

Xavier Koller was born in Schwyz, Switzerland.

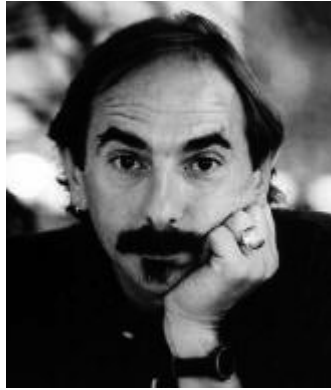
After graduating from High School, Xavier Koller first went through a four-year apprenticeship as a precision toolmaker and then, after three years of training at the Academy of Drama in Zurich, Switzerland, graduated as an actor/director. The next several years he spent acting and directing at German and Swiss theatres.

He did a number of TV-plays as an actor, directed commercials, acted in movies, and wrote and directed his first full lengths feature film in 1972.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2001 Highway**, theme park simulator film, 70', director.
Condor Communications
- 1999 Gripsholm**, German-speaking period piece, director/co-writer.
Wilkening Film/Catpics Ltd. / DOR Film
Awards: Prix C.I.C.A.E. (Confédération des cinémas d'art et d'essai européens)
- 1998 Ring of Fire**, feature film, director
Neveland Films Inc.
Award: Crystal Award, Heartland Filmfestival
- 1993 Squanto, a Warrior's Tale**, feature, family adventure film, director
Walt Disney Company
Award: Award of Excellence, Film Advisory Board of the United States of America
- 1990 Journey of Hope**, feature film, drama, writer/director/producer
Awards: Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film 1990; Bronze Leopard International Film Festival Locarno; 1st Prize Film Festival of Nuremberg; National Award of the Swiss Federal Office of Culture; Sergio Leone Award
Biggest grossing Swiss film of the year
- 1986 Tanner, the Rebellion**, feature film, drama, writer/director/producer
Awards: National Award of the Swiss Federal Office of Culture; Winner of the Karlovy-Vary Film Festival; FIPRESCI-Award Montreal Film Festival 1986; Swiss Entry for the Academy Awards 1986
Biggest grossing Swiss film of the year

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Emotion is Motion is Emotion

Long before Xavier Koller settled in the United States to write and direct films, following his success with *Journey of Hope* (Reise der Hoffnung – Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1990), he gave me some food for thought: It's not action that moves the plot of a film, it's emotion. A film can be full of special effects and action, but if the audience doesn't feel for the characters and relate to what they are feeling, the

film will fail. Emotions create action. Emotion was and is the starting point and goal of Xavier Koller's cinematic work – always has been and probably accounts for his success, too.

Before Koller became a filmmaker he studied acting at the Academy of Drama in Zurich (1964–1967): "I realized that before an actor moves he must achieve the correct emotional truth. I had trained my body intensively and studied movement, but whatever action and move I made was empty until I got a certain picture of my emotional psyche." Later, as a film director/writer, he used this understanding when focusing on the movement of his characters and the plot of his stories.

In *The Frozen Heart* (Das gefrorene Herz – 1980) a devious tramp moves an icy corpse from one village to another, past a boundary stone buried in the snow. In *Tanner, The Rebellion* (Der schwarze Tanner – 1986) a furious mountain farmer grabs a perplexed official by the hair and pulls out a clump – an

"I moved and I essentially relished it. I enjoyed acting, with my body, and I got a certain picture of how, from what point on, one has to act in order to achieve the right form."

Xavier Koller

action that plunges him into endless difficulties with the representatives of the State and with his fellow farmers. In *Journey of Hope* a Turkish family sets off for Switzerland – and is drawn into a never-ending cycle of hope and despair. In all these cases, the primary action that propelled the plot forward was motivated, not by what they did, but by the primary emotions of the characters.

Stories

"Whatever one writes about Xavier Koller's *Fanø Hill* will never do justice to *Fanø Hill* because *Fanø Hill* is a movie." This sort of summary repudiation of the critics was in fashion at the time. It was 1969, the year after revolutionary 1968, when the "old guard" of Swiss films had been nonchalantly consigned to the scrap heap of Swiss movie history by the film rebels. The prevailing genre – screen adaptations of literary and social and provincial comedies – was being reinvented by a rising generation: the term "New Swiss Film" was born, and the concept of "Jungfilmer" i.e.

