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'The Loneliest Man in Town' Review: An Aging Blues Singer Faces an Uncertain Future in Minimalist Austrian Drama

The latest feature from filmmaking duo Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel ('La Pivellina') follows an 80-year-old Austrian musician obliged to let go of the past.

BY JORDAN MINTZER FEBRUARY 19, 2026 2:38PM





'The Loneliest Man in Town' VENTO FILM/COURTESY OF BERLINALE

A bluesy trip down memory lane yields a few touching moments of nostalgia, but not necessarily enough of them to justify feature-length treatment, in Italian-Austrian directing duo Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel's latest collaboration, *The Loneliest Man in Town*.

Premiering in competition at the Berlinale, this minor-key drama chronicles the slow and steady fall — or more like the soft landing — of real-life 80-year-old Viennese bluesman Alois Koch, a.k.a. Al Cook, who lives in a condemned apartment along with his record collection and other mementos from his long musical career.

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The Loneliest Man in Town

THE BOTTOM LINE

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Venue: Berlin Film Festival (Competition)

Cast: Alois Koch, Brigitte Meduna, Alfred Blechinger, Flurina Schneider, Sarah Morrisette, Natascha Hierman, Ingrid Schaffernack

Directors: Tizza Covi, Rainer Frimmel

1 hour 26 minutes

Rather than opting for straightforward documentary treatment, which could have made for an intriguing portrait of a man who grew up in postwar Austria and fell in love with American music, the filmmakers attempt to dramatize Cook's life while he faces the perils of old age. The problem is that there's not a whole lot of drama in this minimalist character study, which follows the singer as he's forced to shed his memorabilia and move onto the next stage of his life, inspired by legends like Robert Johnson, Ma Rainey and Elvis Presley.

Indeed, the King clearly had a huge influence on Cook, who still sports a rockabilly pompadour and claims he learned English by listening to an old Elvis interview over and over again. The sole tenant remaining in a Viennese apartment building that's been marked for demolition, Cook holds onto his flat and its many memories for as long as he possibly can, dodging an elderly enforcer (Alfred Blechinger) hired by his landlord to coerce the holdout into leaving.

There are times when *The Loneliest Man* recalls another minimalist portrait of an old man's troubled existence: the Italian neorealist classic, *Umberto D.* But that movie managed to draw lots of conflict and emotion from its hero's quotidian plight, whereas Covi and Frimmel — whose filmography oscillates between docs (*Notes From the Underworld*) and fictional work (*La Pivellina*) — are too steeped in Cook's musical reminiscences to build much of a plot.

They're clearly fascinated by their subject, who looks a bit like Robert Mitchum and has the same kind of stoical screen presence. Archive footage viewed on old VHS tapes and Super-8 film reveals that Cook was a talented and charismatic musician, plucking away at his Gibson while singing blues standards or original material. In the present, he performs a few numbers for us, including a lovely acoustic rendition of "Silent Night" he plays on Christmas Eve, sitting alone in an apartment illuminated by candles



THE LONELIEST MAN IN TOWN rarely mimics the work of the realists, although Covi and Frimmel rarely mimic the Finnish auteur's deadpan style of humor. *The Loneliest Man* is much more observational, following Cook through the creeping day-to-day routine of transforming his existence. This includes selling off his belongings to pay for a trip to the Mississippi Delta, where he plans to eke out the rest of his days like all the American bluesmen he worships. But a late encounter with a girlfriend (Brigitte Meduna) from his distant past convinces Cook that it might be better to stay in Vienna.

Lensed on 16mm by Frimmel, who handled DP duties, while Covi is credited as both screenwriter and co-editor, the film has a grainy old-school look that adds to the general sense of time gone by. Most scenes are shot from a fixed camera position, which can accentuate the level of tedium when there's not much happening. Still, blues fans may delight at seeing close-ups of vintage album covers of greats like Lonnie Johnson or Blind Lemon Jefferson, while Elvis fanatics will recognize the King's 1957 movie musical, *Loving You*, which Cook watches dubbed in German at Vienna's Kinokulturhaus.

Other viewers may be left wondering why all of this merits a full-length movie, or at least one that unconvincingly tries to turn fact into fiction. The filmmakers never manage to muster up enough emotion in their depiction of Cook's daily struggles, even if there are a few touching scenes in which the singer recalls his beloved dead wife, whom we glimpse in old photos and in one rather moving home video.

At best, *The Loneliest Man in Town* creates a unique vibe that's partly steeped in such memories and partly filled with contemporary malaise, although the film never feels overtly bleak and ultimately holds out hope for Cook's future. Melancholic and nostalgic, it's like a blues track performed in the present but forever fixated on the past.

