

**Janus Films Presents**

# REVANCHE

**A FILM BY  
GÖTZ SPIELMANN**

**STARRING JOHANNES KRISCH,  
URSULA STRAUSS, IRINA POTAPENKO  
ANDREAS LUST, HANNES THANHEISER**



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**In German with English subtitles**  
**Running time: 121 mins**  
**Not Rated**  
[www.revanchefilm.com](http://www.revanchefilm.com)  
[www.janusfilms.com](http://www.janusfilms.com)  
[www.criterion.com](http://www.criterion.com)

## **REVANCHE**

(r-vänch, -väsh) n.

1. The act of retaliating, especially in response to some bad action; revenge.
2. Second attempt to win a game requested by a losing player.
3. A usually political policy, as of a nation or an ethnic group, intended to regain lost territory or standing.

[French, from Old French *revancher*, to revenge : re-, re- + *vengier*, *vencher*, to avenge; see *revenge*.]

## **SYNOPSIS**

At once a gripping thriller and a tragic drama of nearly Greek proportions, *Revanche* is the stunning, Oscar-nominated, international breakthrough film from Austrian filmmaker Götz Spielmann. In a ragged section of Vienna, hardened ex-con Alex (the mesmerizing Johannes Krisch) works as an assistant in a brothel, where he falls for Ukrainian hooker Tamara (Irina Potapenko). Their desperate plans for escape unexpectedly intersect with the lives of a rural cop (Andreas Lust) and his seemingly content wife (Ursula Strauss). With meticulous, elegant direction, Spielmann creates a tense, existential, and surprising portrait of vengeance and redemption, and a journey into the darkest forest of human nature, in which violence and beauty exist side by side.

## **DIRECTORS NOTES**

### **WRITER-DIRECTOR GÖTZ SPIELMANN**

#### **THE MOVIE'S THEME**

I keep going back and forth: Is it about revenge? Is it about reconciliation? The search for identity? These are all just catch phrases that don't really say anything. That's not the way I work. *Revanche* is a story – not theory enhanced by images. Maybe what my films are trying to do is to get to the bottom of life by focusing not on a social context but on existential questions. That's my passion, what sparks my curiosity, impels me: tracking down the substance of life, its essence deep down inside. There is, behind all the conflicts and painful things I show in my films, a fundamental spark of optimism – the conviction that life isn't a mistake, that it all somehow makes sense.

#### **EMOTIONS**

*Revanche* is an emotional piece, like all my movies. The characters are searching, are infused with subconscious feelings of love, grief, revenge, longing, loneliness, affection, and compassion. I like emotional movies, and I loathe kitsch and sentimentality. They are manipulation, escapism. Emotions are not the opposite of lucid thought and formal precision.

#### **THE RED-LIGHT DISTRICT, PROSTITUTION**

Behind the scenes in the red-light district everything is about making a profit, about making a little money here, a lot of money there, or maybe even about making really big money. Just about everything else takes a backseat. That's the essence of our society, the society we have created and in which we live. And it's also the basic problem. The red-light district is just a condensed version of our civilization. Prostitutes sell their bodies; many so-called successful people sell their consciences. They are respected figures in society, when in fact they are the bigger prostitutes because they act out of greed rather than need. Instead of abusing themselves, they abuse others, the environment, and the world.

#### **NATURE IN REVANCHE**

This is my first film in a long time where nature plays a key role. The woods, the trails, the secluded lake, but also the light, the weather – all these things are important elements in the film. *Revanche* starts out with momentum, with a strong plot, and gradually flows into a kind of silence: a powerful silence, I hope. In my mind, nature represents the silence behind the conflicts. Not as an idyllic refuge one can run to for relief, but as a force, an energy with its own almighty intelligence.

#### **THE LONELINESS OF THE CHARACTERS**

Loneliness is probably an inextricable part of our modern lives, and yet I consider it an illusion. We always think of ourselves as being separate from the world, and

in this way we deceive ourselves. This separation is just an invention of our imagination, in many ways we are constantly and directly interwoven in a larger whole. Loneliness is an attribute of our limited awareness, not of life itself. From the outside, the old man appears to be the loneliest character, but I think he is the least lonely of all. He has a clear identity, even if outwardly this makes his life difficult. It is an identity nevertheless. And he has his faith. And he isn't afraid of death. He may be alone, yes. But he isn't lonely.

