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Author(s)	Hy Hollinger
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Berlin Film Fest Reviews

Baby

(WEST GERMAN-COLOR)

Berlin, Feb. 25.

A Basis-Film Verleih Production, Berlin, in coproduction with Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), Cologne; production manager, Clara Burckner, tv producer, Wolf-Dietrich Brückner. Features entire cast. Written and directed by Uwe Friessner. Camera (color), Wolfgang Dickmann; music, SPLIFF; editor, Tanja Schmidtbauer. Reviewed at Berlin Film Fest (Forum), Feb. 25, '84. Running time: 114 MINS.

Cast: Udo Seidler (Baby), Reinhard Seeger (Pjotr), Volkmär Richter (René), Frank Marwitz (Tilo), Harald Kempe (Mark), Jeanette Radlinski (Marina), Sylvia Woiczehowski (Bärbel).

Uwe Friessner, graduate of the Berlin Film Academy, scored with a rather impressive debut film, "The End Of The Rainbow" (1979), a docu-drama on a juvenile delinquent in Berlin played by a nonprofessional with a similar court-record as the one on the screen. Now he's back with another Berlin story, "Baby," featuring a young body-builder type who earns his pay as a bouncer at a disco and dreams of opening his own athletic club one day. Instead, he falls in with a couple of conmen and petty thieves.

Baby, the protagonist of this docu-fiction thriller, is played by an amateur actor using his own slang, dialect, and reverse euphemisms to the point of needing subtitles even for a German audiences. The same goes for everyone in the film — make no mistake, Friessner has attempted to capture the lingo of the streets and discos in all its pristine purity. On that score, he's made a quite significant contribution to the urban ethnographic genre.

The drawback is that he forgot to tell a story over the two-hours-long stretch of collected episodes in life and times of a young innocent enticed down the road to crime and murder. It starts with a rumpus at the disco, during which Baby gets the worst of it in a gang-up by a bunch of thugs — until he resorts to a baseball bat (!) and wreaks his vengeance on one of the assailants, nearly killing him in the process. The police pick him for questioning on an assault charge, but two friends at the disco hire a lawyer to argue his case, and eventually set him free. In the meantime, the conmen use his car and his apartment for their own purposes. These illegal activities get Baby deeper into a mess than before, for the petty crooks put the heat on our innocent to join them in a small-time robbery. It works, and they all divide the money.

Next comes a bigger heist at a supermarket. Baby loses his nerve at the last minute and kills a watchman, but the getaway appears to be successful. After the loot is divided, and Baby has afterwards invested in converting an abandoned factory loft into a sports club, he and one of the two cronies notice that they are suddenly under police surveillance. When the news comes that the third party in the hold-up has been picked up at the airport, they face a dead end — there's nowhere to go on this urban island called West Berlin (situated in East Germany far from the West German mainland), that is, without passing a control point.

Friessner's handling of nonprofessionals is commendable, and Wolfgang Dickmann (one of Germany's ace lensers) gives the pic a polish seldom seen in Berlin productions. This is an action pic for and about men in the broadest

manner of speaking. It's also a film that accurately reflects the Berlin scene down to the last detail. The weakness, however, is in the script: "Baby" starts well, then begins to wander for long stretches into the realm of fiction-documentary. —Holl.