



FESTIVAL DE CANNES  
COMPETITION  
2023 OFFICIAL SELECTION

# CLUB ZERO

by JESSICA HAUSNER

## Cast

Mia Wasikowska, Sidse Babett Knudsen, Amir El-Masry, Elsa Zylberstein, Mathieu Demy, Ksenia Devriendt, Luke Barker, Florence Baker, Samuel D Anderson, Gwen Currant

## Crew

*Director:* **Jessica Hausner**

*Writers:* **Jessica Hausner, Geraldine Bajard**

*Director of Photography:* **Martin Gschlacht**

*Editor:* **Karina Ressler**

*Composer:* **Markus Binder**

*Casting Director:* **Lucy Pardee**

*Costume Design:* **Tanja Hausner**

*Hair & Make-Up:* **Heiko Schmidt, Kerstin Gaecklein**

*Production Design:* **Beck Rainford**

*Sound Recordist:* **Patrick Veigel**

*Sound Designer:* **Erik Mischijew**

*Re-recording Mixer:* **Tobias Fleig**

## Production

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Austria, UK, Germany, France, Denmark, Qatar / 2023 / 110' / Colour

## Synopsis

Miss Novak joins the staff of an international boarding school to teach a conscious eating class. She instructs that eating less is healthy. The other teachers are slow to notice what is happening and by the time the distracted parents begin to realise, Club Zero has become a reality.



## Director's Note

### THE TEACHER-STUDENT-PARENT RELATIONSHIP

CLUB ZERO looks at how parents hand over their responsibility for their children to a teacher who misuses this trust. Ms. Novak manipulates the children and alienates them from their parents. Once the parents decide to save their children, it is already too late. They are forced to live through the biggest nightmare of every parent: losing their child. CLUB ZERO addresses this existential fear and ponders, "How can parents check on their children when they simply do not have enough time for them?"

This problem is not an individual one but a societal one - this could happen to me, as well as to you. Parents don't know everything that goes on at a school and have neither the time nor the means to. We live in a meritocracy that makes us work increasingly more. I am led to the impression that parental failure is systemic.

CLUB ZERO is set in a boarding school to emphasize the dependency of parents on teachers. In our society, teaching is often badly paid and not valued enough, yet it should be a highly respected job and paid accordingly. Should parents fully trust teachers or should they take on more responsibility? And how is that possible in a society based on work and success? I am interested in how our society assigns such responsibility. As Miss Dorset, the film's headmistress, says,





“Parents don’t have time for their children and then it is up to us to give them all the attention and affection they need.”

### **YOUTH, IDEOLOGY & MANIPULATION**

Young people today fear for their future. They fight for it. They want to act, to assume responsibility, to have power over their lives, to make a difference. To find meaning. They want to save the planet and, in doing so, their future. They become political, some join radical groups. They don’t want to wait until it’s too late. I understand that and I have deep sympathy for this generation.

In CLUB ZERO, Ms. Novak takes advantage of the children’s fears and wishes to make a difference.

She melds their fears and desires into her ideology. She truly believes that she is saving them and together they take it too far. That is what makes her so convincing and so dangerous: Her belief meets the wish of the young people to change the world and increases the dangerous inclination towards developing eating disorders for some of them.

I went to a Catholic girls’ school in the 1980s and the idea of eating very little was prevalent. It was competitive among us. We would only chew on sugar-free gum and were disgusted by a girl who ate an egg sandwich during break. Secretly, we admired her because she didn’t care about what we thought. It was an interesting dynamic. It was about belonging and setting certain rules that you had to comply with. This dynamic is also present in CLUB ZERO.



Ben, for example, is the kid with the egg sandwich but his desire to belong is too strong, so he joins the group. There is a pack mentality that is difficult to break away from.

During that time, a friend of mine became anorexic and she would sometimes spend several weeks in a hospital. It made me understand how life threatening this disorder can be. I saw that it is really an addiction: it is hard to just stop and start eating again.

Not eating is also a way of punishing others. For parents, it is most painful to see one's child refusing to eat. It is a refusal that translates into a refusal to live. Where this rejection comes from is a very important question to ask. I was thinking about hunger strikes when I wrote CLUB ZERO.

