



76. Internationale  
Filmfestspiele  
Berlin  
Berlinale Competition

A movie poster featuring a man in a dark suit standing in a doorway, looking out. In the doorway, another man in a blue suit is visible. The scene is set in a room with a piano, a mirror, and a vase of flowers. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and shadows.

# AL COOK IN The Loneliest Man In Town

A FILM BY TIZZA COVI AND RAINER FRIMMEL

VENTO FILM PRESENTS



76. Internationale  
Filmfestspiele  
Berlin  
**Berlinale** Competition

## International Press Agent

Brigitta PORTIER / ALIBI COMMUNICATIONS

[brigittaportier@alibicommunications.be](mailto:brigittaportier@alibicommunications.be)

+ 32 477 98 25 84

## International Sales Agent



Be for Films

[info@beforfilms.com](mailto:info@beforfilms.com)

[www.beforfilms.com](http://www.beforfilms.com)

# The Loneliest Man In Town

A FILM BY **TIZZA COVI AND RAINER FRIMMEL**

WITH **AL COOK**

86 MIN - AUSTRIA



## Synopsis

Al Cook lives surrounded by memories. In his apartment and basement studio, books, videotapes, and vinyl records fill the space. They are all that remains of a life once fully lived. Here, time seems to stand still.

Outside these walls, the world has moved on. The blues, the music that means everything to him, is slowly being forgotten. His hometown no longer feels like home, and the loss of his beloved wife, Silvia, still weighs on him every day.

When a ruthless real estate company targets his home for demolition, his refuge collapses, leaving him to face the ruins of his existence.

As he is forced to let go of the treasures of his life, one by one, Al Cook faces a painful question: how do you move forward when your memories are all you have left? In the face of total loss, he chooses a radical new beginning.

## Interview With The Directors

**Sometimes people you have known for a very long time become the protagonists of your films, while in other cases one quite specific encounter leads you to work with a person. What sort of connection did you have with Al Cook?**

**RAINER FRIMMEL:** Al Cook is one of the protagonists we have been friends with for a very long time. We discovered what we know about his life over many conversations, long before the idea of making a film was floated.

**TIZZA COVI:** We were aware that a film with him would be a great project, but difficult as well, because he is a very independent artist: someone who wants to be in sole charge. He has always had complete control over his artistic work, from his pieces of music – which he sings and plays himself – to the design of the record cover. His artistic approach is similar to

ours. He works mainly as a team of one person and often performs alone, although he also has a loyal band. So he wanted to have a say in the making of the film too, of course, and we went back and forth for a long time until he came to trust our concept. We tried to convey to him that to a certain extent he would be a protagonist playing himself, but he would also be a role model for a lot of other people who are in similar situations.

**RAINER FRIMMEL:** What fascinated us was that this talented blues guitarist performs in very small venues sometimes, and at other times on a much larger scale – always refusing to compromise about his musical vision. For us, he's a symbol of all those artists whose commitment to authenticity means sacrificing the opportunity to be seen or heard more widely. It's a question we also ask ourselves again and again: to what extent must you be prepared to compromise in order to achieve something?



**Did you at some point consider making a documentary, in the style of *Notes from the Underworld*, or was fiction always the option that better suited Al Cook?**

**TIZZA COVI:** We always wanted to make a feature film. Al Cook has presented his life story in a very comprehensive autobiography, but we felt strongly that these factual details should only play a minor role in our narrative. We also wanted to make a film without much dialogue, especially because *The LONELIEST MAN IN TOWN* is about loneliness and loss: both topics that are difficult to put into words.

**How can Al Cook be described as a musician?**

**TIZZA COVI:** Al Cook started making music when he was about fourteen years old. The key experience for him was going to the cinema and seeing Elvis Presley for the first time. Thanks to a neighbor who always played blues records with the window open, he came to realize that this was the music through which he

could express his innermost being. He has heard, played and lived nothing but the blues.

**RAINER FRIMMEL:** Al taught himself everything he knows: how to play musical instruments, how to sing in English with a Southern accent even though he's never been to the USA in his life. His present wife, Brigitte, calls him the Karl May of music. (NOTE: the famous German novelist Karl May wrote extensively about the Wild West despite never having been there). The recordings from his most successful period, in the late sixties and seventies, really suggest that he could have had an international career if he hadn't been so adamant about not compromising.

**Was his apartment, with the studio he set up in the basement, so visually powerful that the theme of home – and the prospect of losing that home – became central to the narrative?**

**TIZZA COVI:** For us, his basement studio, where he

spends a lot of time, was really crucial. It feels like a sort of secret retreat, which gives us the opportunity to look inside his personality. And the apartment, where he was born and still lives, also speaks of a different era. So the apartment and the basement studio are both important protagonists. This naturally tied in with the theme of people being forced out of their homes, since so many old houses are being demolished in Vienna right now, and long-term tenants are often treated very ruthlessly.

