

Berlin Fest Reviews

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Tret i Sarkan

ty strong terms in regard to industrial misery in a socialist society.

Indeed, up until only a few years ago, sociocritical themes of this sort were rarities in E. European cinema. Now that a children's film in Czechoslovakia has taken such a progressive stand on a common ecological problem is a sure sign of better things to come in Czech and Slovak film circles.

Credits in general are a solid plus, particularly kid thrills and musical score.—Holl.

Unternehmen Geigenkasten (Operation Violin Case) (EAST GERMAN-COLOR)

A DEFA Film production. "Johannisthal" group, East Berlin; world rights; DEFA Aussenhandel, East Berlin. Directed by Gunter Friedrich. Screenplay, Anne Gossens; camera (color), Günter Heimann; editor, Vera Norwark; sets, Marlene Willmann; music, Bernd Menzel; production manager, Siegfried Kabitzke. Reviewed at Berlin Film Fest (Children's Fest), Feb. 15, 1986. Running time: 85 MINS.

With: Alexander Heidenreich (Ole), Dirk Bartsch (Andreas), Peggy Steiner (Marie), Matthias Krohse (Jens), Swetlana Schönfeld (Ole's mother), Gerd Grasse (Ole's father), Peter Bause (Lt. Vogel), Fred Delmare (Grandpa Tönchen), Andreas Schumann (Herr Neumann), Gerd Hartmut Schreier (Herr Frank).

Berlin — One of the delightfully amusing kidpics at the Berlinale, Gunter Friedrich's "Operation Violin Case" has a pair of fun-raising youngsters playing Sherlock Holmes in a small provincial town. Ole is always scheming up something. His attempt to fly with a Leonardo da Vinci contraption gets him into the air on a windy day off a steep hill — but the resulting crash puts him in a hospital for a spell. There he watches an older Holmes film on tv and hits upon the idea to become a detective.

The summer vacation now over, the kids in school make fun of the inventive youngster. Only his friend Andreas goes along with the new scheme, taking on the role of Dr. Watson. The rest is finding the right costumes; they pretend to be interested in taking violin lessons to get their hands on an empty violin case, as shown in the film. While out scouting for a case to solve, they stumble on a real burglary.

Helmer Friedrich has packed his kidpic with witty jokes, both visual and verbal. The added note that crooks are running around in socialist society, just as in the capitalist countries, is worth reflecting on as well.—Holl.

El Rigor Del Destino (Hardships Of Destiny) (ARGENTINE-COLOR)

A Gerardo Vallejo production. Produced, written and directed by Vallejo. Camera (color), Yito Blanc; editor, Luis Mutti; sound, Miguel Babunji; sets, Abel Facello; costumes, Beatriz di Benedetto. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (forum), Feb. 24, 1986. Running time: 100 MINS.

With: Carlos Carella, Alejandro Copley, Lenor Manso, Ana Maria Picchio, Victor Laplace, Alberto Benegas.

Berlin — Set in Tucuman, a province in northern Argentina, "Hardships Of Destiny" is a film about three generations of a family who live through the tumultuous period of the last 10 years. It opens in 1976 as an old farmer, living in an isolated country house, is brought the news that his son is dead and his daughter-in-law and beloved grandson have left for Spain.

Seven years later, with the coun-

try returning to normal, they return home and the old man is reunited with the little boy, who worships him. Pic's main concerns are the relationship between these two, the oldster conveying to the lad his homespun philosophies about life and also explaining what happened to his father. The father, we discover, is not the paragon we might have expected, but a rather unsavory drunk and womanizer.

From its title, viewers might expect a more rugged film than this actually is. It's more of a hymn to the Tucuman people who survived the bad years and are now looking forward, with the rest of the country, to a brighter future. Technically pic is fine in every department.—Strat.

