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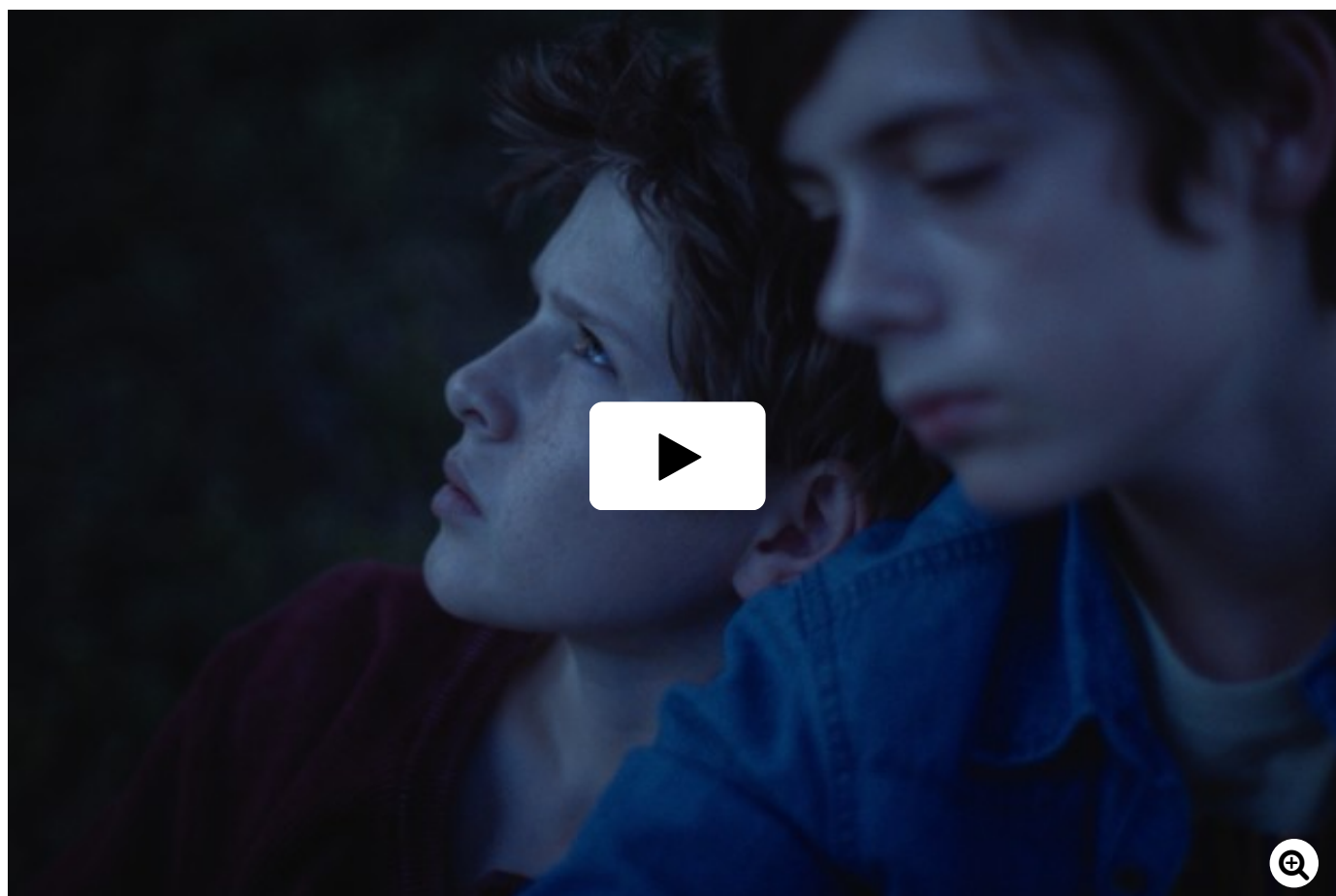
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VENICE 2026 Orizzonti Review: *Eklipse*

by [SUSANNE GOTTLIEB](#)

