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'Rimini': Film Review | Berlin 2022

Michael Thomas stars as a happy-go-lucky lounge lizard in the latest comedy-drama by Ulrich Seidl, the Austrian director of the 'Paradise' trilogy.

BY LESLIE FELPERIN FEBRUARY 13, 2022 8:58AM





Michael Thomas in Rimini. COURTESY OF ULRICH SEIDL FILMPRODUKTION

The first part of an intended diptych about two Austrian brothers, sleazy-fun black comedy *Rimini* follows one sibling, Ritchie Bravo (**Michael Thomas**), a part-time gigolo/self-catering host who's living off the thin vapors of his almost evaporated fame as a singer of cheesy power pop ballads in the crumbly Italian seaside resort of the title. Over the course of events, Ritchie tries to achieve a kind of moral redemption but only via a simultaneous betrayal, so it's a break-even effectively.

Likewise, this stands as one of Austrian director **Ulrich Seidl**'s better but not quite best features in a pretty consistent career, not as scurrilously seedy as him at his worst, or as merciless, but not as ambitious or startlingly insightful as his best. Co-written with regular collaborator Veronika Franz, it's also his first fictional work since he concluded his *Paradise* trilogy with *Hope* back in 2013, not that the documentaries he's made in the interim like *In the Basement* and *Safari* are any less noteworthy or distinguished. All Seidl's work basically operates on a narrow spectrum between careful contrivance and random chance, while the preoccupations (sex and prostitution, tourism and immigration, amorality and religion) stay roughly the same throughout.

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**THE BOTTOM LINE**

He sells sexy time by the seaside.

Venue: Berlin International Film Festival (Competition)

Cast: Michael Thomas, Tessa Goettlicher, Hans-Michael Rehberg, Inge Maux, Claudia Martini, Georg Friedrich

Director: Ulrich Seidl

Screenwriter: Ulrich Seidl, Veronika Franz

1 hour 54 minutes

Rimini is right in that thematic wheelhouse, and even features a few familiar faces from earlier Seidl pictures, such as star Thomas (*Import/Export*, *Paradise: Hope*), Inge Maux (*Paradise: Love*) and Claudia Martini (*Dog Days*), as well as several key off-camera contributors, like longtime DP Wolfgang Thaler, production designer Andreas Donhauser and producer Philippe Bober. Unlike *Rimini*'s protagonist, a lone wolf in a sealskin coat who performs with just one roadie and a sound system, Seidl is once again getting the band back together.

First met coming home to his suburban family home in Austria to see his newly widowed, senile father (Hans-Michael Rehberg) and brother Ewald (Georg Friedrich), Richie is simultaneously a ridiculous figure and sort of a likable guy. Still working a look he must have perfected back in the 1980s, with a bleached blond mane of hair and sleeveless undershirts, he struts on stage and off, always on, always performing, whether he's having a beer, singing a classical *leid* for his mother's funeral or crooning his moldy old hits. (Fritz Ostermayer and Herwig Zamernik's original compositions written for the film absolutely nail the true horror of the *Schlager* music sound; think easy listening meets country but with a lobotomy.)





Ritchie Bravo for 200 euros on a slow night, or having sex with aging clients like Annie (Claudia Martini). There's no doubt that it's meant to be a bit comical when Annie's deaf mother is heard in the room next door crying out for a hot-water bottle when Ritchie and Annie are in the middle of doing 69. But as with his look at women sex tourists in Africa in *Paradise: Love*, Seidl isn't entirely mocking of sex work, and certainly not judgmental about it, chiming in a way with recent British Sundance hit *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande*. Ritchie takes money for sleeping with these ladies, but he also seems to genuinely enjoy it, especially since, as with singing, it's something he's actually pretty good at.

Clearly, one thing he's lousy at is parenting, judging by the fact that his adult daughter Tessa (Tessa Goettlicher) shows up suddenly, spitting mad that she hasn't seen him for over 12 years. Plus, she never got any birthday presents, let alone the car and the starter flat everyone else gets from their dad, so now she wants 30,000 euros, an oddly specific number that's never quite explained.

Glowering nearby protectively is Tessa's silent Middle Eastern boyfriend, with whom she lives in a recreational vehicle, along with another five or six men who are quite possibly Syrian refugees. Throughout, Ritchie makes mildly racist comments to the Arab-looking people he meets, not necessarily abusive but just ignorant or clumsy, like trying to persuade women wearing hijabs to "take their burqas off." More often than not, he just walks by them as they sleep in doorways and under awnings all over Rimini, as if they've been blown there like sand from the beach, silently silting up the corridors of the city.

Seidl and Franz pull the strands of Ritchie's story together in a way that, as is often the





Cast: Michael Thomas, Tessa Goettlicher, Hans-Michael Renberg, Inge Maux, Claudia Martini, Georg Friedrich

Production companies: Ulrich Seidl Film Produktion, Essential Filmproduktion, Parisienne de Production, Bayerischer Rundfunk, Arte France Cinema

Director: Ulrich Seidl

Screenwriter: Ulrich Seidl, Veronika Franz

Producers: Philippe Bober, Michel Merkt

Executive producers: Sarah Nagel, Isabell Wiegand, Dan Wechsler, Jamal Zeinal-Zade, Andreas Roald

Director of photography: Wolfgang Thaler

Art direction: Andreas Donhauser, Renate Martin

Costumes: Tanja Hausner

Editor: Mona Willi

Sound designer: Matz Mueller

Composers: Fritz Ostermayer, Herwig Zamernik

Casting: Eva Roth, Henri Steinmetz, Klaus Pridnig

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