1982 **Citizen in the Computer – The End of Freedom?**, TV play, writer/director

1981 **Freedom of the Press**, TV play, Co-writer/director

1980 **The Frozen Heart**, feature film, comedy, writer/director
Awards: National Award of the Swiss Federal Office of Culture; Winner of the Latin American Film Festival in Ecuador; Award of the City of Zurich; Movie of the Year
Biggest grossing Swiss film of the year

1978 **Galgensteiger**, TV movie, historical drama, director

1977 **Homosexuality**, TV play, co-writer/director

1976 **The Rifle King**, feature film, drama, writer/director/producer
Awards: Quinzaine des Réalisateurs, Cannes 1973; National Award of the Swiss Federal Office of Culture

1969 **Fanø Hill**, short feature film, writer/director/actor/producer
Awards: National Award of the Swiss Federal Office of Culture; Award of the City of Zurich

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Young Filmmaker, became standing phrases. Both coinages were more an outgrowth of Swiss movie journalism than the indication of an identity chosen by the young filmmakers themselves.

Xavier Koller was there from the very start

French-Swiss Alain Tanner's film *Charles Mort ou Vif?* was captivating movie buffs across Europe (and later round the world). In German Switzerland the cinematic innovators were celebrating their creations at their own festival – the newly established Solothurn Film Days.

In 1969, Koller bared his soul on celluloid for the first time: as director, cast member and producer of a short fiction film entitled *Fanø Hill*. Shot on a Danish island using the simplest possible means, it is a "Cain and Abel" story, playfully existential but devoid of theoretical pretension. *Fanø Hill* was awarded a film prize by the City of Zurich. Three years later, in 1972, Xavier Koller again traveled to an island, to shoot *Hannibal*. But this time it was Crete, or more precisely, the old leper colony of Spinalonga, where, according to a story he wrote himself, an old German doctor with a fascist past had gone into hiding. No question that, in the context of the young filmmakers at work in Switzerland in the 1970s, this is material bearing Koller's own personal stamp.

Trilogy of success

One is tempted to call the films made by Xavier Koller at the end of the Seventies, in the Eighties and in the early Nineties the "mountain trilogy", "success trilogy" or "homeland trilogy", but in any case a trilogy. *The Frozen Heart*, *Tanner*, *the Rebellion* and *Journey of Hope* have a great deal in common: their success in the movie theaters; their use of the mountain landscape as a factor in the plot; the exact rendering of the language and mentality of local characters through the precise direction of the actors and the enormous trouble taken with the dubbing, The voices of the international cast had been replaced with the voices of dilettantes from the respective valleys to achieve the authenticity and identity for the local characters. Language is music, Koller says. Hundreds of people's voices were tested for their sound and talent to select the few who were able to deliver the quality Koller was looking for.

These three films also marked the start of his collaboration with his friend and producer Alfi Sinner, with whom Koller founded the Zurich production company Catpics for *Tanner*, *the Rebellion* in 1984. But there is undoubtedly another way of seeing it: *The Frozen Heart* and *Tanner*, *the Rebellion* are both based on stories by the Central Swiss writer Meinrad Inglin (1893–1971), whereas *Journey of Hope* was inspired by a ten-line item in a newspaper. One might also object that *The Frozen Heart* is a comedy and owes much of its success to laughter; *Tanner*, *the Rebellion*

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is a historical epic that brings a successfully repressed segment of Swiss history to the screen; and *Journey of Hope* is a topical drama with a poignant immediacy capable of gripping the general public.

Xavier Koller as an entertainer in one film, a political teacher in the second, and the warning voice of conscience in the third: and each time as different as can be. Yet, what the three films have in common is that Koller knows all the people in his stories down to the last detail – and likes them, best of all the rogues. Running the gamut from cheerful to gloomy, happy to miserable – that is what Koller's films share.

Auteur

Xavier Koller is a film auteur – which is decisive to his work – with all the ramifications, positive and negative: he takes possession of every story, not sparing a Meinrad Inglin (or even a Kurt Tucholsky); and his intense, work-intensive manner of taking possession can sometimes come down to a virtual dispossession of his co-authors. The stories he shoots must first of all become his own stories. That's the way Xavier Koller works.

However different his movies are, Koller's signature with regard to story line, precise characterization, and his typical feeling for the rhythm of the plot, make *The Frozen Heart*, *Tanner*, *the Rebellion* and *Journey of Hope* into the trilogy of success that culminated in an Academy Award in 1990 – a hitherto unattained triumph for the "new Swiss Film."

