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FILM

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PRESENT



SSIFF

NEW DIRECTORS  
FESTIVAL DE SAN SEBASTIÁN  
2018



Official  
Selection  
Zurich Film Festival

# MIDNIGHT RUNNER

YOU CAN'T RUN AWAY  
FROM YOURSELF

A FILM BY HANNES BAUMGARTNER

WORLD PREMIERE: SAN SEBASTIAN 2018



#### **LOGLINE**

**The fateful double life of a famous top athlete – based on a true story.**

#### **SYNOPSIS**

Jonas Widmer is one of the leading long-distance runners in Switzerland and his great ambition is to run the marathon in the Olympics. Despite his difficult childhood he appears to have found his way: besides running, he works as a chef, is always ready and willing to support his friends and acquaintances, and he and his girlfriend Simone are soon moving into their first flat together. But then Jonas unsuccessfully defends his title during his home race and memories of his deceased brother Philip are finally catching up with him. Unable to put his emotional suffering into words, Jonas develops a tragic double life in his growing desperation.

Interview with Director

## HANNES BAUMGARTNER

**What prompted you to tell the story of a serial offender in your debut film?**

The real offender's ambivalence and inner conflict have engaged me from the beginning: on the one hand his brutal, goal-oriented violence on the other his societally commendable integration – a top athlete and popular chef. A person who is described as sensitive, dutiful and always ready to help by those around him. This contradiction challenged me to see behind the façade of this person.

**And why do you tell the film solely from the perpetrator's view?**

The perpetrator's point of view makes a direct examination with the ambivalent main character possible. I'm interested in the process of encapsulation: how a person drives themselves further and further into isolation despite offered outside help, how they are incapable of finding a way to put the immense inner suffering into words. The film is to show how the main character is desperately trying to suppress this incredible inner pressure through sports, work, and relationship – and how this suppression process leads him to violence.

**MIDNIGHT RUNNER is based on a true story. How much of the film's story line is true, how much is fiction?**

The film is a subjective interpretation of the real case. The focus lies on as genuine as possible a depiction of the emotional development and not on an objective retelling of the facts. I'm most interested in the process of Jonas' isolation, his great sense of emptiness and despair. In this sense, we took the artistic freedom to densify the true story and to add fictitious elements in a few places. In order to protect the affected people and to establish a creative area of freedom, we have changed all the names and moved the story from the early noughties to today.

**The film is very observant and you eschew to offer a concluding explanation for the deeds. How come?**

I think that it is necessary for many people to find a plausible explanation for such brutal acts. The horror mustn't remain unexplainable. Over the course of our research which lasted several years I had to realise, however, that our main protagonist's tragic acts cannot be explained in a monocausal way. There is a plethora of causes which are all connected: The past plays as much as a role as Jonas' enormous need for affection as well as his incapability to communicate



his inner world and feelings. The film tries to show this web of causes and their interaction – without being able to unravel it once and for all. The aim is challenging the viewer to a differentiated examination of the background of violence.

**What role does his brother Philipp play in the fatal development from top athlete to murderer?**

The brother is his central person of reference. He is the only person who shares the fate of his childhood with Jonas and who can understand Jonas' inner life at least to some extent. With Philipp's suicide, Jonas loses a vital part of his own identity. Philipp's appearance in the film

is, however, also a confrontation with Jonas' own dark side: the brother reminds him of the traumatic childhood and quarries shame, aggression, and despair to the surface.

**What is the importance of sport for the main character?**

Sport is an important outlet for Jonas to deal with his frustration, disappointment, and his inner emptiness. The athletic success also supports and reaffirms him in his quest for recognition and attention. At the same time, the sport becomes a front: the stability that Jonas conveys to the outside through his athletic career, paradoxically also gives him an aura of being untouchable – nobody thinks that a successful top athlete can have far reaching issues.