Food refusal is also a political form of strike - an extreme form of passive resistance whether against parents or against society.

### **FAITH, FASTING & RELIGION**

Food control has always been part of religion. I think this is because through fasting, you feel a high that encourages spiritual enlightenment. You can change your mind through changing your food intake. Furthermore, controlling your food intake suggests controlling your body. It strengthens a feeling of power and of being "special".

Eating is very personal but at the same time very social. Imagine you meet friends for dinner and you don't eat. This can make them feel attacked, it can irritate them. Why? Because you question





their way of living. We all believe in something, no one is free from superstition. Each of us belongs to a group that has certain principles or codes. We need to understand the subjectivity of our beliefs in order to understand how Ms. Novak and the kids are convinced of theirs. Their "food religion" is an example of a radical belief.

### **FAIRYTALES & ARCHETYPES**

Traditional fairytales are told to help children (and adults) gain a moral compass, to learn right from wrong. In CLUB ZERO, Ms. Novak and the kids question what we all think is right. They have their own truth. Even though they are obviously going to starve, they still believe. A big inspiration for me was the fairytale of The Pied Piper of Hamelin, in which all children die at the end.

All but one, who was sick that day and could not join the other children. I was also inspired by Russian fairy tales, which convey a completely different morality than European fairy tales. Morality is distributed in a different way, the crooks and thugs are often the heroes of the story.

The use of fairytales as an inspiration also gives way to a more distanced approach, a general point of view: psychological or social details are pushed into the background to tell a more universal story. The characters resemble archetypes rather than individuals. The aesthetic emphasizes the universal quality of the story: setting, costumes, uniforms - we don't know exactly when or where the story takes place. English as the universal language for boarding schools - and as a universal film language.





There is a certain kind of absurdity that dwells in our existence. Seen from a more distanced point of view, a lot of things that we believe in and that we do seem ridiculous, absurd or in vain. In my films, I always try to find a distant perspective to reflect upon this. CLUB ZERO is told from such a point of view: exaggeration to the extent of absurdity offers a more humorous approach to the film's darker themes.

*Jessica Hausner*



# The Music of CLUB ZERO

## Interview with Composer Markus Binder

*"I have hardly ever used scores in my films before. I only used source/diegetic music, music that is actually playing in the scenes – a quintessential arthouse cinema purity rule. With LITTLE JOE, it was the first time I used existing music (by Teiji Ito) for a film score. It's not that the music punctuated or amplified the emotions, it rather contrasted with the story which I found interesting. In CLUB ZERO the music was expressly composed. The music is there to emphasize the narrative's driven rhythm, one thing inevitably follows another. That's why we chose drums. I talked to the composer Markus Binder about cult music. He took inspiration from African and Asian cult drums and created a drum rhythm of his own. There is undeniably a religious like quality to this drumming."*

Jessica Hausner

**Did you start working on the music before the film was shot or did the composing unfold as you received visual material?**

That's quite an interesting question. Can you even write a film score before anything visual is made available to you? Would that even make sense? A director once told me that he always works with the same composers for his films who don't start until the film is shot. I couldn't have imagined that for my process, especially with the little time that one gets in post-production. For CLUB ZERO, my relationship with Jessica allowed me to experience the development of the film very closely: how the idea came about, the first drafts of the script. We had many conversations on the direction that the film should take. As a result, I sensed the film's atmosphere right from the start and immediately

had an idea for the sound. I made a few demos before the shooting began and it turned out to be exactly what Jessica wanted. For example, we worked on the humming sounds a long time before shooting and wondered how fast it should be, how many notes it should have, what the polyphonic version of it should look like. Of course, I noticed that making something too precise at that stage also doesn't make much sense. It needs the rhythm offered by the visual material.

**Can you tell us more about this symbiosis between image and music, and music's function in film?**

When you listen to music, without any visual aid to it, sometimes images or a story arise in your mind, whether they be actually visual or more emotional. Something that always astonished us

in the editing room was how incredibly strong a simple image could be and how blending it with music could reinforce said strength. This complementary effect that the visual medium and the acoustic medium have on each other is tremendous. If you create a picture to go with the music, you quickly create that first wow impression. The next step is to then reduce and polish this effect to its essentials.

