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Anna's Mutter

(Anna's Mother)
(WEST GERMAN-COLOR)

Berlin, Jan. 6.

A Planet-Film Production, Munich, in coproduction with CCC-Filmkunst, Berlin, and G & J (Gruner & Jahr) Film Production, Hamburg. Features entire cast. Distributed by Jugendfilm, Berlin, world sales, Cine-International, Munich. Produced by Marin Moszkowicz. Written and directed by Burkhard Driest, based on the Stern-book by Heiko Gebhardt. Camera (color), Lothar E. Stichelbrucke; sets, Dieter Baechle; costumes, Latona Vogel; makeup, Traute Koller; sound, Klaus-Peter Kaiser; editing, Patricia Rommel; music, Kristian Schultze; production manager, Eric Moss, Anja Schmidt-Zaeringer. Reviewed at Filmbuehne Wien, Berlin, Jan. 6, '84. Running time: 90 MINS.

Marianne Grünwald	...	Gudrun Landgrebe
Ulrich, her friend	.....	Rolf Zacher
Anna, her daughter	.....	Verena Corinna Gille
.....	.....	Isolde Berth
Micha	.....	Roger Fritz
Günter	.....	Michael Simbruk
Reporter	.....	Georg Marischka
Sonja	.....	Sabrina Lorenz

"Anna's Mother" is Burkhard Driest's first film as a director. He's better known for his scripts for Reinhard Hauff's films: "The Brutalization of Franz Blum" (1973), based on his own autobiographical data while serving a prison term; "Fuses" (1974), adapting a Franz Josef Degenhardt novel; "Paule Pauländer" (1975), an authentic portrait of poverty in sections of Germany; and "Last Stop Freedom" (Slow Attack) (1980), starring Driest in another prison story with autobiographical touches.

From scripser to thesp to helmer seem to be logical steps — in view of his debut pic, "Anna's Mother," being another crime-and-prison tale, the true story of one Marianne Bachmeier.

"The Bachmeier Case" also happens to be the title-theme of Hark Bohm's new pic (its previous working title was "No Time for Tears"), which means in effect that both Driest and Bohm have been racing each other in a good-natured show of one-upmanship to the boxoffice. Once it was known that both directors were working on the same film, the initial release dates were set for the spring but, like any feature exploiting the daily headlines and magazine cover stories, the maxim of striking while the iron is hot necessitated a scurry for a convenient New Year release. Undoubtedly, both films thereby suffered under the pressure since the production credits are sloppy.

Burkhard Driest and his producers have placed all their blue chips on two promising p.r. angles: (1) the well-known Stern mag publication titled "Anna's Mother," which chronicles the story of a mother who took justice into her own hands in an open courtroom hearing by killing with a pistol the man who had strangled her seven-year-old daughter in a sex crime; and (2) actress Gudrun Landgrebe, who had currently soared to the top of the popularity ratings via her performance in a German b.o. winner, Robert van Ackeren's "The Woman Flambee" (it preemed at Cannes last year in the Directors' Fortnight section). Surely, these factors can indeed be parlayed into a boxoffice win at home.

The Bachmeier Case as a true story, however, carries more drama in its reported media account than this after-the-fact fiction narrative. Instead of hiring genuine dialog writers (the bane of New German Cinema), Driest as author-director simply spices the sensational with questionable cultured references to Antonin Artaud and sociocritical statements on how the media tend to mangle the

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human aspects of a courtroom drama.

Landgrebe plays Marianne Grünwald/Bachmeier like a sex-bomb in the waning days of the commercial movies in the 1950s. Hardly a scene in which she appears is free of excessive stylization, some bordering on the maudlin and the downright corny. Worst of all, the story itself — known by heart by a vast majority of potential German moviegoers and other devotees of the boulevard press — loses its direction by molding an apparent star image for Landgrebe. And at the cost of a real-life tragedy.

Landgrebe, for German film buffs, also played a hipped emancipated femme lawyer in Dorothea Neukirchen's "Double Trouble" (1982), a social comedy that flopped and is better forgotten.

Opening scenes show the girl living with her mother and casual friend in an idyllic country retreat, the pot-of-gold for such a romantic haven (dog and cat included) coming from the recent sale of a bar. Soon Marianne and Ulrich weary of clawing at each other whenever their collective libido surfaces, and he talks of shipping off to Goa while she of opening another bar. The new bar, in a nearby urban area, is not only opened — it also proves to be a commercial success, particularly with Marianne on hand to attract the male customers. Throughout these sequences, Landgrebe struts around in leather or peek-a-boo blouses.

Another couple appear regularly on the scene, a well-to-do doctor and his wife. They want to adopt the girl, and the deal is closed over champagne one day — just as Anna disappears. The rest is the story of the child-murder and the subsequent murder-case — the emphasis here being not that of the sex murderer, but Grünwald/Bachmeier's instead.

Only pluses are the polished lensing (Lothar E. Stichelbrucke) and Rolf Zacher's performance as Marianne's tough-but-tender playmate. "Anna's Mother" is for sensation-seekers. —Holl.