



Berlin film festival 2022

## Rimini review – Ulrich Seidl's lounge singer is so horrible, he may be brilliant

★★★★☆

The Austrian director torments everyone, including the audience, in this grotesque tale set in the Italian resort out of season



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**W**retchedness, sadness and confrontational grotesquerie once again come together in a movie by [Ulrich Seidl](#), although it's leavened by something almost - but not quite - like ordinary human compassion. If you've seen Seidl's other movies you'll know what to expect and you'll know to steel yourself for horror. Perhaps this one doesn't take Seidl's creative career much further down the road to (or away from) perdition, but it is managed with unflinching conviction, a tremendous compositional sense and an amazing flair for discovering extraordinary locations.

The Italian coastal resort of Rimini in winter is an eerie, melancholy place; Seidl shows it in freezing mist and actual snow. Refugees huddle on the street and some groups of German and Austrian tourists take what must be bargain-basement package vacations at off-season rates in the tackiest hotels. It is here that Ritchie Bravo, played by Seidl regular Michael Thomas, plies his dismal trade. He is an ageing lounge singer with a drinking problem, a cheery, bleary style, an Islamophobic attitude, a bleached-blond hairdo of 80s vintage and a spreading paunch. Ritchie makes a living crooning to his adoring senior-female fanbase, who show up in their coach parties to catch his act. (You could compare him to Nick Apollo Forte in Woody Allen's [Broadway Danny Rose](#) or Gerard Dépardieu in Xavier Giannoli's *The Singer* - except much, much more horrible.) He also tops up his income by having sex with some of the fans for money - truly gruesome scenes in the starkly unforgiving Seidl style.

But Ritchie has reached a personal crisis. He has to go home to [Austria](#) when his mother dies and he is reunited with his brother Ewald (Georg Friedrich). His father, Ekkehardt (played by Hans-Michael Rehberg, who died in 2017 shortly after filming his scenes) suffers from dementia and now does not understand that his wife is dead. This lonely, stricken figure is awarded the film's final desolate moments. But, most traumatically, back in Rimini, Ritchie is confronted with long-alienated grownup daughter Tessa (Tessa Göttlicher), who angrily demands money from him as recompense for the way he abandoned her and her mother years before. Crucified with guilt, and galvanised by family feeling after the funeral, Ritchie sets out to get Tessa her money - which means embezzling the cash out of his addled dad's bank account and videoing his sex sessions with his tourist clients for blackmail purposes.

It doesn't end well. That hardly needs saying. His reunion with Tessa is to be the instrument of his gruelling punishment: he is guilty and deserves everything that's coming to him, except in Seidl's world you get the sense that horrible things would happen to him even if. or especially if. he didn't behave badly. There is torment for