### **THE FATEFUL INCIDENT/COINCIDENCE**

I don't believe in coincidences. Coincidence is just something our intellect can't understand. We only see pieces of the whole, never the entire picture. That is the crucial challenge in narration: to take the "coincidence" that sets the story in motion and embed it in such a way, condense it in such a way that it emerges in a deeper context in the end. Ancient mythology is a great source to draw from.

### **THE MOVIE'S FORM**

Working with cinematographer Martin Gschlacht is very intuitive, very precise, without a lot of talk or discussion. Before getting started, we don't really go into resolution, concrete scenes, technical stuff, etc.; instead we talk a lot about the story, its hidden meaning, about the formal basic conception of the film, about rhythm, about style. We think these things out in detail before we start, then when we shoot, we can work intuitively and precisely. I want to make movies that don't manipulate the viewer with effects. My style, the form of my films, which is something I am constantly working on, aims at simplicity and clarity. That may not sound spectacular, but it is difficult to do and I think that ultimately it has the greatest power. I believe that the form of the film is where its individuality lies, and this individuality is where true beauty comes from. Not in the "moral" or the "criticism" or in vain demonstrations of "abilities."

### **WORKING WITH THE ACTORS**

I believe that acting is best when it combines vitality with precision. I try to help actors with this, to guide them in that direction. All actors are different, each has his or her own approach. That's why I don't have any one method either, but various ones. It all depends.

### **PREPARATIONS**

Irina Potapenko spent a few nights "incognito" in a brothel, drank champagne with the customers, pole danced, familiarized herself with the job. Andreas Lust spent almost a week at the police station in Gföhl, did alcohol testing, received training at the shooting range, got to know the police officers and their lives. Johannes Krisch spent several nights driving around the city with a brothel driver. The actors incorporate this knowledge into the story, into their parts. The result is a different kind of self-assurance and naturalness in their acting: true-to-life, authentic.

### **THE MOVIE'S "HAPPY ENDING"**

My movie doesn't have a happy ending. Why should it? That's just kitsch, something that might make you feel giddy today, but tomorrow everything is back to normal again. Despite all the terrible things that happen in the world, despite all the problems and conflicts, I believe that life is right the way it is. That's why I'm only interested in art that is life-affirming. This gives it force and urgency. And in this way it goes beyond mere reason.

## **INTERVIEW WITH GÖTZ SPIELMANN**

**By Karin Schiefer, Austrian Film Commission**

**The title *Revanche* clearly reflects the theme of your new film. Should we expect a classic story of revenge?**

Possibly classic, but not in the sense of genre cinema. That doesn't interest me so much; I work intuitively rather than according to a concept. While the story definitely contains some elements of suspense, I've tended to disguise them in this production through my directing rather than elaborate on them. The suspense doesn't occupy the foreground for me.

**So is the theme of guilt more important?**

The question of guilt was certainly the main theme at the beginning, the initial intellectual impetus, though that shifted gradually. What the film explores more deeply now, and what doesn't sound like it conforms with the Zeitgeist, is the secret behind life. That's where my focus turned, to the secret, the riddle that life represents to me. Life, and I believe in its beauty. To put it in banal terms, I believe that despite all the terrible things that happen, despite all the problems and misunderstandings, despite all the loneliness and conflicts, life is the way it should be. Exploring that more deeply is what I'm doing right now. This focus was probably a part of the story from the beginning, but concealed, and now I'm starting to discover it by working with it.

There's an uppermost level, a story of revenge which is told in an extremely clear and relatively stringent way, with a story of guilt and an obvious main character, a "hero." That's the surface. Deeper down, I hope, the film tells us about a kind of stillness behind things. It's difficult to express that in words, because it refers to a realization, knowledge or experience which begins beyond conscious thought and language.

**The story's constructed in such a way that the question of guilt can be interpreted in an extremely relative and subjective way.**

That's right. In that sense the film's obviously a sequel to *Antares*. It should be clear that the characters see, and are able to see, nothing more than portions of reality.

