

ASIA ARGENTO • STEVE BUSCEMI • CURTIS HARRINGTON

# FILMMAKER™

THE MAGAZINE OF INDEPENDENT FILM

## Exiles

### The story of Erika and Klaus Mann

**E**scape to Life — *The Erika and Klaus Mann Story*, a feature-length documentary by Andrea Weiss and Wieland Speck (pictured above) profiles the tragic lives of the two eldest children of Nobel prize-winning author Thomas Mann.

Although they claimed to be twins, Erika and Klaus Mann were, in fact, born more than a year apart. That they identified as twins, however, comes as little surprise: They grew up together in the hermetic household of Germany's leading literary family and, as children, shared an intense make-believe world; they both craved the love and respect of their powerful and remote father, who they referred to simply as "the magician"; and both were writers, actors and homosexuals. Yet their relationship was ultimately

strained by the demands of living in permanent exile.

Although she was a lesbian — and was forbidden to perform in Germany — Erika married twice, first to the actor Gustaf Gründgens and later to the poet W. H. Auden, through whom she was granted British citizenship. Klaus fled Nazi Germany during WW II and joined the U.S. army to fight against his former homeland. His life was further shattered by Erika's gradual shift in loyalty away from him to their father. He turned to drugs, eventually committing suicide. His writing — including his most famous novel, *Mephisto* — remained unpublished during his lifetime.

Award-winning documentarian and author Andrea Weiss (*Before Stonewall*, *Paris Was a Woman*, *The Man Who Drove with Mandela*)

and Wieland Speck, best known for the 1985 feature film *Westler* and as the longtime director of the Panorama section of the Berlin International Film Festival, have assembled a wealth of archival materials and interviews to bring the story of Erika and Klaus Mann to life. Dramatizations from Klaus's fiction are also incorporated, rather than reconstructions from actual historical events, in order to shed light on the imaginary world into which he escaped.

Produced by Greta Schiller (Jezebel Films) and Thomas Kufus (zero film, Berlin), the recently completed 35mm film (for which Vanessa and Corin Redgrave provide the voices of Erika and Klaus Mann) has yet to secure distribution. — Steve Gallagher

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# JEZEBEL

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