

**STRAND
RELEASING**

presents

The Ground Beneath My Feet

A FILM BY
Marie Kreutzer

Starring Valerie Pachner, Pia Herzegger, and Mavie Hörbiger

PRESS NOTES

*OFFICIAL SELECTION
Berlin International Film Festival*

Country of Origin: Austria
Format: DCP / 1:2.39 / Color
Sound: Dolby 5.1 Surround
Running Time: 108 minutes
Genre: Drama
Not Rated
In German with English Subtitles

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

Lola manages her personal life with the same ruthless efficiency she uses to succeed in the business world. She keeps her relationship with her boss Elise secret, as well as the existence of her older sister Conny, who has a long history of mental illness. But when she receives the news that Conny has attempted suicide, Lola's secrets begin to unravel into the workplace. As she tries to do what's best for her sister without jeopardizing all she's worked so hard for, Lola slowly

finds her own grip on reality slipping away. The new film from Marie Kreutzer is a taut Austrian psychological thriller reminiscent of *Repulsion*, featuring Valerie Pachner's Maguey Prize winning performance as Lola.

IN CONVERSATION WITH MARIE KREUTZER

What inspired you to set *THE GROUND BENEATH MY FEET* in the business consulting world, and how did you research this world to prepare the film?

I've been interested in business consulting for quite a while. My stepsister worked in consulting in her twenties and I did a short documentary about her in 2004. It was difficult though because everything concerning her work was confidential and it was not possible to film her "work world" directly. I think I already thought about a fictional story in that setting while not being able to capture it. It might be a coincidence, but I also had a difficult time in 2004 work-wise, and was very exhausted and depressed, which I couldn't really "name" at that time. Looking back I think that maybe the subject of having to function and to perform all the time related more to me than I thought, and still does.

I had the opportunity to talk to several ex-consultants. Three of them read the script in different stages. Their feedback always came quickly, clearly, and was extremely productive. Although they didn't work as consultants anymore, the years of having to be extremely efficient were noticeable in how they worked with me, and how they talked to me. Sometimes the way the words were chosen taught me more about the world they had lived in than what they were talking about. I was not really surprised by what I heard, but what I love about research are the details of finding the tone, the colours, the texture of a universe. Of course a consultant's job is exactly what we imagine it to be, but people are only good at what they do if they believe in it, and that's what interested me. The people we are talking about are very intelligent and educated. But they are also very young and looking for a meaning in what they do.

At the same time I think the world of consulting is not far away from where most of us are. I don't have to wear a suit for work, but still there's times in my life when I cannot turn off my phone, receive twenty emails an hour and when there is no room for weakness, or at least for me it seems that way. We are all running all the time. And it's no wonder many of us are exhausted and need different kinds of treatment or drugs to deal with what society wants us to be. A psychiatrist who read the script said to me: Not 100% of Conny is mental illness and not 100% of anyone else is sane. That is what the film is about, for me: There is a darkness in all of us.

How did you develop Lola's character and her combination of hardness and vulnerability?

I can't talk much about "creating" Lola because she was just there. She is so many women I have seen. Actually women I am highly irritated by, personally. We all struggle for perfection all the time and it's sick. And those who seem to deny the fact that it's a struggle, those are the women who irritate and fascinate me at the same time.

Lola was also inspired by Hitchcock's *MARNIE*, unconsciously, but *MARNIE* came up again and again. What they have in common is their independence, their way of living without relying on

anyone, refusing to see their own darkness. They are absolutely alone and that makes them characters who are also very touching and vulnerable while at the same time being so “hard”. Actually MARNIE made me decide that Lola would have to be a Blonde.

I never judge my characters, I couldn't tell their stories if I would. I understand Lola in every moment of the film. It was a shock to me to find out late in the editing process how much of Lola is inside me! It was at a time when the first people saw the film and reacted very, very differently and I was confronted with my fears of failing and not being good enough while blaming myself for not being home enough, working too much and working out too little. Lola cannot save Conny. Lola has to save herself. I am not saying she achieves that during this film!

It was the first time you worked with Valerie Pachner. Did she bring anything specific that changed or inflected the role?

Every actress and actor brings something specific, and a film changes with every cast decision. What I liked about Valerie was that she seemed down-to-earth, unlike Lola. She is a warm person, and I was looking for that contrast. There is nothing insecure about Valerie, at least nothing I could see! She is so “here”, which is not only what makes actresses and actors really good, but something so different from Lola whose thoughts are never where her feet are. I didn't have to work much! Sometimes I made something up between takes because she was so good that I wouldn't have needed a second one. I let her try another subtext or listened to her thoughts while knowing I already had everything I needed.

