



NEW RELEASES

Corsage

In *Corsage*, a dry, wry, winking quasibiopic of the Empress Elisabeth of Austria, the anachronisms arrive slowly, subtly and then, quite recklessly, all at once. Does that swimming pool the empress dives into, with its chrome-plated handrail, not look a bit contemporary for a mid-19th century palace? That modernist doorway inside certainly does. Who knew that Kris Kristofferson's 'Help Me Make It through the Night' was a prim chamber-music standard for the House of Habsburg? Including the Rolling Stones' 'As Tears Go By' is pushing it a bit, though by the time Marie Kreutzer's film boldly and wittily departs from biographical record to rewrite history entirely, such era-fudging seems positively cautious by comparison. When stood, however, beside past depictions of the empress – nicknamed 'Sissi', though Kreutzer's film prefers brisker formalities – *Corsage* seems less like an audacious aberration than an attempt, if not to correct the record, at least to balance out the mythology surrounding its subject. For a generation of European filmgoers, the legend of Elisabeth was vividly sealed and illustrated by the trilogy of floridly romanticised Sissi films of the mid-1950s, which starred a teenage, impossibly beautiful Romy Schneider as a supposedly true-life fairy-tale princess, and surrounded her with so much sweetened visual and aural *viennoiserie* that it was easy to forget the real Elisabeth's life ended grimly when she was assassinated, aged 60, by an anarchist. (The third film in the Sissi trilogy concluded with a sentimentally joyous reunion between the empress and her young daughter in Venice.)

Corsage coolly takes a seam-ripper to such high-kitsch historical fantasy, even as it constructs its own fiction around how the empress lived and died – one that grants its heroine both the agency and tragedy denied her by past efforts to cast her, sometimes quite literally, as a dainty porcelain icon. Whether or not Kreutzer's film presents us with the 'real' Sissi, eons after the death of anyone who could testify either way, is moot; the point is that this empress, as tartly, cannily played by the emphatically un-Schneider-like Vicky Krieps, at least feels like she could be real, possessed as she is of perverse intelligence, petulant independence and a palpable libido.

For starters, this empress is older than the Sissi films ever permitted her to get. The year is 1877, and she regards her approaching 40th birthday with the same thin-lipped moue of discontent that she does most aspects of her lavishly serviced but joyless courtly life – from her diet (minimal) to her political duties (even more so) to her relationship (barely detectable) with cold-fish husband Emperor Franz Joseph (Florian Teichtmeister). Is that all there is? If so, Elisabeth tallies the contents of her life to an obsessively precise degree, logging her weight and dimensions daily, insisting her handmaidens give not so much as a millimetre as they fasten her corset, practising and timing to the last second her ability to hold her breath underwater. Why? Let it be said that no detail is irrelevant in a film as fastidious as it imagines its subject to be.

But then *Corsage* releases her, bit by bit, from the prisons of both her palace and her history. She cuts her high-piled hair and relaxes into heroin; on hearing rumours of her dalliance with dashing riding instructor Middleton (Colin Morgan), she decides to live up to them. There's even a tattoo planted

on her shoulder, though Kreutzer's postmodernism steers largely clear of the adolescent punk vibrancy of Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* (2006). From the bleached, linen tones of Judith Kaufmann's camerawork to the calm, cutting strut of Krieps's performance – her best since her international breakthrough in Paul Thomas Anderson's *Phantom Thread* (2017), with Kreutzer's film even more fascinated by her stoic but quizzical features – *Corsage* asserts its contemporary perspective with an ironic propriety.

It maintains that veneer of good behaviour through to its fully radical final act, in which a whimsically but intricately planned climactic caper builds, most unexpectedly, to a full rewrite of Sissi's own last chapter – a fiction that feels, by this point, truer to its reconstructed portrait of a woman determined to live, breathe, speak, fuck and, if it comes down to it, die on her own terms. With elegant insouciance, Kreutzer and Krieps give us a royal actually worthy of a mantelpiece figurine – not that this empress would have stood for such frippery.

Guy Lodge, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2022-23

Vicky Krieps on 'Corsage'

Vicky Krieps is no stranger to playing embattled women. The Luxembourgish actor's memorable breakout turn was as the steely muse in Paul Thomas Anderson's gothic power play *Phantom Thread* (2017). Meanwhile, last year she played a filmmaker trying to step out of her older boyfriend's shadow in Mia Hansen-Løve's *Bergman Island*. Now she takes the lead role in Austrian director Marie Kreutzer's alternative biopic of the 19th-century royal Empress Elisabeth of Austria, or Sissi as she was better known. In *Corsage*, Krieps's Sissi is turning 40 and starting to chafe against her gilded Hapsburg cage.