**You worked on your debut film for five years and intensely studied the real perpetrator's psychology. Do you feel empathy for him?**

There are many tragic elements in his biography which affected me. His traumatic childhood or his constant struggle for social and societal integration are only two examples. At the same time, preserving a certain distance was very important to me while examining his acts of violence. A shocking characteristic of his psychology was the inability to assess his acts. He showed little awareness for the results and consequences of his acts. This ambivalence of empathy and rejection has been a constant companion throughout the development process.

**How do you reply to the possible reproach that you offer a murderer a platform with your film?**

Violence is a societal reality, which is why I think it is pivotal to examine it in its complex entirety. MIDNIGHT RUNNER isn't a legitimisation of violent acts, but an attempt at understanding their origin. The sophisticated debate is a first step to approach the topic.



**An important aspect of your desired debate is currently being discussed intensively: the connection between masculinity and violence. Your main character Jonas assumes dominance over his female victims. To what extent are his acts of violence about his masculinity?**

I must say that we started working on this film six years ago and weren't able to aim at currently essential debates such as #MeToo. But one thing is clear: a connecting between violence and images of masculinity exists. Jonas moves within this context.

**Jonas does portray an image of strong masculinity to the outside...**

...absolutely. Especially as a top athlete, and particularly in an unusual sport such as the Swiss Army Run where a shotgun is carried on the back, even though it is never employed. As a top athlete, Jonas can thus embody a powerful image of masculinity. He has the will to endure

and win and receives recognition for it. In his private life and in his work environment, he complements his public image by embodying the dutiful and humble young man. His whole power is assembled in the outer appearance and stands in strong contrast to his inside: there seems to be no connection between outer and inner Jonas.

**And the women in his life?**

On the outside, he is connected with them, for example with his adopted mother and his girlfriend. But to his innermost human experience women don't have access. Only one person knows his innermost being: his brother Philipp. The two of them share the childhood trauma, the early struggle for survival. The neglect suffered on the hands of the biological parents was so severe that Jonas still couldn't walk at four years old, while Philipp wasn't speaking at six. This creates a fundamental disconnect from the

world. Both brothers react with aggression and violence in the end. The older one directs it at himself and takes his own life. The younger one – Jonas – aims it to the outside and eventually kills a woman who was unknown to him.

#### **Why did he only attack women?**

I'm not a psychologist. But during the research and the writing stages, I have intensely studied the character. I think that Jonas's quest to escape from his inner emptiness and torture is connected to a woman – albeit diffusely. She embodies his longing for saving, for someone who understands him, and who could release pressure and inner emptiness. Hence it is most-

ly women with whom he maintains a relationship level in his environment and to whom he attempts to open up. Men are charged entirely differently to him: with them, he competes athletically. In his inflated expectation of a woman saving him, Jonas approaches women increasingly more direct and random. However, since he isn't sure how women could solve his problem, this search remains a dead end. He almost exclusively provokes rejection, which only increases his frustration and desperation. The women who reject him become the target of his pent-up anger.

#### **To what extent has the current feminist wave been changing ideologies of masculinity and the construction of male gender identity?**

This movement has caused a new significant wave of discussions. Many men, however, reflexively reject this discussion. I think we should enter it. Especially from our film's vantage point, a conversation amongst men is necessary. Mainly to accept and understand that to find your male identity, you need to confront your own weaknesses. If the film could contribute anything to this discourse, I would more than welcome it.

#### **Why do young men often have difficulties to communicate and control their emotions?**

Upbringing and education as well as social context and norms play a vital role. How do I learn to deal with emotions? What role models do I have? In my private life, I still come across men who fear losing face in an open conversation about themselves. In the film, we tried to show a person with a fragile sense of self who is continuously looking for recognition and hardly can cope with rejection. Because he cannot control his emotions, he tries to dominate his victims. The inability to handle his feelings is thus being compensated. For Jonas, this compensating is intensified to murder over the course of the film.

Interview with main Actor

## MAX HUBACHER

### What appealed to you about Jonas Widmer?

As an actor, I'm always interested in the chasms of the figures I play. With Jonas, I was curious as to how a person with such positive character traits could become an aggressor. The character's ambivalence of being the perpetrator and victim at the same time particularly fascinates me.

