

'Vera': Review

BY ALLAN HUNTER | 4 OCTOBER 2022

Italian socialite Vera Gemma plays a version of herself in Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel's hybrid docudrama



SOURCE: BE FOR FILMS
'VERA'

Dirs: Tizza Covi, Rainer Frimmel. Austria. 2022. 115mins

Vera Gemma should be in a Paulo Sorrentino film. Her glamorous look and faded grandeur makes her ideal casting as a jaded jet-setter or great beauty gallantly fighting off ennui. Directors Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel take her more seriously, crafting a shimmering blur of fiction and non-fiction to

provide a sympathetic insight into someone forever in the shadow of her famous father, spaghetti western star Giuliano Gemma. An intriguing, unclassifiable film is pitched somewhere between reality television (The Kardashians, say) and the whimsical autobiographical creations of Gianni De Gregorio.

An unusual hybrid, 'Vera' is full of sympathy and understanding

Vera premiered in Venice Horizons, where it won both Best Director for Covi and Frimmel and Best Actress for Gemma, and has been shortlisted for this year's European Film Awards. Further festival potential is likely, while Italian arts channels and streamers should also take note.

Sporting bleached blonde locks and a glowing tan, fiftysomething Vera has the look of Donnatella Versace. She seems to possess a collection of cowboy hats and matching handbags for every occasion. The hats are just one of the ways she continues to honour her father, a handsome, much loved movie star who worked for Visconti, Zurlini and the cream of the spaghetti western directors. There is a clip from Lucio Fulci's *Silver Saddle* (1978) to illustrate the point.

Initially *Vera* has the feel of a straightforward documentary as Covi and Frimmel follow Vera on an evening in Rome, strolling the streets in search of some distraction. A bar tender and a taxi driver are the audience for her philosophical reflections on a life that was never as silver spoon as it appeared. "For everything you have in life, there's a price to pay," she wearily acknowledges.

Shot on Super 16mm, the film has the grainy look of cinema verite. Its guiding theme is the way Vera's life has been defined by being the daughter of Giuliano. A casting session for a film is a disaster until the director learns who she is and wants a selfie. A trip with Asia Argento, herself the daughter of filmmaker Dario Argento, takes them to a cemetery where the grave of Goethe's son doesn't even mention his name. It is a "warning for us children of artists", declares Argento.

Vera could easily be a figure of ridicule but, through the eyes of Covi and Frimmel, she comes across as lonely, warmhearted and vulnerable. Everyone wants something from her. She has a taste for hunky, good-looking men who resemble her father. Her sister Giuliana dismisses her latest filmmaker boyfriend Gennaro (Genaro Lillio) as "he umpteenth exploiter". He approaches her at one point discussing a role in his new film. You assume he is offering her the part until it becomes apparent he wants her to approach her friend Monica Bellucci on his behalf.

It is all so true to life that it is hard to believe it could be anything other than an observational documentary. At one point, we see Vera and her sister watching 8mm home movies from their

childhood in which their athletic father poses for the camera. The nature of *Vera* is constantly challenged by events in which real people take the lead in what we assume are fictional developments.

Vera is a passenger in a car accident that leaves 8 year-old Manu (Sebastian Dascalu) with a broken arm and his father Daniel (Daniel De Palma) threatening legal action. A distraught Vera wants to take care of the boy and probably the father as well; he could be the latest addition to her muscly, macho conquests. The relationship between Vera and the boy is the most touching element of the film. He brings out her maternal instincts and he loves her for who she is to him – the lady who buys him ice-cream and gifts and sits laughing beside him as they watch a Laurel and Hardy film. Like most of the happiness in her life, it proves to be fleeting.

An unusual hybrid, *Vera* is full of sympathy and understanding for a woman dealing with loneliness, ageing and the inescapable legacy of a father who has left her a lost soul at the mercy of an often cruel world.

Production company: Vento Film

International sales: Be For Films info@beforfilms.com

Producers: Tizza Covi, Rainer Frimmel

Screenplay: Tizza Covi

Cinematography: Rainer Frimmel

Editing: Tizza Covi

Music: Florian Benzer, Michael Pogo-Kreiner

Main cast: Vera Gemma, Daniel De Palma, Sebastian Dascalu, Annamaria Ciancamerla, Asia Argento