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BERLINALE 2022 Competition

## Review: *Rimini*

by [DAVID KATZ](#)

12/02/2022 - BERLINALE 2022: Ulrich Seidl returns after a decade-long absence from fiction filmmaking with a characteristically harrowing work, which still finds glints of light in the void



Michael Thomas in *Rimini*

We know that the average life of a professional musician is a gig-to-gig, paycheque-to-paycheque one; the decline of physical music sales and the rise of streaming platforms have solidified this sorry outcome. What **Ulrich Seidl** posits in *Rimini* [+], his first fiction work since premiering *Paradise: Hope* [+] in 2013, is that it can potentially look like a divine punishment acted out on Earth, a purgatory of faltering resolve. There's a reasonably popular app around right now called Cameo, which lets you purchase short greeting videos from celebrities; *Rimini* feels like an almighty shriek of pain emanating from one of those 15-second snippets.

Premiering in competition at the [Berlinale](#), with a companion film called *Sparta* set to follow perhaps later on this year's festival circuit, *Rimini* is comfortable and confident territory for Seidl and his co-writer and partner **Veronika Franz**. It sees a return for regular Seidl player **Michael Thomas**, toplining the film as one Ritchie Bravo, an ailing lounge singer – imagine Engelbert Humperdinck as played by booze-sozzled, late-era Mickey Rourke. Ritchie's pitiful existence is the tour-bus-full-of-retirees circuit in the northern Italian city of Rimini, which Seidl has chosen to set in the off-off-season, with COVID-foreshadowing empty beaches, and dense fog like something out of a Romantic landscape painting.

Seidl plays out Ritchie's numbers in excruciating, long takes, made all the more eerie by the fact that the film is shot in widescreen CinemaScope, with ultra-slender focal lengths – the chipping walls and ceilings exude personality, to put it mildly. He belts out, in a few sequences, his signature tune, the ripe power ballad "Emilia"; each time you hear it – and my, you hear it a lot – it grows and takes on a certain kind of poignancy, echoing the plot developments in Franz and Seidl's screenplay.

But this is a bait and switch, lest we think Seidl was going to give us a redemptive film about a guy who could use a break. In a very interesting twist on the cinematic norm, he partakes in sex work with eager fans post-show, depicted in the explicit and full-frontal shots familiar from numerous past works of Seidl's. And with his immediate family virtually estranged, he receives an unwelcome visit from his daughter Tessa (**Tess Göttlicher**), who requests some of the money she sympathetically believes she's owed, after he walked out on her and her mum. But Ritchie is cash-poor, and only just keeping the lights on financially himself...

Several early reactions to *Rimini* have expressed some fatigue with Seidl's predictable targets, and the customarily blank affect with which he films them. But although this is as merciless and as pointed – for his admirers – as ever, one can still identify a breakthrough, through characterising it as a "late work". Seidl is part of a post-war boomer generation now on the verge of retirement, dealing with ageing parents and their legacies; Ritchie's military-vet father (unnamed, and played by **Hans-Michael Rehberg**) is a dementia sufferer in a care facility, and the film periodically cuts to little vignettes of his life. So *Rimini* also earns its laurel as a sensitive study of mortality, as well as a lacerating look at much else that Seidl sees in us, as is his wont.

*Rimini* is a co-production between Germany, Austria and France, staged by [Seidl Film Produktion](#), [Essential Filmproduktion](#) and [Parisienne de Production](#). [Coproductio Office](#) handles its international sales.

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