### How did you – mentally and physically – prepare for this role?

I initially closely studied the real offender's biography but then tried to develop my own character. MIDNIGHT RUNNER isn't supposed to be a biopic but a fictional story inspired by actual events. Concerning the physical preparation, I spent several months working on my running style, my cardio, and strength with a personal trainer. I didn't just want to play a good runner; I wanted to be one. For this reason, I even gave up smoking.

### How much did you know about the real case before doing the film?

Before the first casting request I didn't know the story – I was only six years old when the horrible acts happened. My parents, however, immediately remembered the case. Only during the research did I realise how present the case still is even after fifteen years and how much it still gets under people's skin.

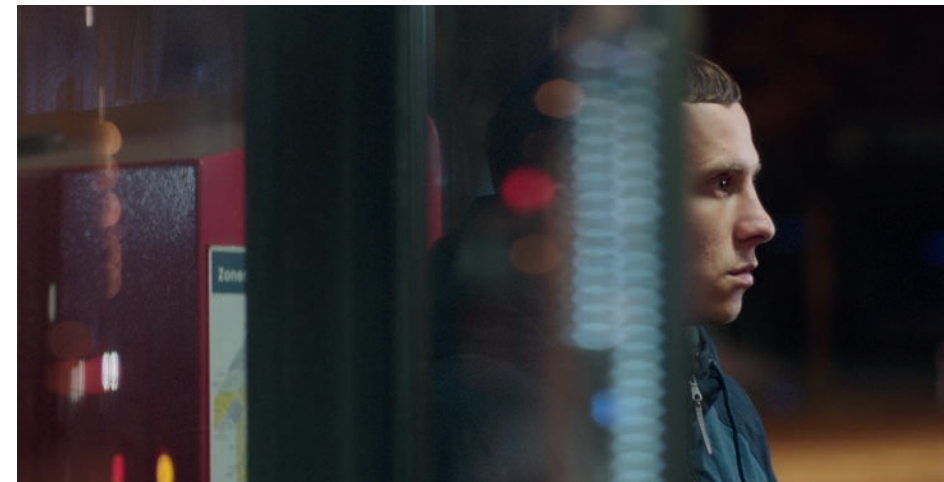
### Has working on the film changed your understanding of the character? Can you understand Jonas Widmer better now?

I think that an actor cannot judge their character morally – even when we very much would like to do that sometimes. You need to accept the character as they are. For me, Jonas Widmer is an outsider relentlessly seeking love and affirmation – which can never meet his expectations. Jonas lacks the skill of self-reflection. This drives him into this complete abyss and gets him to the point where he doesn't look for blame in himself but always in others.

### A particular challenge was the shooting during the renowned Berne Grand Prix: you started with over 30,000 runners and were a part of the real top-level group. How did you experience this shoot?

The Berne Grand Prix was one of the highlights and so utterly different from the rest of the filming: suddenly you're moving in a real environment and don't actually need to play a part anymore, but merely become part of the event. The significant challenge was that we could shoot certain scenes only once, for instance the

start or the finish. I didn't run the whole race, but whenever I was wrangled in, I wasn't allowed to show any weakness and had to follow the relentless tempo of the top runners at any cost. When I eventually came down the stretch and was frenetically spurred on by the real audience, I did feel like a top athlete for a brief moment. I was so euphoriant that I nearly tore off my headband – which would have been disastrous as we couldn't repeat the scene and it would have been undeniable that my haircut then was completely different from the rest of the film.







