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Berlinale Panorama

LONDON

A film by Sebastian Brameshuber

Austria, 2026, 120'

PRESS NOTES

Press materials can be downloaded [HERE](#)

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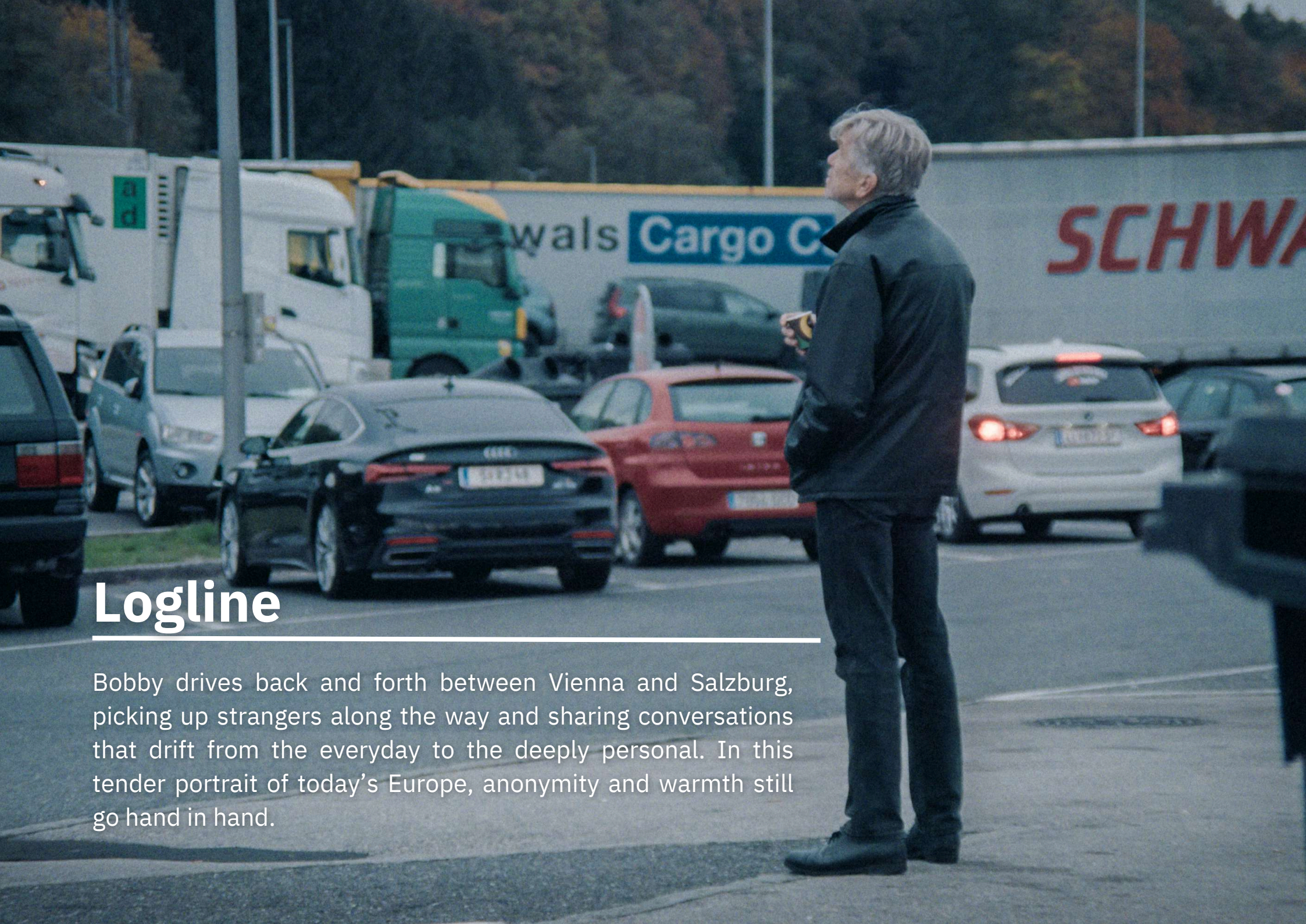
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Logline

Bobby drives back and forth between Vienna and Salzburg, picking up strangers along the way and sharing conversations that drift from the everyday to the deeply personal. In this tender portrait of today's Europe, anonymity and warmth still go hand in hand.

A blurred photograph of a highway with several cars in motion. The focus is on the rear of a dark blue car in the foreground, with a red car visible behind it. The background is out of focus, showing more vehicles and the road stretching into the distance.