**Two worlds meet, that of prostitutes and pimps and the conventionality of**

**rural life. You once said something about the former, the setting of your last play, *Imperium*, that it's in a sense a condensed outline of society as a whole. In what way?**

For two reasons: Firstly because when you look behind the scenes, it's all about making money, some amount of profit, and an incredible number of things are subordinate to that. That's also what makes up today's society, and it's also one of our fundamental problems. Secondly, people constantly try to conceal the banality of this, to give it a false significance, and to hide the primitive greed driving it, the need that creates it. I see in this a more intense, simpler and therefore extremely obvious analogy to the current state of our society.

**You directed two stage plays between *Antares* and *Revanche* - one by Schnitzler and one of your own, *Imperium*. Is *Revanche* a further development of the material from *Imperium*?**

No, these two projects were in fact created completely parallel to one another. The idea behind *Revanche* is older than the play. The play revolves around a medium-size brothel owner who's ruined by his plan for life, which is too narrow and too superficial. In the case of *Revanche* the brothel owner is a secondary figure whose main function is to represent the milieu, which I'm now quite familiar with from research.

**Did these last two works cast a new light on your films and alter your approach?**

No, not really. My theatrical work enriches my other work through different experiences, stimulates my thinking through working closely with great plays. But my film work isn't really influenced by it. At the same time however, everything has some kind of influence, so that's true, I suppose. But I'm not aware of precisely how; I don't notice it.

**Working with actors is known to be an important part of your work as a director. Compared to *Antares*, there are some new faces - how was the cast chosen for *Revanche*?**

When you avoid the beaten paths with well-known celebrities you can discover great new actors. Discovering new faces isn't really my intention; that just happens because I look for the best possible cast without any preconceived notions, and do a lot of looking around and auditions beforehand. In the case of

Johannes Krisch I've felt for a long time that there's a movie actor with a great deal of potential. This is his first leading role in a theatrical film. A real discovery for Austrian cinema, in my opinion. I hope that others will see it that way too. For the role of Tamara we looked for a young Russian actress; did auditions in Moscow, Kiev, and finally in Bucharest. Then we found Irina Potapenko in Berlin. She's originally from Ukraine, then moved to Berlin at the age of eight and grew up there. She plays a prostitute and prepared by spending a few nights with the women at a brothel in Vienna, observing the clients and getting to know the life. A part that takes a great deal out of her emotionally, which she put a great deal of dedication into. I considered Andreas Lust for a part in *Antares*, and he really convinced me, even though I decided on someone else in the end. He plays a policeman who accidentally shoots and kills a young woman and who has psychological problems as a result. He spent some time with the police in Gföhl to better slip into the character and the milieu. I think Ursula Strauss is one of the most interesting actresses of her generation, and it was high time for us to work together. I was thinking about her when I wrote the screenplay. It was the same with Hannes Thanheiser, who plays the old farmer. He had small parts in *Erwin und Julia* and *Antares*. The farmer was written for him. But choosing the cast isn't the only important thing; rehearsals are too. I spend a few weeks working with the actors before shooting starts, and we condense the figures and scenes, filling them out and "setting them free."

**Your work with Martin Gschlacht has turned out well for some time now.**

"Turned out well" doesn't do it justice; it's more than that. It's our third film together, and our collaboration has become extremely intuitive, extremely precise, without a great deal of talking. We've also become friends over the years, which is a beautiful thing, working together with friends. Beforehand we talk about the resolution, specific images, technique, etc., and a great deal about the story, its hidden meaning, the film's basic formal concept, rhythm and style. We work mostly with natural light and go to the limits of what's possible with 35mm stock. At the same time it should "look good," and not be an attempt to simulate documentary authenticity à la Dogma. Extremely few cuts, long shots. Of course that invites the danger that there are fewer possibilities to make corrections during editing. Everything must be precisely planned for shooting. That's what we look for during shooting, and then we don't have to do much talking about what we want, it has become natural. A director couldn't ask for anything more.

**This is the first film you've produced with your own company. What was**



### **behind this decision?**

Simply because I never really felt that with any of my previous films I had found a producer who made me feel I was in good hands. I run my company together with my wife, Sandra Bohle. We're producing the film together with Prisma-Film, and the combination of individuals and our work together has turned out extremely well so far. I expected shooting would be more difficult, as I had to think and act as both the director and producer. But the opposite was the case. A lot of things are much easier. I have the sense that I can plan and make decisions in a much better way for the good of the film and the great crew. We work hard, all of us together, but we enjoy working in this way. At least I hope the majority saw it like that. As producers we tried our best to make this atmosphere possible.