Jessica's intention as a filmmaker is not to aim for a quick effect. With this in mind, is the music a kind of resistance, a counterpart or a support to the visuals? This film is set in a very classical European environment. The music, on the other hand, is difficult to locate. This fascinates me. The instruments that I used come from all over the world. The sound in the opening and ending credits of the film was

played on an old spinet, which is something like a small piano. You have a string of five sides per key. I opened the box and played around on these sides with a plectrum. The drums came from Morocco and London while the other string sounds came from a string instrument I brought back from Vietnam and a two-sided banjo type guitar from Siberia. The origin of these devices doesn't really matter. The rhythm of the music is western and goes in the direction of techno, but you don't exactly know where the sound is supposed to come from. I think that's the beauty of art, that it can be placeless and doesn't have to be culturally identifiable.





**Have you, nevertheless, drawn cultural inspiration during your research?**

I wanted the film's score to be secular. That's something I want to emphasise. I find religions culturally interesting, but otherwise they're suspicious to me. You can say that techno or electronic music per se is the secularisation of cultic music. Even if it doesn't deal with religious questions or feelings at all, music that consists of repetition and of rhythm is immersive and has a spiritual effect on the body or even on the organism. As a drummer, I myself notice this effect all the time. In Zimbabwe, I saw a concert of Thomas Mapfumo: he stood with his back to the audience, completely absorbed and around him was a whole band playing the same thing over and over again. You'd think that you were in a techno club but what

you were hearing was the drumming on Mbiras, an African percussion instrument which are like metal tongues inside of a pumpkin.

I also used Mbiras for the score, by the way. I then built my own drum set in my studio with blankets hung everywhere to keep the sound nice and dry and then played, from my point of view, electronic music or techno, on drums of animal skins. Here again there is a connection between ritualistic and repetitive sounds, which you know from electronic music as well as from some kind of traditional music from Africa and South-East Asia.

**Jessica also talked about creating 'irritations' through music.**

Yes, in the sense of making the film's viewing more sober, more secular. It seems to me that it works well in the film, that the music combined with the visuals creates a certain distance or, as Jessica calls it, 'irritation' for the audience. But who knows. At some point I gave up trying to think of what reactions I should evoke in the audience, because everyone reacts so differently.



# The Look of CLUB ZERO

## Interview with Costume Designer Tanja Hausner

*"The costumes in my films are often very colorful and bold. There is a humorous exaggeration in CLUB ZERO. One suddenly notices details, such as a flower on a blouse, and that leads you to think about the creative decision-making process. I find that interesting, it preserves the viewer's ability to think along. I enjoy it when a film leaves gaps and room for your thoughts. It is one of the elements that make the viewing experience pleasant and enjoyable."*

Jessica Hausner

**Let's start by discussing your collaboration with Jessica first. You've been designing the costumes for her films right from the start of her career, right?**

Exactly, I made the costumes for her even when she was a student. That's how I got in touch with film in the first place. Back then, I was still studying law, although I always wanted to do costume design. After that brief law detour, I worked mostly in theater while also doing costumes for Jessica's films. In reality, our collaboration started much earlier because we loved dressing up as kids, so there's something seamless about us working together. It's the nicest thing to work with her because you know about a project early on. We talk about visuals as soon as she has an idea for a film. Then you have at least a year or two to gather

courage, thoughts and talk about the project again and again. That's a huge advantage, to be able to commit to something for so long. The other nice thing about working with Jessica is that she's just as brave as I am. We stick to daring ideas, just like with the color palette. No realism but a stylization that brings something unexpected, always with a certain irony. In theater, there's often a great concept at the beginning and then, as time goes on, it gets more and more reduced until what's left at the end is more of an attempt. Jessica designs bold concepts with me and sticks to them. Until the very end.

**You said that you get involved as early as the idea stage of the film. Are the visual aspects already decided during script development?**

That's an interesting question. Usually, Jessica writes the script first and then we talk about it. I never noticed that costume ideas flowed into the script; the two areas are quite independent of each other. But we do talk about it a little. About the color scheme, the characters or the milieus... That's all very inspiring for me, I get to start thinking about the design in good time.

