

## Obituary

### We deeply mourn the loss of Dr. Ralf Schenk

The DEFA Foundation is in mourning for its long-time director, Dr. Ralf Schenk. The film scholar and journalist passed away on Wednesday, August 17, 2022, at the age of 66, after a brief but grievous illness.

Ralf Schenk studied journalism at the University of Leipzig from 1975 to 1979. In those years, he was already a film buff, and he wrote film reviews and led the Youth Film Club of Leipzig's Capitol Cinema. After graduating, he worked for magazines and newspapers for over twenty years, including: *Die Weltbühne*, *Film und Fernsehen*, *Film Spiegel*, *Filmdienst*, and the *Berliner Zeitung*. He also contributed to several public-broadcasting TV documentaries. He was always particularly interested in filmmakers from eastern Europe, especially from Poland and Hungary, as well as East Germany's DEFA productions.

As of 1990, Ralf Schenk made a pioneering contribution by reworking the history of the DEFA Studios and productions. His three edited volumes on the subject have become standard references in the field: *Das zweite Leben der Filmstadt Babelsberg*, about DEFA feature films; *Schwarzweiß und Farbe*, about DEFA documentaries; and *Die Trick-Fabrik*, about DEFA animation films. He also conducted numerous interviews with DEFA filmmakers, on behalf of the DEFA Foundation and the Potsdam Film Museum, which will provide future generations with an important source for researching and understanding the corpus of DEFA films.

From 2012 to 2020, Ralf Schenk served as the director of the DEFA Foundation. Early on, he recognized the importance of preserving DEFA films in high-quality digital formats, which are essential for their current and future distribution and presentation. During his tenure, he also edited two volumes that filled lacunae in the field and were published in the DEFA Foundation's book series: *Verbotene Utopie. Die SED, die DEFA und das 11. Plenum* and *Sie. Regisseurinnen der DEFA und ihre Filme*. He was particularly passionate about tracking down DEFA productions that had been banned or lost. He deserves most of the credit for the reconstruction of *Die Schönste* (*The Most Beautiful*), *Hände hoch oder ich schieße* (*Hands Up or I'll Shoot*), *Sommerwege* (*Summer Paths*) and *Fräulein Schmetterling* (*Miss Butterfly*). For his efforts on behalf of the legacy of DEFA films, he was awarded the Bundesverdienstkreuz am Bande (Federal Cross of Merit on Ribbon) in 2020.

Ralf Schenk's expertise and knowledge seemed unfathomable. He was an advisor for filmmakers and researchers alike and a pundit for film-oriented media. He networked with many national and international film festivals, which turned to him for ideas or to serve as a moderator, curator, or member of the jury. He served on the selection committee for the Berlin International Film Festival's feature film competition from 2004 to 2019.

Ralf Schenk followed his passion and was active as a film journalist until shortly before his death. His most recent co-edited book, *Publikumspiraten. Das Genrekino der DEFA und seine Regisseure (1946-90)*, came out in May 2022.

DEFA Foundation Director Stefanie Eckert: “We mourn for our long-serving director, our colleague, our companion, our kindhearted friend. His name will always remain intertwined with the history of DEFA films and the DEFA Foundation. We will miss his humor, his curiosity and his enthusiasm. Our sympathy goes out to his family.”

August 2022