### **What role does time play in this story?**

In my opinion the best films are the ones where time is transformed into a space for experience. Like a river you watch flow by, where all the water eventually comes together in a sea at the end. On the one hand storytelling in film is bound to time like any other dramatic art. But the most important experiences in life happen in a place where time is suspended, and plays a role. That's why I always see my work as taking place on two different levels. The story you're telling is a means to this end, but it isn't the purpose or the destination. Everything needs a surface, a superficial level which must fit and which requires suspense, though that isn't the most important thing. Sometimes not making use of this suspense might be the right thing to do, if that would go too deep or interfere with something behind the story too much. You could say that's the deception in filmmaking. *Revanche* is a very precisely written story, but the focus when it was being made wasn't producing as much suspense or breathlessness as possible. Telling the story of *Revanche* in a way that creates a maximum amount of suspense would be easy to do. The important thing for me was a formal and aesthetic slowness. In my opinion that's the exciting thing and the risky aspect of the film. What interests me most is telling a thriller at an extremely slow pace. I don't want viewers to just forget time for ninety minutes thanks to cinematic mechanisms and its methods of manipulation. I want them to become conscious of it. That's when you can truly overcome it.

## PRODUCTION BIOS

### **GÖTZ SPIELMANN – Writer/Director**

Born in Wels in 1961, grew up in Vienna. Starts writing and directing while still in school. His first film is aired on television in 1978. In 1980 he starts studying screenwriting and directing at the Vienna Film Academy. Two films completed during his studies receive international prizes and are screened at the Stadtkino, an arthouse cinema in Vienna. Spielmann graduates in 1987. Soon afterwards, he writes and directs four cinema and made-for-TV films in succession. In 1999, after several years of silence, his next feature film *The Stranger (Die Fremde)* is Austria's nomination for the Foreign Language Oscar. This is followed by *Spiel im Morgengrauen*, a made-for-TV movie, and in 2004 the feature *Antares*. *Antares* is shown internationally at more than 30 festivals, at arthouse theaters in many countries including France, the USA, and Germany. *Antares* is nominated by Austria to compete for the Foreign Language Oscar. Its explicit sex scenes spark heated debate among Academy members. Since 2005 Götz Spielmann has also written and directed for the stage. In 2006 he is awarded the Upper Austrian State Prize for Culture in the category of film. The same year he founds the production company Spielmannfilm.

### **GÖTZ SPIELMANN: FILMOGRAPHY**

#### **(wrote and directed all films)**

2004 ANTARES. Feature; 115 min / Festivals: Locarno, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, San Francisco, Mills Valley, Palm Springs, Istanbul, Hof, Mannheim, Seville, Thessaloniki, Busan, Mar del Plata, a. o. / Awards: Austria's nomination for the Foreign Language Oscar; Opening film at the Diagonale film festival in 2004. U.S. Distribution: Film Movement.

2001 SPIEL IM MORGENGRAUEN (adapted from Arthur Schnitzler). TV; 90 min

1999 THE STRANGER (DIE FREMDE). Feature; 100 min / Festivals: Toronto, Moscow, Seattle, Hof, a. o. / Awards: Austria's nomination for the Foreign Language Oscar

1994 DIE ANGST VOR DER IDYLLE. TV; 90 min; co-production ORF/ZDF / Festival: Berlinale Panorama 1995

1993 DIESES NAIVE VERLANGEN. TV; 95 min; co-production ORF/ZDF / Awards: Erich Neuberg Prize 1994

1991 DER NACHBAR. Feature; 95 min; color / Festivals: San Sebastian (competition), Montréal, Hof, Bratislava, Brussels, Saarbrücken, Strasbourg, a. o. / Awards: San Sebastian: CICA Prize, FIPRESCI Honorable Mention for the

remarkable construction of an exceptional character; Bratislava: SPECIAL Prize; Wiener Filmpreis 1993; Goldene Kader 1994/Best Screenplay

1990 ERWIN UND JULIA. Feature; 100 min; color / Festivals: Locarno (competition), La Baule, Trieste, a. o. / Awards: La Baule: Best Leading Actress for Julia Stemberger

### **MARTIN GSCHLACHT – Cinematographer**

Born in Vienna in 1969. Studied camera and production at the Vienna Film Academy, graduated in 1996. Since the mid-nineties DOP for various Austrian features, made-for-TV films, and commercials. In 1999 he also became a producer when he co-founded the Vienna-based production company coop99.