Forget it

Xavier Koller took his revered "Oscar" back to where he had received it and, with his wife, Sabina, pitched his tent in Santa Monica – looking out on the Hollywood Hills – to face a new challenge. Koller started anew: thematically and geographically.

In his opinion, there is no looking back – the challenge is in the next scene. What has come before is in the past. "Forget it!", as he always says. Looking back isn't his specialty. However, farewells are painful for those left behind, and new beginnings always rough for him.

The native of Central Switzerland remains stubbornly on the carpet, takes possession of the material offered to him, refusing to notice that, in Hollywood's multi-million-dollar circus, it can never completely belong to him. In 1994 he made a \$20-million film about Native Americans for the Walt Disney Company: *Squanto – a Warrior's Tale*. The film was an impressive re-enactment of a time when America was first discovered by Europeans and the consequences that ripped a young Native American away from his homeland. In 1999 Koller made *Ring of Fire* on a small

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Walo Deuber worked with Xavier Koller on projects for Swiss television and on *Der schwarze Tanner*. He lays claim to being the first person to demonstrate the gooeyness factor of American white bread to Xavier. That was in February 1980, at the Grand Union on West Broadway in New York. Holy smoke!

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TRANSLATION

Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart,
Riehen

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budget with one of the independents. The gritty story, set in the rodeo world and filmed in the country and in Las Vegas, had already been edited and was ready for launch when, shortly before the premiere, the distributor went bust, dragging the film down with it. Although still not in commercial release, the film has been extremely successful in film festivals. "Forget it," he said again. The past is the past. He moved on.

Then Xavier Koller did something he had never done before. In the year 2000, at the request of his Swiss producer Alfi Sinniger, he got involved in a project that already existed: the filming of Kurt Tucholsky's novella *Castle Gripsholm*. With his typical meticulousness, he immediately set to taking possession of the existing script, Tucholsky's light summer story and the heavyweight biography of the great writer and journalist who was persecuted by the Nazis. And with his typical consistency, film auteur Koller turned it into his own Tucholsky story for the screen: *Gripsholm* - after Tucholsky's *Castle Gripsholm*. But by now *Gripsholm* had long become above all "Tucholsky according to Koller."

Full power

Film auteur Koller wouldn't have it any other way. That's something one has to know. But in return one gets a full-power plot, full-power emotions, and gripping stories. In *Gripsholm* emotion is everything: it drives the action of the film.

Xavier Koller himself is constantly on the move, and I suspect his favorite direction is uphill. And although he moves his audience now up, now down – the one element that constitutes the soul of his films is, as always... emotion.

Script: Stephan Kolditz, Xavier Koller
Camera: Pio Corradi
Editing: Patricia Rommer
Sound: Heinz Ebner
Musik: Kol Simcha

Original Version: German (English subtitles)
Art Direction: Peter Manhardt
Cast: Ulrich Noethen, Heike Makatsch, Jasmin Tabatabai, Marcus

Thomas, Sara Föttiger, Annette Feller, Katharina Blaschke, Leif Lijeroth, Inger Nilsson, Rudolf Wessely, Horst Krause
Production: Catpics AG, Thomas

Wilkening Filmgesellschaft, Dor Film, SF DRS, Teleclub
World Rights: Catpics AG

Xavier Koller

GRIPSHOLM



2000 | 35mm | colour | 97' | Original Title: Gripsholm

A sweeping, wide-screen portrayal of friendships savored on the cusp of history, *Gripsholm* is an involving, beautifully shot period drama that reinvigorates familiar elements. Margin German writer Kurt Tucholsky's semi-autobiographical novel *Schloss Gripsholm* with elements from the scribe's own life, Swiss director/writer Xavier Koller and German scripter Stefan Kolditz have come up with an emotionally dense "Summer of 32" that melds the last-gasp frippery of pre-Nazi Europe with moving portrayal of how relationships can be reshaped by exterior circumstances without denying the sincerity of their origins. [...] Koller gives the material an impressive flow and suppleness, aided by nimble Cinemascope camerawork by Swiss D.P. Pio Corradi and a big screen score that matches the visuals. VARIETY, November 20-26, 2000