Synopsis

Bobby is always in his car, driving back and forth on the highway that links Vienna and Salzburg. Other people travel that same route, he picks them up to save money on petrol and talks to them along the way: the soldier questioning what it means to fight, the supermarket trainee heading to see family, the academic looking at the history of the highway, the queer woman about to get married; different paths, different accents, different stories, most of them true. Bobby listens, but also speaks about himself, about his youth, about aging, about his friend in a coma in Salzburg who's the reason for all these trips. Mountains and forests rush by outside, broken up by junctions, barriers and bridges, the quality of light shifts along with the seasons. Neither a documentary, nor entirely fiction, *London* is a quietly political portrait of today's Europe via its in-between spaces and those passing through them. Even in these strange times, anonymity and kindness can still go hand in hand.



About the director

Sebastian Brameshuber (*1981) studied stage and film design at the University of Applied Arts Vienna and film at Le Fresnoy, France. Since 2004, his works have been showcased and awarded at festivals such as Berlinale, Viennale, Art of the Real, FIDMarseille, IDFA, BAFICI, Sarajevo FF, and BFI London. His 2019 film *Movements of a Nearby Mountain* won the Grand Prix at Cinéma du Réel in Paris. Retrospectives of his work were held at the Austrian Film Archive in Vienna and Anthology Film Archives.



Filmography

MOVEMENTS OF A NEARBY MOUNTAIN

AT / FR | 2019 | Documentary | 86' | Mischief Films & Panama Film

IN, OVER & OUT

AT / FR | 2015 | Short Film | 10' | Südufer Film OG & Le Fresnoy

OF STAINS, SCRAP & TIRES

AT / FR | 2014 | Short Film | 19' | KGP Filmproduktion & Le Fresnoy

AND THERE WE ARE, IN THE MIDDLE

AT | 2014 | Documentary | 91' | KGP Filmproduktion

MUEZZIN

AT | 2009 | Documentary | 85' | KGP Filmproduktion

PRESERVING CULTURAL TRADITIONS IN A PERIOD OF INSTABILITY

AT | 2004 | Short Film | 3' | Amour Fou Filmproduktion

Director's statement

Shot in a studio, *London* stages encounters between strangers during a series of ride-sharing trips. The minimalist setup, akin to a chamber play, allowed for a process-oriented approach involving the actors and the story. I wanted to capture a sense of raw presence while using cinema to elevate it to another plane, creating a film that oscillates between the real and what lies beyond it.

London takes place on the Westautobahn, also known as the A1, a seemingly functional motorway connecting Vienna and Salzburg before ending at the German border. People from across Europe travel along it for a variety of personal reasons, often unaware of the deep vein of history running through it—for this road follows a line first drawn almost 90 years ago, at a time of great unrest.

The A1 twists and turns like a river, its banks accumulating stories and history like sediment: past and present, private and political, trivial and profound. Despite being strangers, the time Bobby and his much younger passengers share in a confined space draws them closer. At times, they become a mirror, reflecting the lives he could have lived back at him. Their conversations seem to skim the surface, only to plunge into deeper waters, as the immediacy of their everyday lives intertwines with history at every bend in the river. When Arthur waves to Bobby from across the shore, he waves back, remembering their time in a city beyond the mainland – one that cannot be reached by road.



About PANAMA Film

Panama Film stands for films that give space to challenging questions, lingering observations and quiet longings. We collaborate with filmmakers with a strong artistic vision and work closely with international production partners who share our passion for cinema. Founded in 2018 by Lixi Frank and David Bohun, following a joint initiative with directors Stefan Bohun and Sebastian Brameshuber, Panama Film has built a distinctive profile in international arthouse cinema.

Panama's productions include MOVEMENTS OF A NEARBY MOUNTAIN by Sebastian Brameshuber, (Grand Prix at Cinéma du Réel 2019) and Sandra Wollner's THE TROUBLE WITH BEING BORN (Special Jury Award at Berlinale Encounters 2020, four Austrian Film Awards including Best Feature). Recent works include STAMS by Bernhard Braunstein (Berlinale Panorama 2023), the co-production THE UNIVERSAL THEORY by Timm Kröger (Official Competition Biennale di Venezia 2023), and BLUISH by Lilith Kraxner and Milena Czernovsky (Grand Prix at FID Marseille 2024). In 2025, WHITE SNAIL by Elsa Kremser and Levin Peter received the Special Jury Prize and the Pardo for Best Performance at the Locarno Film Festival. Panama Film's latest production, Sebastian Brameshuber's LONDON, will premiere at Berlinale Panorama 2026.