**RAINER FRIMMEL:** This struggle against invisible forces symbolizes his whole life, which is dominated by resistance to change. In our previous films we worked in a far more documentary style; we took the rooms as we found them. On this film, we worked with set designers for the first time. Since Al had already emptied his apartment for the forthcoming renovations, the set designers combed through all his possessions, together with him, and rebuilt the rooms in reduced fashion.

**THE LONELIEST MAN IN TOWN** tells the story of a person who leads his «little», modest life and has appropriated the blues world of the Mississippi Delta without doing any travelling. So although the film is also about loneliness, isn't it first and foremost the story of a lived passion?

**TIZZA COVI:** That's nicely put; yes it's the story of a lived passion, because Al Cook is Viennese and yet has the blues in him, even though he's never been to the USA. But America has very often been with him. He got to know a lot of blues originals in Vienna, musicians he admired very much, and he played with them in Vienna's legendary *Jazzland* club.

**RAINER FRIMMEL:** It's a passion combined with an absolute uncompromising attitude – and an extraordinary talent. When these three factors come together, personalities like Al Cook are the result.

**If anything bears witness to his passion, it is his collections – such as his material on Elvis – which**



**could fill a small museum. Does everything here come from his own collections?**

**TIZZA COVI:** We only show objects that he actually owns. The 8 mm film projector, the records, the VHS cassettes, his Elvis collection.

**RAINER FRIMMEL:** When he does something, he does it thoroughly. He has collected everything about Elvis that was published in the fifties and sixties.

**Objects are a central feature of the visual composition, and you often film them in close-up. There are scenes with very little light. What factors influenced your approach to visual design?**

**TIZZA COVI:** The question facing us was: How can you show loneliness and loss? Together with our assistant Lennart Hüper, Rainer developed a visual language which also conveys a lot by means of details, in fixed shots with careful composition.

**RAINER FRIMMEL:** Haptics is also something that is disappearing. However, memory is best transported by means of objects that can be touched. Al often wanders around his apartment, looking at objects in his collection, and each one triggers a stream of memories. He is someone who lives very much in his memories. As far as the lighting goes, we remained true to our principle of working as far as possible with natural and existing light; Lennart helped us here by creating very discreet lighting. Previously, with camera work of a very documentary nature, I always had to capture something in a matter of minutes. With this film there was time to work on a shot, to set the light and choose the details, and that was very nice for me.

**Was it also important for you to adopt a humorous and affection perspective on the people of this city?**

**TIZZA COVI:** For me, the most important thing in cinematic work is to incorporate humor into drama. The older I get, the more uncomfortable I feel with

movies that don't even make me smile. We never aim for comedy, but we work with people who have this comedy within them; the situational comedy arises from the fact that things aren't rehearsed or copied exactly. Taking an affectionate view of us humans is the elixir of life for us.

**In visual terms, your films often contain little references to your other works; I'm thinking for example of Al getting dressed in front of the mirror, which reminds me of Kurt Girk...**

**TIZZA COVI:** What unites our films is that we always engage completely with a personality. In the case of Al Cook, his appearance plays a major role. It's very important to him that his hair is properly styled, that he's perfectly dressed in the style of the fifties: the end of that decade was also when his world ceased to move on.

**RAINER FRIMMEL:** We can't deny that we have per-

sonal preferences; for example, we're very fond of Super 8 film. We pose the question of what photography and film do to memory. How will Al react when he sees himself in old films? His face alone says a lot. For me, that's what film is all about; being able to work without many words, just through images that create emotions.

**TIZZA COVI:** If you want to make a film without much dialogue, you need a very charismatic person. And Al has incredible charisma.

**How did you deal with the choice of music for this film?**

**TIZZA COVI:** First, we asked Al which songs he would like to have in the film, and then we made a selection. *The Loneliest Man in Town* was his biggest hit, and it also provided the title for the film, but then there are others by artists including Lonnie Johnson, Bertha Chippie Hill and Robert Johnson.

**RAINER FRIMMEL:** And he wrote one song especially for the film, the one he records in the scene in the basement: *If I Had Money Just Like Henry Ford*.

**Towards the end, there are some very powerful moments in the film when the apartment is gradually overcome by emptiness. How did that come about?**

**TIZZA COVI:** As always, we tried to shoot chronologically, and that meant removing things one at a time, as he sells them. The increasing emptiness was also an emotional aspect that came as a surprise to us. But it was stipulated in the script that Al wouldn't sell the record player, so he could play a record before leaving the apartment.

**RAINER FRIMMEL:** If you know how attached Al is to the collections he has built up throughout his life, it's even more touching to stand with him in an empty room, when it really isn't clear how his life will continue.

