



Berlinale 2026 review: The Loneliest Man in Town (Tizza Covi & Rainer Frimmel)

E. Nina Rothe
February 22, 2026



“This Austrian gem employs a man endlessly fascinating on his own, and builds a story around him that doesn’t need action or tricks to be bewitching.”



Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev famously said *“If you are not moving forward, you are moving backward,”* and perhaps that sentence, often quoted by today’s business leaders, is the key to Al Cook’s existence. A well-respected blues musician in his native Vienna, Al Cook (born Alois Koch) has never been to the Mississippi Delta, or even to the US for that matter. Yet the bluesman’s love for the sounds often played and sung by Southern Black musicians is palpable. He lives an existence surrounded by memories and mementoes of his career, photos of the blues gods – which for Cook includes Elvis Presley – and longing for his late wife. Yet the world is changing around him and outside his front door, and soon the reality of the times is going to come barging into his life, complete with a huge pot belly, long white hair and tattoos.

But let me explain. When we first meet Cook, playing a cinematic version of himself, he is indeed *“the loneliest man in town,”* the last holdover in an apartment building that is slated for demolition by a duo of unctuous developers. Cook has been renting one of the apartments and a basement space, the latter a studio of sorts for a man who once had a dream, but forgot to follow it and now seems stuck in reverse. As often people who haven’t gone forward seem to be.

When the developers, in particular the aforementioned pot-bellied and tattooed white-haired man, make him an offer he cannot refuse – and that’s literally, or he’ll go down with the wrecking ball – Cook turns to an old VHS tape and an old flame for answers. The videotape shows an interview with the artist when, at 35, he said his dream was to move to the US and play with the blues artists there. The old flame, who walked out of his life because he’d gifted her, a self-described Beatles fan, with an Elvis album, listens to his musings and the two, now older, wiser people, manage to give each other some peace of mind. As well as a bit of fire under the proverbial *a***, which might or might not push Cook to emigrate to America. You’ll have to watch this touching film to find out!

As our protagonist tries to decide what to do with his life, one thing is certain: he must get rid of all his belongings, which are keeping him too stuck in his current existence. He comes across young people who are looking for souvenirs of a life lived and who walk away holding treasures which will carry them, and Cook, into a future unknown. It’s an idea any one of us who has ever shopped at a vintage fair or a charity shop understands deeply. And there is a sense of poetry in the exchanges.

Personally, I loved the languid, slow pace of a film which only lasts 86 minutes, and yet seems a much longer work, in a good way. I never wish for films to be more lengthy but I did regret  when I was no longer in the company of this wonderfully unorthodox protagonist that filmmaking duo Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel have brought us. Cook/Koch is a gem, an ageless rock star who covers his hair in hairspray and sees the world through special blues-colored glasses. That the world has moved on outside of his sanctuary of memories seems like one of life's great tragedies, because the world Cook occupies is so much more fascinating than the one we find ourselves in.

Needless to say the soundtrack to the film is outstanding, yet incredibly subdued and all courtesy of Al Cook. He is known for the hit the film is named after, and alongside his music there are songs sung and played by Lonnie Johnson, Bertha Chippie Hill and Robert Johnson. Cook also wrote one song especially for the film, titled 'If I Had Money Just Like Henry Ford', which plays at a pivotal moment. The cinematography feels very fly-on-the-wall and is by Frimmel himself. The production design by Lotte Lyon and Christian Gschier is also noteworthy, and one notices the space encroaching as the apartment begins to empty out.

Finally, the film reminded me somewhat of 2017's *Lucky*, starring Harry Dean Stanton and directed by actor John Carroll Lynch. With the same brilliance of the American film, this Austrian gem employs a man endlessly fascinating on his own, and builds a story around him that doesn't need action or tricks to be bewitching. Because creative human beings are filled with inner movement and wonder and need only a spotlight to shine through and fill our hearts.

(c) Image copyright - Vento Film

This entry was posted in [2026 - Berlin, Berlin, Reviews](#) and tagged [Alois Koch](#), [Berlinale](#), [Christian Gschier](#), [Lotte Lyon](#), [Rainer Frimmel](#), [The Loneliest Man in Town](#), [Tizza Covi](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

Proudly powered by [WordPress](#). Theme: [Bushwick](#) by [James Dinsdale](#).

Copyright © 2010-2026 International Cinephile Society. All rights reserved.