Berlin, 1932. The summer before the National Socialist Party comes to power. Kurt Tucholsky, a pugnacious Jewish essayist and journalist with a clear vision about Germany's future, travels to Sweden to spend the summer at Gripsholm Castle, together with his girl friend Lydia, nicknamed The Princess. Known as an author of very ironic novels, he is also a celebrated librettist and writer of risqué chansons for various Cabaret shows of Swinging Berlin. Two of their best friends, Karlchen, a passionate hobby pilot, and Billie, the sensual cabaret star, join them for a while in their love nest in Sweden, adding some extra spice to their leisure time. But the past reaches Kurt at his vacation retreat and his future looks grim, for the German Reichswehr filed charges against him, based on his editorial, headlined "Soldiers are Murderers". Sensing the "Brown Danger" looming over the horizon, Kurt decides not to return to Germany. "One always thinks love outlasts time, but time always outlasts love", Tucholsky wrote in his famous novel, this movie is based on. That's what our four friends, Kurt, Lydia, Karlchen and Billie come to realize at the end of their sensual, boisterous, melancholic and bittersweet summer journey to the north. Soon nothing will be the same ever again.

Script: Xavier Koller, Feride Çiçekoglu
Camera: Elemer Ragalyi
Editing: Galip Iyitanir
Sound: Pavol Jasovsky
Musik: Jan Gabarek, Terje Raydal,

Arlid Andersen
Original Version: Turkish, Italian,
Swiss-German (English subtitles)
Art Direction: Kathrin Brunner
Cast: Nur Surer, Necmettin

Çobanoğlu, Emin Sivas, Erdinç Akbas,
Yaman Okay, Mathias Gnädinger,
Dietmar Schönherr
Production: Catpics AG, Condor Films
World Rights: Catpics AG

Prizes: Bronze Leopard, Locarno International Film Festival (1990); Sergio Leone Award, Italy (1990); Oscar, Academy Award for Best Foreign Film (1991)

Xavier Koller

JOURNEY OF HOPE



1990 | 35mm | colour | 114' | Original Title: Reise der Hoffnung

Journey of Hope is a compassionate plea for humanity and tolerance, bound to stir up emotions. Director Xavier Koller wisely avoids one-sided polemics, but never leaves any doubt on which side he stands.

Variety, 10.12.1990

Xavier Koller creates a powerful bond between the audience and this family. A humanist with roots in the Swiss working class, he makes sure we know his characters as human beings - never mind that they're Turkish peasants lacking every rudimentary street smarts. Koller picks and chooses his moments carefully, alternating humdrum and the horrific. The film has the nail-biting tension of a first-class thriller, steadily and unequivocally building to a shattering climax.

Film Comment, May-June 1991

This is the true story of a Turkish couple, Haydar and Meryem, who start their "Journey of Hope" from a small village in the mountains of South-East Turkey in September 1988. They decide to take their 7 year-old Mehmet Ali, the brightest and wittiest of their eight children, along: "He is a fresh seedling to grow roots in the new soil of your future" grandfather suggests. It is a journey, which is meant to take them from their poor country into rich Switzerland. The family has sold their livestock and their farmland in order to finance the trip to the supposed Paradise of milk and chocolate. Their first stop after leaving their Kurdish homeland is Istanbul, where they're stowed away on a freighter to Genoa. Once in Italy, they are taken to the mountains by smugglers and sent on towards Switzerland without guidance, despite the snow and the cold. Their Journey of Hope now turns into their worst nightmare.

Script: Xavier Koller, Walter Deuber
Camera: Elemér Ragalyi
Editing: Fee Liechti
Sound: Hans Künzi
Music: Hardy Hepp