Current titles in production are EVERYTIME (Sandra Wollner), ICE CREAM (Patric Chiha) and OUTSIDE THE SQUARE (Pavel Cuzuioc) as well as the co-production THE DREAMED ADVENTURE (Valeska Grisebach).



Interview with the director

In LONDON, as in your last film *Movements of a Nearby Mountain*, the car and the landscape – which is to say the mobile and the immobile – have an essential role to play. Can you tell us something about the process underlying the concept for this film?

The car almost inadvertently became an important part of the film again. What unites my films is the question of how the past permeates the present – how 'big history' affects everyday life at a personal level. The idea for LONDON goes back a long way. It started when I myself was often on the road between Vienna and Berlin, getting lifts. I noticed that during the time you're 'sitting out' the journey together in the car, something happens to you and the person next to you. You start talking, but instead of looking at each other, you both tend to stare straight ahead at the "landscape film" beyond the windshield. The result is a conversation with a slow rhythm and moments of silence, and this bears a certain similarity to the psychoanalytic situation. I thought this setting could say something about the state of the present. For my film *Of Stains, Scrap and Tires*, Bobby Sommer recorded a poem; that's how we met. He told me about his life, I told him about my idea. From that moment on, we were in dialogue.

Did the screenplay for LONDON emerge with him in mind as the main character?

I thought Bobby might be good casting for the driver, because I knew him as someone who has a genuine interest in a wide variety of people. At the same time, I became interested in the West Autobahn, because what you see along the highway is literally landscaped: the "landscape

film" beyond the windshield is based on a script" written by the Nazis, who wanted to set out the most picturesque route possible between Salzburg and Vienna. My father died in 2019. During that period, I had to drive up and down the West Autobahn in a state of mourning. The history of the highway took a back seat, and I started thinking about how many different personal stories were in motion on that road at that moment – in the car in front of me, next to me, behind me. That provided the impetus for Bobby's backstory. My main character would be someone who was grieving or in mourning for something.

LONDON is a fictional narrative in an everyday setting. The levels of fiction and non-fiction become blurred; did you want the dramaturgy to leave that question open for as long as possible?

People like to talk about a border zone between the documentary and the fictional, but there is no border; the two states flow into each other to a greater or lesser extent, always in motion and negotiation. What particularly appeals to me is creating a tipping point and then keeping the question of reality and fiction simmering constantly.

How meticulously did you cast the passengers, in order to create the illusion that it was all random?

Bobby Sommer was clear from the beginning, and I wanted Cliff, who played the lead in my last film, to be part of the action. There's only one professional actress: Anca Cipariu plays the Romanian migrant worker. We held some auditions with very precise specifications: for the role of the conscript, for instance. Paul quickly emerged as ideal for that part.

But we also held more unspecified auditions with young people. We engaged them in informal conversations to find out who they are – whether they 'wear their hearts on their sleeves' while still being reserved to some degree. In the end, the only people who are interesting on camera are those who have a certain enigma about them. Two themes played a crucial role in the selection: war, and the migration associated with it – but from a personal perspective, so they could be related to the great, impersonal history of the West Autobahn.

Did you prepare the actors for filming together with Bobby?

Generally, the passengers encountered Bobby for the first time when the camera was turned on. The idea was for them to meet each other as strangers. It was important for me to keep the conversations as free as possible. Everything that seems to happen at the same time now – shot and reverse shot – was actually filmed with two or three hours in between, sometimes more. The unity of time and space was only re-established in the editing.

How would you describe the studio set for the shoot?

For the studio shoot, we first we had to shoot the plates: the shots of the landscape passing by. We did that for two to three hours at a time – always driving from Vienna to Salzburg with three cameras: out on the left, out on the right and out in front. Then, in the studio, next to the car there was a large screen as a rear projection, without a green screen. There was also a large screen in front of the windshield. We wanted this set-up to be as close as possible to a real journey along a highway, also in terms of the time you have to sit together in the car. The plates were produced a year before the shoot, so we could then go through the seasons, day and night, sun and rain, during a studio shooting block of about a week and a half. Logistically, it was extremely complicated.

How did the filming proceed, in concrete terms?