### **MARIA GRUBER – Production Designer**

Maria Gruber graduated from the HTL Graz (polytech high school), Department of Art and Design, field of specialization: Decorative Design. She studied stage design at the University of Music and Dramatic Arts in Graz.

### **KARINA RESSLER - Editor**

Born in Villach in 1957. Karina Ressler graduated from the Vienna Film Academy and has been a sought-after editor for feature and made-for-TV films in Austria and Germany since 1985.

## **CAST BIOS**

### **JOHANNES KRISCH (Alex)**

Born in Vienna in 1967. Since 1989, sought-after ensemble member of the Vienna Burgtheater, where he has worked with such directors as Claus Peymann, Jürgen Flimm, Hans Neuenfels, Ruth Berghaus, Leander Haussmann, Karlheinz Hackl, Paulus Manker, Philip Tiedemann, among others. Performances at the Salzburg Festival and the Landestheater Liechtenstein. In addition to stage acting, he has also taken numerous film and television roles, among others in *Andreas Hofer – Die Freiheit des Adlers* (director: Xaver Schwarzenberger, 2001), *Conny und die verschwundene Ehefrau* (Reinhard Schwabenitzky, 2005) and *Schön, dass es dich gibt* (Reinhard Schwabenitzky, 2005). The part of Alex is his first leading role in a feature film.

### **URSULA STRAUSS (Susanne)**

Born in Melk/Lower Austria in 1974. She trained to be a kindergarten teacher, and after graduation went on to study acting at the Vienna Volkstheater (1993 to 1996). She performs regularly on various Vienna stages, including Theater in der Josefstadt, Ensembletheater, Theater in der Drachengasse, and Volkstheater. Her filmography includes *White Cherries* (director: Leopold

Lummerstorfer, 2000), *Free Radicals* (Barbara Albert, 2003), *Crash Test Dummies* (Jörg Kalt, 2005), *Kotsch* (Helmut Köpping, 2006), *Falling* (Barbara Albert, 2006), and most recently *Krankheit der Jugend* (directed by students of the Vienna Film Academy under the auspices of Michael Haneke, 2007). She plays the lead in the new TV police series *Schnell ermittelt*, which will begin its first season in 2008.

### **IRINA POTAPENKO (Tamara)**

In 1994 at the age of eight she and her mother come to Berlin from the Crimean Peninsula on the Black Sea. She has been stage acting since she was twelve, first at a small Russian theater, later at the Volksbühne Berlin in numerous plays directed by Frank Castorf. Since 2005 she has also played in several movies. Among other roles, she starred in the German feature film *Prinzessin* (directed by: Birgit Großkopf) and in 2006 she played the part of Adelaida in the movie *Idiot* (Frank Castorf). She's never gone to acting school, learning her trade instead by getting up on the stage and just doing what comes naturally.

### **ANDREAS LUST (Robert)**

Born in Vienna in 1967. Studied acting at the Mozarteum in Salzburg. He has performed at the Vienna Volkstheater, the Städtischen Bühnen in Freiburg, the Landestheater in Tyrol, the Vereinigten Bühnen Bolzano, and at Theater Phönix in Linz, among others. He has had many film roles, including *For God and Country* (director: Wolfgang Murnberger, 1994), *Die Liebe eines Ganoven* (Peter Ily Huemer, 1995), *Schwarzfahrer* (Nikolaus Leytner, 1996), *The Unfisch* (Robert Dornhelm, 1997).