## CAST

Jonas Widmer **MAX HUBACHER**  
Simone **ANNINA EULING**  
Barbara Widmer **SYLVIE ROHRER**  
Kurt **CHRISTOPHE SERMET**  
Philipp Widmer **SALADIN DELLERS**  
Laura **LUNA WEDLER**

Further actors (in order of appearance)

Martin Aebi **ROLF BÜRGI**  
Woman on bus **LENYA KOECHLIN**  
Chef Scheuber **CASPAR KAESER**  
Woman on bridge **LOTTI HAPPLE**  
Woman with shopping bag **PASCALE GÜDEL**  
Family Doctor **MARKUS AMREIN**  
Simone's mother **DIANA DENGLER**  
Woman at tram stop **LARA MARIAN PATZACK**  
Sports physician **SEVERIN TROESCH**  
Woman at Zollikofen train station **MIRJAM RAST**  
TeleBärn presenter **RAHEL GRUNDER**  
Woman in neighbourhood street **FERNANDA RÜESCH**  
Local reporter **THOMAS RINER**

## CREW

Director **HANNES BAUMGARTNER**  
Writers **STEFAN STAUB**  
**HANNES BAUMGARTNER**  
Script Consultant **ANDRES VEIEL**  
Producers **STEFAN EICHENBERGER**  
**IVAN MADEO**  
Editing **CHRISTOF SCHERTENLEIB**  
Cinematography **GAËTAN VARONE**  
Production Design **DEMIAN WOHLER**  
Costume **LEONIE ZYKAN**  
Make-Up **MARINA AEBI**  
Original Sound **JEAN-PIERRE GERTH**  
Sound Design **MAURIZIUS STAERKLE DRUX**  
Production Management **ANDREA BLASER**  
Unit Management **ANNA FANZUN**  
Casting **NINA MOSER, REVOLVE CASTING**  
**IVAN MADEO**  
  
produced by **Contrast Film Bern GmbH**  
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**Teleclub**  
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**Burger Community Bern**  
  
World Sales **Be For Films, Belgium**

# MAX HUBACHER

Jonas Widmer



© Jasmin Zwick

Max Hubacher is born in Berne in 1993. At the age of seven, he performs with a children's theatre group in Berne for the first time. At age thirteen he appears in Robert Walser's «Liebes-traum». In 2010 he makes his film debut with the film «Bold Heroes» where he played a boy who has cancer. He becomes acquainted with a larger audience through the main role in the successful Swiss drama «The Foster Boy» (2011). In 2017, he plays the main part in the German war drama «The Captain», and in 2018 he can be seen twice on the big screen with «Mario» as well as the drama MIDNIGHT RUNNER which is based on real events. Simultaneously, Max Hubacher is finishing his last year at the University of Music and Theatre Leipzig.

## Filmography

**2018, MIDNIGHT RUNNER**  
Cinema, 92'; Director: Hannes Baumgartner

**2018, MARIO**  
Cinema, 119'; Director: Marcel Gisler

**2017, THE CAPTAIN**  
Cinema, 118'; Director: Robert Schwentke

**2017, LET THE OLD FOLKS DIE**  
Cinema, 92'; Director: Juri Steinhart

**2015, A DECENT MAN**  
Cinema, 94'; Director: Micha Lewinsky

**2014, DRIFT**  
Cinema, 93'; Director: Karim Patwa

**2013, NIGHT TRAIN TO LISBON**  
Cinema, 111'; Director: Bille August

**2011, THE FOSTER BOY**  
Cinema, 107'; Director: Markus Imboden

**2010, BOLD HEROES**  
Cinema, 93'; Director: Michael Schaerer

## Awards

- Swiss Film Award, Best Actor for «Mario»
- European Shooting Star, Berlinale
- Swiss Film Award, Best Actor for «The Foster Boy»

# ANNINA EULING

Simone



© Sandra Gadiot

Annina Euling is born in 1991. At the age of five, she appears in Giacomo Puccini's opera «Madame Butterfly» at the Theatre in Freiburg. Later she is active in the youth ensemble of the Theatre in Freiburg as well as the Theatre in Solothurn. In 2004 she is cast in her first film. In 2013 she begins studying for a Master's degree in Acting at the University of the Arts in Zurich and graduates in the summer of 2018.

