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## **Cannes Review: *Gentle Monster* Is a Masterfully Performed Drama In the Aftermath of Betrayal**

**[Savina Petkova \(https://thefilmstage.com/author/](https://thefilmstage.com/author/)**

**[spetkova/](#) • May 16, 2026**

“Look into my eyes / can you see they’re open wide / would I lie to you?” Those lyrics linger in the air as a soft whisper for only a moment before the accompanying piano notes carry them away and into the beginning of *Gentle Monster*, the latest from *Corsage* director Marie Kreutzer. One might already suspect that the cover of such an emblematic ’90s pop song, pulsating under the fingertips of the film’s protagonist, Lucy (Léa Seydoux), could serve as exposition in some way. Yet the growl camouflaged in Seydoux’s silky voice might just as well be a sign of fatigue—the Lucy we meet in this opening scene is still adapting to quiet, countryside life from a career of touring European capitals. When her husband Philip (Laurence Rupp) interrupts her practice by rushing in, full-on panic attack, it’s the patience in her consoling voice that signals it’s not the first time she has stopped mid-song to make room for him.

Somewhere in the Austrian hills, a big house with an even bigger garden offers Lucy, Phillip, and their little boy Johnny (Malo Blanchet) a new start—in the boxes, naked walls, and all one sees is a life being unpacked, slowly but surely. Kreutzer’s script reveals very little directly: fleeting references to Philip’s burnout being the reason to move are countered by the joy with which he holds up a Super-8 camera to document a new chapter in their familial life. Scenes of domestic bliss flicker in the reels as the only real testament to his career as a filmmaker—except for a poster of Bergman’s *Persona* propped against the wall—in a gesture that feels already like a slight. Instead of taking the opportunity to weave a meta-narrative around an artistic couple and their mysterious decline, Kreutzer refuses to characterize Philip or his work. At the same time, we’re given glimpses of Lucy’s career as an avant-garde concert pianist who solely covers songs by male artists in front of rapt audiences.

Yes, *Gentle Monster*’s perspective is female in the sense that the audience has more access to Lucy’s psychology, but in the second act, Kreutzer splits the perspective by introducing us to a character who has been secondary until then: police officer Elsa Kühn (Jella Haase), who delivers a search warrant at the narrative’s start. When proceedings swerve to Elsa’s life off the clock, we see a hyperindependent

woman with an ageing, ailing father who tends to be inappropriate with the live-in nurse, and matching that, Haase's performance is as stoic as you'd expect from any lead in a police procedural. Lensed by cinematographer Judith Kaufmann (*The Teacher's Lounge*, *Corsage*), the film looks crisp and exposing in its static, wide-shot scenes, countered by the intimate soundtrack from French artist Camille.

*Gentle Monster* marks the Austrian filmmaker's return to psychological drama / thriller territory of 2019's *The Ground Beneath My Feet*, but the former wouldn't exist if it wasn't for the genre-bending *Corsage*. In fact, a turn of events following the completion of the her-story period film became the real-life basis for Kreutzer's new script. Saying any more would reveal perhaps a bit too much about plot than intended, but if the reader is already familiar with a certain scandal that shook the Austrian film industry in 2023, they wouldn't be surprised by the plot twist that comes early in *Gentle Monster*, whose title refers to Philip's character. Rupp, who's primarily known for his TV roles and 2024's absurdist comedy *Veni Vidi Vici*, carries the heavy load for the role of a tortured man whose desperation and resentment are cloaked in love. His face remains expressionless and hard to read throughout as the relationship with Lucy strains and snaps, and no amount of sorries can wash off the stench of secrets he exudes in every scene.

Léa Seydoux, on the other hand, almost carries the film's emotional weight like a crown—rather than self-congratulatory, the confidence she radiates as Lucy comes across as a genuine belief that things may not be so bad after all. Even if the plot is one of subdued melodrama picking at the male-inflicted wounds of women, both Seydoux and Haase embody a degree of relatable pretense to spare the men who hurt them while simmering with rage on the inside. For all its measuredness, *Gentle Monster* is a merciless film, not so much to the viewers but its titular character—a gesture some may deem exaggerated, yet there is a tenderness that steers Kreutzer's script away from revenge, humiliation, or brutal punishment. For its taboo subject matter, this already says a lot.

*Gentle Monster* premiered at the 2026 Cannes Film Festival.

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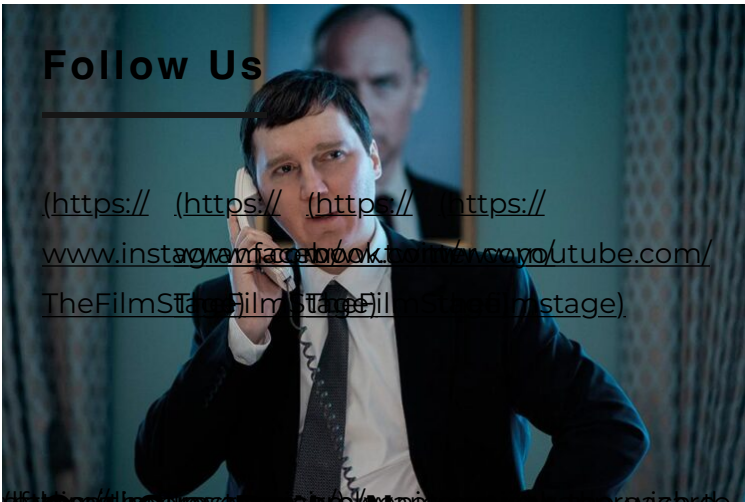
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Savina Petkova is a Bulgarian freelance film critic, programmer, and academic, based in London, UK.