05/09/2026 - VENICE 2026: In his semi-biographical drama, Manuel Wetscher tests the friendship between two boys when it comes to light that one of their fathers has AIDS



Moritz Hohlrieder and Finley Brown in *Eklipse*

Blood stains and mosquitoes, excrement, mud, milk, lakes and a mountain stream, its water flowing down and away like a life force. Two boys sharing a glass of Coke, spitting on each other as part of a game. Austrian director **Manuel Wetscher** leans heavily on symbolism in his debut feature, *Eklipse*, which has premiered in the Orizzonti section of the 83rd [Venice Film Festival](#). Liquids and bodily fluids are a dubious threat. The year is 1999, and while AIDS may not be a death sentence any more, the illnesses that stem from it are.

AIDS caused the cancer that Wetscher's father died of in the early 1990s. He can be seen throughout the quieter, more emotional moments of the film, when the director intercuts personal VCR footage with the fictional story. The plot, however, follows young Tomy (**Moritz Hohlrieder**), who is spending the summer with his best

friend, Chris (**Finley Brown**), at the mountain farm that his uncle Georg (**Hannes Perkmann**) is managing. As they milk cows, treat infected udders, build dams on the stream and lip-sync to various songs, with gelled spikes in their hair, sunglasses on and the song “Blue” blaring from the speakers, life seems good.

The only upheaval on the horizon is the imminent solar eclipse of 11 August 1999. Will technology fail? Is it the apocalypse? Or is that reserved for the approaching millennium? As a viewer, one can sense the atmosphere of a different time. It is a nostalgic nugget of the late 1990s that today’s Millennial generation heartachingly looks back upon as an era “before things got really bad”. But all is not well for Tomy, even if the age-old adult lie of “Everything is going to be fine” keeps being thrown at him. While Tomy is aware that his father, Franz, is in hospital with a severe case of pneumonia, what he does not know is that the illness was caused by an AIDS infection. The mountains in his native Tyrol may be big, but the community is small and its horizons limited. The locals may have all the knowledge they need about the disease, but the stigma runs as deep as the valleys.

“You need to talk to Tomy,” is Georg’s advice to the lad’s visiting mother, Elfie (**Lisa Schützenberger**). “Franz does not want that,” is her response. The noble idea is to protect the child from himself and from the truth, but it is only a matter of time before this backfires. When the milkman spills the beans about the “gay disease” to Chris, an estrangement starts to creep in between the frightened boy and the clueless son of a sick man. Others, like the heir to the farm that Georg manages, Peter (**Lenz Moretti**), see a way to profit from the information. “You know how things work here,” even the apparently friendly owner of the bar says.

Just as the moon eclipses the sun, toying with what can be seen and what remains in the shadows, the friendship between the boys and the goodwill of the community will be put to the test. Wetscher delivers a slow-burner that finally culminates in harsh truths being spoken, loyalties rupturing or persisting, and the realisation that empathy and understanding should always triumph over spite and ignorance.

Eklipse was produced by Austria’s [Eutopiafilm](#) and Italy’s [Albolina Film](#), and is sold internationally by [Films Boutique](#).

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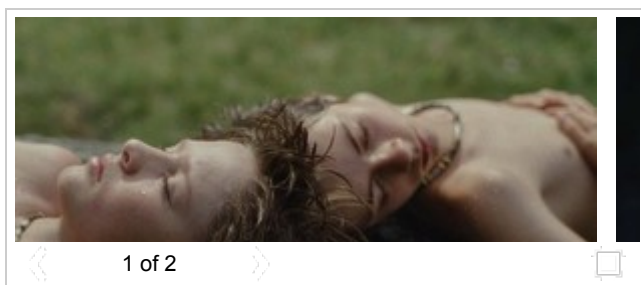
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