

FILMINK, May 2007, Australia

KEEPING IT REEL!
FILM FESTIVAL

THE GOETHE-INSTITUT FESTIVAL OF GERMAN FILMS



the GOOD GERMANS...

You don't think Germans can be funny? Think again! There are more than a few laughs on offer at THE GOETHE-INSTITUT FESTIVAL OF GERMAN FILMS. BY BRIAN DUFF

German cinema in the 21st century has come into its own as a unified brand of filmmaking, finally moving beyond the East-West schism that defined the majority of its history, and now rivals its European neighbours in terms of international relevance and excellence. Best Foreign Language Academy Award winners *Nowhere In Africa* and *The Lives Of Others*, nominees *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* and *Downfall*, and the well-lauded and more forward looking *Head-On* and *Run Lola Run* have done much to lay the groundwork for this recent renaissance, acting as critical tent-poles for the rest of the country's offerings. The Goethe-Institut Festival Of German Films rolls out across Australia this month with a rich cross-section of films which might help shift public opinion away from the impression that German filmmaking is heavy and no fun.

HIGHLIGHTS
MONKS – THE TRANSATLANTIC FEEDBACK
 The Monks – a rock band comprised of five American GIs stationed

in West Germany – transformed themselves from a dullsville standards band into the zygoté of all industrial music when they stuck around following WWII. While bringing howling feedback to the Germans may strike some as a dubious achievement, this film is a thoughtful, almost careful exposition on the merging of cultures, and one that reserves its loyalty for the creative and the groundbreaking – regardless of taste. It makes a variety of largish claims regarding the genesis and foundations of the subculture, but seems to do so without exaggeration or hesitation. Refreshingly, the film's format forgoes the increasingly popular MTV-style, and relies instead on more organic interviews and a variety of excellent found footage.

VALERIE
 A tragicomic film about a fashion model sleeping hard in a parking garage, *Valerie* seems to be of two minds. It is, on one hand, a "struggle story" about a title character (Agata Buzek) that hardly deserves her lot. However, somewhere along the way, the other hand of European

sensibility begins to surface as Valerie begins to resemble the hundreds of cute continental starlets that got through tough times with a giggle and occasional surreal twist. It references Italian and especially French film readily, and while the film is worthy of lofty comparisons, there is an inkling that, as an audience, we are being taken for a ride, and that our compassion for the title character is merely grist for the emotional mill that the film constructs.

FC VENUS
 There is perhaps no sub-subgenre as crowd pleasing as the "football movie". From *Rudy* and *Fever Pitch* to *Goal!*, there is little as energising as footy. However, perhaps unsurprisingly, football for Germans has meant films detailing soccer-playing storm troopers (*Joyeux Noel*, *Escape To Victory* and *The Miracle Of Bern*, most memorably). While not a panacea for wartime films, *FC Venus* does happily blend the "sport movie" with its delightful companion piece, the "battle of the sexes film", and brings levity to the pitch. The implausibility of the film's

plot (soccer obsessed denizens of a regional German town battle their better halves for the right to remain obnoxiously male) does little to diminish its effect, nor does its occasional dip into amateurism. The film is fun, gentle and sweet: a worthy his-and-hers for the festival.

SUMMER '04
 A kitchen sink drama about maturity, complacency and passion, *Summer '04* has an exceptional tone that is bound to appeal to a committed – if limited – crowd. It boasts a cast of credible actors, all of whom seem to have approached their roles with great dedication. However, this is exactly the type of film that local directors seem most adept at producing and it comes across as a dead ringer for the average AFI winner – not necessarily a bad thing, just a familiar one. Miriam (Martina Gedeck) is the matriarch of an ostensibly perfect, and appropriately dull, nuclear family when she surprises herself by coveting a mysterious new man. Hers is, of course, a familiar story, but it is done well here, and the hard-fought happy ending is satisfying in its comprehensive finality and believability.

The Goethe-Institut Festival Of German Films screens in Sydney at The Chauvel Cinema from April 19-29; in Melbourne at The Palace Cinema Como and Palace Brighton Bay from April 20-29; in Brisbane at The Palace Centro Cinema from April 26-29; and in Perth at The Cinema Paradiso from April 26-29. For more information, head to www.goethe.de/ozfilmfest.