

Intimate Lighting

The Czech New Wave

Few cinematic movements have parameters as defined as those of the Czech New Wave – the films presented in this season were produced during the comparatively relaxed period of political liberalisation in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, a time of flourishing artistic creativity. This brief window of opportunity led a cadre of astute young writers and directors to act as a barometer, taking the measure of the times through their highly imaginative, politically engaged cinema. A number of filmmakers left the country after the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968.

The filmmakers we are focusing on, most of whom were students of the Prague film school, FAMU, were smuggling damning critiques of the government into their state-funded films and hence many were indefinitely shelved or banned outright. We must recognise the deliberate aesthetic approach of these films as being symptomatic of a society emerging from a period of cultural conservatism, and as such they are mordant, slyly subversive slices of life under communism.

Influenced by the subjectivity of the French New Wave and the *cinéma vérité* of Italian neorealism, Czech directors used non-professional actors, improvised dialogue, allegorical subjects, spiky, associative editing and edgy camerawork to create highly personal and distinctive filmmaking styles.

Professor Jaromír Šofr, cinematographer on two titles in this season is our guest of honour; Professor Šofr will participate in a discussion following *Closely Observed Trains* on Sunday 23rd April, and in a career masterclass on the evening of Monday 24th.

Introduction and film notes by David O'Mahony.

A multi-event pass is available for Intimate Lighting: The Czech New Wave in person or over the phone from the IFI Box Office only – 5 events for €45.

Presented in association with the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Ireland.

APR 8TH (14.00) DOUBLE BILL

MORAVIAN HELLAS

KAREL VACHEK

(MORAVSKÁ HELLAS)

FILM INFO:

34 mins, 1963, Czechoslovakia, Black and White, 35mm, Subtitled

Described by Jan Švankmajer as 'the strongest personality of the New Wave', Karel Vachek's reputation was based largely on *Moravian Hellas*, his graduation short film, an experimental documentary essay on the Strážnice Folklore Festival. Blending traditional reportage with staged sequences, Vachek's unconventional approach presents the festival and its participants in a heightened, theatrical fashion.

DIAMONDS OF THE NIGHT

JAN NĚMEC

(DĚMANTY NOCI)

FILM INFO:

63 mins, 1964, Czechoslovakia, Black and White, 35mm, Subtitled

A vital entry to the nascent New Wave, the premise of *Diamonds of the Night* is a model of simplicity: two unnamed teenage boys flee a German train taking them to a concentration camp. Relentlessly pursued through forbidding terrain, the terrified, starving youths must endure extremes in order to survive. Jan Němec's debut feature, a lean reduction of Arnošt Lustig's autobiographical novel, *Darkness Casts No Shadow*, is a sustained exercise in dynamic minimalism and raw poeticism. The forward rush of the hand-held camera, the associative editing and textured sound design coalesce to create an intoxicating cinematic experience.

INTIMATE LIGHTING

THE LOVES OF A BLONDE

MILOŠ FORMAN

APR 9TH (14.00)

(LÁSKY JEDNÉ PLAVOVLÁSKY)

FILM INFO:

88 mins, 1965, Czechoslovakia, Black and White, 35mm, Subtitled



Andula works at a shoe factory near Prague; at a dance held for local army reservists she meets and falls for Milda, a young piano player. Some days later she hitchhikes unannounced to Milda's home where his exasperated parents are forced to reveal their uncertainty as

to their son's whereabouts. Displaying a canny ear for the rhythms of speech, Miloš Forman's poignant tale of thwarted romantic idealism foregrounds long, semi-improvised and often highly amusing dialogue exchanges between the principals, for whom the director has clear sympathy in spite of their manifest flaws.

Miloš Forman's 1975 classic One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest will screen as an IFI Classic in April. See page 8 for details.

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IVAN PASSER

APR 12TH (18.30)

(INTIMNÍ OSVĚTLENÍ)

FILM INFO:

71 mins, 1965, Czechoslovakia, Black and White, Digital, Subtitled



Petr, a musician, and his girlfriend, Stepa, travel from Prague to a provincial town where he is due to give a concert. Whilst there, he reconnects with an old friend, Bambas, who invites the sophisticated couple to stay

with his family in their rustic house in the countryside. A beautifully observed drama of the everyday, *Intimate Lighting* is the only film Ivan Passer made in Czechoslovakia, though he co-wrote most of Miloš Forman's New Wave work.

The Soviet invasion saw him leave for the USA where he continued to direct, the high point being the undervalued *Cutter's Way* (1981).

