

## Information

### *Biography Karlheinz Böhm*



## Karlheinz Böhm (1928-2014)

- From highly acclaimed film idol to humanitarian aid in Ethiopia
- Founder of the organisation *Menschen für Menschen*

**“Help for self-development instead of alms“: it is according to this principle that Karlheinz Böhm founded the aid to Ethiopia *Menschen für Menschen* in 1981. His anger about the unfair gap between rich and rich was the driving force behind his action. Wells, schools and health stations are constructed with the donations received by his aid organisation *Menschen für Menschen*, giving millions of Ethiopians hope for a better future.**

Karlheinz Böhm was born on 16 March 1928 in Darmstadt, Germany, as the only son of famous conductor Karl Böhm and soprano singer Thea Linhard. Due to his father's occupation, the family moved a lot: consequently, he spent a few years in Hamburg as a child and later in Dresden, where his father was the director of the Saxon State Opera. During the Second World War Karlheinz Böhm lived in a Swiss boarding school. Afterwards he and his parents moved to Graz, Austria, where he graduated from high school in 1947. Following his father's wishes, Karlheinz Böhm first started studying philosophy and philology at the University of Graz.

But he fell in love with the stage: working as an assistant film director and taking acting lessons from a famous Burg actress led Karlheinz Böhm to his first, short engagement as a stage actor at the legendary Vienna Burgtheater in 1948. This was followed by several years at the Theater in der Josefstadt in Vienna, which he always considered his artistic home. He got his first small film roles in “Der Engel mit der Posaune” (1948) and “Haus des Lebens” (1952). 1952 Arthur Rabenalt gave him the chance to prove himself, at the side of Hildegard Knef and Erich von Stroheim, in a leading role (“Alraune”). Karlheinz Böhm won international fame in his role as Emperor Franz Joseph at the side of Romy Schneider in the “Sissi” trilogy between 1955 and 1957.

In 1960 he set a counterpoint to his image as Sissi emperor as Mark Lewis in Michael Powells startling psychodrama “Peeping Tom”. Today, this film is among the New York Times' top ten film classics. Following a four year stay in Hollywood, where he appeared in “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” (1962) and “The Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm” (1962) amongst others, Böhm turned towards European theatre and undertook the stage direction of several opera performances. In 1964 he and his father brought “Elektra” by Richard Strauss to the Stuttgart State Opera: Karlheinz Böhm staged, Karl Böhm conducted.

In the early 1970s, he gave an impressive characterisation in Rainer Werner Faßbinder's productions “Martha”(1973), “Effie Briest” (1974), “Fox and His Friends” (1974) and “Mother Küster's Trip to Heaven” (1975) a remarkable movie comeback. In the following years Böhm worked as ensemble member of the Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus, where he ultimately had a great success as “King Lear”, as well as of main stages in Hannover, Basel, Zurich, Vienna and Munich.

# Information

## *Biography Karlheinz Böhm*



### **A bet that moved many and changed a lot**

On 16 May 1981 Karlheinz Böhm was a guest on the German TV show “Wetten, dass..?”. His legendary appeal to the audience had a decisive effect on his life. Böhm bet that “not even every third viewer will donate one Deutschmark, one Swiss franc or seven Austrian schillings for people in the Sahel region”. Although he won the bet, 8.4 million Austrian schillings (about 600,000 Euro) could be raised. In October 1981 he flew to Ethiopia for the first time, and on 13 November 1981 he founded the aid organisation *Menschen für Menschen*.

The first time Karlheinz Böhm travelled to Ethiopia in 1981, he visited a refugee camp with about 1,500 half-nomads from the Haiwa tribe in Babile, east Ethiopia. Together with them he started the first project in the Erer Valley, about 30 kilometres away, where the refugees settled in four new villages and started a new life as independent farmers. Today *Menschen für Menschen* operates numerous long-term projects in different regions of Ethiopia. These include agricultural and agro-ecological projects, the construction of wells, tapped springs and schools, as well as the development of the health care system, training programmes and didactic measures to improve the situation of women in society. According to the principle “help for self-help” millions of Ethiopians could thus be accompanied on their way to a better future. Karlheinz Böhm never received a salary for his work in one of the poorest countries on earth.

For his commitment in Ethiopia Karlheinz Böhm received numerous awards. Amongst others the Decoration of Honour for Services to the Republic of Austria, the honorary Ethiopian citizenship, honorary doctorates at Ethiopian universities in Jimma and Alemaya, as well as the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. In addition, he was awarded the Balzan Prize, the most valuable peace prize, “for his life’s work serving humanity” and the UNESCO Award as well as the Save the World Award.

Karlheinz Böhm died on 29 May 2014 aged 86, following a long and serious illness, in his house near Salzburg.

*Further information about the life of Karlheinz Böhm, in pictures and texts, can be found in his autobiography “MEIN LEBEN – Suchen Werden Finden”, published in 2008 by Collection Rolf Heyne.*

### **Press contact:**

Association *Menschen für Menschen*  
Capistrangasse 8/10, 1060 Vienna, Austria  
Martina Hollauf, E-Mail: [m.hollauf@mfm.at](mailto:m.hollauf@mfm.at)  
Phone: +43 1 5866950-16