

Little Girl

(“La Pivellina”)

A film by Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel

100 min / color / Austria-Italy / 2009 /
HDCAM (S-16mm transfer) / 1.66 / stereo
Italian w/ English subtitles



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SELECTED PRESS

"Humane and quietly moving." – *Variety*

"A gem...most impressive.

Asia Crippa's riveting presence melts not only the characters' but viewers' hearts as well." – *Hollywood Reporter*

"[five stars] Bittersweet yet often joyful. If you can imagine a movie that takes a Dardennes-like approach to a milieu more familiar from Fellini's *La Strada*, you're halfway ready for the rough-hewn kind of magic at hand. One of the year's most delightful finds." – *Toronto Eye Weekly*

"Remarkable...Affecting...Graceful...Astonishing authenticity.

Asia Crippa is a delight." – *Screen Daily*

"Charms in the neo-realist tradition. The child is utterly delightful." – *Now (Toronto)*

"An emotionally potent chronicle of love and kinship...with the perfect cast."

– *Cinema Scope*

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

OFFICIAL AUSTRIAN ENTRY ~ *Academy Awards* ~ *Best Foreign Language Film*

WINNER ~ *Best European Film, Director's Fortnight* ~ *2009 Cannes Film Festival*

OFFICIAL SELECTION ~ *2010 Berlin Film Festival*

WINNER ~ *Audience Award, 2011 Libertas Film Festival Dubrovnik*

SYNOPSIS

Bathed in the neorealist tradition of Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica, *La Pivellina* is a captivating tale of people at the margins of society who open their hearts to a stranger.

In a run-down park on the outskirts of Rome, a two year-old girl is discovered and taken in by a family of hard-luck circus performers. A note in the child's pocket from a desperate mother reveals little about who she is or why she was left. As the bond grows between the girl and her surrogate family, this naturalistic drama becomes a revealing and soulful portrait of courage and discrimination, and of loss and togetherness.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTORS TIZZA COVI AND RAINER FRIMMEL

Is *La Pivellina* based on a real story?

Tizza Covi : I wrote the screenplay. We started by telling a story showing how our protagonists live, though not purely in documentary form. I should also mention that in Italy, a great many children are abandoned at this age, not just newborns. Unfortunately, it's a current problem.

***La Pivellina*, is also your first fictional work. A few of the elements and characters in *Babooska* appear again. To be precise, you crossed a fine line in the direction of fiction. What moved you to go towards fiction yet still stay close to reality?**

Tizza Covi: The documentary approach is what interests us the most in terms of filmmaking. What you get from reality just can't be reenacted. Still, with documentary film we had come to a place where not being able to directly influence what's happening bothered us. The second factor was that in both films, *Babooska* and *La Pivellina*, we worked with people who were wonderfully natural and had no problem at all with a camera being nearby.

How did Patty become the protagonist of *La Pivellina*?

Tizza Covi: We've known Patty for a long time, and we think her voice and behavior resemble that of Anna Magnani, whom we adore. She has an explosive personality, though she did a lot to hold herself back during shooting. Patty was happy to appear in the film. On top of that we shot in winter, a time when nothing's happening in the circus business. This was a welcome change of pace during a time that is normally dead for them. We lived with them in their trailer, played cards or dice at night or went to the pizzeria. Circus people who work outdoors don't have much to do in winter: getting their trailers ready for the summer, rehearsing and improving their acts; otherwise the shoot filled up a period of nothing but waiting time.

Rainer Frimmel: I'd like to add that she and her husband are extremely strong together. I don't think that any couple could be more different than Walter and Patrizia. Of course, that aspect fascinated us too.

It doesn't seem that there was a screenplay with set dialogues. What was the basis for shooting, what did you do to prepare?

Tizza Covi: We wrote the story with an extremely concrete beginning and an extremely concrete ending. The dialogues weren't written down. An hour before shooting would start, we talked to

Patty, Tairo or Walter, told them which scenes we had planned and what would have to be in the conversation. How they formulated their lines and the order was left up to them. One difficulty that we didn't expect occurred in the middle of the film, where we would have liked to include some real, documentary-style elements from their everyday life.