NOBODY WILL LAUGH

HYNEK BOČAN

APR 19TH (18.30)

(NIKDO SE NEBUDE SMÁT)

FILM INFO:

94 mins, 1965, Czechoslovakia, Black and White, 35mm, Subtitled



Inspired by a tale from Milan Kundera's collection *Laughable Loves*, Hynek Bočan's feature debut tells the story of Karel Klíma, a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, who gets himself into trouble when he loses a paper written by an aspiring but

hopeless student. A white lie results in the manic author of the worthless text aggressively confronting Klíma, which wreaks havoc in the latter's professional and personal life. This sardonic story of the minor transgressions of a scholar grown lazy offers a merciless criticism of a society based on hypocrisy and envy.

INTIMATE LIGHTING

A REPORT ON THE PARTY AND THE GUESTS

JAN NĚMEC

APR 22ND (14.00)

(O SLAVNOSTI A HOSTECH)

FILM INFO:

71 mins, 1966, Czechoslovakia, Black and White, 35mm, Subtitled



A group of picnickers' blissful summer's afternoon is rudely interrupted by the unexpected appearance of a strange authority figure and his henchmen, who coerce the group into joining his bizarre outdoor birthday party, with its sinister rules and arcane formalities. With a

surrealist streak redolent of Luis Buñuel, NĚmec's second feature is a brilliantly conceived and executed allegory of the corruption of absolute power; it was shelved for two years until the relaxation of censorship during the Prague Spring, after which the Soviets formally banned it forever and it didn't resurface until the Velvet Revolution of 1989.

CLOSELY OBSERVED TRAINS

JIRÍ MENZEL

APR 23RD (20.00)

(OSTŘE SLEDOVANÉ VLAKY)

FILM INFO:

93 mins, 1966, Czechoslovakia, Black and White, Digital, Subtitled



Miloš is an unambitious 22-year-old student who starts work as a signalman at a train station in German-occupied Czechoslovakia. His encounters with a variety of characters, especially Máša, to whom

he is failing to lose his virginity, and sundry Nazi collaborators and resistance fighters bring the naive young man into contact with the tragedy of the war. Winner of the 1968 Best Foreign Language Oscar, *Closely Observed Trains* brought the Czech New Wave international acclaim.

Professor Jaromír Šofr, the film's cinematographer will participate in a post-screening Q&A with director Conor Horgan.

PUBLIC MASTERCLASS WITH PROFESSOR JAROMÍR ŠOFR

APR 24TH (18.30)



This unique masterclass will be a discussion of Professor Šofr's work as a cinematographer, in 1960s Czechoslovakia, working on some of the key films in the Czech New Wave movement.

The masterclass will provide audiences with historic background information on the conditions for filmmakers in 1960s Czechoslovakia and provide a degree of contextualisation for the films presented in the season throughout April.

THE SEVENTH DAY, THE EIGHTH NIGHT

EVALD
SCHORM

APR 26TH (18.15)

(DEN SEDMÝ, OSMÁ NOC)

FILM INFO:

100 mins, 1969, Czechoslovakia,
Black and White, 35mm, Subtitled



The stationmaster of an unremarkable Czech village disappears one day; almost simultaneously a travelling group of actors arrive to perform a passion play, which is enough to spark an outbreak of collective paranoia amongst the villagers who begin to

question who these alleged actors really are. Suspicions are turned inward and soon nobody is to be trusted.

A direct response to the Soviet occupation of 1968, Schorm's pointed allegory was instantly banned by the authorities and didn't receive its premiere until 1990, by which time the director had sadly passed away.

THE FIREMEN'S BALL

MILOŠ
FORMAN

APR 29TH (14.00)

(HOŘÍ, MÁ PANENKO)

FILM INFO:

71 mins, 1967, Czechoslovakia,
Digital, Subtitled



A grand ball has been arranged by a small town's fire brigade in honour of their oldest-serving member because he is dying of cancer. He will be ceremoniously presented with a golden hatchet at the event which will include

a live band, an auction and a beauty contest all of which is disastrously and hilariously derailed through the rampant corruption, ineptitude and internecine squabbling of the firemen. Miloš Forman's depiction of a self-serving institute's descent into farcical dysfunction can be read as a satirical commentary on the failings – although well intentioned – of the Communist system.

Miloš Forman's 1975 classic One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest will screen as an IFI Classic in April. See page 8 for details.

THE CREMATOR

JURAJ
HERZ

APR 30TH (14.00)

(SPALOVAČ MRTVOL)

FILM INFO:

95 mins, 1969, Czechoslovakia,
Black and White, 35mm, Subtitled



Made hastily during the Prague Spring of 1968, Herz's nightmarish tale of Karl Kopfrkingl, a fanatically zealous cremator who believes he is releasing the souls of the dead for reincarnation, is finally receiving the recognition it deserves. The setting is the late

1930s, the time of Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia, the invading force onscreen being referred to only as The Party, an ambiguity designed to provoke the Soviet censors at the time of the film's release. Kopfrkingl's gifts for cremation attract the attention of the Nazis who see a potential role for him in their new regime.

The screening of The Cremator will be introduced by noted costume and set designer, Joe Vaněk.