Her famous beauty is perceived to be waning while she despairs of court ceremonies in which her only function is as a statue. The film was initially Krieps's idea. 'At 15, I read a biography about her and I was left with a feeling that there's something behind the screen of Sissi that was darker and more sad and melancholic. The mystery around this woman has always stayed with me,' she tells me. When Kreutzer and Krieps finished working together on their 2016 portrait of parenthood, *We Used to Be Cool*, Krieps immediately said 'What about Sissi?'

At first Marie Kreutzer was sceptical about making a film about Sissi. What changed her mind?

When I proposed the idea she was very puzzled and surprised because to her Sissi was a very superficial, kitschy, souvenir shop figurine, and she was never really interested in that or in making a biopic. But then she started researching and discovered that while her youth is well known, and her death is [she was assassinated] we don't know a lot about Sissi at 40. She found these little acts of rebellion – that she was smoking, which was not really allowed for a woman at her time, or that she would sit at this huge banquet and wouldn't touch the food, or would leave the house in the middle of the night and go horse-riding.

This all shows the thing that I found most interesting, which is that when you are a queen or an empress or anyone public, where do you go? You can't go anywhere because you're trapped, always seen. So the only place to go is inside, and that's something that always fascinates me, how people can find a way to escape on the inside.

Did your experience of fame after Phantom Thread inspire your performance?

I got scared from the *Phantom Thread* press tour. It was not for me. I’m not this public person. Now I’m getting used to it, but I had trouble coming into touch with this world where you are suddenly seen from the outside. It’s not like I had become very famous but it was overwhelming to go to Hollywood and to be seen and to be recognised and talked about or written about, taken pictures of.

And so when I came back and saw the script, I knew now some of what Sissi was feeling. I knew I wouldn’t have to do anything to understand her internally but that in order to take her seriously, I would have to go down the road of [learning] the horse-riding, the fencing, the corset, the gymnastics...

It sounds like a particularly arduous shoot.

I underestimated how it would feel to wear a corset like that for such long hours. Women at that time, they would wear one maybe for a couple of hours a day. But when we make movies, we start at 5am and the shoot lasts for 12 hours and you never get to sit down. That’s actually too much. But once we started, I had to go through with it. For both Marie and I, it was very hard. She even cried once because we were trying to make a movie about how a woman was imprisoned and how we wanted her to be free. And then she was imprisoning me in a way – although for a purpose. We both underestimated the pain.

Isabel Stevens, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2022-23

CORSAGE

Director: Marie Kreutzer
A Film AG production
In co-production with: Samsa Film, Komplizenfilm, Kazak Productions, ORF Film/Fernseh-Abkommen, ZDF/Arte, Arte France Cinéma
With the participation of: ARTE France
In association with: MK2 Films, Alamode Filmverleih
Presented by: IFC Films
International Sales: MK2 Films
Producers: Alexander Glehr, Johanna Scherz
Casting Director: Rita Waszilovics
Screenplay: Marie Kreutzer
Director of Photography: Judith Kaufmann
Editor: Ulrike Kofler
Costume Designer: Monika Buttinger
Hair and Make-up Designer: Maike Heinlein
Music: Camille
Production Sound Mixer: Alain Goniva
Re-recording Mixer: Loïc Collignon
Supervising Sound Editor: Nicolas Leroy
Stunt Co-ordinator: Olivier Bisback

Cast

Vicky Krieps (*Empress Elisabeth of Austria*)
Florian Teichtmeister
(*Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria*)
Katharina Lorenz (*Countess Marie Festetics*)
Jeanne Werner (*Ida Ferenczy*)
Alma Hasun (*Fanny Feifalik*)
Manuel Rubey (*King Ludwig II of Bavaria*)
Finnegan Oldfield (*Louis Le Prince*)
Aaron Friesz (*Rudolf*)
Rosa Hajjaj (*Valerie*)
Lilly Marie Tschörtner
(*Duchess Maria Sophie of Bavaria*)
Colin Morgan (*George 'Bay' Middleton*)
Alice Prosser (*Anna Nahowski*)

Austria-Luxembourg-Germany-France 2022
114 mins

A Picturehouse Entertainment release

NEW RELEASES

Lynch/Oz
From Fri 2 Dec
Bones and All
From Fri 2 Dec
Tori and Lokita
From Fri 9 Dec
Triangle of Sadness
From Fri 16 Dec
Decision to Leave
From Fri 16 Dec
The Banshees of Inisherin
From Fri 16 Dec
She Said
From Sat 17 Dec

Living
From Mon 19 Dec
Corsage
From Tue 27 Dec
Enys Men
From Fri 13 Jan (intro + Q&A with Mark Jenkin on Fri 13 Jan 18:00)

RE-RELEASES
Fanny and Alexander (Fanny och Alexander)
From Fri 2 Dec
The Queen of Spades
From Fri 23 Dec
Rashomon
From Fri 6 Jan

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