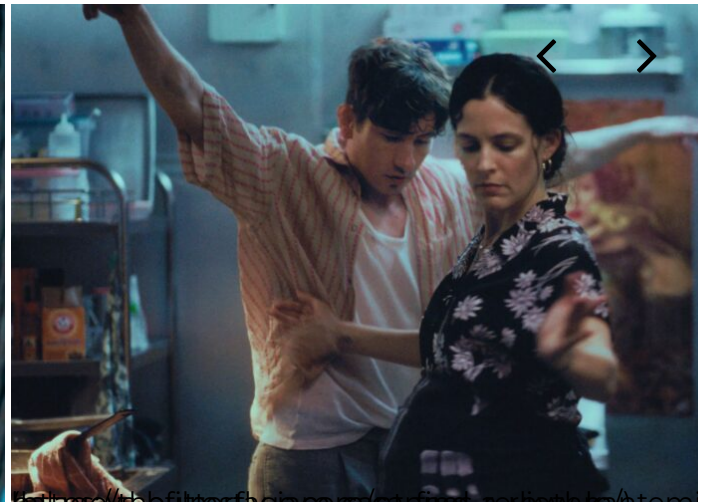
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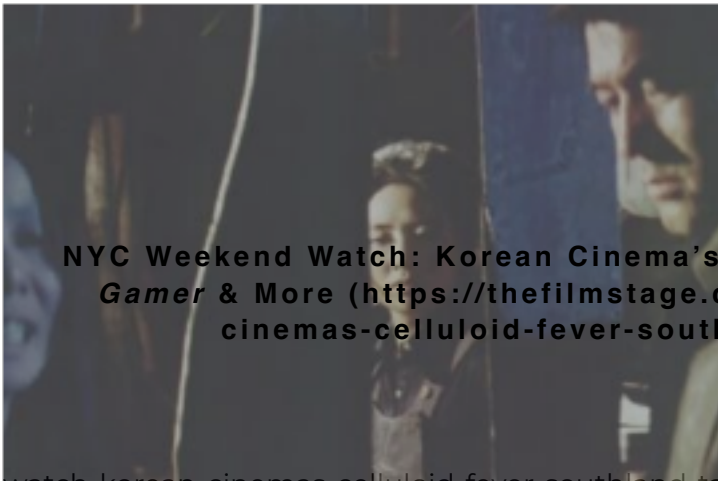
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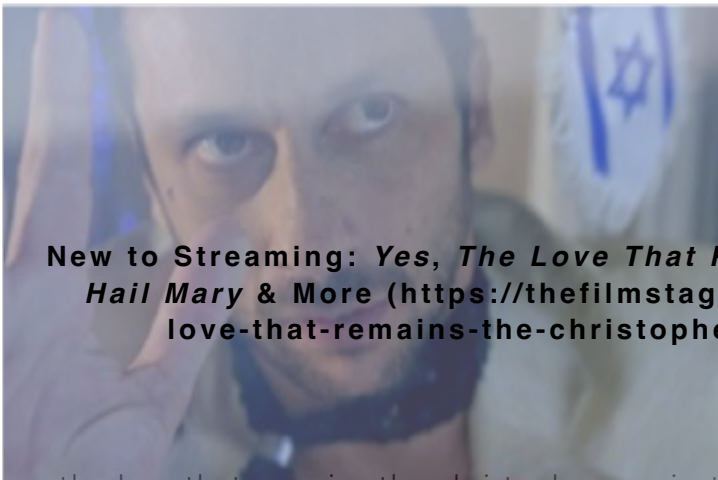
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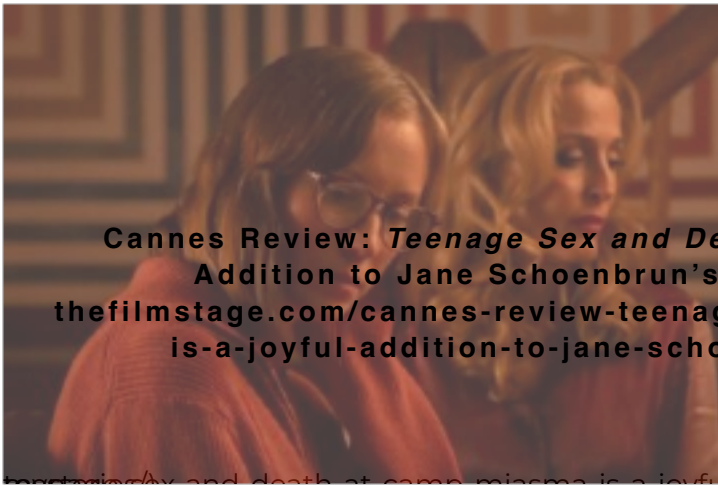
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