

Oct 2, 2022

## Movie Review: KINO/22 German Film Festival



October is here, which means it's time again for one of my favourite film festivals in Hong Kong – KINO, the German film festival that is hosted each year by the Goethe-Institut. Their selection of films is always top-notch, with both topical and thought-provoking films and some comedic fare thrown in for good measure.

KINO/22 will run from October 13 to 23, 2022. Opening night will again take place at the Louis Koo Cinema at the HK Arts Centre in Wanchai with other screenings held at the Broadway Cinematheque, Premiere Elements and the Hong Kong Film Archive, reflecting just how popular this festival is. Nine new and award-winning full-length films are being screened at this year's event, offering movie lovers a great opportunity to dive into German cinema.

### The Royal Game (Schachnovelle)

Public notary, Dr. Josef Bartok (Oliver Masucci, **NEVER LOOK AWAY**) is about to board a boat in Rotterdam to the West. Surprising him at the gate is his wife, Anna (Birgit Minichmayr, THE WHITE RIBBON). She clearly hasn't seen him in a while as she comments that he used to have a moustache. The couple gets on board and begins to relax in their newfound freedom but something's amiss. Flashback to 1938 when Hitler annexes Austria. Bartok is immediately swept up for questioning by Gestapo agent Franz-Josef Böhm (Albrecht Schuch, BERLIN ALEXANDERPLATZ) as Bartok knows where Vienna's elite has hidden their wealth. Böhm confines Bartok to a hotel room where he can hear the screams of other people being tortured day and night. His only other contact is the officer who silently brings him his bowl of soup every day. During one of his interrogations, he manages to steal a book about chess from Böhm's office and he surreptitiously begins teaching himself the game as a way to maintain his sanity and keep from telling Böhm the valuable information he wants to know. Now, back on the boat, he comes across world chess champion Mirko Czentovic, who is playing 20 matches at the same time for money. Bartok helps one of the passengers come to a draw with Czentovic and everyone is impressed. They want Bartok to play the master one-on-one but this will be more than just a simple game of chess.

Advertisements

REPORT THIS AD

THE ROYAL GAME is the latest in a string of film adaptations based on the novella, *Schachnovelle*, by the late Austrian author Stefan Zweig who, along with his wife, committed suicide in 1942, one year after the book was published. Zweig had fled Austria in 1934 after Hitler came to power in Germany. He first went to England, then briefly to the US before ultimately moving to Brazil in 1940. The book was the inspiration for the 1960 film, BRAINWASHED, and there were two Czech films as well – ŠACH MAT (CHECKMATE) in 1964 and KRÁLOVSKÁ HRA (THE ROYAL GAME) in 1980. In this version, director Philipp Stölzl (NORTH FACE) and screenwriter Eldar Grigorian tweak the story to reflect how Zweig himself may have been feeling as he was writing the book. Around that time, he had written to a friend telling him of his despair at being in exile. Perhaps Zweig saw himself in Bartok – someone who had a wonderful, rich life that was taken away from him by the Nazis, leaving him with nothing. Chess, which Bartok disparagingly calls an "activity for bored Prussian generals", keeps him alive but it traps his mind. It may be that Zweig felt that his moves were doing the same thing to him. Petrópolis, the city in Brazil where they had finally settled, had a large German population. While the culture would have been very familiar to him, I would suspect that in the early 1940s there would have been more than a few Nazi sympathizers living there. After travelling so far, perhaps he felt trapped with nowhere else to go.

Masucci puts in a powerful performance as Bartok, showing audiences two distinct sides to this character – the *bon vivant* and the broken man. For his efforts, he took home the Best Actor award at the Bavarian Film Awards last year. The film also won awards for Best Production (Bavarian Film Awards, 2021), Best Costume Design (German Film Awards, 2021) and Best Costume Design (Austrian Film Awards, 2022).

THE ROYAL GAME is a thought-provoking film and a great choice to kick off the festival with. Definitely check it out!

For more information about KINO/22 and the full programme, visit their website at [www.goethe.de/hongkong/kino22](http://www.goethe.de/hongkong/kino22). Tickets are on sale right now with prices ranging from \$70 to \$95. Student discounts are also available. Don't wait too long to get yours because the screenings always sell out.



Advertisements

REPORT THIS AD

**Thanks for reading but don't be a lurker! If you liked what you just read, here are some suggestions:**

Sign up to receive my movie reviews in your inbox automatically  
 Share this review on your Facebook page  
 Leave me a message telling me what you thought of my review or the film  
 Bookmark the site and visit often  
 Like my [Howard For Film Facebook page](#)  
 Watch my reviews on my [YouTube page](#)  
 Check out my [Howard For Film magazine](#) on Flipboard  
 Tell your friends about the site

Advertisements

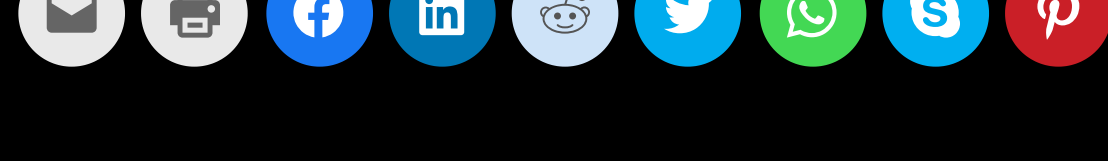
Create a website that is uniquely you.

[Start Today](#)

REPORT THIS AD

Rate This ★★★★★ 2 Votes

Share this:



Posted in Drama, Foreign Language, Thriller, War  
 Tagged austria, film, goethe institut, kino, oliver masucci, royal game, schachnovelle, stefan zweig  
 Leave a comment

### Leave a Reply

Enter your comment here...