

SYNOPSIS

RIMINI

Dir. Ulrich Seidl

Austria/France/Germany / 2022 / 114 min /

In German, with English subtitles

Color

Aspect ratio: 1.85:1 Sound: 5.1 Surround

Richie Bravo, once upon a time a successful Austrian pop star, chases after his faded fame in wintry Rimini, Italy. He funds his dissolute lifestyle and addiction to gambling with concerts for busloads of German-speaking tourists and sexual favors for his female fans.

His world starts to collapse when his adult daughter suddenly breaks into his life and demands money from him that she feels he owes her. Meanwhile his elderly father, who suffers from dementia, goes round and round in circles in an Austrian nursing home as his condition steadily declines.

PRESS

“A shiveringly precise slow burn that continues to burrow new tunnels in the mind long after it ends... This is not, in the end, a tale of hubris brought low, or even of a tacky life staring down a long lens at a tawdry, dwindling death. Instead it’s a chilling parable about the sins of the father becoming the punishments of the son, and about the moral arc of the universe bending, across generations, toward the coldest justice imaginable.” - *Variety*

“It could be sentimental, this “winter journey” to the graveyard of dreams and desire. It could be a settling of scores, a satire, an exposé. But it never is. We’re in an Ulrich Seidl movie. And at the end we sit silently in our seats.” - *WELT Online*

“There is a kind of brilliance in it. [*Rimini*] is managed with unflinching conviction, a tremendous compositional sense and an amazing flair for discovering extraordinary locations.” - *The Guardian*

“Ulrich Seidl finds the real drama.” - *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*

“*Rimini* shows that a director does not have to like his characters. But he has to love them, and then he can tell us anything.” - *Die Zeit*

Interview with Ulrich Seidl by Markus Keuschnigg

Before filming you always spend a long time researching. What was the biggest challenge with RIMINI in this respect?

My choice of Rimini has to do with the fact that my parents took us there to spend our holidays at the seaside in the 1950s. I can still see myself playing on the beach with my brother in our plain black trousers. Moreover, we found settings in Rimini that were extremely inspiring and almost ideal for the way I imagined the story in terms of its images and atmosphere. There was also another decisive factor, one which later turned out to be quite a challenge in terms of the logistics and finances of the production. The film was to be set in winter, at a time when the beaches, the sea, the bathing huts, and beach bars disappear in the fog.

All of us – the film team, the actors, the extras – got ready for the shoot in Rimini at the end of November 2017. Everything was planned, everything booked. But the fog did not and would not rise. One bright sunny day after the next. So, I sent the whole team back home, and waited and waited. It was not until the beginning of the following year that the fog came. And not only that. Rimini had never seen so much snow as during that winter, which gave us wings. Our joy was immense.

What triggers your work on a new film project? Is it the characters /people and their stories or does it start with an overarching theme, a set of motifs out of which the narrative evolves? Or perhaps something completely different?

In contrast to a documentary film, where the idea for a film is usually an overarching theme, as in *IN THE BASEMENT* or *SAFARI* for example, a feature film develops in a different way. At the outset I don't have a theme as such or a fully developed story in my head, but instead I draw on various ideas and conceptions that I had either stored away at some point or have been carrying around with me for a while. These can be half-finished stories that I wrote at some point, images I can't get out of my head, or true events that I have heard or read about.

My own experiences and observations flow into the creative pool of ideas just as much as the specific places or landscapes which are the inspiration for scenes or stories. Sometimes it's also places or locations that you've always wanted to shoot, but which haven't previously been connected to a plot for a film.

There is also another source of inspiration for me, namely certain actors you would like to work with and for whom you sometimes already have a vague story in your head.

That was the case with Maria Hofstätter in *PARADiSE: Faith*, because I couldn't have imagined any other actress for that film. It was also like that with Georg Friedrich, who plays Richie Bravo's brother in the film *SPARTA*, which will follow *RIMINI*. And it is especially true for Michael Thomas, who played a major role in shaping the character of Richie Bravo in *RIMINI*. One could say that with Richie Bravo, Michael Thomas takes on the role of his life.