**Let's talk about the design of the school uniforms in the film.**

Uniforms are a big topic in all of Jessica's films. In CLUB ZERO, it was school uniforms,

in LITTLE JOE it was lab coats. We also had the uniforms for the Order of Malta in LOURDES. Uniforms are so distinct that they multiply and reinforce impressions. They always create a strong image.

Firstly, for CLUB ZERO, it was important to us that they didn't look like English school uniforms, which always consist of blazers, ties and crests, as well as skirts and pants. We wanted something casual, just a polo shirt and then the sweatshirts for the winter, the whole in a cheerful color scheme that contrasts with the great, but also dark, threatening-looking school. We thought it would look great having the kids in these yellow school uniforms buzzing around in front of the dark walls like glowing bees.







Secondly, we considered whether boys and girls should wear different uniforms. We managed to create a unisex uniform, which personally I think is very nice. I tried to design really short pants for the boys, but in the end, it almost became a kind of pant skirt, which fits well with the androgynous figure of the young people. I think it's nice that there's no distinction.

#### **What was the approach for Miss Novak?**

The interesting thing was that Mia didn't have much time, so she couldn't come to Europe that often. We had her in London once and that's when I brought different styles for her to try out. First, we had a little dress that made her look a little coy, like an older girl who doesn't really care about her appearance. But that took away so much of her strength and

that's how we came up with the oversized jacket, the long skirt and just the polo shirts. It's sort of a mixture of femininity and masculinity, bringing us back to an androgynous quality. Her clothing represents a kind of armor that she wears in order to be taken seriously. It's not so much about the inner conflicts that she might have. We also talked about that a lot, that these conflicts only come out very privately, when she's meditating in her room. We originally wanted to depict that through the costume as well, but then decided not to.

#### **And the color selection? In every scene she wears a polo shirt in a different color.**

Yes! It's actually always the same style, a slim skirt or pants that are a bit à la Marlene Dietrich and just this color changing polo shirt.

It makes one notice that time goes by but she stays true to her style in the end.

### **What about the different parents?**

It was clear for us that they had to differ from each other, so that we didn't end up with a "prototype" parent.

Ragna's parents are a bit hippie or bobo-like, perhaps a bit artistic and alternative, and yet very wealthy. Therefore, they sometimes wear kimonos, Asian pants and flip-flops. The father who has a slightly childish manner, wears cartoon characters on his T-shirt or fancy sweaters. We know a lot of parents from our environment that are somehow a bit young at heart and hip. That is where the inspiration for them is from.

Elsa's parents rather carry their wealth in front of them by wearing status symbols. The father wears Versace shirts and leather shirts, black and gold dominate in color, exuding a certain power and masculinity. The mother dresses in the style of Chanel, with bows, silk blouses and bouquet jackets and pearl earrings. It is very important for both to show what they have.

And then there is Ben's mother who comes from a completely different background. She works as a nurse and is only able to send her son to this school thanks to a scholarship. It was important to Jessica that she was dressed in yellow. I understood it as a way for the character to show warmth and embody a home where her son and his friends are welcome. The other parents are portrayed as rather critical of their children,





while she is critical of the school. She is full of motherly spirit and perhaps cares for her son a little too much, as is implied in the film. At home, she wears patterned blouses, sweaters and aprons. There's always something modest, something touching about her. When she is with the other parents at the meeting, she makes an effort to put on a hat, a costume jacket and skirt, but of course you can still tell that there are class differences.

#### **Let's talk about Miss Dorset.**

With Miss Dorset, Jessica had a sort of Cleopatra look in mind. I immediately thought of collars and jewelry that make her a bit majestic. She wears colliers, multi-row necklaces, large flower shapes, and embroidery on her shoulders;

always a lot of jewelry and dresses made of silk. The funny thing was that one day, Sidse came out of the dressing room and said, "Today I'm dressed like the Queen!". I was a little offended because the costumes don't seem so auntie or queen-like to me, but pretty and chic. However, she just had that feeling. Yet she played the role with a grandeur and wears very high heels. She presents these very fashionable outfits with a great naturalness.

