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Innocent Sorcerers

Andrzej Wajda, Poland 1960

Polish title: *Niewinni czarodzieje*

Written by Jerzy Andrzejewski and
Jerzy Skolimowski

Tadeusz Łomnicki.....Bazyli
Krystyna Stypułkowska..... Pelagia
Zbigniew Cybulski.....Edmund
Wanda Koczeska.....Mirka
Krzysztof Komeda..... Himself
Roman Polański.....Dudzio
Sława Przybylska.....Singer
Jerzy Skolimowski..... Boxer
Kalina Jędrusik..... Journalist

Music by.....Krzysztof Komeda
Cinematography

...Krzysztof Winiewicz

Editor.....Wiesława Osocka

Distributed byKADR

Release date: 17 December 1960

Running time: 87 minutes

Andrzej Wajda established himself as a central figure of the Polish Film School with his acclaimed War Trilogy—*A Generation* (1955), *Kanał* (1957) and *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958). *Innocent Sorcerers* (1960) marked a departure from the pathos of tragic young Poles embroiled in WW2 to the carefree defiance of post-war youth culture against the backdrop of communism.



The film follows Bazyli (Tadeusz Łomnicki), a young, bleached blonde sports doctor who lives in a sparse studio flat and plays drums into the early hours at a local jazz den. He mingles with his cohort, a bunch of carefree, scooter-riding mods, as they meander around the Bohemian milieu of late 1950s Warsaw, and dismisses the advances of young women like journalist Kalina Jędrusik. He links up

with Edmund (Zbigniew Cybulski) who tries in vain to pull one of his hipster pal's female admirers. Instead, it is Bazyli who ends up in his pad with the coquettish Pelagia (Krystyna Stypułkowska). The pair tease each other, play strip poker but don't go all the way. In the end, nothing happens. The refusal of abandonment reveals a sense of indolence and underlying fear.

The shooting of *Innocent Sorcerers* coincided with that of Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1960), though whilst the New Wave label never extended to the Polish Film School, Wajda's film nonetheless captures the aesthetic expression of the zeitgeist. Bazyli has the same nonchalant, chain-smoking cool as Michel — Jean-Paul Belmondo's petty miscreant — while Stypułkowska sports a Jean Seberg-esque crop. Whereas Godard's film was hailed internationally as a defining moment, Wajda had to contend with both the communist regime's censors and the backlash from the Catholic church, which makes the filmic nuances distinctly subtle. The film is peppered with self-references, from the original film poster in the opening shot to a radio host announcing, 'the new song from the film *Innocent Sorcerers*, sung by Sława Przybylska'. Real jazz musicians Jan Zylber, Andrzej Trzaskowski, and notably Krzysztof Komeda, cameo in the background. At one point Bazyl even speaks directly to camera. Indeed, the film's title itself nods to Adam Mickiewicz's 19th Century metaphysical poem *Forefathers Eve*, which tells of 'innocent sorcerers... imprisoned against their will,' grappling with the angst of love, death and subordination to social rule.

Yet, despite its political neutrality, Wajda himself commented later, with some irony, on how 'the authorities of the (Wladyslaw) Gomulka era held quite a different opinion on the innocent subject of a young doctor who is fond of nylon socks and quality cigarettes, owns a taperecorder whereon he records his conversations

with girlfriends, and has but a single passion: playing percussion in Krzysztof Komeda's jazz band. Communist ideologues and educators found the subject more troublesome than the Home Army or the Warsaw Uprising."

The film triumphs through the captivating performances of its lead cast: a personnel made up of some of Poland's finest young guns of the day. Bazyli's friend Edmund is played by Polish superstar, Zbigniew Cybulski — the tinted lens-wearing "cursed soldier" Maciek in *Ashes and Diamonds*, while Krystyna Stypułkowska was a chance find as the pixie-ish female lead, Pelagia. Responding to a call for auditions, though with little acting experience, Wajda was so impressed that he hired her after two sessions. Upon the film's release, Polish youth magazines nominated her as their favourite actress of the year. Jerzy Skolimowski plays a boxer — Wajda and author Jerzy Andrzejewski, being somewhat older than the main pack, hired the twenty-something to tweak the script for youth appeal. And then there is the almost cameo-like, on-screen introduction to Roman Polański and pianist-composer Krzysztof Komeda—with the young director cast as the double-bass-playing Dudzio in Komeda's jazz outfit. Having already worked together on Polański's non-dialogue short *Two Men and a Wardrobe* (1958), their ongoing collaboration would soon blossom with the brilliant *Knife in the Water* (1962). *Innocent Sorcerers* remains a vibrant and alluring satire on the existentialism and alienation of youth culture.



Andrzej Wajda

Born: 6 March 1926, Suwałki, Poland

Died: 9 October 2016, Warsaw, Poland



You always stress the importance of the Polish school of filmmaking in the creation of our cinematography. You made films in tough post-war conditions. Where did the success of the Polish school come from?

We were young, and our cinema was young. We had a story to tell, our war experiences. We wanted not only the Poles, who had experienced it all themselves, but also the world to see it in our films. And to put them across, one needs to look for the proper film language. A European language of cinema, not the language cinema uses to communicate with a domestic audience.

At that time, the new post-war European cinema started to come into being: Italian neorealism. That was the direction we identified the most with. We — Polish filmmakers — wanted to present ourselves to the world. But the Polish language is unknown abroad and the dialogues uttered by the actors couldn't fulfil this expectation, especially because the words were the main focus of the censorship. So we thought that films with strong images would gain more interest abroad and appeal more to foreign audiences.

*When I was in Japan, I found out how much *Kanał* and *Ashes and Diamonds* resonated with the Japanese youth. I've also had similar experiences with audiences in other countries. But it wasn't just me, also Andrzej Munk, Jerzy Kawalerowicz, Tadeusz Konwicki — the whole group who created the Polish Film School at that time.*

Andrzej Wajda interviewed by Joanna Poros, PAP Culture.pl #film

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