

D "German Gems" Berlin and Beyond film festival founder Ingrid Eggers programmed this slate of 2009 German-language releases, which range in content and tone from a quirky documentary of a female-helmed, around-the-world adventure by automobile in 1927, *Miss Stimmes*, to the not-quite-dark-nor-funny enough "noir comedy" about extortion, cannibalism, and revenge, *The Bone Man*. But it's the two featured dramas that will likely garner the most attention: *Being Mr. Kotschie*, by Norbert Baumgarten, and *Vision*, by Margarethe von Trotta. As Jürgen Kotschie wearily anticipates his fiftieth birthday, his rather bland, suburban life begins to fracture almost imperceptibly; imperceptibly, at least, to others. But from Kotschie's point of view, the tenuous line between reality and dreams begins to blur, and he becomes increasingly alienated from his uneventful existence. A fevered, hallucinogenic road-trip to an equally uneventful village in search of an old flame ensues, and, somewhat remarkably for a modern German film, he learns to gratefully accept the simple pleasure of being alive. *Being Mr. Kotschie* offers a dose of existential-crisis-lite, neurotically embodied by a thoroughly likeable lead (Stefan Kurt), whose minor resemblance to Basil Fawlty adds a sense of physical playfulness to the role. In *Vision*, the remarkable life of Hildegard von Bingen is given the biopic treatment by von Trotta with mixed results. On the one hand, the subject matter of a multi-talented, visionary "renais-

sance woman" who lived 300 years before the Renaissance even began, is truly compelling. But von Trotta can't help but throw a little Sapphic mystery into the mix, and the powerful bond between Hildegard (Barbara Sukowa) and the spirited Richardis (Hannah Herzsprung) plays out like a not entirely convincing hot-for-teacher melodrama. Fortunately, Sukowa plays the headstrong Hildegard with just the right amount of compassion and self-importance, and Heino Ferch is rock-solid as her confidante, scribe, and confessor, Brother Volmar. *Castro*. (Nicole Gluckstern)