

patient causes a harrowing traffic accident by ignoring a red light on the way to the train station, or when Tilda pulls the emergency brake on a train after Amandus stepped off while the train was leaving the station. And with the police actively looking for them, hiding in a toilet cabin wouldn't normally achieve the trick either.

Against all odds and mishaps, the journey continues and succeeds because it is not simply a contemporary recapitulation of the quintessential *"Reise nach Italien"* which resonates throughout German literature and drama. Rather what we are given is the unwavering devotion of a young girl to provide a final fulfilling experience for her beloved grandfather. Having the family reunite in Venice and find a solution for the care of Amandus, coupled with Niko and his wife acquiring a new foundation for their tottering marriage, is a charming way of depicting the venerable tradition of German yearning for the joyous mystique of Italian culture.

### US Remake

In 2018, Til Schweiger filmed a US remake of this movie with Nick Nolte in the role as the grandfather and Matt Dillon as his son. Emma's role was cast with Emily Mortimer. The movie debuted in December of 2018 as "Head full of Honey" but only in four theatres across the US. Despite the high powered cast it turned out to be a total flop, grossing only 11,000 Euro. It was pulled out of distribution and discontinued after only a week. The British *Observer* gave it a downright nasty review, calling the humor as funny as a "root canal treatment without anesthesia".

The *New York Times* called the movie (oddly enough) *offensive*. What Germans perceived as sweet and nourishing was regarded as cloying and bizarre by many British and American critics. The Demenz-Drama-Desaster is just the latest proof that humor cannot be exported as easily as other goods. One might justifiably suspect that this cultural dynamic is sometimes tinged with malice aforethought when it concerns humor that is "Made in Germany". When the British introduced this label in the Merchandise Marks Act of 1887, it was meant as a warning to consumers of potentially bad quality. Maybe Til Schweiger himself suffered a temporary degeneration of brain cells by assuming that the British and their American cousins had had a change of heart in the last 130 years concerning imports having the aforementioned label.

## THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

### Friday Film Fest Series



## Honig im Kopf

Directed by Til Schweiger

April 26, 2019

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

The German Society of PA

611 Spring Garden St.

215-627-2332

# Honig im Kopf (2014)

**Director:** Til Schweiger  
**Producer:** Til Schweiger, Thomas Zickler  
**Writer:** Til Schweiger  
**Screenplay:** Til Schweiger, Hilly Martinek  
**Music:** Dirk Reichardt  
**Camera:** Martin Schlecht  
**Length:** 139 Minutes  
**Cast:** **Dieter Hallervorden** as Amandus Rosenbach  
**Til Schweiger** as Niko Rosenbach  
**Jeanette Hain** as Sarah Rosenbach  
**Emma Schweiger** as Tilda Rosenbach  
**Katharina Thalbach** as Vivian Saalfeld  
**Tilo Prückner** as Dr. Ehlers  
**Commentary:** Karl Moehlmann



## The Director



Til Schweiger is one of Germany's most popular actors as well as one of its most successful directors. Born in 1963 in Giessen, his breakthrough as an actor came in 1994 with *Maybe...Maybe not*. In 1996, he produced *Knockin' on Heaven's Door*, a road movie which won him several awards and which remains a cult favorite worldwide. *Barefoot*

(2005), *Rabbit without Ears* (2007) and *Kokowääh* (2011) followed. He starred in Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Bastards* in 2009 with his portrayal of the legendary Hugo Stieglitz. *Honig im Kopf* has proven to be his biggest hit, climbing to number one on the movie charts with 7.3 million viewers and grossing 57 million Euros "Gesamteinspielergebnis", thus becoming the "Kassenschlager" of the season.

He and his wife Dana have four children, of whom Emma is the youngest, born in 2002. Emma played a role in *Kokowääh* when she was nine years old. In this movie she is twelve and was widely praised for her portrayal of a loving granddaughter who sojourns with her Alzheimer's afflicted grandfather.

## A Comedy?

How do you make a funny movie about such a horribly debilitating disease? Alzheimer's is irreversible and not a normal part of aging. It destroys brain cells, causing a radical deterioration of mental capability and memory. This

progressive degeneration affects not only cognitive and functional abilities but also emotions and behavior. It was first identified by Dr. Alois Alzheimer in 1906 and afflicts an estimated 5.7 million Americans, most of them age 65 and older. One in ten people 65 and older is living with the disease.

When the retired vet Amandus (wonderfully instantiated by Dieter Hallervorden) gives a speech at his wife's funeral, it becomes clear that he has the dreaded disease and has lost his functional independence. His son Niko convinces him to move to his house in an affluent neighborhood in Hamburg where Niko lives with wife Sarah and daughter Tilda.



When Amandus' deteriorating mental state nearly causes a fire in the kitchen while he is trying to bake a cake, it is not really funny. When he cuts down the bushes in front of the house instead of trimming them, Sarah cannot laugh. When he mistakes the refrigerator for a urinal in front of the horrified couple, you start to cringe. And when he causes total mayhem during a garden party, all patience and tolerance in dealing with Amandus has been exhausted and the stress on the marital relationship reaches its limit.

A transfer to a retirement home seems inevitable. The movie could end here and it would be just another sad story about the horrible effects of the disease on an older person and his loved ones. Enter the young granddaughter Tilda, played by Til Schweiger's own daughter Emma. Her unconditional support and love for her grandfather shifts this movie to another key and elevates it to a higher plane.

Tilda asks her doctor, the pediatrician Dr. Ehlers, about the disease and he explains it to her with an apt metaphor: "wie Honig im Kopf" (a head full of honey). He suggests that visiting places that the sick person has known could help him in coping with the disease. Since Amandus had talked about how he and his wife Margarete had spent their honeymoon in Venice, Tilda is determined to take her grandfather to Italy instead of having him committed to a retirement home.

Her undivided attention and sensitivity to Amandus' needs centers this story in the loving relationship between a child and a grandfather. We can laugh about the humorous aspects without ever losing sight of the tragic side. Tilda's determination to help her grandfather provides the fuel for an adventurous and ultimately elegiac journey.

## The Trip

When an older Alzheimer's patient and a 12-year-old girl escape from home and attempt to travel across Germany and the Alps to Venice, you would expect a rapid resolution to such an ill-advised endeavor. Especially when the