

“PICCO“ (Film Review)

Written by Marcelle Perks

Thursday, 30 September 2010 07:40



It's a cliché in prison movies (or any films involving incarceration) that you get to know the bad guys right away. In writer/director Philip Koch's debut movie PICCO, which plays like a cross between the 2001 German psychological shocker DAS EXPERIMENT (remade this year as THE EXPERIMENT) and the 1979 British classic drama SCUM, the interesting thing is that you never know who's going to turn nasty, or why.

The movie works because it carefully sets up an initial slow-burning focus on the domestic life of four youths sharing a cell in a German juvenile detention center, and then lets the violence and nastiness escalate. Both the viewer and the characters are confined to one cell, and hence there's no cutting to another locale—and consequently no escape.



When newcomer Kevin (Constantin von Jascheroff) arrives, he's dubbed “Picco,” or newbie. At first it doesn't seem so bad, and Koch does a terrific job establishing their banal day-to-day existence. Considering there are numerous static shots (moodily filmed to emphasise the gray and dark green hues of the building) the actors express their various characters mainly through body language. There's a lot of male posturing and smoking and fooling around. Marc (Frederick Lau) is the leader of the group and a natural bully; pragmatist Andy (Martin Kiefer) just wants to get by; the sensitive Tommy (Joel Basman) has already tried to take his own life and is on antidepressants. Kevin's arrival calls the group's dynamics into question; initially, he doesn't want to do any harm to any other prisoner, but he finds himself forced to choose

“PICCO“ (Film Review)

Written by Marcelle Perks

Thursday, 30 September 2010 07:40

between being a victim or an oppressor.

Based on real events, the film lays bare the weaknesses of a system in which 80 percent of inmates will re-offend. It also demonstrates the banal victimization of the weaker members of the group. When the others find out that 15-year-old Juli was a male prostitute, he is raped and otherwise brutalized until he commits suicide. Trapped in a confined space with no outlet for their emotions, the prisoners create brutal entertainments to amuse themselves. Initially, Kevin’s reluctance to comply with the strict code of oppressor or oppressed singles him out as one of the weaker ones—but he soon learns, and the film unflinchingly details just how far human beings are prepared to go just to preserve the psychological status quo.

The last 45 minutes of PICCO make for intense, painful viewing. The movie has won three German awards, including the Oldenburg Film Festival’s Best German Film Award, and is scheduled for release across that country in November. It’s bound to be picked up for U.S. distribution soon, and this harrowing thriller is one to watch for.



{jcomments on}