First, the camera would always be pointing at the passenger; after between an hour and an hour and a half, we would reverse the set up. The camera moved to the other side, as did the screen for the background, and we repeated the whole thing loosely. There would be someone sitting in the back of the car to make sure it bounced a little during the "drive". The particular point about a studio is that it's very quiet. If you were filming during a real car ride, you wouldn't really end up with this calm atmosphere. Bobby also had a button in his ear, the one facing away from the camera, so I could communicate with him. I encouraged him to let the passengers dictate the rhythm of the conversation. It was particularly important that he should show restraint; when you're shooting without predetermined dialogue, you can feel obliged to keep the conversation going. It's not easy to tolerate moments of silence, or uncertainty about what's coming next, because you get the feeling that nothing important is happening. But that's usually a fallacy – on the one hand, because you can cut things a lot during the editing, but also because precisely what is initially perceived as meaningless is often what's essential for the authenticity of the whole.

Towards the end of the film, the narrative takes on a slightly dystopian character, with military personnel checking the route. How much did the war in nearby Ukraine play into the narrative?

It was a combination of personal issues, the historically charged location of the West Autobahn and current developments – especially the war in Ukraine, which is full of echoes from the past, as was the case with the Balkan war. I tried to picture the highway as more interesting than it is on a superficial level; as a river, where history and personal stories are deposited on its banks like sedimentary layers. Today, hardly anyone thinks about the history of this highway. But it does forge a path into the

present, via detours: via Bobby, who blames his father's war traumas for their family conflicts; via Jon, who feels that the partisan legacy of his grandparents has influenced the formation of his identity a good eighty years later; via Polina and her family's escape from the war in Ukraine; and via Paul, who is plagued with moral questions about military service. But I wasn't only concerned with ghosts of the past; there's also fear of the future – for myself and also for my son and the next generation – when war in Europe is suddenly a real possibility again.

Under the Nazis, only a short section of the West Autobahn was built in the end.

Immediately after the Anschluss in March 1938, the groundbreaking ceremony was held at Walserberg. Although only a short stretch to Salzburg was built, the entire route had been planned out, and many sections were cleared and leveled at that time. What's more, bridges and viaducts were built in Salzburg and Upper Austria which carry the West Autobahn today. At the end of 1941, all work was suspended due to the war. Construction wasn't resumed until the mid-1950s, with the West Autobahn also serving as a symbol of the Second Republic's westward orientation. Today, cars go much faster, the volume of traffic is higher, noise barriers and trucks obstruct the view – the focus on the landscape has declined. But the lines of sight with Melk Abbey, Traunstein Mountain and the route along the Salzkammergut lakes are by no means accidental. The ideology of the past, the instrumentalization of the landscape, is physically embedded in the foundation and in the perspectives provided by the highway.

What was the idea behind the title, LONDON, which seems incongruous geographically?

I don't see the title as mystery; there's an associative interaction with

the film. The most obvious reference is Bobby's time in London when he was a young man. London stands for what it meant to him back then: freedom and the opportunity to be who you want to be. And perhaps London is also the place where Bobby and Arthur's friendship or relationship had its real home.

On a mental level, the title reflects the way your mind wanders during a drive like this; in this state of being on the move, being in a corridor-like non-place, you soon reach out for other times and geographies. For me, the title opens up the narrow space of the car to a mental geography and to a destination that's more of a feeling. London is also a city beyond the mainland that can't be reached by road alone. There's a similarity with the past, which Bobby pursues in the film: it is ultimately unattainable, no matter how far he drives.

Interview: Karin Schiefer | AUSTRIAN FILMS
January 2026

Translation: Charles Osborne

Reflections on *London*

What Lies Ahead

by Jordan Cronk

An instant addition to the pantheon of great films that take place almost entirely inside cars, Sebastian Brameshuber's *London* is a road movie that charts an existential course through the congestion of contemporary life. Like the best entries in this unofficial genre—James Benning and Bette Gordon's *The United States of America* (1975), Jim Jarmusch's *Night on Earth* (1991), Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* (1997), and, most recently, David Eastel's *The Plains* (2022)—the Austrian director's third feature turns its vehicular setting into a microcosm of the outside world, while at the same time getting an impressive amount of mileage out of a concept predicated on reducing cinema to its spatiotemporal essence. Where *London* differs is in its perspective, in its engagement not merely with the lives of its characters and their cultures, but also the global and historical concerns they represent.

