

A Film by
Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel

NOTES FROM THE UNDERWORLD

with
Alois Schmutzer
and Kurt Girk





NOTES FROM THE UNDERWORLD

documentary / Austria 2020
115 min. / DCP / B/W & Color / 1:1,66
Shooting format: Super 16mm

PRODUCTION

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SYNOPSIS

There is unrest in the milieu of the Viennese underworld of the 1960s. In a controversial trial the singer Kurt Girk and his legendary friend Alois have to pay for their proximity to the illegal card game "Stoss" with long prison sentences. The charismatic protagonists tell us about this time from a perspective never shown before.

A love letter to a past Vienna that is also a social portrait of post-war Austria.

INTERVIEW

If Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel don't travel for their film projects, they plunge beneath the surface of their city. A fascination with the underlying melancholic aspects of Viennese songs leads them to one of its most outstanding interpreters - Kurt Girk. The intriguing account of his life is interwoven in **NOTES FROM THE UNDERWORLD** with the city's gangster milieu of the late 1960s.

There are two outstanding performers at the center of **NOTES FROM THE UNDERWORLD: one is Kurt, the singer, and the other is Alois, who made a name for himself on the right and the wrong side of the law with his irrepressible strength. How did the two of them come together for the film?**

Rainer Frimmel — Alois Schmutzer is considered a legend in the so-called Viennese underworld. He was one of the main figures in Stoss gambling in the late 1960s. The fact that Kurt also moved in those circles was always kept quiet in his biography – as was the period he spent in jail. He never talked about it much, and that made us curious. And that's how the connection with Stoss gambling and with Alois, with whom he has maintained a lifelong friendship, came about. The story of the criminal case which features in the film emerged as a result of that.

Tizza Covi — The indignation about their unjust convictions, which slumbers within Kurt and Alois, is something we wanted to convey too. You still find books that claim Alois committed the robbery, although it has been proven that he was not involved. No matter whether he was a Stoss player or not, whether he got into fights, a great injustice was perpetrated there. He was sentenced to 10 years behind bars because it was claimed that he instigated the robbery.

NOTES FROM THE UNDERWORLD is also a story about resistance. Despite their terrible experiences, these two men have found contentment in life.

Rainer Frimmel — They both experienced the Nazi period, the air raids at the end of the war and the subsequent Allied occupation. They grew up being confronted as children with open, state-authorized violence on the street. Both of them spent many years in prison, but due to their strong personalities they didn't let that break them. Today they both convey the very strong impression that every day of freedom should be seen as a gift.



Tizza Covi — We focused first on the subject of their childhood. We wanted to create an awareness of the violence that these men grew up with as children.

The more the film progresses, the stronger its political dimension becomes. Misuse of power by the police and the judicial authorities becomes apparent, cruel methods of incarceration emerge, and this also echoes the terrors of the Nazi regime and the role of authority and the state in the first postwar decades.

Rainer Frimmel — The film is also concerned with the postwar judicial system and the conditions in prisons at that time. We're dealing with a time when prison conditions were really terrible. It wasn't just that conditions in penal institutions were catastrophic: the reasons why people ended up behind bars were horrifying. One aim of the film is to point out that everybody – whether they are guilty or not – has the right to be treated humanely.

The Vienna songs themselves, are also central features of the film. Why did you decide to play them in their entirety?



Tizza Covi — The song we placed at the beginning is a way of indicating that this film will feature long shots. It's a formal introduction for the audience to the tempo of the film. The choice of those two songs originated with Kurt: they were his favorites. The final song Last night the past came back to me is particularly important to us. It was Kurt and Alois's absolute favorite song, and every time they got together and we were around, they sang it. It was their song.

Interview: Karin Schiefer

STOSS is an illegal gambling, which was popular in the Viennese underworld. It is a card game with simple rules and was played in back rooms of taverns and coffee houses. Beside crooks, so-called Frankists, i.e. blameless, mostly wealthy business people, also took part in the game of Stoss. In the 1960s there were several deadly shootings in Vienna for the supremacy in illegal gambling.



Kurt Girk



Alois Schmutzer

CREDITS

documentary / Austria 2020

115 min./ DCP / B/W & Color / 1:1,66

Shooting format: Super 16mm

with	Kurt Girk	directors	Tizza Covi, Rainer Frimmel
	Alois Schmutzer	idea	Rainer Frimmel
	Helene Simon	camera	Rainer Frimmel
	Richard Benda	sound	Tizza Covi
	Anton Östreicher	editing	Tizza Covi
	Gunther Gahleitner	dramaturgy	Emily Artmann
	Peter Leitheim	dramaturgical	
		consultation	Wolfgang Widerhofer
		music	Kurt Girk
		sound mixing	Manuel Grandpierre
		archival	ORF-Archiv
		producers	Tizza Covi, Rainer Frimmel
		production	Vento Film

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BIOGRAFIE

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 Vento Film.

Tizza COVI and Rainer Frimmel have been awarded for their work with the Austrian Art Prize for Film (2013) and the Honour Award of the Gijon International Film Festival (2018), among others.

They received numerous awards for their documentaries **DAS IST ALLES (THAT'S ALL, 2001)** and **BABOOSKA**, including the Wolfgang-Staudte Prize at the Berlinale.

Their first fiction film **LA PIVELLINA (2009)** premiered at the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs in Cannes where it was awarded with the Europa Cinemas Label. The film was screened worldwide at over 170 film festivals (including the Berlinale), received over 30 awards and was Austria's official submission to the Foreign Oscar.

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. Like all their films it was realised with non professional actors and it was shot on Super 16mm film.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2020 **Aufzeichnungen aus der Unterwelt**
Notes from the Underworld
115 min. documentary
- 2016 **Mister Universo**
90 min. fiction
- 2012 **Der Glanz des Tages**
The Shine of Day
90 min. fiction
- 2009 **La Pivellina**
100 min. fiction
- 2005 **Babooska**
100 min. documentary
- 2001 **Das ist alles**
That's all
98 min. documentary



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