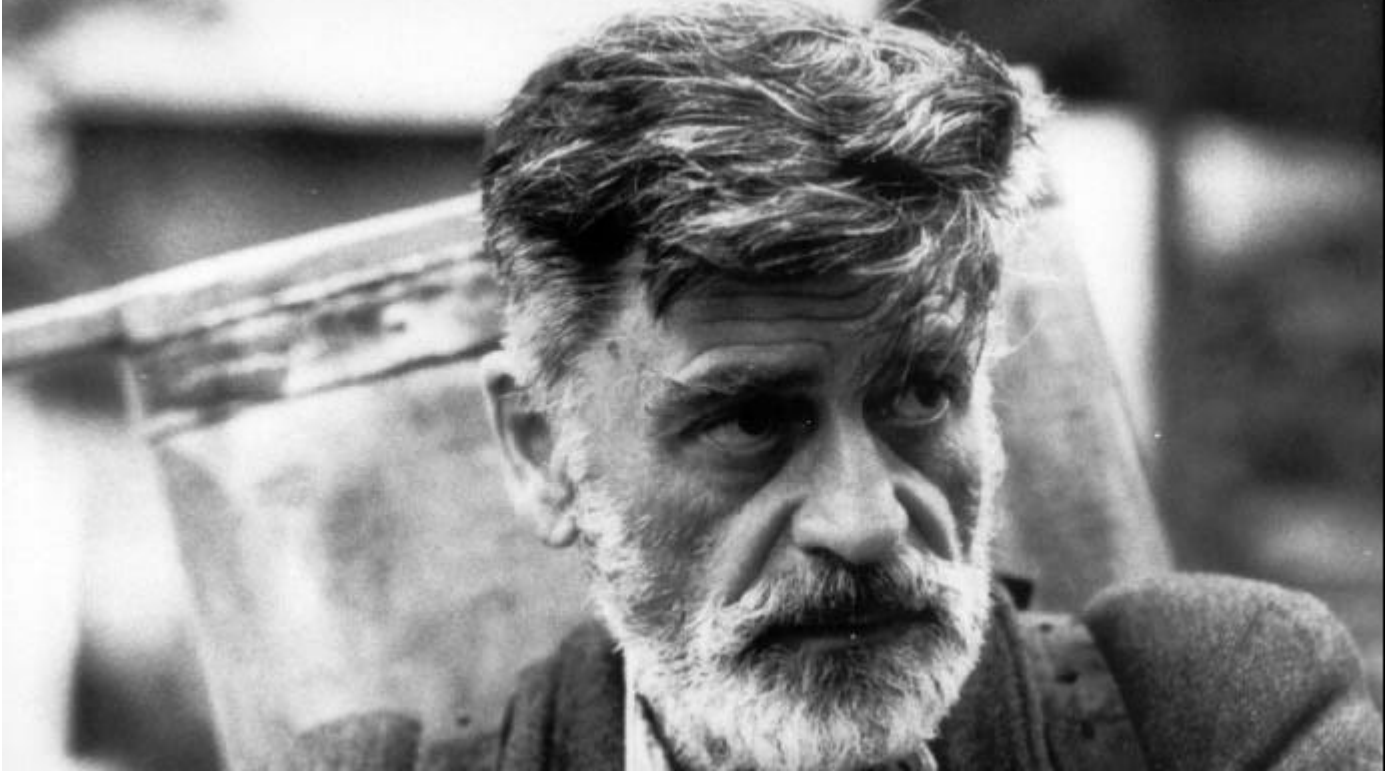
Original version: Swiss-German
(English subtitles)
Art Direction: Rolf Engler
Cast: Otto Mächtlinger, Dietmar
Schönherr, Renate Steiger, Heinz

Bühlmann, Giovanni Früh, Jürgen
Cziesla, Albert Freuler, Ernst Sigrist,
Ingold Wildenauer
Production: Catpics, SF DRS, ZDF, ORF
World Rights: Catpics AG

Prizes: Grand Jury's Special Prize,
Karlovy Vary Film Festival (1986);
FIPRESCI Award, Montreal Film
Festival (1986)

Xavier Koller

TANNER, THE REBELLION



1985 | 35mm | colour | 106' | Original Title: Der schwarze Tanner

Koller has succeeded in making plausible Tanner's authority-defying stand as an early predecessor to today's young protestors. There is no nostalgia involved when he evokes the past. The general style is straightforward, unsentimental and authentic. Apart from a leisurely-paced first half, the pace is just right. Elemér Ragalyi's excellent lensing, in mostly subdued colors, is an important asset. *Variety*, 22.1.1986

Solothurn Film Days: The best of the features was undoubtedly *Der schwarze Tanner* by Xavier Koller, one of the best developed, scripted and acted films I've seen in a long time. The scenario, though depicting a serious situation in wartime Switzerland, is laced with humor...

Monthly Journal of the British Federation of Film Societies, April, 1986

1941. World War II. Kaspar Tanner runs a farm in the mountains. In order to feed the population during the war, the Swiss Federal Government orders all land owners to grow grain and potatoes. Tanner is a true patriot and a democrat, prepared to defend his homeland at all times, but he nevertheless refuses to let be regimented by his own government. "Those steep mountain pastures of mine have been providing grass for my meagre livestock for generations to produce milk and cheese and I'll keep it that way the generations to come. The soil will be washed away from the rocks it is grabbing on to in this terrain as soon as I till it. I'm not going to destroy the nature of this land just to obey an unjust order of my government."