It's common knowledge that shooting with children isn't easy. How difficult was it working with such a young girl?

Tizza Covi: Asia was almost two years old during the shooting. I should start by saying that our style of shooting has nothing to do with a classic film crew. Rainer operates the camera; I take care of the sound and the clapboard. For children we aren't in any way scary. And kids need time, of course. I spent a great deal of time with her, until she fell asleep in my arms, and then with Patty in the trailer, and afterwards she would go to sleep there all the time. When we picked up the camera or the sound equipment we didn't change to such an extent that she would have noticed. Our working style is probably the best for shooting with children.

Rainer Frimmel: Of course, a great deal happened spontaneously. Telling her exactly what to do doesn't work at that age. Instead, you have to adapt the situation in light of how she feels at the moment. When you take a closer look at the themes, the film has something to say about having to grow up fast. Asia has to deal with being abandoned, and Tairo was also alone at a very young age. It's also about different generations coexisting.

Tizza Covi: Another part of the film that's very important to us involves sticking together, and the fact that in the world they live in they help each other so quickly. Helping each other is a matter of course. Showing this other type of society was important to us.

Rainer Frimmel: And childhood is another important aspect. In Tairo's case his childhood and being abandoned. He was "officially" given up after his parents' divorce, but he was only three at the time and had to stand on his own two feet at an early age. This is also a kind of abandonment that you have to deal with, but he still managed to find a substitute family in this microcosm.

In your Italy the weather's never nice, the surroundings seem pretty dreary, and at the same time you sense a calm simplicity in life and a humorous narrative style.

Tizza Covi: The image of nice weather in Italy's a cliché; winters in Rome are terrible, and it rains all the time. We're just trying to show Italy in a more realistic way.

In a purely technical sense, you have lots of experience with filming inside a trailer.

Rainer Frimmel: Of course, there are a lot of difficulties involved with shooting under these conditions that you have to be ready for all the time. We shot on Super-16 mm, though with a handheld camera this time. We never used artificial light because we always wanted to be as close to reality as possible.

Tizza Covi: But we still kept our style using long takes during which something can develop.

The fact that not all the details were specified in the screenplay probably made editing even more important.

Tizza Covi: We had more footage than with our previous films, about 20 hours in all, which is still a relatively small amount for a fiction film. I do the editing. During editing we had to drop a lot of beautiful things that worked really well because they moved too far away from the story.

Interview: Karin Schiefer

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Tizza Covi (born in Bolzano, Italy, in 1971) lived in Paris and Berlin before studying to become a photographer at the Graphische Lehranstalt in Vienna. After finishing her studies she went to Rome where she worked as a free-lance photographer. She has won several scholarships for her photographic work.

Rainer Frimmel (born in Vienna, Austria, in 1971) also graduated as a photographer from the Graphische Lehranstalt in Vienna. He has received scholarships in Rome, Paris and New York for his photographic work.

In 2002 Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel founded their film production company Vento Film to produce their films independently.

FILMOGRAPHY

Das ist ales (That 's al) / documentary - Austria 2001 / 35mm, 98 min

Award: *Prix regards neufs* (Visions du Réel – Nyon)

Baboska / documentary - Austria/ItalyI 2005 / 35 mm, 100 min

8 Awards, including: *Wolfgang-Staudte-Award* (Berlinale), *Prix international de la Scam* (Cinéma du réel - Paris), *Best Austrian Documentary* of 2005/06 (Diagonale - Graz), *Best Italian Documentary* (Festival dei Popoli - Florence)

La Pivellina is their first fiction feature film.

CAST

Patty Patrizia Gerardi

Asia Asia Crippa

Tairo Tairo Caroli

Walter Walter Saabel

CREDITS

Directed by Tizza Covi and Rainer Frimmel

Screenplay Tizza Covi

Camera Rainer Frimmel

Editor Tizza Covi

Key Cast Patrizia Gerardi, Asia Crippa, Tairo Caroli, Walter Saabel

Producer Rainer Frimmel

Production Vento Film

With the support of Innovative Film Austria

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