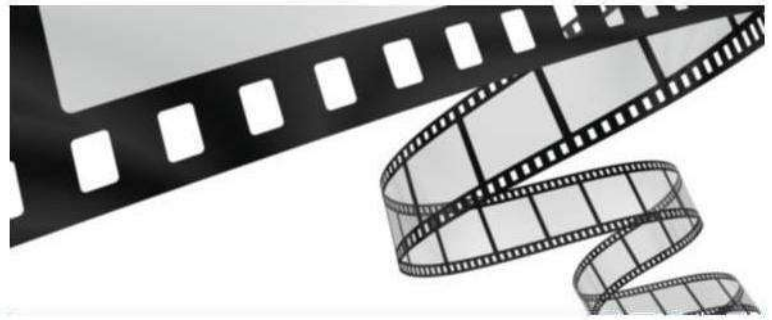


# CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

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## **Phoenix 2014**

**Germany/Poland 98 minutes**

**Director: Christian Petzold**

**Writer: Christian Petzold, Harun Faroki, Hubert Monteilhet**

**Cast: Nina Hoss, Ronald Zehrfeld, Nina Kunzendorf**



## **Reviews:**

**Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian**

Christian Petzold, the German film-maker renowned as a master of suspense, returns with this gloomy, implausible noir, set in the ruins of divided postwar Berlin. Nelly (Nina Hoss) is a Jewish woman left for dead in Auschwitz, who miraculously survived being shot in the face: once the bandages come off after reconstructive plastic surgery, she basically looks as good as new, but different. Her devoted friend Lene (Nina Kunzendorf) wants Nelly simply to recover her wealth from her Swiss bank account and come to live with her in the future state of Israel, but Nelly is on a obsessive, self-destructive mission to track down Johnny (Ronald Zehrfeld), the charming but treacherous husband who saved his own skin by selling her out to the Nazis.

When she finds him, a startlingly macabre and in its way ingenious situation develops. Yet it is all fundamentally let down by the simple fact that the plastic surgery is ridiculously and unrealistically represented (rather like the 1997 Alejandro Amenabar movie *Open Your Eyes*, remade as a Tom Cruise vehicle called *Vanilla Sky*). Reconstructive surgery could never

come anywhere near the convincing results shown here: not in 1945 – and not in 2015, come to that. The flaw is fatal, and the fantasy crumbles.

### **Mark Kermode, The Observer**

After being left for dead by the Nazis in the closing days of the war, disfigured concentration camp survivor Nelly (Nina Hoss) undergoes reconstructive surgery, emerging from her bandages with a new face. When Nelly meets estranged husband Johnny (Ronald Zehrfeld) in a Berlin club, he fails to recognise her, but sees enough similarity with the wife he believes to be dead to enlist “Esther” in a scam – posing as Nelly in order to access her valuable estate. Thus begins a noirish game of cat and mouse as Johnny unknowingly instructs our heroine on how to impersonate herself, while she struggles to divine signs of affection or betrayal in his demeanour.

Inspired by Hubert Monteilhet’s *Le retour des cendres* (upon which novel J Lee Thompson’s 1965 film *Return from the Ashes* was based), *Phoenix* nods toward Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* and Wolfgang Petersen’s *Shattered* as it spins its web of mistaken identity and psychological intrigue. But beneath the playful genre trappings lurks something much darker – an investigation of guilty memory and wishful forgetfulness in the wake of unspeakable national horror. Director Christian Petzold has described Johnny as “the ‘new’ German who wants to change guilt into money”, and the duplicitous relationships on which *Phoenix* pivots can clearly be read as political rather than personal. In her sixth collaboration with Petzold, Hoss is typically terrific, bringing the character of Nelly (back) to life with mercurial aplomb, the strength of her performance carrying us over the implausibilities of the plot.

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### **Club notices:**

#### **Our last presentation: ‘Elle l’Adore’**

50 members and guests returned feedback forms following the showing of this film, the breakdown was as follows:

- ‘Excellent’: 23 vote
- ‘Very good’: 24 votes
- ‘Good’: 4 votes
- ‘Satisfactory’: 0 votes
- ‘Poor’: 0 votes

Please visit the current season page at <http://www.chelmsford-filmclub.co.uk> to read all the feedback comments.

#### **Our next presentation:**

**Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> December at 8pm – The Green Ray**