

Introduction

... only the good stuff ...

It's all about branding. Trademarks are a must-have in the film market. And among national cinematographies everyone strives after an image that helps distinguish them from all the other players. But only some get lucky.

In this worldwide struggle for uniqueness Austria seems to have succeeded admirably. The British *Guardian* nailed it with trenchant irony: *For the Austrian League of Extraordinarily Pessimistic Gentlemen, it's only the good stuff: sex tourism, the disappointment of immigrants, care-home degradation, suburban paedophilia, irrational violence, industrial farming and, lest we forget, latent Nazism.*

A growing number of serious critics and other rigorous observers will agree wholeheartedly that carefree entertainment is not a concept Austrian filmmakers embrace warmly. Branding? Well, certainly!

Just to get this straight: doom and gloom is only the reverse of the medal. There have been many very happy moments for Austrian filmmakers in 2013. Most notably for example when Ulrich Seidl, beaming with joy, celebrated the premiere of *PARADISE: HOPE*, the third and final part of his Paradise trilogy, at the Berlin Film Festival; or when Götz Spielmann took a bow facing a standing ovation crowd in San Sebastian after the presentation of his profound drama *OCTOBER NOVEMBER*; and not forgetting Michael Haneke, who finally collected his Best Foreign Language Oscar for his suffocating chamber piece *AMOUR* – Hollywood's golden boy wiped the grumpiness right off Michael Haneke's face. You should have seen him, once the official part was over, lazing at the

Austrian consul's residence all smiles and joking, at peace with the world and truly enjoying himself. What a difference an Academy Award makes!

If Haneke and Ulrich Seidl are the notorious and much lauded chefs responsible for the pessimistic brew also known as the New Austrian Cinema, many others have added spicy flavours, surprising ingredients and tasty dishes to the menu.

Just consider Daniel Hoesl's poignant social satire *SOLDATE JEANNETTE*, which after its Sundance launch collected a Tiger Award at the Rotterdam Festival; or Katharina Mückstein's bittersweet *TALEA*, the portrait of a teenager and her estranged mother, who slowly find common ground again; or Gustav Deutsch's *SHIRLEY - VISIONS OF REALITY*: animating and cinematically vivifying thirteen Edward Hopper paintings, the film tells the story of a theater actress' odyssey through a period of 40 years. It is a hybrid film par excellence.

Gory as could be expected, but nevertheless also great fun within the genre's boundaries, Marvin Kren's *THE STATION* (Blutgletscher) delivered the chills and thrills at Toronto's Midnight Madness section.

The outstanding quality of Austrian documentary films was confirmed by Anja Salomonowitz's *THE 727 DAYS WITHOUT KARAMO* (Berlin Film Festival), Paul-Julien Robert's *MY FATHERS, MY MOTHER AND ME*, Elena Tikhonova and Dominik Spritzendorfer's *ELEKTRO MOSKVA* (all surfacing at Nyon), Arash and Arman T. Riahi's *EVERYDAY REBELLION* (CPH:DOX) or Erwin Wagenhofer's thrilling *ALPHABET* (Amsterdam's IDFA), which tackles the topic of education in the times of globalization.

Among the coproductions underlining the international appreciation of Austrian input and production skills were Claude Lanzmann's monumental *THE LAST OF THE UNJUST* – undoubtedly one of this year's Cannes highlights; Bernard Rose's *THE DEVIL'S VIOLONIST* (featuring David Garrett as the furious fiddler) or Hungary's Foreign Language Awards entry, *LE GRAND CAHIER*.

Due to a number of high-profile films to choose from for the 86th Academy Awards race, the Austrian selection of Julian Pölsler's *THE WALL* may have come as a small surprise. On the other hand, this existentialist parable has one very valuable asset – compared to the formulaic mainstream movies that keep flooding our screens, *THE WALL* is clearly something else.

On a more general note: If *more of the same* is essentially Hollywood's credo – more sequels and explosive dramas and comic-book approved super heroes – then being considered *something else* is one of the defining elements that potentially help a film catch the cinema gourmet's eye.

How to grab the film market's attention has become a mystery of major proportions. All we can be sure of is that the film business as we know it keeps changing more rapidly than ever.

The best brains of the business keep analyzing the contradicting facts and interpreting the writings on the wall, but their conclusions are obscure at best. What effects do the faltering DVD sales have? How can we cultivate the wilderness of VOD and streaming platforms? A flash of genius would be most welcome to teach us how best to reach out to a social media-obsessed YouTube generation.

Will the continental divide between Hollywood's mega-budget films and the increasing numbers of kickstarter and credit card productions fueled by technical developments widen even more? Are edgy TV series (from *Breaking Bad* or *Mad Men* to *The Killing* and *True Blood*) the real alternative or the new mainstream? And what is left for the classic

art-house and auteur cinema? Are they bound to become a minority program for hardcore film aficionados? Or should we be celebrating the dawning of the golden age of *anything goes*?

At the end of the day we just have to accept that the future is unwritten. And when it comes to the film world it means: now more than ever.

Even if this may sound very un-Austrian, I believe there is no alternative to thinking positive and trying to focus on the opportunities that change will offer.

This Austrian Film Review 2013 catalogue offers proof that there is definitely no reason to feel pessimistic. It lists all feature films and documentaries and coproductions that premiered theatrically and/or at this year's big festivals, and also offers a selection of next-generation shorts and made-for-TV productions. And, once again, diversity is what gives the trademark *Austrian Films* credibility beyond the individual cinematic achievements.

Regardless of where you pick up this catalogue, I sincerely hope you put it to good use, get curious and feel challenged.

Martin Schweighofer

P.S. Wonder what's in the pipeline for 2014? Well, actually, quite a lot: Get ready for new productions from Jessica Hausner, Umut Dağ, Andreas Prochaska, Hubert Sauper, Nikolaus Geyrhalt, Ulrich Seidl, Marie Kreutzer, Barbara Eder, Michael Sturminger or Tizza Covi & Rainer Frimmel to name just a few. More about their next films can be found in our *Coming Soon 2014* catalogue, which will be published at the beginning of the new year. So what's cooking? Only the good stuff, of course. What else?