## Filmography

**2018, MIDNIGHT RUNNER**  
Cinema, 92'; Director: Hannes Baumgartner

**2016, GOLIATH**  
Cinema, 85'; Director: Dominik Locher

**2014, FATHER OF FOUR SONS**  
TV Series; Director: Enne Reese

**2013, MORD AM HÖLLENGRUND**  
TV-Film, 90'; Director: Maris Pfeiffer

**2013, TATORT – WINTERNEBEL**  
TV-Film, 88'; Director: Patrick Winczewski

**2012, FAMILIE UNDERCOVER**  
TV Series; Director: Edzard Onneken/Joseph Orr

**2012, SUPEREGOS**  
Cinema, 93'; Director: Benjamin Heisenberg

**2012, FIVESIXTHS**  
Cinema, 28'; Director: Jonas Marowski

**2010, MARY & JOHNNY**  
Cinema, 80'; Director: Samuel Schwarz

**2008, HAPPY NEW YEAR**  
Cinema, 93'; Director: Christoph Schaub

**2006, CANNABIS**  
Cinema, 82'; Director: Niklaus Hilber

**2005, SCHÖNES WOCHENENDE**  
Cinema, 82'; Director: Petra Volpe

## Awards

- Study Prize Winner of Migros Culture Percentage's Acting Competition

# HANNES BAUMGARTNER

Writer & Director



Born in Männedorf in 1983. During his time at grammar school, Hannes finds access to film through photography.

At the F+F School for Art and Media Design in Zurich, he creates his first short films «Mein Bester Freund» (My best friend) and «Toter Mann» (Dead Man). Both films centre around the subjects of friendship, relationship, and violence. Between 2010 and 2012 Hannes finishes his Master's degree in filmmaking at the Zurich University of Fine Arts. His graduation film «Teneriffa» is shown at 20 international festivals and wins the Zurich Film Award for Best Short Film.

MIDNIGHT RUNNER is Hannes Baumgartner's film debut which he has been developing since 2012.

## Filmography

### 2018, MIDNIGHT RUNNER

Fiction, 92'; Writer & Director

- World premiere: San Sebastian International Film Festival, 2018

### 2012, TENERIFFA

Fiction, 21'; Writer & Director

- Zurich Film Award 2012: Best Short Film
- Filmplus Cologne 2012: Nominated for Young Talent Award
- 34th Film Festival Max Ophüls Prize, Germany 2013
- 16th International Short Film Days Winterthur 2012
- 11th ISFVF Student Film Festival Beijing, China 2012
- 32th VGIK Student Film Festival Moscow, Russia 2012
- 7th Zubroffka International Short Film Festival, Bialystok, Poland 2013
- 48th Solothurn Film Fest 2013
- 7th Open Cinema St. Petersburg, Russia 2012

### 2009, TOTER MANN

Fiction, 24'; Writer & Director

- 13th International Short Film Days Winterthur 2009

### 2008, MEIN BESTER FREUND

Fiction, 25'; Writer & Director

- 12th International Short Film Days Winterthur 2008
- 44th Solothurn Film Fest 2009

# STEFAN STAUB

Writer



Born in Berne in 1980. He discovers his love for cinema at Filmstelle, the student film club of the University and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, where he is in charge of the programme and the screenings.

After graduating with a Master's degree in Film, Journalism, and Social Psychology from the University of Zurich, he works for the promotional department of Swiss distributor Frenetic Films beginning in 2007.

In 2010 he is awarded a scriptwriting scholarship by DrehbuchWerkstatt in Munich (University of Television and Film) and moves to Germany for one year. He gains further experience in the position of programme curator for the International Short Film Days in Winterthur, as author and director of image films and teaching films, as well as the programme assistant for the Solothurn Film Fest.

MIDNIGHT RUNNER is his first screenplay for a feature-length film.

# CHRISTOF SCHERTENLEIB

Editor



Born in 1958. From 1981 until 1988 Christof Schertenleib studies at the Film Academy in Vienna with a specific interest in directing and editing. Since 1990 he has been working as a freelance editor and director.

As a director, he counts several short films as well as five feature-length films amongst his oeuvre, such as «Liebe Lügen» (1995) and «Zwerge sprengen» (2010).

As an editor, he has worked on over 25 fiction and documentary films, among other things for the directors Ulrich Seidl, Michael Glawogger, and Simon Jaquemet.

