

ely
film
society

jan
2016

the
notes

We'll be meeting soon to propose a long list - it starts at thirty and gets ground down to twelve - of films to present for next season, starting in June. As ever we'll aim to mix nationalities, periods and genres to represent the best of overlooked or classic films that have mostly never been publicly shown in Ely before. Any comments on previous choices or directions you'd like us to consider in our deliberations, direct them to a committee member. And remember: the only thing that guarantees EFS continuing is your continued membership and attendance. Us choosing the films is the easy bit!

Daisies

Věra Chytilová, Czechoslovakia 1966

Czech title *Sedmikrásky*

Screenplay ... Vera Chytilová, Ester Krumbachová, Pavel Juráček

Ivana Karbanová Marie II

Jitka Cerhová Marie I

Marie Cesková

Jirina Myskova

Marcela Brezinová

Julius Albert Man About Town

Oldrich Hora

Jan Klusák

Josef Koníček

Jaromír Vomáčka

Music Jirí Slitr

Cinematography..... Jaroslav Kucera

Film Editing Miroslav Hájek

Production Design Karel Lier

Of course it was risky. Our studio head didn't want to allow it. He said he didn't want us to break our necks. I said: 'But I want to break my neck!'

Věra Chytilová was a spiky force of nature who doggedly made films in a much-repressed country, and moreover films that fought back against narrative and character convention in a way remarkable even now to a generation used to the visual trickery of CGI and music video



editing techniques. The quote above, from a 1990 TV documentary *The Kids From FAMU*, about the celebrated generation who created the 'Czech New Wave' of the 1960s, was her typically blunt take on the making of *Daisies* in 1966, not as a maverick with a few friends and a home camera (the price of creative freedom on that

scale today, in any country) but in a government-funded studio with a full crew and a guaranteed budget.

She needed the courage thereafter. On its release, a deputy in the federal parliament, Pruzinec, held the puritan communist line against such visual mockery, denouncing 'the waste of

working-class money' on the film, which drew out fellow FAMU film directors in solidarity in a rising mood of boldness that already presaged the Prague Spring to come. Chytilová herself was unmoved by the criticism of its 'celebration of the wanton'. "They said it misrepresented the life of Czech youth", she declared in the documentary interview. "What we were interested in, was the idea of destruction as such".

Chytilová came to *Daisies* having turned down the chance to adapt and direct Bohumil Hrabal's comic novel *Closely Observed Trains* [shown at EFS Sept 2014] which went to Jiří Menzel. *Daisies* could almost not be more different. Instead of history, pure modernist fantasy; instead of monochrome, slashes of vivid pop-art colour; instead of duty and fear, boldness and rebellion; and above all, instead of the manipulations of men, the raucous full celebration of being women.

Daisies is canonised as a feminist film, years ahead of its time in demanding the space that comes with a woman's view of the world. Chytilová herself had been a fashion model before training in film, and every scene constructs and deconstructs the elaborate mechanisms of displaying femininity to the conventional world. Two young women, both called Marie (the religious significance is there for the symbol-spotter: dark and blonde, interchangeably Madonna and whore, and both worshipping a serenely higher faith) awake almost as puppets, declare the world to be "spoiled" and go out into it to test their luck and leave a mark. Flapper dancing, drunkenness, tormenting the "men around town", sad suited sacks (like the federal deputy perhaps) who whimper and sigh and pay before being serially despatched on the train home. "Why don't you want us to go bad? We're still maturing", trills a Marie in yet another expensive restaurant.

Set free of this low unambitious male orbit (pleading telephone voices fall away), Maries I and II explore clothes, idleness and above all food. Appetite is the only law. "We'll have to think

of a worse kind of life" says a Marie. Repeatedly there is an unreality check. "Too much" says a Marie. "Does it matter?" asks a Marie. "It doesn't matter" replies a Marie. They embark on a surrealist odyssey (shades of fellow director Jan Švankmajer and his stop-motion nightmares: he released the influential short *Punch And Judy* the same year as *Daisies*) in a dumb waiter and arrive at the top of civilised expectations, a grand (and not at all communist-minded) banquet room deserted but for the most exotic food. The scene that followed was what so outraged the deputy in its bourgeois depravity: to find, steal and waste such luxury was not what the workers could possibly want or deserve. (Everybody loved it). Very probably why Chytilová took such care to make it into a set piece worthy of Buster Keaton with the creepy edge of Erich von Stroheim.

All passion spent, the Maries ponder where their scruples have led them. "If we're good and hard-working, we'll be happy" they chant as they attempt to repair the damage. Have they succeeded? Are they free or in yet more material delusion? Does it matter? Chytilová's final full-screen declaration likewise pushes the plate of pie firmly in your face, asking who's been the fool all along.

Though in full sound and colour, *Daisies* plays dazzlingly with the tropes of silent cinema, a time when directors felt free to use edited film to remake the mind of the viewer. The cinematography (by Jaroslav Kucera, who later married Chytilová) employs clever lab tricks to colour footage, and skips between images with the punch of a sleek fashion magazine and the insouciance of a circus act, while the music uses 1920s jazz forms to create a mood of jaded carelessness. *Daisies* cares nothing for reality but delivers a sucker punch for anyone who needs to be told what matters.

Chytilová fell foul of authority thereafter, being banned from "official" film making from 1969 to 1976 despite her prominence abroad, but fought her militant corner to the end. Arguably she never made a better or more epoch-defining film.



VĚRA CHYTILOVÁ

Ostrava 2 February 1929

Prague 12 March 2014

- 1961 The Ceiling
- 1962 A Bagful of Fleas
- 1963 Something Different
- 1965 The Automat World
- 1966 Sedmikrásky (*Daisies*)
- 1969 Ovoce stromů rajských jíme (*Fruit of Paradise*)
- 1976 The Apple Game
- 1978 Inexorable Time
- 1979 Pretas Story
- 1980 Kalamita
- 1981 Calamity
- 1981 Panelstory
- 1981 Chytilová Vs Forman – Consciousness of continuity
- 1983 Faunovo velmi pozdní odpoledne (*The Very Late Afternoon of the Faun*)
- 1984 Prague: The Troubled Heart of Europe
- 1986 Wolf's Cabin
- 1987 Vlčí bouda (*Wolf's hole*)
- 1987 Šašek a královna (*The Jester and the Queen*)
- 1988 Kopytem sem, kopytem tam (*Tainted Horseplay*)
- 1990 Tomas Garrigue Masaryk a Liberator
- 1991 My Citizens of Prague Understand Me
- 1992 Dědictví aneb urvahošigitntag (*The Inheritance or Fuckoff guysgoodbye*)
- 1998 Trap, Trap, Little Trap
- 2000 Flights and Falls
- 2001 Exile from Paradise
- 2005 Patrani po Ester
- 2006 Hezké chvíle bez záruky (*Pleasant Memories*)

NEXT MONTH'S FILM IS
THE KILLERS (Robert Siodmak, US 1946)
Monday 15 February

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