**There are two kinds of hope on the one hand, a bit of the things he sold to younger people will live on, and on the other hand, there is the possibility that he could still live his dream. His life strikes me as both an unfulfilled and a fulfilled dream, at the same time.**

**TIZZA COVI:** That's a very fine thought. We left it open because we didn't know ourselves how he would decide.



## About The Directors

Born in Bolzano in 1971, Tizza Covi lived in Paris and Berlin before studying photography in Vienna. Rainer Frimmel, born in Vienna in 1971, also studied photography in Vienna. Since 1996 they work together on films, theatre, photography. In 2002 they founded their own film production company Verto Film. They received numerous awards for their documentaries DAS IST ALLES and BABOOSKA, including the Wolfgang Staudte Prize at the Berlinale. LA PIVELLINA, their first feature, was awarded the Europa Cinemas Label at the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs in Cannes and was Austrian official entry for the Oscars 2011. Their second feature film DER GLANZ DES TAGES (THE SHINE OF DAY, 2012) received the Silver Leopard for best actor in Locarno and the Max Ophüls Prize in Saarbrücken. Their third feature film MISTER UNIVERSO (2016) also premiered in Locarno where it received the Fipresci Award. VERA (2022) was selected in the Orizzonti section of the 79th edition of Venice Film Festival, winning the awards for Best Director and Best Actress (Vera Gemma). It was selected as the Austrian entry for the Best International Feature Film at the 96th Academy Awards. Like all their films it was realized with non-professional actors and it was shot on Super 16mm film.

## Filmography

2022 **Vera** (fiction)

2020 **Aufzeichnungen aus der Unterwelt / Notes from the Underworld** (documentary)

2016 **Mister Universo** (fiction)

2012 **Der Glanz des Tages / The Shine of Day** (fiction)

2009 **La Pivellina** (fiction)

2005 **Babooska** (documentary)

2001 **Das ist alles / That's all** (documentary)





## About AL COOK

Al Cook, originally named Alois Koch, was born in 1945 and grew up in post-war Vienna. Although he developed a strong interest in astronomy as a teenager and initially aspired to become a scientist, he trained and worked as a precision mechanic. In 1960, Al Cook began his musical career after seeing the US feature film *Loving You*, starring Elvis Presley. He decided to become a rock 'n' roll musician, studied Presley's music intensively, and taught himself to play the guitar. However, this style of music met with little success in Vienna, prompting Cook to seek new artistic directions. Inspired by an imported tape of classic blues recordings by African-American musicians, he spent the following years studying the vocal and instrumental techniques of country blues singers. He read books and magazines and listened to shellac records and LPs featuring songs and interviews by the "fathers of the blues," including Blind Lemon Jefferson, Son House, Charlie Patton, and Robert Johnson. A self-taught musician, Al Cook went on to master a wide range of blues styles, including slide guitar. In 1970, he released his first LP, *Working Man Blues*, followed by *Slide Guitar Foolin* (1973) and *Hard Rock Blues* (1975). During the 1980s, Cook formed a rockabilly trio. From 1986 onward, he returned to authentic blues, consistently refusing to make concessions to pop music.

## Cast

Al Cook  
Brigitte  
Fredi  
The student  
Woman with dog  
Travel agent  
Tenant advice

**Alois KOCH**  
**Brigitte MEDUNA**  
**Alfred BLECHINGER**  
**Flurina SCHNEIDER**  
**Sarah MORRISSETTE**  
**Natascha HIERMANN**  
**Ingrid SCHAFFERNACK**

## Crew

Directors  
Assistant Director  
Screenplay  
Cinematography  
Editing  
Music  
Sound  
Sound Design  
Sound Mixing  
Set Design  
Lighting  
Producers

Produced with the support of

Film Laboratory  
Shot on

**Tizza COVI, Rainer FRIMMEL**  
**Lennart HÜPER**  
**Tizza COVI**  
**Rainer FRIMMEL**  
**Tizza COVI, Emily ARTMANN**  
**AI COOK**  
**Tizza COVI**  
**Nora CZAMLER**  
**Manuel GRANDPIERRE**  
**Lotte LYON, Christian GSCHIER**  
**Lennart HÜPER**

**Tizza COVI, Rainer FRIMMEL – Vento Film**

**Österreichisches Filminstitut und ÖFI+**  
**Filmfonds Wien**  
**ORF Film und Fernseh-Abkommen**

**Augustus Color**  
**Kodak Vision 16mm**

## Technical Details

Sound Format	<b>5.1</b>
Aspect Ratio	<b>1:1,66</b>
Running time	<b>86'</b>
Genre	<b>Drama</b>
Original version	<b>German</b>
Subtitles	<b>English</b>
Year of production	<b>2026</b>
Country	<b>Austria</b>