



Venice 2026 review: Eklipse (Manuel Wetscher)

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“An intimate coming-of-age drama about prejudice, ignorance, and those feelings you don’t quite know what to do with.” 



Most films about AIDS, or any crippling disease for that matter, choose to focus on the afflicted, Ira Sachs’ *The Man I Love* a recent example. Austrian director Manuel Wetscher takes a different, more original angle in his debut feature *Eklipse*; instead of placing the suffering front and center, he keeps the patient far off screen and points his camera at a couple of adolescents who are suddenly confronted with the harsh realities of grown-up life. An intimate coming-of-age drama about prejudice, ignorance, and those feelings you don’t quite know what to do with, *Eklipse* is a beautiful queer story set in a milieu where such stories are shunned. And you might learn a thing or two about farming too.

It’s the summer of 1999, and Tomy (Moritz Hohlrieder) and his best friend Chris (Finley Brown) spend the summer at the farm of Tomy’s uncle Georg (Hannes Perkmann). They help him out with the chores of daily farm life, like milking cows, fertilizing the meadows, and building a small dam to harness their water supply. They also loiter in the sun, play at war in the woods, and watch a much younger farmer, Peter (Lenz Moretti) have sex with his girlfriend Hanna (Lisa-Lena Tritscher). Tomy’s father is in hospital for pneumonia, they say, and he hasn’t seen his dad for a while. But he is with his best friend, and they are having the time of their lives.

When a truck driver collecting Georg’s milk lets it slip to Chris that Tomy’s dad actually has ‘the gay disease’, a rift starts to form between the two boys. Chris becomes scared, and suddenly the furtive glances at his friend make sense, or the moment he puts his head on Tomy’s shoulder as they watch Peter and Hanna go at it. “*Don’t be so gay*,” his friend says in a biting tone. Meanwhile Tomy does not understand why his friend suddenly shuts him out. He tries to bridge the gap, but the chasm is widening (Wetscher couldn’t make this more visually clear than in a wordless shot, the boys at either end of the frame, with a large doorway between them). When Chris blurts out the secret, their bond seems definitively broken.

The story of *Eklipse* is very personal to Wetscher, as he lost his own father to AIDS when he was around the same age as Tomy. This was already the subject of his short film *Richard*, a collection of home videos showing the loving dad his father was. He incorporates some of that same material in this film as a tribute to his father, but the more important side of the backstory is that this film is clearly told from experience, and it can be felt in every frame. Part of the success of *Eklipse* in conveying these feelings is also owed to the two young actors, Hohlrieder and Brown, who give memorable child performances and fully grasp the emotional turmoil of their characters. Cinematographer Simone Hart adds to the

authenticity through a period-appropriate softer image, often shot with shallower focus and bathed in a warm light that makes the image almost shimmer from the summer heat. The soundscape created by Isobel Cope and Peter Rösner enhances that by filling the background with trickling water, buzzing insects, and the sweet sighs of lovemaking. Wetscher guides it with a steady hand, remarkable for a first-time director, and even allows himself some humor (a hard cut from a 'cowgirl' position to milking a cow is quite tongue-in-cheek) and plenty of focus on the menial farm work and the pastoral life in the Tirol Alps; there's not that many films in which you will get a shot of a cow curled up like a sleeping cat. Some of the material doesn't fully work, like Georg's relationship with a woman who runs the local tavern. But the interplay between the boys and Tomy's mother (Lisa Schützenberger), as well as Uncle Georg, is lovingly drawn while not shying away from the narrow-minded and uninformed reactions from the townspeople in rural areas like these, certainly in the late '90s. The film is sensitive when it needs to be, but can also show the harsh realities gay people, and in particular those with AIDS, have to face. Wetscher manages to funnel the social realism of the story and its context through a truly cinematic lens, creating a film that is more about the perception of the disease than the effects of it, and that makes *Eklipse* a very compelling and promising debut, and Wetscher a name to keep an eye out for.

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