

Two To One [12A]

2024 Germany 115 mins

UK released **2 May 2025**

Director **Natja Brunckhorst**

Screenplay **Natja Brunckhorst**

Cinematography **Martin Langer**

Music **Amaury Bernier; Hannah von Hübner**

Cast **Sandra Hüller** (Maren); **Max Riemelt** (Robert);
Ronald Zehrfeld (Volker); **Peter Kurth** (Markowski);
Martin Brambach (Lunkewitz); **Ursula Werner**
(Käte)

When the process of German reunification began in 1989, all East Germans were asked to draw up their cash and financial assets so that these could be converted into Western standard Deutschmarks. Some time after this process was complete, it emerged that there was a difference between the amount of East German wealth recorded in the files and the amount of Deutschmarks paid out. Somewhere along the line, somebody had made off with quite a bit of additional cash. Drawing on elements of what was subsequently discovered, and adding in a healthy dose of conjecture, Natja Brunckhorst's lively little thriller weaves an entertaining story about what might have happened.

Sandra Hüller plays Maren, at first glance just another unemployed woman living in a housing estate on the outskirts of Halberstadt – a place where almost everyone has recently been made redundant. She doesn't want to be paid to do nothing, she says resentfully, and it's a sentiment that's widely shared, echoing a wide (and somewhat prescient) fear of being unable to compete with better educated Westerners in the new economy. When Robert's uncle Markowski (Peter Kurth) arrives on the scene with tales of giant piles of old currency at the underground bunker complex where he works, breaking in and stealing some sounds like an exciting low-stakes romp, a means of blowing off some steam. But when she learns that there may still be a way to exchange some of that money for the real deal, a different kind of thrill emerges.

Two To One's success, as its title hints (being a reference to the perceived unfairness of the official exchange rate), lies in its appreciation of East German humour and the challenges of adjusting to capitalism – the way that eager anticipation of perceived freedom and plenty gave way to recognition of new forms of exploitation, and the effort that some people made to hold on to socialist values despite the seductiveness of capitalism.

A capable cast enables the film to walk a difficult path between comedy and realism. Two distinct tonal shifts divide it into informal acts and keep it fresh. There's some great design work involved, bringing together the East German products and styles often mocked in the West at the time with the then ultra-modern Western good which, thanks to the passage of time, now look equally twee. Other stereotypes about Eastern Europe are subverted. The people are as varied as anywhere else, each with their own sense of style, the colours are bright and the weather generally sunny. The film is full of heart. When its characters find themselves at odds, there is always more comedy to be found than destruction.

This isn't to say that there is a lack of edge. There are several instances of real threat, not to mention the nerves experienced whenever an official figure ventures onto the housing estate. There is also the romantic tension stemming from Robert's (Max Riemelt) jealousy and Volker's (Ronald Zehrfeld) penchant for self-sacrifice.

A wild story delivered with verve and a suitable degree of irreverence, Two To One promises a good time and largely delivers it.

Jennie Kermode, *Eye for Film*, 8 March 2025 (abridged)

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