Set between Vienna and Salzburg, the film unfolds on the West Autobahn (or A1), a highway connecting the two cities whose picturesque route was originally conceived by the Third Reich. Over the course of 122 minutes, we watch Bobby (Bobby Sommer), an unmarried 72 year-old former museum ward and Velvet Underground fan, make the 350km drive back and forth with ten different passengers who he engages in everything from small talk to heavier conversations regarding friends, family, and the personal and political dynamics that define those relationships. In fact, it's a situation involving Bobby's longtime friend Arthur, who we learn is in a coma at a Salzburg hospital after suffering a stroke, that's prompted these drives; the ride share component is

convenient, to be sure, but it's also therapeutic.

Bobby's passengers comprise a diverse array of people of differing interests, ethnicities, and outlooks—and he's equally attentive to all of them. No matter the topic of conversation, he evinces a genuine curiosity for the person sitting beside him, whether a disillusioned young soldier, a deli clerk with a sick mother, an African immigrant mourning his dead father, or a queer activist with conservative parents. Sometimes, he's content to simply listen on, vaguely bemused, as when a budding communist and part-time movie theater employee extolls the Marxist virtues of *Avatar* (2009), or when a bespectacled history buff (humorously played by the filmmaker Ted Fendt) reveals that he's on his way to photograph Nazi-era bridges before their pillars are destroyed. Other times, his companion's stories prompt Bobby's own reminiscences; in perhaps the film's most revealing exchange (as well as the source of its enigmatic title), a heart-to-heart with a new mother traveling with her husband and child prompts Bobby to describe a traumatic moment in his youth when his father, disappointed in his son's lifestyle, ignores him when they see each other from across a crowded train car.

For all its specificity with regards to both geography and the current sociopolitical climate, the film pays little mind to strict realism. For one thing, the driving scenes were shot entirely in studio, a not uncommon measure at any scale of moviemaking that Brameshuber turns into a subtly provocative formal gambit by simultaneously stripping these sequences of all but the faintest hint of outside noise, creating an aesthetic vacuum where variables of light and sound cede to a kind of

profilmic truth. Fully aware that there are only so many ways to film people in a car, the director doesn't attempt to find any sort of new angle or perspective—most of these sequences follow a basic shot-reverse-shot template, albeit without recourse to things like eye-line matches, with occasional shifts to POV when surveying the road ahead—but instead emphasizes the uncanniness of the enclosed space and the way that even the illusion of movement can suspend cinematic time. Indeed, despite the occasional scene set outside the car at a diner or a rest stop, the film generates a uniquely enveloping atmosphere, as if being held in a state of unconscious intrigue.

Part of that intrigue comes from the information the film elides and the questions it raises but doesn't necessarily answer. We know, for example, that Bobby and Arthur are estranged, but we're never made privy to the reasons why they fell out. It's suggested that they were bandmates, or at least bonded over music—not unlike Bobby and his father, a WWII veteran and one-time musician (and later mailman) whose alcoholism seems have alienated him from his son. What's clear is that the past weighs heavily on Bobby's mind, and that his present day empathy and acts of kindness—even in the face of rising fascism and the occasional military checkpoint—are both a balm for those painful experiences and a bulwark against whatever may lie on the horizon. “Up to a certain point it's very abstract,” Bobby says early on regarding radio reports about armed conflicts transpiring around the world. “But when it gets real, it may be nothing like we imagined.” The same could be said about this strikingly conceived film, which continually opens up new narrative pathways in the mind's eye while staying firmly grounded in the here and now.

A quiet revolution

by Olivia Cooper Hadjian

From Vienna to Salzburg and Salzburg to Vienna, Bobby, a retired man, shares his car with people younger than himself, sometimes still in their teens, whose features and accents reflect a variety of origins – among them, we recognise Cliff, who appeared in some of Sebastian Brameshuber's previous films[1]. The tone of the conversations varies; some are functional, reduced to their simplest form due to a language barrier, others turn intimate in an instant. An anti-dramatic narrative unfolds. Working with non-actors who elaborate characters based on their lives, Sebastian Brameshuber strips fiction of its illusionist and escapist functions, but uses its power to create situations that wouldn't happen naturally and boil them down to their essence. His minimalist *mise-en-scène* highlights each face, polishes each fragment of existence like a diamond. Although the film takes place almost entirely along the route connecting two cities, ellipses break up this line. Just as the lives of the passengers before and after their journey remain off-screen, we are free to imagine the beginning and/or end of each conversation. Rather than subjecting our perceptions to a plot, the film sharpens our awareness of the present, and develops under cover.

