

# Johannes Schmid about TALES OF FRANZ

## “Exploring the neighbourhood on their own”

9 year old Franz is the smallest kid in his class. On top of that, his voice often lets him down in stressful situations, leaving him with nothing more than a squeaky sound. In Franz's life there is a need for creative solutions to the everyday problems of growing up, which he finds with the help of his best friends, the self confident and opinionated Gabi and the fiercely loyal Eberhard. Until one day Franz falls under the spell of Hank Haberer, an influencer with reprehensible advice on how toxic masculinity can boost your success in life.



**The film stays true to a kind of children's logic. How was this consequently maintained throughout the script?**

Johannes Schmid: In almost every scene the focus is on Franz; there is not a single scene without him or at least one of the three main young characters. Our DoP Matthias Grunsky adopted Franz's perspective and the camera constantly stayed physically close to him, searching for the right angle. With the help of children's acting coach Eli Wasserscheid we managed to get the kids in the right emotional space.

**TALES OF FRANZ targets a younger age group than your earlier titles.**

Schmid: The main actors in both *BLÖDE MÜTZE* (aka *SILLY'S SWEET SUMMER*) and *WINTERTOCHTER* were 12 years old, which is almost like working with grown-ups. But to work with a bunch of 9 year olds, you need a lot of energy to keep them focused. Nevertheless it was great fun having these boys and girls around.

**Who came up with those 20 rules for becoming a real man?**

Schmid: The book series by Christine Nöstlinger compiles short stories and anecdotes about a young boy's life, addressing the target group of kids that just start to read. Screenwriter Sara Wassermair had to develop a story based on many episodes and details from the books, but with the dramaturgy and storyline of a feature film. She came up with the idea of the influencer Hank Haberer and his 20 rules. Haberer's character and tone are inspired by loads of male influencers that you find all over the internet.

**These days gender related topics are often addressed in movies, but seldom for such a young audience. This was the right moment?**

Schmid: On the internet, kids might easily get confronted with this wave of right-wing populists, spreading messages about toxic masculinity. It's important to address these issues with them at the moment when they start thinking about it, probably at the age of nine. Up till then every-



body plays with everybody and it just doesn't matter, but at this age your perception starts to change.

**Film and media could be the right channels to open this debate with kids?**

Schmid: I am a German, living in Scandinavia, and I notice great differences in media content. In Sweden you'll come across a lot of different role models for family structures in children's media. Already in pre-school children learn to use a gender-neutral pronoun. All this creates a different





mindset. In German speaking countries I sometimes have the impression that society is already more advanced than the way it is reflected on screen. Through Franz we aim to raise the topic with children, and with Gabi we introduce a strong female character. Katharina Posch (producer): Gabi, who is helping Franz whenever he is too shy or clumsy, has a surprising fan base. The impact of her character is amazing. My daughter told me she wanted the same trousers as Gabi!

**Your film has a thing in common with GODZILLA: the tagline that “size matters”.**

Schmid: On the contrary, this film

tells that “size doesn’t matter”. Franz is learning on his journey that he can have self confidence because of who he really is, and that the best version of Franz is the real Franz.

**You have an interesting way of portraying grown ups. Not as 100% caricatures (as often is the case in children’s films) but just a little bit awkward.**

Schmid: Looking at adults through children’s eyes, all of them sometimes seem a bit strange; adults do weird things. But they are never ridiculed. Together with the actors, I wanted to create real life characters. The comic relief is never within the acting or the



costumes; it is within the situation and the behaviour of adults. None of the grown up actors are playing ‘funny’.

**Your version of Vienna looks like a village, so peaceful and friendly.**

Schmid: Vienna is a big and modern city, which has at the same time a strong small town vibe in some districts. 20 years after my last visit, it was interesting to rediscover the city through the eyes of Franz. At the age of 9, children start to carefully explore their neighbourhood on their own, going to school alone, hanging out with friends and thus discovering the urban space. They start having a

life of their own, without parents. This journey enlarges the radius of their lives and encourages them to become more independent.

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Gert Hermans