**You talked about black and gold as a sign of power in reference to Elsa's father. What about the combination of black and gold of the Club Zero uniform at the end of the film?**

That's a funny story. I was wondering what Miss Novak might wear while meditating and I found a black velvet suit at a thrift store with a gold sign

already embroidered on the sleeve. It looked great on Mia so we thought that she could wear it while meditating. It then occurred to us that we could transform the gold embroidery into the Club Zero logo which already had a meander-like shape. I hadn't even thought about adding badges but Jessica was like, "Why not make some?". That's how the full uniform was created. A blend of ideas that came about during a fitting.

Such fittings are a lot of fun. It's better than to just try on one piece after the other without thinking about the bigger picture. That's also what I really like about working with Jessica, who is always present for the fittings. Working with the actors is also incredibly exciting. Great things come out of that.







## Jessica Hausner

Jessica Hausner was born in Vienna in 1972. She studied directing at the Film Academy of Vienna where she made the awardwinning short films **FLORA** (1996) and **INTER-VIEW** (1999).

Her debut feature film **LOVELY RITA** premiered in Cannes in Un Certain Regard in 2001. She returned to Un Certain Regard in 2004 with her second feature, **HOTEL**. In 2009, **LOURDES** was selected in Competition at the Venice Film Festival where it was awarded the FIPRESCI Prize.

**AMOUR FOU** (2014) premiered in Un Certain Regard and **LITTLE JOE** (2019), Jessica Hausner's fifth feature film and her English- language debut, in Competition at Cannes where Emily Beecham received the "Prix d'interprétation féminine" for Best Actress.

## Filmography

**CLUB ZERO** (2023) - Austria / UK / Germany / France / Denmark / Qatar

**LITTLE JOE** (2019) - Austria / UK / Germany

**AMOUR FOU** (2014) - Austria / Luxembourg / Germany

**LOURDES** (2009) - Austria / France / Germany

**HOTEL** (2004) - Austria / Germany

**LOVELY RITA** (2001) - Austria / Germany

**INTER-VIEW** (short film, 1999) - Austria

**FLORA** (short film, 1995) - Austria



## Mia Wasikowska

Mia Wasikowska gained international recognition as the title character in Tim Burton's 2010 retelling of the Lewis Carroll novel, **ALICE IN WONDERLAND**, her performance earned her the AFI Award for Best International Actress. She recently starred in Mia Hansen-Love's **BERGMAN ISLAND**, and Robert Connolly's **BLUEBACK**. Other credits include **BLACKBIRD**, **JANE EYRE**, **THE DEVIL ALL THE TIME**, **JUDY AND PUNCH**, **CRIMSON PEAK**, **MAPS TO THE STARS**, **THE DOUBLE** and **ONLY LOVERS LEFT ALIVE**.

Mia made her directorial debut with **LONG, CLEAR VIEW**, a segment of **THE TURNING** anthology film, based on Tim Winton's novel, which was nominated for an AACTA Award in 2013. She followed this with **AFTERBIRTH**, a segment of **MADLY**, an international anthology of short films featuring innovative love stories, which premiered at the 2016 Tribeca Film Festival.

## Sidse Babette Knudsen

Sidse Babette Knudsen is perhaps best known for playing the iconic lead role in the BAFTA-winning television series **BORGEN** for which she has also been Emmy nominated. Her film credits include **THE DUKE OF BURGUNDY** directed by Peter Strickland, Susanne Bier's **AFTER THE WEDDING**, starring alongside Tom Hanks twice in both Tom Tykwer's **A HOLOGRAM FOR A KING** and Ron Howard's **INFERNO** and Ben Sharrock's BAFTA-nominated **LIMBO**. She has also worked extensively in French cinema winning a Cesar for her performance in **L'HERMINE**. Other television credits include HBO's **WESTWORLD**, Philip K Dick's **ELECTRIC DREAMS** series for Channel 4 & Amazon, Jack Thorne's **THE ACCIDENT**, a four-part series for Channel 4 and David Hare's **ROADKILL** for the BBC.





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