

'Gentle Monster' review: Léa Seydoux is excellent in Marie Kreutzer's undisciplined follow-up to 'Corsage'

BY **WENDY IDE, SENIOR INTERNATIONAL CRITIC** | 16 MAY 2026

Cannes Competition title explores the collateral damage of abuse



**SOURCE: CANNES FILM FESTIVAL
'GENTLE MONSTER'**

Dir/scr. Marie Kreutzer. Austria/Germany/France. 2026. 115 mins

Celebrated musician Lucy (Léa Seydoux) has moved with her husband Philip (Laurence Rupp) and their young son from the city to the Bavarian countryside, in the hope of helping her husband Philip, a struggling filmmaker, heal from creative and emotional burnout. But there's a ticking time bomb in


their marriage that no relocation can escape. When officers from Munich's CID knock on their door with a warrant to confiscate Philip's computer equipment, as he is suspected of possession of child sexual abuse material. Austrian director Marie Kreutzer's unflinching but undisciplined follow-up to her impressive Cannes prize-winning film, *Corsage* (2022), wrestles with the fallout.

Léa Seydoux impresses in a tricky role

It's a subject that has a particular resonance for Kreutzer, who was caught up in controversy following the 2023 conviction of *Corsage* actor Florian Teichtmeister for possession of child sexual abuse material. The closing credits of *Gentle Monster* include thanks to "the haters" who targeted her in 2023, and implies the experience of being collateral damage in the scandal was one of the inspirations for this film.

The majority of films dealing with child sexual abuse approach it either from the point of view of the victim or the perpetrator, and *Gentle Monster's* perspective – from the point of view of the partner of a man accused of such crimes – offers a rare angle on the subject matter. Whether this alone will be enough to attract audiences to a picture that lacks *Corsage's* stylistic brio and punk spirit remains to be seen. Seydoux's star power will be a draw, and she impresses in a tricky role. Much of the performance is internalised since, for obvious reasons, Lucy can't share her burden.

The alienation Lucy feels, and the sickening dread that her husband might have targeted their son, prompts her to try and confide in Philip's female investigating officer, Elsa (Jella Haase). Elsa politely shuts down any potential intimacy, but Kreutzer develops her separately as a character with her own subplot and her own problematic family member – Elsa's father, in the early stages of dementia, sexually assaults his female live-in carer. In some ways, there's a deliberate mirroring in the stories of Lucy and Elsa. Yet this creates an imbalance; both structurally, in the increasingly bitty and ragged third act, and by implying a false equivalence between the crimes of Lucy's husband and those of Elsa's father.

As with *Corsage*, Kreutzer's use of music is bold and distinctive. Lucy's avant-garde performances, on grand piano, glass harp and harmonium, deconstruct pop songs such as The Cure's 'Boys Don't Cry' and soul duo Charles & Eddie's 'Would I Lie To You?' (a little on the nose, this choice). She specifically chooses love songs written by men; her musical interpretations, she explains, are a way of taking the songwriters' words and interrogating them. Lucy's mother (Catherine Deneuve), herself a concert , raises an eyebrow at her daughter's choices, both musical and domestic. The only thing worse

for the career of a female artist than having children, she observes acidly, is moving to the countryside. She doesn't know the half of it... yet.

The film is most effective in conveying the sense of life's foundations and certainties being suddenly undermined, and the doubt and panic that creeps into previously happy memories. Fragments of phone camera and video footage shot by Philip allow us to see through his eyes. And what at first could be dismissed as innocuous moments of family intimacy become freighted and tainted with the suspicions that now cling to everything that Philip does or says.

Production company: Film AG Produktions GMBH

International sales: MK2 FILMS, julie.lupfer@mk2.com

Producers: Alexander Glehr, Johanna Scherz

Cinematography: Judith Kaufmann

Editing: Ulrike Kofler

Production design: Myrna Wolff

Music: Camille

Main cast: Léa Seydoux, Jella Haase, Laurence Rupp, Catherine Deneuve