Lola's sister, Conny, suffers from schizophrenia. How did you research her mental illness and world of the psychiatric ward for the film?

My aunt was diagnosed with schizophrenia in her early twenties. So I unknowingly researched for decades! When I worked on the script I talked to several psychiatrists and psychologists, visited the psychiatric wards and spent time there. I mean hours, not weeks, because it's really too much if you are a sensitive person like me. I don't know any other place that is so uncanny. Literally everybody walking down the hall or sitting in a chair eating lunch seems unpredictable. But that's not only scary, it attracts me at the same time. The funny thing is that when I was asked to describe charisma once I also used the word “unpredictability”.

So, that was maybe the most important thing about Conny. And although the character was already written as an unpredictable person, a person that would always make you insecure, an irritating, moody, but at the same time almost too confident woman, I had to find ways to make her even less foreseeable while shooting to REALLY irritate Valerie and other actors around her.

Do you see THE GROUND BENEATH MY FEET in the continuity of your previous work, or does it feel like a departure from the other films you have directed?

I don't think strategically. I do what I am interested in and what I'm drawn to. Just like a consultant, I'm only good if I believe in what I do. I don't care about genre and there is no master plan of an oeuvre! The first treatment of THE GROUND BENEATH MY FEET was already written between my first and second feature film, it just took me some time. It doesn't feel like a departure, I didn't work differently and I am surprised how different people seem to perceive it from my other films.

I always love my character and I always love my actors. I take them seriously and I believe in the script. Every film is its own universe and I love to go with it, to be prepared and then leave all the thinking behind and just being intuitive on set. Actually a big issue during writing, shooting, and editing the film was something that is familiar to me: The fear that the main character might not be lovable for the viewer. But I had the exact same issue with Gruber in GRUBER IS LEAVING and Stella in WE USED TO BE COOL.

Lola seems to have arranged her life perfectly and achieved ‘success’, but as often, it’s family that catches up with her.

Family is the best subject! Because you can’t choose your family. You’re born and your family history is already there. You can’t create or influence it. You can leave a partner or friend but even if you leave your family, they will always be a part of you.

It’s a film where we at times feel one step ahead and at others one step behind Lola. What was important to you in the film’s pacing?

I hardly ever think about pacing during the shoot and I film every scene from beginning to end, no pieces, no pick-ups. Working with my editor Ulrike Kofler has maybe become my favourite part of filmmaking – it’s not as stressful as shooting, I don’t have to argue so much, and it’s so beautiful to have all that material and make something with it.

But what you are talking about is maybe more script-related. Unpredictability was important. Not only because of suspense but because of the feeling it gives you as a viewer to never really know HOW this story is told to you. Nobody takes your hand and shows you what to think. An actor who saw the film found the end was undecided, but to me it was important to let the viewer decide. For me the end is absolutely clear.

DIRECTOR’S BIOGRAPHY

Marie Kreutzer was born in Graz, Austria, in 1977 and studied screenwriting at the Film Academy Vienna. Her first feature length film, THE FATHERLESS, premiered at the Berlin Film Festival in the Panorama Special sidebar in 2011, receiving Special Mention for ‘Best First Feature’. Her second film, GRUBER IS LEAVING (2015), was nominated for the Austrian Film Award and won Special Mention as ‘Best Film’ at the Zurich Film Festival. In 2016, her third feature film WE USED TO BE COOL also premiered at the Zurich Film Festival in competition. After finalizing her first TV movie EMERGENCY LIES starring Josef Hader in 2017, THE GROUND BENEATH MY FEET is Marie Kreutzer’s newest feature film as writer and director and premiered in the Competition of the 69th International Film Festival Berlin 2019.

DIRECTOR’S FILMOGRAPHY

2019 – *The Ground Beneath My Feet*
Feature Film, 108’
Berlinale 2019 (Competition)

