



EISMAYER (2022) VENICE FILM FESTIVAL | CRITICS' WEEK 2022 ★★★★★

SEPTEMBER 4TH, 2022

Author: Meredith Taylor

Dir/Wri: David Wagner | Cast: Luka Dimic, Gerhard Liebmann | Austria,
Drama 87'

Austrian writer director David Wagner comes to Venice with this first feature, a provocative character driven drama based on real life, and starring dynamic acting duo: Gerhard Liebmann and Luka Dimic in the leading roles.

At first *Eismayer* seems like another well-made armed forces affair focusing on a real person Sergeant Major Charles Eismayer, feared for his tough intransigence in training Austrian army recruits, in particular Major Mario Falak (Luka Dimic), who he mockingly calls "Ali Baba". But our expectations are challenged and continually put to the test when the film

FILMUFORIA

THE VOICE OF INDIE CINEMA

of the 'powers that be' to strike a more humane and conciliatory approach to the traditionally tough drilling procedures, the red-beret'ed conscripts still quail under the intransigent gaze of their abrasively draconian instructor Deputy Lieutenant Eismayer who seems to go far beyond the call of duty in laying down the law.

And Liebmann gives a compelling performance in the central role as this hard-bitten perfectionist whose heteronormative family life is a dysfunctional mess. Exerting as much control over his family – a wife Christina (a sensitive Koschitz) and sweet little son Dominik (Tatzber in his debut) – as he does over his troops, Liebmann brings surprising humanity to his character: and we feel for him despite his unappealing persona and inability to see the humanity in others, and that's the skill of Liebmann's performance. But then Eismayer takes a shine to a sultry young Serbian recruit who gradually thaws his frosty demeanour revealing in its place a heart of gold. Fate throws the two soldiers together in a story that is unexpected in its outcome as the thematically thorny narrative finds a satisfying conclusion, based on a little known episode in Austrian military history.

Elegantly and artfully framed by Serafin Spitzer with Raphael Caric and Thaire Galleguillos' nifty set design, the resonances with Oliver Hermanus' 2019 drama *Moffie* are clear, but this is a more stagey outing that manages its tonal shift from austerity to an unexpectedly bracing denouement that is both thrilling and upbeat. MT

VENICE FILM FESTIVAL | VENICE CRITICS' WEEK 2022

Copyright © 2022 Filmuforia