

Journey Into Cinema

Exploring the Outer Edge of Film

Redmond Bacon · February 16, 2026

Festivals · Berlinale · Panorama

Don't Send In The Clowns. They're Already Here.



Being silly is a serious business. This is especially true if you are working as a clown, where you dedicate your life's work to developing a persona characterised by stupid gestures. In Adrian Goiginger's poignant drama *Four Minus Three* (2026), a female clown has her world turned upside down by a tragic accident — and with it, an existential challenge to her joy-filled life.

This Austrian work is essentially the [Alan Moore anecdote](https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/141645-heard-joke-once-man-goes-to-doctor-says-he-s-depressed) [https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/141645-heard-joke-once-man-goes-to-doctor-says-he-s-depressed] about the man telling his doctor he's depressed in full form. As we all know, when the doctor recommends he visits the Great Clown Pagliacci, he



breaks down and reveals *he is Pagliacci*. What do the people who entertain the depressed do when they are depressed? **This film is your answer.**

Based on the true story of Barbara Pachi-Eberhart, and her best-selling novel, *Four Minus Three* shines in the fact that it takes the artistic integrity of clowning (a phrase I never thought I would ever write) seriously, using its premise to explore the intense peaks and troughs of living through a seemingly impossible life event.

Valerie Pachner stars as hospital clown Barbara — performing to sick and dying children — married to the professional artist clown Heli (Robert Stadlober). Their life is chaotic — two manic kids, a disordered household, an uneven split between work and domestic duties — but happy, characterised by a deep silliness and a variety of playful antics. But when Heli's clown van collides with a train, killing him and the children, she is forced to slowly rebuild her life, taking us on a journey through bad decisions, awkward sexual experiments and stirring moments of quiet relief.

Moving backwards and forwards in time to capture life both with and without Heli, *Four Minus Three* at first seems like it's spinning its wheels a bit, but eventually the cumulative aspect of the past and present colliding provides a true tearjerking experience, **capturing how grief never works in a truly non-linear aspect, but is a constant companion that jerks you between eras.**

I appreciated the subtle use of colouring here, with the flashbacks captured in light-filled yellow and orange tones, while the modern-day takes on a sickly blue-and-green hue. Yet it's not as black-and-white as that, with the occasional mixture of colours allowing for more nuanced emotions. There's plenty of close-ups and handheld camera too, but there's nothing too flashy, with the drama firmly rooted in powerful, subtle performances — especially the excellent lead Valerie Pachner.

It's great to see her back to peak form after last year's dreadful Panorama entry, [Delicious](https://journeyintocinema.com/panorama-reviews-2025/#Delicious_by_Nele_Mueller-Stofen_2025) [https://journeyintocinema.com/panorama-reviews-2025/#Delicious_by_Nele_Mueller-Stofen_2025] (Nele Mueller-Stöfen, 2025). This work reaffirms



her major talent as a dramatic actress, moving between comic antics and deep-seated grief with ease, especially during one standout scene where she acts as her clown persona in front of a potential new lover. Tragedy, grief and desperation commingle in a powerfully affecting combo. Nothing particularly special here. **Just solid Euro drama, extremely well-executed.**

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