2017 – *Emergency Lies*

- TV-Movie, 90'*
Based on the Screenplay by Pia Hierzegger
Awarded "Best TV-Movie" – Filmfestival Biberach 2017
- 2016 – **We Used To Be Cool**
Feature Film, 96'
Zurich Film Festival 2016, Filmfest Hamburg 2016, Das Filmfest Prag 2016, Tallinn IFF 2016
- 2015 – **Gruber Is Leaving**
Feature Film, 104'
Beijing IFF 2015 – Tiantan Award for "Best Sountrack", ROMY 2015 for "Best Camera in a Feature Film", Special Mention at the Zurich Film Festival 2015
- 2011 – **The Fatherless**
Feature Film, 104'
Berlinale 2011 – Panorama Special (Special Mention "Best Debut"), Diagonale 2011 ("Best Film" and 3 more awards), Bozner Filmtage 2011 (Award for "Best Film"), IFF of New European Film Bulgaria ("Best Director" Award)
- 2007 – **Christmas Service**
Documentary, 25'
- 2006 – **White Box**
Short Feature, 27'
Based on a story by Siri Hustvedt;
Diagonale 2007: Award for the most promising young writer; Premiers Plans Angers 08
- 2005 – **7 Mortal Sins / Lethargy**
Documentary, 25'
- 2002 – **Un Peu Beaucoup**
Short Feature, 34'
Diagonale 2003
- 2000 – **Cappy Leit**
Short Feature, 17'
Diagonale 2001, Oberhausen 2001 (Award of the Children's and Youth Film Competition)

THE ACTORS

VALERIE PACHNER

Valerie Pachner was born 1987 in Wels, Upper Austria. She graduated from the prestigious Max Reinhardt Seminar in 2013. Valerie then became a regular cast member of the Residenztheater ensemble in Munich.

For her performance in the movie EGON SCHIELE – DEATH AND THE MAIDEN she not only received the Austrian Film Award as Best Actress but also the Romy for Best New Talent. Her new movie RADEGUND by Terrence Malick will be released in 2019. Currently Valerie is shooting the eagerly awaited prequel to the hugely successful KINGSMAN series, directed by Matthew Vaughn, alongside Ralph Fiennes, Rhys Ifans, August Diehl, and Daniel Brühl.

PIA HIERZEGGER

Born in Graz in 1972, the Austrian actress, writer and director Pia Hierzegger is one of the members of the Grazer Off-Theatre Groupe "Theater am Bahnhof".

Hierzegger is known for movies like SLUGS, CONTACT HIGH, THE FATHERLESS or the film adaptation of the novel THE BONE MAN by Wolf Haas.

With the Play "vernetzt denken" she won the Augsburg Play Competition in 2007. In the theatre season 2009/10 she dramatized the novel "Life Eternal" by Wolf Haas as a Play for the Grazer Schauspielhaus.

Her recent films include HOTEL ROCK'N'ROLL by Helmut Köpping and Michael Ostrowski, WE USED TO BE COOL by Marie Kreutzer and WILD MOUSE by Josef Hader.

Furthermore her script for the TV Film EMERGENCY LIES was filmed and directed by Marie Kreutzer.

MAVIE HÖRBIGER

Mavie Hörbiger was born in Munich in 1979. After graduating from drama school in Munich she has had a successful career on stage in Hannover, Bochum, Basel, Vienna, at Salzburg Festival and since 2012 as a member of the Ensemble of Burgtheater in Vienna, as well as in cinema and TV. For her role in "Diener zweier Herren" she received a nomination for the Vienna Theatre Nestroy Award.

On TV she was last seen in several "Tatort" productions and the crime thriller SPUREN DES BÖSEN: BEGIERDE (2016) by Andreas Prochaska. For the "Tatort" crime drama DIE LETZTE WIESN (2014) by Marvin Kren she received a nomination for Best Supporting Actress from the German Academy for Television. On the big screen Mavie Hörbiger last starred in BIBI & TINA 2 by Detlev Buck in 2014, AXOLOTL OVERKILL by Helene Hegemann (2015) and in two other films in 2016: SOMMERHÄUSER as well as the sequel to Christian Zübert's cult film LOMMBOCK.

CAST

Lola	Valerie Pachner
Conny	Pia Hierzegger
Elise	Mavie Hörbiger
Birgit	Michelle Barthel
Sebastian	Marc Benjamin
Herr Bacher	Axel Sichrovsky
Jürgen	Dominic Marcus Singer
Clemens	Meo Wulf

CREW

Written and Directed by	Marie Kreutzer
Producers	Alexander Glehr
	Franz Novotny
Line-Producer	Johanna Scherz
Director of Photography	Leena Koppe
Edited by	Ulrike Kofler

Production Designer	Martin Reiter
Music by	Kyrre Kvam
Costume Designer	Monika Buttinger
Makeup Design	Maike Heinlein
Production Sound Mixer	Odo Grötschnig
Sound Design	Veronika Hlawatsch
Re-recording mixer	Bernhard Maisch
Production Manager	Gottlieb Pallendorf
Casting	Rita Waszilovics

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