Erzi De Da Wanou (The Sandwich Man) (TAIWANESE-COLOR)

A Sunny Overseas Corp. production. Produced by Ming Chi. Directed by Hou Shao-Shen, Jen Wan, Jong Cheung-Tsang. Screenplay, Wu Nien-Chun, from stories by Hwan Tzen-Ming; production supervisor, Wu Chung Ling. No further credits supplied. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (market), Feb. 22, 1986. Running time: 102 MINS.

With: Chen Bo Jeng, Yang Li-Ying, Jo Shen-Li, Chiang Sha, King Ding, Chan Chi.

Berlin — Now that international interest in Taiwanese cinema has been aroused by such films as Edward Yang's "Taipei Story" and Hou Shao-Shen's "Time To Live And Time To Die" (unspooled in the Berlin Forum), some of the earlier films of this new wave are being unveiled including the 1983 three-part pic "The Sandwich Man." Hou Shao-Shen directed the first part only, but this apprentice work already shows a confident talent.

His episode is "Son's Big Doll" and is set in 1962. Long out of work, a man manages to get a job dressed as a clown promoting the films at the local cinema. His peculiar get-up makes him a laughing stock and shames some of his relatives. Worse, his baby son only recognizes his father when he's in clown makeup. To the child, he's a "big doll." It's a touching, beautifully handled featurette.

Part 2, "Vicky's Hat," directed by Jen Wan, takes place in 1964 and deals with two friends selling Japanese-made pressure cookers in small towns. One is strangely attracted to a schoolgirl who always wears a hat to hide a disfiguring scar, while the other, married with a pregnant wife, dies when a pressure cooker explodes during an outdoor demonstration. It's a grim, but effective, centerpiece.

"A Taste Of Apples," directed by Jong Cheung-Tsang, and set in 1969, has a cyclist on his way to work hit by a car driven by an American officer. Ironically his misfortune brings to his family more money and food than they ever had before including, for the first time, apples.

All three stories deal with the plight of poor people trying to get by and, to a degree, with foreign influences on Taiwanese society. In the first story, the hero gets the idea for the clown makeup from a Japanese magazine, and the outside influences on stories two and three are obvious.

Mandarin-track pic would be an integral part of any future programming by archives or festivals on Taiwanese cinema, but tv exposure also indicated in certain countries.—Strat.

Paris Minuit (Paris Midnight) (FRENCH-COLOR)

A Mai production. Produced by Jean-Pierre Malignon. Associate producer, Olivier Donnet. Directed by Frédéric Andrei. Screenplay, Philippe Malignon. Andrei, camera (Fujicolor). Bertrand Chatty; editor, Dominique Roy; music, Christophe Donnet; sound, Eric Vaucher; production manager, Jacques Perrier; assistant director, Jean-Marie David; sets, François Carton. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (market), Feb. 23, 1986. Running time: 94 MINS.

Serge Cartan Frédéric Andrei Marie Isabelle Texier Lt. Belland Gabriel Cattand Rougier Philippe Malignon Leproux Michel Creton Carmona Jean-Pierre Malignon Martin Alain Sachs Alexis Jean-Paul Comart Roubaud Jerome Nobeccor The Tramp GINETTE Garcin Frederique Isabelle Willer

Berlin — Frédéric Andrei, the young actor who scored in the lead role in "Diva" and since has made a trio of short films, turns feature director with this offbeat crime pic. "Paris Midnight" starts out like any other French cop film (armed bandits rob a fashionable jewelry store in mid-August; three are killed; two, slightly wounded, escape) but then goes off in some intriguingly odd directions. Result is quite a lot of fun. It opens in France mid-April.

The couple who get away, played by the director himself and newcomer Isabelle Texier, are lovers. They decide to split up, but keep in touch via a series of coded messages broadcast by radio stations. Using picture postcards which they leave in strategic positions, they move around the famous monuments of Paris by night, always a step or two ahead of the police.