As a director, what particularly interests you about Michael Thomas and how did you come to realize that he needed to have a leading role?

The role of Richie Bravo was invented solely for him. It is – as the expression goes – made-to-measure. The original idea goes back a long way. When I was travelling with him in Ukraine about 17 years ago, preparing for the filming of *IMPORT EXPORT*, I experienced him as a singer for the first time.

One evening, in a restaurant lulled by a band hammering out some bar music, he suddenly stood up, grabbed the microphone and started singing “My Way” by Frank Sinatra. I was completely fascinated as in the space of a heartbeat he captivated the audience with his voice and his charisma. That experience stayed with me.

Years later, Veronika Franz and I wrote a first version of the Richie Bravo story for a film about mass tourism consisting of several episodes. Michael Thomas, alias Richie Bravo, as singer and entertainer, with old-school charm, a Casanova, a widow chaser in an all-inclusive package holiday resort. That was the plot.

And then again, at a much later date, I was reminded of the Richie Bravo story when I was dealing with the true story of a man from Germany who ended up in prison for taking nude pictures of boys in a poor and godforsaken backwater in Romania and posting them on the internet. In the end, these two stories became two films about two brothers. Richie Bravo, who tries to revive his past fame in *RIMINI* on the Italian Adriatic, and his younger brother Ewald who in *SPARTA*, the second film of the diptych, tries to build a new life abroad in Romania. By the end, the brothers’ father, suffering from dementia and eking out his days in a nursing home in Austria, also joins them. All three men are caught up by their past.

The actor Hans-Michael Rehberg, who plays Richie Bravo’s father in RIMINI, died in November 2017. Can you outline how the collaboration with Mr. Rehberg came about?

Finding a suitable actor was not an easy task. When I got to know Hans-Michael Rehberg, he was already seriously ill and rejected my offer. But after a few days his wife called and said he would be interested in the role after all. We then did an audition with him, and the results didn’t really convince me. I was in a dilemma. How could I refuse a seriously ill man his wish to play the role? When, two weeks later, I finally mustered up the courage to turn him down, the phone call went differently than I had imagined.

His wife more or less insisted on him doing more screen tests, because she couldn’t imagine that he wouldn’t meet my requirements. And she was right.

A few weeks before filming began, that is, during the most intense period of preparation, Rehberg again and again had to spend full days in his room at our chosen location, a nursing home in Lower Austria. He had to mingle with the patients living there, had to take his meals there with them and take part in the occupational therapy program. He was already very weakened at that time and got tired out quickly, so I had serious worries. A normal shoot with him seemed impossible.

But my concerns were swept away completely on the first day of shooting. As soon as the first clapperboard fell, this great actor was a completely changed man. There was no trace of tiredness or exhaustion. He played his part in an extremely disciplined way and with great empathy. Knowing that this would be his last role, he gave it everything he had. A great gift to me and to the film.

You work with the same people again and again, not only in front of the camera but also behind it. One gets the impression that there's a "Seidl family" or "Seidl company". What advantages do you see in this way of working and what disadvantages might there be?

If you see every film, every new project, as a new challenge, insofar as everything has to be rethought, planned and realized, then there can only be advantages in having a team that has bonded over the decades. Let me give you three examples.

I have been working with Veronika Franz for 25 years. We have written all of the scripts together since *DOG DAYS* and come up with all the concepts for films together (including some that haven't yet been realized). In all artistic matters she is my first point of contact and something like a controlling authority. She knows how to put my ideas into perspective and ask what they really mean.