## Filmography (selection)

### 2018, MIDNIGHT RUNNER

Fiction, 92'; Director: Hannes Baumgartner

### 2016, DARK FORTUNE

Fiction, 113'; Director: Stefan Haupt

### 2016, SAFARI

Documentary, 91'; Director: Ulrich Seidl

### 2014, CHRIEG

Fiction, 106'; Director: Simon Jaquemet

### 2013, PARADISE: HOPE

Fiction, 92'; Director: Ulrich Seidl

### 2012, PARADISE: FAITH

Fiction, 115'; Director: Ulrich Seidl

### 2012, PARADISE: LOVE

Fiction, 180'; Director: Ulrich Seidl

## Awards (selection)

- Festival für Filmschnitt und Montagekunst Köln: Best Documentary Film Edit for «Safari»
- Swiss Film Awards: Nominated for Best Edit for «Chrieg»

# STEFAN EICHENBERGER

Producer



Born in Aarau in 1984. He studies Communication and Media Science, Philosophy and Sociology at the Universities in Fribourg and Berne. Subsequently, he gains his Master in Film Production at the University of the Arts in Zurich.

Both of the graduation films he produces become festival successes: PARVANEH with over 30 international festival screenings and over 15 awards, amongst them an Oscar nomination; UNKNOWN TERRITORY was recognised with the First Steps Award in Berlin as well as the Golden Eye at Zurich Film Festival.

In 2015 he produces the feature-length film WONDERLAND an anthology film about Switzerland which was realised by ten directors. The film celebrates its premiere in the International Competition of Locarno in 2015 and is awarded several prizes.

## Filmography (selection)

### 2018, MIDNIGHT RUNNER

Fiction, 92'; Director: Hannes Baumgartner

- World premiere: San Sebastian International Film Festival, 2018

### 2015, WONDERLAND

Fiction, 99'; Director: 10 newcomer Directors

- World premiere: International Competition, Film Festival Locarno 2015
- Berne Film Award 2015
- Zurich Film Award 2015
- Max Ophüls Prize for socially relevant film 2016

### 2013, UNKNOWN TERRITORY

Documentary, 93'; Director: Anna Thommen

- Best Documentary, FIRST STEPS, 2013
- Best Documentary Film, Zurich Film Festival 2013
- Best Documentary Film (nominee), Swiss Film Award 2014
- Audience Award, Solothurn Film Fest 2014

### 2012, PARVANEH

Fiction, 24'; Director: Talkhon Hamzavi

- Best Foreign Film, Student Academy Awards 2013 (STUDENT OSCARS), Los Angeles
- Best Short Film, FIRST STEPS, 2014
- Best Live Action Short Film (Nomination), Academy Awards 2015 (OSCARS), Los Angeles



## CONTRAST FILM



Contrast Film unites the passion for artistically demanding film with the expertise of marketing and social sciences. This link enables the making of socially relevant movies with audience appeal which tend to cause a stir on national and international level.

The production company is led by three partners: Stefan Eichenberger, Ivan Madeo, and Urs Frey.

In 2013, the three producers won two Student Academy Awards with PARVANEH and UN MUNDO PARA RAÚL.


In 2014, THE CIRCLE premieres at the Berlinale, wins the Teddy Award as well as the Panorama Audience Award, is shown at over 130 festivals and was selected as Switzerland's official entry for the Oscars.

In 2015, PARVANEH is nominated for an Academy Award and THE CIRCLE receives four Swiss film awards. The 10-directors work WONDERLAND then wins several national and international awards, among them the Max Ophüls Prize for Best Socially Relevant Film.

In 2017, Stefan Eichenberger is invited into the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which awards the Oscars every year, and Ivan Madeo is Switzerland's Producer on the Move at Cannes Film Festival.

In 2018, their film MIDNIGHT RUNNER celebrates its world premiere at A-Festival San Sebastian.

For further information: [www.contrastfilm.ch](http://www.contrastfilm.ch)

 Be for Films

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