The cop in charge of the case (Gabriel Cattand) latches on to the postcards — all of which carry a line from a poem by Apollinaire — and the broadcast messages, but can never work out where the young outlaws will rendezvous next.

Matters are complicated by the fact that Andrei's sister is a member of a large bike gang roaming the streets, and that his mother, on hearing of her son's trouble, is rushed to a hospital.

Credit Andrei for injecting a few new ideas into a tired genre. He and Texier are properly tough yet vulnerable, while the cops are generally seen as being a bit thick. Sharp lensing by Bertrand Chatty on famed locations all over the city almost all shot at night, is an added plus.—Strat.

Los Insomnes (The Insomniacs) (ARGENTINE-COLOR)

A Ferlain S.A. production, Buenos Aires. Directed by Carlos Orgambide. Screenplay, Beatriz Guido, Bernardo Raitman, Orgambide based on story by Guido; camera (color); Eduardo Legabia, Silvart; editor, Eduardo López; music, Luis Maria Serra; sets, Leandro Rogues; sound, Sergio Stavropoulos. Reviewed at the Delphi Palace, Berlin Film Fest (forum), Feb. 21, 1986. Running time: 80 MINS.

With: Elsa Berenguer, Betiana Blum, Carlos Leyrado, Selva Aleman, Mirra Busneli, Roberto Carnaghi, Alberto Fernández de Roso, Marta Gam, Marcos Zucker, Antonio Grinamo, Hugo Midon, Boy Olmi.

Berlin — Obviously intended as an allegory of pre-Alfonso Argentina, "The Insomniacs" is so excessively concerned with the meaning behind the lines, that it doesn't care whether the lines themselves make any sense at all.

The entire story takes place in one building, populated by a crowd which is supposed to reflect everything that is wrong with Argentine society. They range from the janitor, on the ground floor, who pretends to have been once a successful

cabaret star and still lives on the past glories of the old continent, in memories of Gardel and stories about holidays in Cannes, to the top floor, in which a handsome youth is tied to a bed and is tortured by a businessman type and his henchman — a transvestite, a tough lady with sexual hangups and a moron.

Everyone is busily hustling for himself, and all are delighted to ignore anything that might disturb their miserable existence. Only the children of the house, running up and down the stairs day and night (the insomniacs of the title) are conscious of what is going on and try to warn the grownups of the horrors under their own noses, but to no avail.

Carlos Orgambide doesn't even try to tell a real story here. He goes on repeating his statements and his warnings from different angles, often resorting to quick montage of short excerpts from sequences already seen. Heavy makeup and overdress suggest the utter decadence of the country, in a cabaret style calling to mind Germany in the '20s. References are made to Argentina's dependence on American money, on the machismo that rules the social conventions, on the perversity of murderers who like cats but kill people, and to top it all, some characters have significant names such as Pandora.

The style itself is rather old-fashioned and the dramatic material insufficient. Technical credits are satisfactory.—Edna.

Mala Noche (Bad Night) (U.S.-B&W)

A Northern Film Co. production. Produced, written and directed by Gus Van Sant, from the novella by Walt Curtis. Camera (b&w), John Campbell; editor, Gus Van Sant; music, Creighton Lindsay; sound, Pat Baum. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival, Atelier (panorama), Feb. 24, 1986. Running time: 75 MINS.

Walt Curtis Tim Streeter Johnny Doug Cooyate Roberto Pepper Ray Monge

Berlin — A low-budget adaptation of an autobiographical novella, "Mala Noche" seems to be aiming for the same audience as "Stranger Than Paradise" via its offhand humor, studied yet vaguely realistic direction and throwaway acting. The Jim Jarmusch film was much more successful, but this debut by Gus Van Sant shows lots of promise and is basically a likeable effort.

Central character is Walt, who works in a small store in Portland, Ore., and lives with his understanding sister. Walt is gay, and develops an almost uncontrollable lust for a young Mexican drifter, one of many illegal immigrants. Johnny, the Mexican, agrees to come to Walt's home for dinner, but insists on bringing his friend Roberto along. Johnny prefers Walt's sister to Walt, and Walt has to settle for Roberto as a lover instead of the object of his desires.

