning about the depersonalising results of globalisation. Yet while such socioeconomic subtexts are hardly hidden, it's in the intimate interplay between infuriating father and insular daughter that the real fireworks occur. Ade's genius is in refusing to allow either character to become a caricature, instead painting both in sympathetic shades of grey. Yes, Winfried/Toni is an exasperating presence whose attempts to reconnect with his daughter border on stalking (he hides in her closet after covertly accessing her apartment). And yes, Ines's soul-sucking profession is one in which corporate venality and moral abnegation are the order of the day. Yet both harbour a heartbreaking awareness of their own shortcomings, their failure to make something better of their lives and relationships. That we feel and share these anxieties is testament to the deceptive precision of Ade, who apparently shot hundreds of hours of footage in search of the film's perfectly timed moments.

When the laughs come, they are as toe-curling as a vintage episode of *The Office* or a performance of Mike Leigh's *Abigail's Party*. An increasingly spirited rendition of *The Greatest Love of All* had me hoiking the neck of my jumper up over my face to hide my radioactive embarrassment. Elsewhere, there's something of the unbearable cruelty of Lars von Trier's *The Boss of It All*, not least in a superbly uncomfortable sex scene that will put you off petits fours for life, particularly the green ones.

But such pain is not without purpose. Amid the symphony of stubbed toes and hurting heels, false teeth and fake smiles, *Toni Erdmann* gradually turns embarrassment to empathy, awkwardness into acceptance. Unlike Giuseppe Tornatore's thematically comparable *Stanno tutti bene*, or even Yasujiro Ozu's *Tokyo Story*, this tale of a pathos-laden parental pilgrimage doesn't want us to conclude that life is indeed disappointing. On the contrary, it wants us to wake up to the possibility of something better, even if that possibility comes wearing a furry Bulgarian folk costume and looking like an escapee from a surreal Andrew Kötting movie.

In a recent interview in the *Observer*, Ade cited the gruelling French comedy *Mon père, ce héros* (remade as *My Father the Hero*) and the alter egos of Andy Kaufman as inspirations for *Toni Erdmann*. Links to both are evident, but thankfully neither leapt to mind as I watched. Instead I was left marvelling at how the writer/director of *The Forest for the Trees* and *Everyone Else* (and indeed the co-producer of Miguel Gomes's astonishing *Arabian Nights*) had forged something utterly unique and wholly undefinable. I laughed, I cried, I shrieked. Bravo!

### **Review: In 'Toni Erdmann,' Dad's a Prankster Trying to Jolt His Conformist Daughter**

A O Scott, Dec. 22, 2016. N Y Times.

Early in "Toni Erdmann" — by a wide margin the funniest almost-three-hour German comedy you will ever see — there is a brief discussion, conducted in a sterile modern office building in Bucharest, about the meaning of the English word "performance." For Anca (Ingrid Bisu), a young Romanian employed by a global consulting firm, it refers to the way she does her job and, more than that, her ability to obey the norms and protocols of the corporate workplace. Her boss, she explains, gives her "a lot of feedback," which is clearly a euphemism.

That boss, a fearsomely serious executive named Ines (Sandra Hüller), happens to be the daughter of Winfried, the man Anca is talking with. It is already clear that Winfried (Peter Simonischek), a shambling, unshaven music teacher with a mop of gray hair and a prankish sense of humor, has ideas about public and professional behavior that would raise alarms in any human resources department. He carries a set of joke-shop fake teeth in his shirt pocket, and has a habit of disrupting the routines of everyday life with absurd

and outrageous improvisations. If for Anca and Ines performance is a synonym for conformity, for Winfried it's the opposite. To perform — to act out, to pretend, to take on a new and unexpected personality — is above all to lodge an existential protest against the standardization of life.

“Toni Erdmann,” written and directed by Maren Ade, is its own kind of rebellion, a thrilling act of defiance against the toxicity of doing what is expected, on film, at work and out in the world. It is named for its improbable hero, the outrageous alter ego Winfried impersonates during his visit to Bucharest. Accessorizing those awful teeth with a stringy black wig, a baggy sharkskin suit and the kind of two-toned dress shirts favored by insecure business-class big shots, Erdmann shows up wherever he is likely to cause Ines the most embarrassment, variously claiming to be the German ambassador and a freelance management coach. Ines isn't fooled by the costume, of course, and it's not always clear whether her colleagues believe Erdmann's nonsense or are playing along with a joke they don't quite get. Nor are Winfried's intentions entirely legible, at least at first. Is he trying to humiliate his daughter, or to save her soul?

“It's very complicated,” he sighs at one point, still in disguise, when Ines is out of earshot. And “Toni Erdmann,” proceeding in a perfectly straightforward manner, from one awkward, heartfelt, hilarious scene to the next, wraps itself around some of the thorniest complexities of contemporary reality.

It is, most simply but also most elusively, a sweet and thorny tale of father-daughter bonding with a finely honed edge of generational conflict, propelled by two extraordinarily natural, utterly fearless performances. Winfried, a shaggy baby boomer, has had the luxury of conflating irresponsibility with idealism. Amicably divorced from Ines's mother, devoted to his own mother and his aging dog, he has settled into a permanent, pleasant state of not-quite-adulthood, in which he reserves the right not to take anything too seriously.

Ines enjoys no such luxury. Like many children of vaguely countercultural parents, she has rebelled by joining the establishment. Everything about her — her omnipresent cellphone, her crisply tailored blazers, her trim physique and curt manner — can seem like a calculated rebuke to her anarchic dad. She dares him to judge her, and when he does, she strikes back, dismissing his naïve, pious criticisms of her turbo-capitalist lifestyle. Navigating deals and presentations, managing difficult clients and sexist colleagues, she is living in the real world, and fighting for a place in it.

Ms. Ade, who at 40 is closer to being Ines's peer than Winfried's, is sympathetic to both of them, but not exactly neutral. “Toni Erdmann,” her third feature, may look like farce — and it does achieve heights of pure, giddy silliness of a kind rarely seen on the big screen these days — but it is driven by a savage satirical energy, a thoroughgoing critique of the way things are. The worst humiliations Ines suffers come not from anything outrageous her father does, but rather from the everyday piggishness of the men who belittle her work, thwart her ambitions or take her for granted.

She swallows their slights and tries to adjust her performance to their expectations, making herself miserable in ways that she can't entirely recognize or acknowledge. She is also part of an enterprise, a system, that is spreading misery across the globe in the guise of opportunity, modernization and efficient business practices. "Toni Erdmann" sets its critical sights not only on the odd folkways of the executive class, but also on German arrogance within the European Union and the casual cruelty of international capitalism. Erdmann may be able to save Ines, but it's not clear who will save Romania.

But maybe neither one really needs saving. This film's generous, skeptical spirit is in any case more diagnostic than prescriptive. Like its hero, it wants to shake its audience, at least for the moment, out of habits of complacency and compromise, to alter our perceptions and renew our sense of what is possible. There are things you will look at differently after seeing "Toni Erdmann." A short list might include petits fours, cheese graters, team-building exercises and a certain song immortalized by [Whitney Houston](#). Also German comedies, Bulgarian costumes, Romanian hotels, fatherhood and the anxious, absurd state of the human race in the 21st century.