

Takacs Filmproduktion presents:



RUNNING ON EMPTY

Original title: JETZT ODER MORGEN

Directed by Lisa Weber

Austria, 2020, 89'

PRESS NOTES

Berlinale 2020

Programme: Panorama

World Premiere

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

19-year-old Claudia lives with her 4-year-old son, her brother and her mother in a public housing complex in Vienna. With no employment or prospects for the future, their days pass uneventfully. Director Lisa Weber accompanied the young woman and her family for more than three years. Eschewing the tired clichés of reality TV, the resulting portrait traces what happens when, by all appearances, nothing is happening. Along the way, Weber reveals individuals capable of evoking empathy, laughter and shock in the viewer – people for whom life is full of ifs, ands and buts – permitting the audience to share in their experience for the duration of the film.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Claudia got pregnant at the age of fourteen. For a long time, her son Daniel served as her excuse for never finishing school or looking for a job. Nowadays, Daniel is in pre-school and Claudia no longer has to care for him around the clock. She could go back and get her high school diploma, or finally search for a job. Instead, she does nothing – it almost feels like she's waiting for something to happen. But for what exactly?

Claudia lives in a public housing apartment in Vienna's Simmering district, together with Daniel, her mother Gabi and her brother Gerhard. Gabi and Gerhard are also unemployed, while all of them receive welfare benefits. The fact that the bulk of their time is spent in the crowded confines of home sometimes leads to conflict, though it also reinforces family cohesion. They watch television together, roll cigarettes, smoke cigarettes. They do each other's hair, take naps, sleep in earnest, celebrate birthdays. Sometimes Gerhard drives a lorry for hours with his simulator. "So much time, and no life," he says, flashing a mischievous grin, before returning to his game. Anything to keep outside life safely outside. *RUNNING ON EMPTY* is a film about life and waiting for it to happen. About dreams, lethargy and ennui in three generations.

Director Lisa Weber accompanied Claudia and her family for more than three years. Eschewing the tired clichés of reality TV, the resulting portrait traces what happens when, by all appearances, nothing is happening. Along the way, Weber reveals individuals capable of evoking empathy, laughter and shock in the viewer – people for whom life is full of ifs, ands and buts – permitting the audience to share in their experience for the duration of the film.

CREDITS

DIRECTOR	Lisa Weber
STORYTELLING	Roland Stöttinger & Lisa Weber
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY	Carolina Steinbrecher
EDITING	Roland Stöttinger
PRODUCER	Rudi Takacs
CO-PRODUCER	Ulrich Seidl
PRODUCTION	A joint production of Takacs Film / Ulrich Seidl Filmproduktion
SOUND	Theda Schifferdecker
SOUND DESIGN	Lenja Gathmann
SOUND MIXING	Alexander Koller
COLOR GRADING	Dimitri Aschwanden
DRAMATURGICAL CONSULTANT	Severin Fiala

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR LISA WEBER

How did you arrive at the decision to accompany Claudia and her family with your camera, to trace the lives of these particular individuals?

In the beginning, my fascination was focused on one person: Claudia. When I met her in the courtyard of the building complex where she lives, she was 11 and I was 19. Due to our ages, we couldn't be friends, the difference was just too big. But somehow, she always stayed on my mind and I maintained the contact for years. I got to know her whole family over the course of my many visits. For me, these were trips into another world, one that fascinated me and in which I felt very at ease. The urge to film arose because I found myself unable to describe my observations in words. As we know, love, happiness and big things like that often manifest themselves in small moments and gestures.

You filmed the family for three and a half years and it seems like they were not bothered by the camera's presence. How did you gain their trust, to allow themselves to be filmed in what are at times intimate situations?

I always had a small camera with me from the first time we met. So I was "Lisa with the camera" and an interesting pass-time. I never did anything with this early material, but the fact that I had been filming from the beginning most likely contributed to their total lack of shyness in front of the film team later on. I never experienced the family differently in the presence of my camerawoman, her assistant and our sound woman while shooting than when I was alone with them. That's not a given and I recognise what a great gift that was. There were some events where they didn't want us to be present. But when they allowed us to come and shoot we had pretty much free reign. Sometimes they even gave us a key and let us come over in the morning before they were awake.

What was the family's reaction to the completed film?

They themselves described the film, which was of course shaped to an extreme degree in the editing process, as a great success, and felt that it captures the truth, with its highs and lows. On one hand, that shows me how well our editor Roland Stöttinger understood and assembled the material, and on the other hand it almost makes the family superhuman in my eyes. I don't know how I would feel if there were a film out there documenting my ups and downs, or my strengths and weaknesses, over the course of three and a half years.

"Idleness" plays a large role in your film: how did you approach the subject?

Simply being idle, doing nothing, is usually a lovely vision or goal for people who actually do a lot. But some people don't consciously choose to do nothing – they just can't manage to do anything and that is not a pleasant experience. The film encourages the

viewer to think about why someone might not manage to do anything and who is to be held accountable for this situation. In an achievement-oriented society, stagnation is stigmatised. Those affected feel this stigma, although in my opinion it doesn't help anyone to become active.

Since completing shooting for the film you have continued to be in touch with Claudia. Have you witnessed any changes in her life?

The fascination that drew me to Claudia in the beginning hasn't disappeared, but it has changed. The large surface for my own projections which she represented for me, with her introverted ways, became smaller the better I got to know her. I no longer suspect that she is operating below her potential, I know it. And I also know that it requires more than a filmmaker who recognises that in order to change the situation. If she were happy with the situation as it is, it wouldn't occupy my thoughts any more, but unfortunately that's not the impression I've gained.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR



LISA WEBER

Born 1990 in Vienna. Spent her childhood between tomatoes and cucumbers in the family business. Later one or two happy semesters of Slavic studies at the university of Vienna. After that she started to study directing at the Film Academy Vienna.

Filmography

2014 „Sitzfleisch“ (Steadiness)

Feature film

2013 „Tanzen üben“ (Learning to dance)

Short film

2012 „Twinni oder so“ (Some Twin Pop)

Short film

2011 „Die und der von da und dort“ (He and she from here and there)

Short film

2010 „Kommt ein Sonnenstrahl in die Tiefkühlabteilung und weicht alles auf“ (Sunray hits frozen-food department and makes everything go soft)

Short film

ABOUT THE PRODUCER



RUDI TAKACS

Born in Vienna, 1986. Started working with Ulrich Seidl in 2008, researching for Seidl's „In the Basement“ and „Paradise“ trilogy for three years. Began his studies in production and script writing at the Film Academy Vienna in 2009. Executive producer and director's assistant for the films „Population Boom“ (2013, directed by Werner Boote) and „The Visit“ (2015, directed by Michael Madsen). He produced his first feature, the documentary „Steadiness“ by Lisa Weber, in 2013/2014, followed by „Paradise! Paradise!“ (directed by Kurdwin Ayub) in 2016.

Filmography:

2016 „Paradies! Paradies!“ (Paradise! Paradise!)

Documentary – Directed by: Kurdwin Ayub

Funded by ÖFI, ORF and Wien Kultur MA7

Released in Austria by: Docs

Festivals: DOK Leipzig, Duisburger Filmwoche, IFF Buenos Aires, Festival de Sevilla

2014 „Sitzfleisch“ (Steadiness)

Documentary – Directed by: Lisa Weber

Released in Austria by: Polyfilm

Festivals: Karlovy Vary, Rotterdam