I have been working with cameraman Wolfgang Thaler for just as long, and he is an ideal partner for my method of making films. He works with as little lighting and camera equipment as possible because flexibility during the shoot is the buzzword for me. You have to be able to change the shooting schedule at any moment and be ready to take on new and spontaneous ideas and implement them immediately. In addition, a film set for my films is what we call a "living" set, by which we mean that sometimes "real" people are performing in front of the camera, who are not obliged by a contract to ply their trade but have to commit themselves body and soul to the role. This requires a relationship of complete trust, especially between the cameraman and the protagonists.

Andreas Donhauser and Renate Martin, who are responsible for the production design, have also been on board for a very long time. I share with them a preference for certain locations and motifs, whether they are to be found in Romania, Kenya, or on the Adriatic, and a vision of how places should be dressed. As far as I'm concerned, the locations they suggest are almost always places that match my aesthetic taste and inspire me for the realization of a given story. This also applies to the décor of the film sets. Or at least we almost always agree on what we don't want from an artistic point of view, even if sometimes we haven't yet managed to find exactly what we're looking for. Even when we have already decided on something, for example a particular image, they keep looking, because there could be something even better. This may be anything but advantageous in terms of production costs, but it's certainly reassuring for a director from an artistic point of view.

I am a person who isn't easily satisfied. All the people who work with me have to come to terms with this dissatisfaction. It may sometimes be frustrating or even demotivating, but it is unavoidable in the common pursuit of making the best possible film.

Your films RIMINI and SPARTA, which you are currently finishing, tell the story of two brothers who seek their fortune far away. Do you see a kinship between these two projects and your PARADISE Trilogy?

Ultimately something similar “happened” to me with RIMINI and SPARTA as with the PARADISE Trilogy. Both projects were originally written as one single film, the individual plot strands were to be told in parallel, woven into each other and alternating. It was only in the editing process, in which all conceivable possibilities were played out, that it became clear that the stories had to be told individually for them to have their full impact.

The three films of the PARADISE Trilogy tell stories about three women and their unfulfilled longing for love, security, and sexuality. The locations of the action, a holiday resort on the coast in Kenya, a diet camp for teenagers in the Austrian provinces, and an estate of single-family homes on the outskirts of Vienna, as well as the individual stories are all very distinct, although the protagonists are all related to each other.

RIMINI and SPARTA are two films with male protagonists. They are also related to each other. Two brothers and their father. Although these films also tell very different stories, describe very different life situations, and are set in different places, the unifying element here is the search for happiness and the attempt to leave one’s past behind. But it catches up with you, that is the bitter or perhaps liberating truth that the protagonists ultimately have to face.

So yes, there is something like an overriding affinity with the PARADISE Trilogy. These films, RIMINI and SPARTA, are also about the longing for love and the longing to be loved, about sexual fulfilment and the failure to achieve it, and about the loneliness that remains.

Five Questions to Fritz Ostermayer and Herwig Zamernik Composers of the Richie Bravo songs

What makes a song a Schlager?

Herwig: Schlager music is folk music without a geographical home. Love, longing, pain, loss and joy packaged into the most beautiful, unapologetic melody, as direct and simple as possible. That is a Schlager.

What were your first thoughts and feelings when you were asked to compose Schlager music for a film by Ulrich Seidl?

Herwig: I was very pleased!

Fritz: Joy and fear, because the “quality” of a Schlager is measured first in terms of its functional suitability and not by the sophisticated criteria of music criticism. A Schlager that doesn’t become an earworm on hearing it the first time unfortunately misses the point. It is no coincidence that both the Schlager and the “hit” have the same etymological root: hitting something in, immediate ignition.

Ulrich Seidl’s wonderful offer to produce Schlager therefore also contained the slightly anxiety-provoking task of having to deliver something that would be, by definition, “commercially successful.”

The songs were written and composed for the man, artist and actor who was to sing them in the film: Michael Thomas. At what stage of your work did you meet him and did this encounter and subsequent ones push your work in a different direction?

