

“Goodbye Lenin”

When her husband fled to West Germany in 1978 Christiane (Katrin Sass) was devastated. Alone with two young children she found solace in becoming a model citizen of Communist East Germany (the “GDR”). Blissfully unaware of its true nature, she thought it was a socialist paradise. But the political ground is going to shift under her feet and one night in 1989 she sees her son Alex (Daniel Bruhl) arrested at an anti-government rally. The shock of that sight causes a heart attack and she spends the next 8 months in a coma. When she finally awakens her doctor tells Alex that her condition is so delicate that the slightest shock could kill her. So it is now up to him to protect her from the knowledge that the Wall has fallen and the GDR has been consigned to the scrap heap of history. How he manages that herculean task when he takes her home from the hospital makes for both an intriguing political satire and a poignant family tale of devotion to family.

Because she is bedridden Alex can control her environment. Up goes the portrait of Che Guevara in her room along with the tired old furniture which he and his sister had stored away. But in between bouts of sleeping she is bored and wants to watch television. Alex solves that problem with a co-worker, an aspiring filmmaker, who comes up with an inventive solution which will keep her in a TV time capsule. However, keeping her in the dark is a full time job, from explaining why the apartment next door has a huge Coca Cola banner hanging from the roof to a host of other changes she can't help but notice. But Alex is ever up to the task.

All is going well until one day when Alex falls asleep in the chair next to her bed. She gets up for the first time and, curious as to something she sees outside the window, goes downstairs into the street. BMW's and Mercedes stream by and she wonders what the IKEA store sells. Like Alice falling down the rabbit hole she is totally disoriented. A panicked Alex finally finds hers and, ever quick witted, he has another explanation for what she is seeing. But the question remains: How long can the charade continue?

Here are but a few of the highlights of “Goodbye Lenin”:

The inventive ways Alex creates a make believe world. The films of the Wall being torn down with throngs of East Germans streaming across the previously fortified border present no problem. He explains

that they are West Germans pouring into the workers' paradise of East Germany. It gets harder and harder to maintain the illusion but he spares no effort.

The evolving romantic relationship between Alex and Lara, the young Russian nurse he meets at the hospital. A wonderfully old fashioned love story.

The secret Christiana has kept from her children for so many years. It changes everything Alex and his sister thought they knew about their past.

The portrait of a country undergoing a near instantaneous transformation from a society where even the chosen few had to wait years to buy a "Trabant", the acknowledged worst car in the world, to a host of other dislocating changes.

The iconic scene when Christiana looks up and sees a helicopter towing a huge bust of Lenin across the sky. It says everything about the death of Communist East Germany.

The films' bittersweet ending.

(Amazon Prime)