### **HANNES THANHEISER (The Old Man)**

His life: diverse and never monotonous. His year of birth: 1925. His many jobs include authorized signatory, circus artist, best boy, solo accordionist, stage designer, interior decorator, exhibition designer, and art dealer. He founded the First Vienna Children's Theater ("Erste Wiener Kinderbühne") and in 1954 he opened the jazz club Studio1 in Vienna (today: Porgy und Bess). In 1979 he is discovered as an actor. He plays one of the leading roles in *Alpensaga* by Dieter Berner. Since then he has played in more than 120 films in Austria and Germany. In 1990 he is awarded the Federico Fellini Prize for Best Artistic Performance in the film *Earthbound* by Oliver Herbrich. In 2007 he receives the Prandtauer Prize awarded by the city of St. Pölten for his life's work. He lives in the countryside and, like his character in the movie, he too plays the accordion.

## **CREDITS**

### **Cast**

Alex: JOHANNES KRISCH  
Susanne: URSULA STRAUSS  
Robert: ANDREAS LUST  
Tamara: IRINA POTAPENKO  
Old Man: HANNES THANHEISER  
Konecny: HANNO PÖSCHL  
Robert's Mother: LINDE PRELOG  
Robert's Father: PETER JOSCH  
Prostitute in Hotel: MAGDALENA KROPIUNIG  
Tamara's Client: TONI SLAMA  
Harry the Thug: RAINER GRADISCHNIG  
Bank Employee: DORIS HINDINGER  
Bank Branch Manager: ALEXANDER LHOTZKY  
Police Officer 1: GERHARD LIEBMANN HOLZMANN  
Police Officer 2: JOHANNES ZEILER  
Police Officer 3: MAXIMILIAN SCHMIEDL  
Pregnant Woman: JULIA SCHRANZ  
Police Detective: THOMAS RADLEFF  
Hotel Night Porter: GÜNTHER LAHA  
Hotel Day Porter: MICHAEL-JOACHIM HEISS  
Cinderella Prostitute: ELISABETHA PEJGINOSKA

### **Crew**

Written & Directed by: GÖTZ SPIELMANN  
Cinematography: MARTIN GSCHLACHT  
Sound: HEINZ EBNER  
Production Designer: MARIA GRUBER  
Costumes: MONIKA BUTTINGER  
Makeup: SUSANNE WEICHESMILLER  
Editor: KARINA RESSLER  
Lighting: GERALD KERKLETZ  
          WERNER STIBITZ  
Music Advisor: WALTER W. CIKAN  
Casting: RITA WASZILOVICS  
Production Manager: STEPHANIE WAGNER  
Producers: MATHIAS FORBERG  
          HEINZ STUSSAK  
          GÖTZ SPIELMANN  
          SANDRA BOHLE  
Steadicam: RICCARDO BRUNNER

THOMAS MAIER  
Assistant Cameraman: NINO VOLPE  
Clapper Loader: ANNA MANHARDT  
Assistant Director: KATHARINA BIRÓ  
Script Supervisor: ALBERT MEISL  
Dramatic Advisor: DAGMAR BENKE  
Making of: TOBIAS DÖRR  
Prop Buyer: SEBASTIAN THANHEISER  
Standby Props: HANSI WAGNER  
GERHILD PERL  
CHRISTOPH KÖNIGSMAYR  
Property Driver: MICHAEL BUCHARD  
Builders: HARALD HAIMBÖCK  
FRITZ MARTAN  
Assistant Costume Supervisor & Wardrobe: VERONIKA ALBERT  
Electrician: GREGOR CENTNER  
Dolly Grip: STEPHAN LUDESCHER  
Sound Assistant: OSCAR KRAVINA  
Location Manager: CHRISTINE SCHWARZINGER  
Set Location Manager: NIKI BRECHELMANN  
Production Assistant: ALEX SCHLACHER  
Drivers: NEPOMUK HURCH  
LOIS GRETZMACHER  
Set Runner: FLORIAN BRÜNING  
Sound Editor: BERNHARD BAMBERGER  
ALEXANDRA LÖWY  
Assistant Editor: JOANA SCRINZI  
Still Photos: LUKAS BECK  
Set Photos: NICK ALBERT  
Catering: B&B Filmcatering, PETER RIGAM, CHRISTIAN WINTER

Production: SPIELMANNFILM  
PRISMA FILM

Produced with the Support of

AUSTRIAN FILM INSTITUTE  
VIENNA FILM FUN  
ORF/AUSTRIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION  
LAND NIEDERÖSTERREICH

**AUSTRIA 2008 / COLOR / 35MM / 1:1,85 / DOLBY DIGITAL / 121 MIN**  
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