Later Roberto is killed in a fracas with the police, and Johnny disappears. Film ends abruptly as the sister decides to go to Anchorage to work in a strip club and Walt finally sees Johnny again on a street corner.

Shot in very high contrast black and white, with lots of oppressive shadows, pic looks good on the big screen, but will probably suffer when transferred to video. Dialog is peppered with four-letter words and an almost Henry Miller-ish use of rough language. It all rings true, and the yearning is there, plus the plight of these oppressed young men from south of the border who try to stay alive while on the run in the inhospitable northwest.—Strat.

Vladimir Horowitz, The Last Romantic (U.S.-DOCU-COLOR)

A Peter Gelb production. Directed by David Maysles and Albert Maysles. Features Vladimir Horowitz, Wanda Toscanini Horowitz. Camera (color), Albert and David Maysles, Don Lenzer; editor, Deborah Pederson, Patricia Jaffe; music, Jack Pfeiffer; sound, Michael Shoskes. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (forum), Feb. 24, 1986. Running time: 87 MINS.

Berlin — "Vladimir Horowitz, The Last Romantic" is a touching portrait of one of the greatest pianists of this century in his old age. The Russian-born master's New York apartment on the Upper East Side was converted into a sound studio and lensed live with no pre-recorded script. Between sessions at the keyboard, beginning with a Busoni transcription of a Bach chorale, Horowitz and wife Wanda, daughter of the last conductor Arturo Toscanini, keep up a relaxed and often humorous conversation. Despite his advanced age, Horowitz shows a lively wit, mugging and clowning at the Steinway before and after serious playing.

Much of the 87 minutes is taken up in performances of Mozart, Schubert, Chopin, Liszt, Rachmaninoff and Scriabin, for whom Horowitz played when he was 10. Between times, the master stretches out on the sofa and reminisces about the greats he has known in a career extending well over 60 years.

He describes Rachmaninoff as "My best friend, composer, conductor and pianist, first class all." As Horowitz plays, the camera gives closeups of his hands and top shots in virtuoso passages.

Wanda Horowitz recounts their courtship and brings out a family album with a picture of Vladimir when he was 24 with the remark, "Doesn't he look like Chopin?" To his wife's feigned annoyance, Horowitz strums a few bars of his famed arrangement of "Stars And Stripes Forever," a bravura piece reserved for encores. After a transcendental performance of Chopin's B-minor scherzo, in a real understatement Horowitz quips, "Good for an old man."

The docu gives an intimate glimpse of piano playing in the grand manner, and is very spontaneous. It's a natural for the art circuits, public television, and video, with offshore prospects bullish.—Kind.

Tras El Cristal (In A Glass Cage) (SPANISH-COLOR)

A TEM Productores Asociados production. Produced by Teresa Enrich. Written and directed by Agustin Villaronga. Camera (color), Jaime Peracaula; music, Javier Navarrete; editor, Raul Roman; art director, Cas Candini. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival, Atelier (panorama), Feb. 23, 1986. Running time: 112 MINS.

Klaus Gunter Meister Angelo David Sant Griselda Marisa Paredes Rena Gisela Echevarria Maid Inma de Colmenar

Also with: Josue Gausch, Alberto Mazzano, Ricard Carcelero, David Caspienet.

Berlin — A horrifying film about a sexual deviant who gets his kicks torturing and killing young boys, "In A Glass Cage" is, perversely, a well-made and probably seriously intended pic. Its very evident qualities only add to its power to disturb and shock.

Presumably set in the '50s, pic opens with a scene in which a middle-aged man is beating a naked boy who's hanging from the ceiling by a rope attached to his wrists. The man (Gunter Meister) kisses the child on the lips before delivering (Continued on page 22)