

Czech cinema I

The history of Czech cinema begins with the first short movies of the architect Jan Kříženecký (1898). The development of Czech cinema as an art form continued in the 1930s with works by Gustav Machatý (*Extase*), Josef Rovenský (*The River*), František Čáp, Martin Frič and Otakar Vávra. After the nationalisation of the film industry (1945) came the Golden Lion from Venice for *The Strike* (*Siréna*, 1947) by Karel Steklý. But with the takeover of power by the Communists (1948) the Czechoslovak cinema was subordinated to ideology and the aesthetics of socialist realism.

The first attempt at more open and critical film art was stamped out at an ideological conference in Banská Bystrica in 1959. Changes came with the new generation of Czech filmmakers in 1963: this is the beginning of the golden age of the Czech cinema – the so-called “Czech new wave” or “Czech film miracle”. This period ended with the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact in August 1968. In the period of “normalization” that followed, many films from the “golden age” were banned and some of the best directors went into exile (Miloš Forman, Ivan Passer, Ján Kádár, Vojtěch Jasný, Jan Němec, Jiří Weiss). Some members of the new wave generation had no chance to make films for several years (Jiří Menzel, Věra Chytilová), some were never able to return to filmmaking (Pavel Juráček) and others produced films that conformed to the current ideology.

After the short period of “perestroika” (1986-1989) came the “big bang” of the “Velvet Revolution” (1989). The 1990s were marked by privatization in this field. The central position of the Barrandov Film studios changed. The greatest producer of films now is Czech Television. Some foreign critics have spoken of a “new new wave” in contemporary Czech cinema: films made by young directors – Jan Svěrák (the Oscar-winner for *Kobyla*), Saša Gedeon, Jan Hřebejk, Vladimír Michálek, Filip Renč – are the most interesting movies from both the artistic and the commercial points of view.

Contents of the course

The course is concerned with selected periods, genres and themes of the history of Czech cinema.

The course is based on video screenings of selected Czech films in the full version and with English subtitles. Some periods of Czech cinema history and some aspects of their typical genres or styles can be illustrated by short fragments from the movies. The class usually begins with a short introduction to the historical and cultural context.

The students may use the services of the video library in the Department of Theatre and Film Studies. The teacher is ready (in his office hours) to answer any questions concerning not only the history and the present of Czech cinema (or some special part of it) but the history of Eastern European cinema as well.

Literature:

Czech Feature Film I, 1898-1930, Praha, NFA, 1995.

Czech Feature Film II, 1930-1945, Praha, NFA, 1998.

Czech Feature Film III, 1945-1960, Praha, NFA, 2001.

Czech Feature Film IV, 1961-1970, Praha, NFA, 2004.

Hames, Peter. *The Czechoslovak New Wave*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1985.

Hames, Peter (ed). *Dark alchemy: the films of Jan Švankmajer*. Westport : Praeger, 1995.

Liehm, Mira and Liehm, Antonín J. *The Most Important Art: Eastern European Film After 1945*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977.

Škvorecký, Josef. *All the Bright Young Man and Woman*. Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1971.

Examination procedure

The assessment is based on two essays: the first one (of 1000-1200 words) will be inspired by the topic:

The history of Central Europe in the mirror of Czech films. This text should be handed in or sent by email until 3 November. The second essay (of 1500-2000 words) will be inspired by the topic:

Czech cinema between tradition and modernism, genre and auteurism, conformity and subversion. This text should be handed in or sent by email until 16 December.

Time and location

The class will take place on Thursdays from 10:50 p.m. to 1.15 p.m. at the Faculty of Arts in Building C, the screening room (No C:34).

Teacher responsible for the course

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