Full credits

Venue: Berlin Film Festival (Competition)

Cast: Alois Koch, Brigitte Meduna, Alfred Blechinger, Flurina Schneider, Sarah Morrisette, Natascha Hierman, Ingrid Schaffernack

Production company: Vento Film

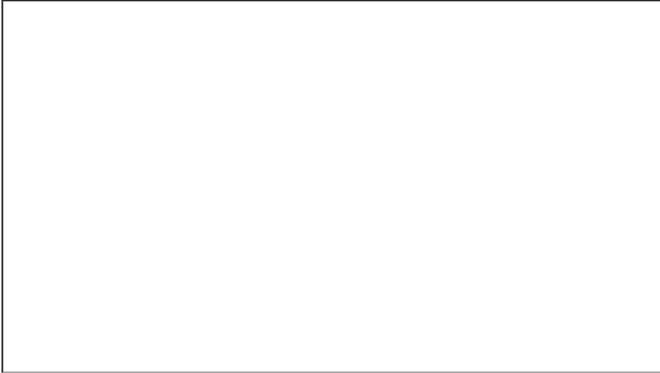
Directors: Tizza Covi, Rainer Frimmel

Screenwriter: Tizza Covi



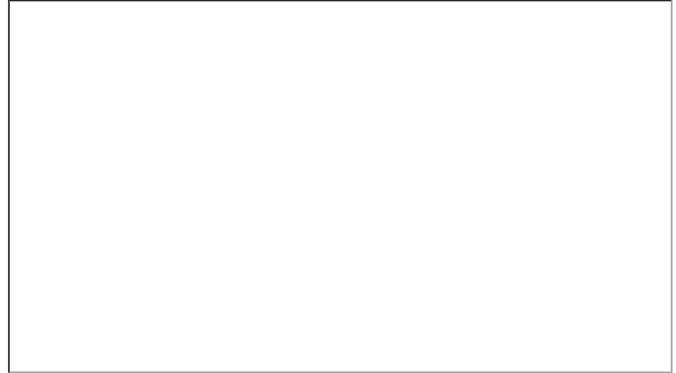
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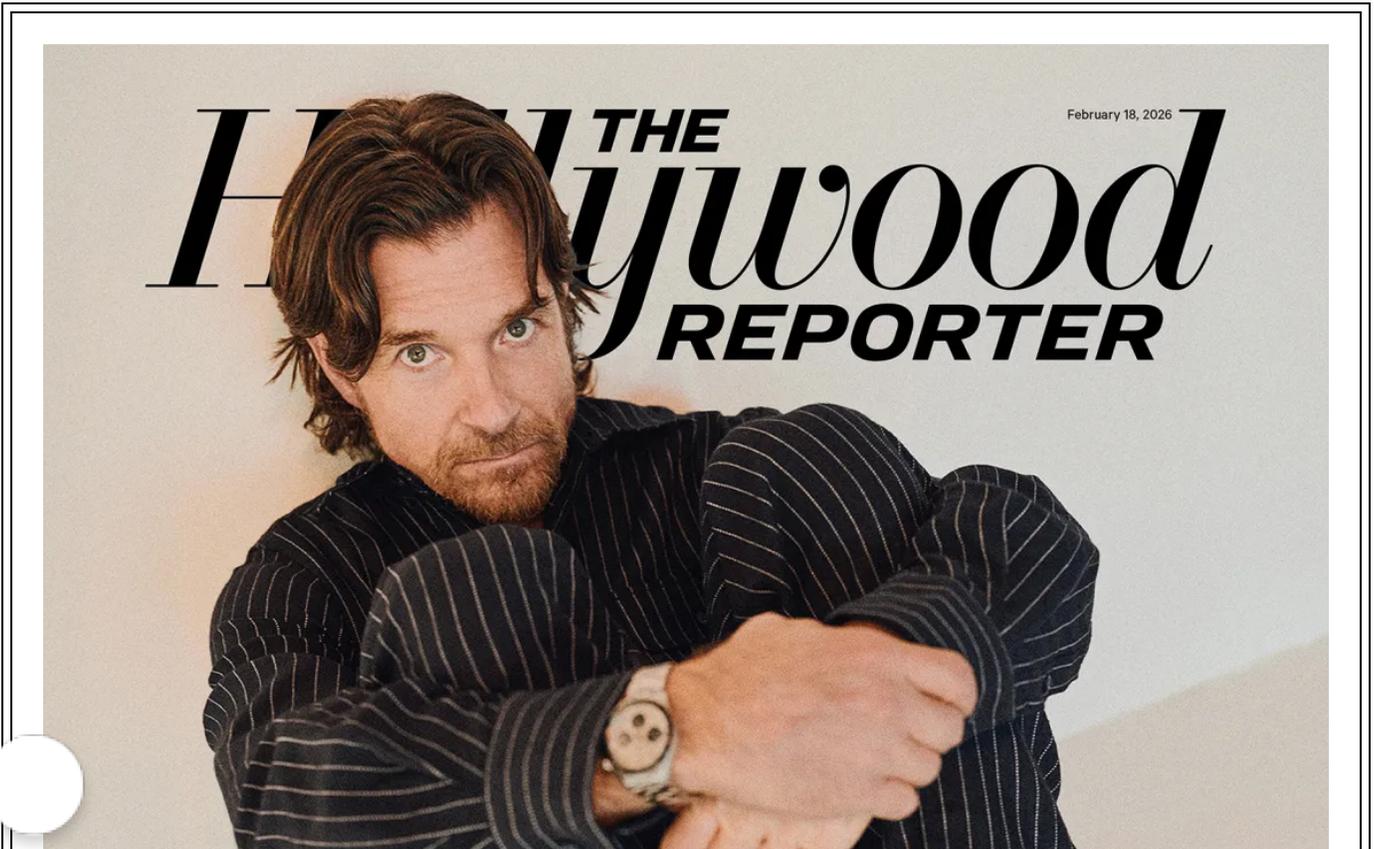


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