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## KARLOVY VARY 2022 Proxima Review: *Zoo Lock Down*

by [SUSANNE GOTTLIEB](#)

13/07/2022 - Andreas Horvath takes the viewer on a relaxing trip through a Salzburg Zoo shut down due to COVID-19



When the world shut down in March 2020, it was the essential workers who kept the needed daily business going. Some of them were more visible on the front line, some were more hidden, such as the zookeepers of Salzburg Zoo, who could not isolate themselves from their animal protégés for several months and were responsible for feeding and caring for them throughout the pandemic. Filmmaker **Andreas Horvath** visited the zoo throughout these early months. His documentary *Zoo Lock Down* [\[+\]](#) had its world premiere in the Proxima section of the 56<sup>th</sup> [Karlov Vary International Film Festival](#).

Unsurprisingly, what Horvath offers within the first moments seems to be a place devoid of life and activity. A

single fox scavenging in his pen, a pair of bears chilling along the small pool. A lonely zookeeper throws food into the enclosure, but there are no excited visitors to witness this playful show. However, this first glance is deceptive. Horvath simply sets the mood in his effort to uncover a world of animals relaxing, playing or eating across the whole area, interacting with their caretakers or plain ignoring them. The initial apocalyptic feel is a hidden paradise. No crowds, no loud noises, just the closest they could get to their natural habitat.

As a viewer, one does not only witness the sweet cuteness factor or icy respect that these lemurs, monkeys, flamingos, crocodiles, fish, snakes, insects, sloths, lions and leopards evoke. There is also the daily procedure of preparing food, shearing the alpacas, cleaning the piranha pool or even trying to artificially impregnate a rhino. The daily life of these animals is repeatedly contrasted with the negative space of the missing humans. Long, empty pathways between the enclosures, automatic doors opening and closing for nobody, the open-air restaurant completely deserted.

These images, however, raise one question: why did Horvath choose to highlight these scenes with his own musical score? The notes, timed and written according to the projected image, faster and gleeful whenever the monkeys jump around, menacing as the crocodile approaches its prey, cancel out the very thing that works best about this documentary. They undermine the natural peacefulness of the scene, and the soft atmospheric sounds of the surrounding, and instead pump the screen up with conceived dramatic tension. The catch of the movie, that this is a zoo devoid of human noise pollution, gets lost.

This supposed attempt to create his own musical variation of “The Carnival of the Animals” works less in those moments when a string arrangement is blaring over the zoo inhabitants, but unfolds its magic when Horvath amplifies the natural sounds of the footage by distorting, enhancing and over layering them — a mixing console filled with natural orchestration instead of classical tunes.

This peaceful melody of life gets pointedly disrupted when Horvath inserts the audio track of absent visitors. The murmuring, the impatient children waiting for the animals to move, the babies crying, the people calling out for each other, the overall sound of civilization. Horvath again plays with these audio landscapes, intensifying and distorting them. But instead of another natural symphony, the sound feels disruptive, the ever-continuing crescendo amounting to a menacing scenario. One that will lead to the dread reopening of the zoo.

For now, only the free-ranging lemurs are taking up the space once inhabited by humans, travelling across the park, using their pathways, chilling in the chairs and on the tables of the restaurant or visiting the other animals. It's a charming, more peaceful variation of the zoo's daily business, and a reminder that wherever humankind retreats, nature takes over.

*Zoo Lock Down* was produced and is distributed by Andreas Horvath.

## more about: Zoo Lock Down



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**international title:** Zoo Lock Down

**original title:** Zoo Lock Down

**country:** [Austria](#)

**year:** [2022](#)

**directed by:** [Andreas Horvath](#)

**screenplay:** [Andreas Horvath](#)

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