Bobby's trips are motivated by a special relationship, rooted in the intensity of youth: he drives to Salzburg to visit a long-lost friend who suffered a stroke and is in a coma. He says he didn't want to start a family in order to preserve his freedom, yet now, his car becomes home to a series of micro-communities. At a time when ideologies tend to emphasise homogenous units – the individual, the family, the nation –, the film highlights other types of connections. The fact that the landscape surrounding the travellers remains mostly in a blur also counters the nationalist agenda: a passenger explains that fascist Austria

traced roads in such a way that the 'motherland' would look its best, but we see none of that.

Bobby seems to grow as his encounters put him in touch with different parts of society. In return, he shares what he has to offer: the perspective of a man who has lost all greed, imperious desires and fear of missing out, and now sees life in the rear-view mirror. Some passengers read the world politically, while others focus on the immediate or the personal. We can tell that they didn't all start out in life with the same opportunities. However, by placing them successively in the same seat, and the same frame composition, the film emphasises continuity over dissonance. The reasons for the passengers' journeys vary, and their interests may diverge from Bobby's, yet Brameshuber chooses to capture moments of convergence. His camera adopts the point of view of the driver or the passengers, imitating the curious gazes that circulate within the vehicle. Each passenger has something in common with Bobby – don't we all? Gradually, their perspectives add up to form a picture of the present. The ever-repeating journey takes on a metaphorical dimension. It seems to encapsulate our shared time on a shared planet, which seems to be getting smaller and smaller.

The car, the quintessential symbol of individualism in prosperous societies, appears to have transcended its original purpose here. While it still provides a sense of freedom, the carefree attitude of the post-war boom era now only survives where there is denial. London captures a reality where precariousness is rife, and cars are shared with strangers for economic and ecological reasons. The changing weather, varying light, and incessant movement around the travellers make us aware of the passage of time. Just as travellers in the car are paradoxically still and moving, they share a moment in the present while also travelling to the past. The car sometimes feels like a time machine, as the stories of

the passengers bring back Bobby's memories.

Just like the present time and space, the past is something that Bobby and his passengers share. Their conversations conjure up the wars and ideologies that shaped the 20th century. Their ripples can still be felt as they reappear today in new forms and shapes – Bobby meets a former-Yugoslavia-born queer activist, and the son of an Albanian partisan who reads Hollywood productions through a Marxist lens. Maybe we are already in the future, as suggested by a military checkpoint on the road, indicating that war or fascism has reached Austria and that underground activism has become a necessity. But wait, maybe that's already true?

Even before the film begins, the title 'London' takes us back to the two years Bobby spent in the English capital, and his subsequent return to Austria with long hair, at a time when 'people would chase you with scissors'. Is the aging man heading towards a rediscovered dissidence? As he encounters the fragments of the world entering his car, he seems to become increasingly committed, as if these windows into the lives of others were gradually reawakening his consciousness. By delaying the appearance of new characters and letting us hear their voices first, the film arouses our desire to get to know these people whom we will soon leave behind. It takes on a performative aspect: the human warmth it depicts also arises within us as we watch. What should one do with one's freedom? The film poses this question both directly, when a passenger asks Bobby, and obliquely, through the succession of life stories. In a world that has lost its innocence, where the spectre of global war looms, the film quietly manifests the possibility of facing reality and taking a stand.



Credits

Cast	Bobby Sommer, Paul Schild, Asja Ahmetovic, Akin Özuckun, Jon Agolli, Veronika Harb, Anca Cipariu, Clifford Agu, Ted Fendt, Polina Skomorokhova, Lana Prerad
Written & Directed by	Sebastian Brameshuber
Cinematographer	Klemens Hufnagl, Patrick Wally
Editor	Dane Komljen, Sebastian Brameshuber
Co-Writer Script	Anna Lehner
Original Sound	Matthias Kassmannhuber, Nora Czamler
Sound Design	Johannes Schmelzer-Ziringer, Aleksandra Stojanovic
Re-Recording Mixer	Simon Apostolou
Art Director & Costume Designer	Bárbara Palomino Ruiz
Casting	Henri Steinmetz
Location Manager	Lena Zechner
Production Manager	Saskia Arth
Line Producer	Camille Chanel
Co-Producer	Sebastian Brameshuber
Producers	David Bohun, Lixi Frank

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