Threats of legal action and fines only make Tanner even more determined. His good sense of humour confuses the officials as well as it entertains his fellow farmers. After being their hero at first, he becomes the red herring of the community, as under the increasing governmental pressure all of his friends bend and obey. Isolated and with his back to the wall he finally gets arrested and is thrown into prison. Used to hardship throughout his life not even prison can break this upright man. His stoic stubbornness causes the officials even more headaches now than before up on his mountain farm.

Script: Xavier Koller
Camera: Hans Liechti
Editing: Fee Liechti
Sound: Peter Begert,
Stanislav Hrodmadnik

Music: Hardy Hepp
Original version: Swiss-German
(English subtitles)
Art Direction: Rolf Engler
Cast: Sigrif Steiner, Paul Bühlmann,

Günter Lamprecht, Otto Mächtlinger,
Heinz Bühlmann, Giovanni Früh,
Emilia Krakowska, Erwin Kohlund
Production: Ciné Groupe
World Rights: Xavier Koller

Xavier Koller

THE FROZEN HEART



| 1979 | 35mm | colour | 108' | Original Title: Das gefrorene Herz

Xavier Koller's adaptation and direction of Meinrad Inglin's short story is spiced with a great sense of humor. A comedy at its best! He easily managed to broaden the slim Inglin text to the proportion of a full-length feature and paints a baroque, expressionistic picture of those two sleepy mountain villages and it's burlesque inhabitants. Koller enriched the piece by inventing new characters, creating fresh motivations and a fair amount of very funny situations to push the story forward. His ensemble of excellent actors, the atmospheric dense camera work by Hans Liechti, the extended use of make up as well as a unique costume design and art direction create a world of its own: A fairy tale of authentic, universal quality - and a lot of fun.

Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 25.1.1980

Winter. Two small villages in the Swiss mountains: Vorderau and Hinterau. Two outlaws, an umbrella-mender and a basket-maker become friends. After one too many schnapps the umbrella-mender, searching for his lost love, freezes to death in the rugged forest between the two villages. The basket-maker finds the body of his friend and reports the death to the authorities of Hinterau. Since the dead man is entirely without means, his body is secretly smuggled to and fro over the border of the two communities, since each village wishes the other to pay for the funeral. Thanks to the cunning basket-maker the umbrella-mender is finally ceremoniously buried in Hinterau. The basket-maker, who had told his friend that he was done with women, meets the dead man's girl-friend, Rosy, who finally shows him that true love and lust really is worth dying for.

Script: James Redford
Camera: Andy Dintenfass
Editing: Anthony Sherin
Sound: Leslie Shatz, Patric Dodd
Musik: Dan Licht

Original Version: English
Art Direction: Linda Sheeris
Cast: Kiefer Sutherland, Marcus
Thomas, Melinda Dillon,
Pete Postlethwaite, Daryl Hannah,

Molly Ringwald, Bo Hopkins,
Russell Means
Production: Neverland Films
World Rights: Neverland Films

Xavier Koller

RING OF FIRE



| 1999 | 35mm | colour | 90' | Original Title: Ring of Fire

Rising rodeo bull-riding star Ely Braxton (Marcus Thomas) is recovering from injuries that almost took his life, but his determination to follow his father's footsteps as bull-riding champion. His brother, Hank (Kiefer Sutherland) is a rodeo clown, a bull-riding teacher. He developed a philosophy for riding bulls which is closer to meditation, opposing the teachings of his successful but violent father who's credo was to dominate and hate the creature underneath in order to succeed. As a stock provider for the bull-riding circuit Hank owns the un-ridden champion bull Zapata, the meanest creature on the tour. Even though the two work together at their home ranch and in the arena, Ely feels closer to his father's riding technique than to Hank's "dancing with bull philosophy". Their loving brotherly relationship is deteriorating rapidly when Ely starts dating the woman (Daryl Hannah) Hank is in love with. Alienated from anyone he loves, Ely must face his demons and finally encounters the most terrifying eight seconds of his life in pursuit of the championship when his draw is his brother's bull, Zapata.