Herwig: We met Michael Thomas a long time before the shoot because the commission was to write a musical identity and story for him in advance. The songs in the film were not pre-recorded, but to be sung live by him in Rimini. So, it was a very long journey from getting to know him, to writing, through to the actual performance.

Fritz: It’s also curious that Michael wasn’t very keen on the idea of playing a pop singer at first. As a fan of musicals, he would have preferred to sing more “demanding” songs. In the direction of Frank Sinatra or Engelbert Humperdinck. Conversely, Herwig and I would run a mile to get away from a musical, we prefer to stay down in the deep valley of Schlager melancholy.

After all, the Schlager music in the film is led “through” the character of Michael Thomas. This gives even the worst schmaltz a deeply human, almost broken dimension. What was kitsch, comes out as despair. That sounds like quite a challenge in terms of writing and composing the songs.

Herwig: Yes, of course it was a challenge, but in the end it’s exactly what the Schlager is about: combining kitsch and despair.

Fritz: Pathos and woe! Since Schlager are collective daydreams, they – like all dreams – do not obey logic and reason, but desire and fear. And Michael lives out these longings and insecurities grandiosely, in real life as well as in his film role. This is another reason why we think our symbiosis has been successful.

Michael Thomas sings other songs in the film besides your original compositions, including Udo Jürgens’s “Immer wieder geht die Sonne auf.” Are you nervous about whether your songs could stand up to a hit-of-the-century like that?

Herwig: No, because I don’t go around like that worrying about competition. Besides, Michael Thomas sings every song with such dedication that they all become his own. He also embodies a seeker who doesn’t always hit the mark, and although Richie Bravo had a few hits in his career, failure and getting lost is also an important part of his life.

Fritz: At some point I decided for my part to think of “Pale Blue Eyes” by The Velvet Underground as the most beautiful Schlager of all time. After that, it’s possible to work on the fallen cultural treasure that is the Schlager with a free and pure heart. Thanks be to Ulrich Seidl.

Interview by Markus Keuschnigg

BIOGRAPHY

Ulrich Seidl started his career with award-winning documentaries such as Good news (1990), Animal Love (1995) and Models (1998). Seidl's first feature fiction film Dog Days (2001) won the Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival in 2001. Import Export (2007) was the first film Seidl produced through his own production company, formed in 2003 with his long-term co-author Veronika Franz. It was followed by his prize-winning PARADISE Trilogy (2012). All three films were premiered in competition in Cannes, Venice and Berlin. The trilogy was followed by In the Basement (2014) and Safari (2016).

The most recent film, Rimini, had its world premiere at the Berlinale (main competition) 2022.

FILMOGRAPHY

2022 Rimini | 2016 Safari | 2014 In the Basement | 2013 PARADISE: Hope | 2012 PARADISE: Faith | 2012 PARADISE: Love | 2007 Import Export | 2006 Brothers, Let Us Be Merry (short) | 2004 Our Father (filmed stage play, Volksbühne Berlin) | 2003 Jesus, You Know | 2001 State of the nation | 2001 Dog Days | 1998 Models |

1998 Fun Without Limits (TV) | 1997 The Bosom Friend (TV) | 1996 Pictures at an Exhibition (TV) | 1995 Animal Love | 1994 The Last Men (TV) | 1992 Losses To Be Expected | 1990 Good News | 1989 War in Vienna (co-directed with Michael Glawogger) | 1984 Look 84 (fragment) | 1982 The Prom (short) | 1980 One Forty (short)

CAST

Michael Thomas

Tessa Göttlicher

Hans-Michael Rehberg

Inge Maux

Claudia Martini

Georg Friedrich

CREDITS

Director

Ulrich Seidl

Writer

Ulrich Seidl

Veronika Franz

Producer

Ulrich Seidl

Cinematography

Wolfgang Thaler

Art Direction

Andreas Donhauser

Renate Martin

Editor

Monika Willi

Sound

Klaus Kellermann