



GIORNATE
degli
AUTORI
VENICE DAYS

TORONTO
INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
OFFICIAL SELECTION
2008

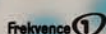
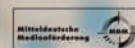


A film by Bohdan Sláma

A Country Teacher

Pavel Liška Zuzana Bydžovská Ladislav Šedivý

© Negativ, s.r.o., Pallas Film GmbH, Česká televize, Why Not Productions, 2008
www.venkovskyucitel.cz





TORONTO
INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
OFFICIAL SELECTION
2008

A Country Teacher

A film by Bohdan Sláma

INTERNATIONAL PRESS THE PR CONTACT

festival@theprcontact.com

Phil Symes TEL 39 346 336 3406

Ronaldo Mourao TEL +39 346 336 3407

WORLD SALES wild bunch

Vincent Maraval TEL +33 6 11 91 23 93 E vmaraval@wildbunch.eu

Gaël Nouaille TEL +33 6 21 23 04 72 E gnouaille@wildbunch.eu

Carole Baraton / Laurent Baudens TEL +33 6 70 79 05 17 E lbaudens@wildbunch.eu

Silvia Simonutti TEL +33 6 20 74 95 08 E ssimonutti@wildbunch.eu

PARIS OFFICE 99 Rue de la Verrerie - 75004 Paris - France

TEL +33 1 53 01 50 30 FAX +33 1 53 01 50 49

avicente@wildbunch.eu

PLEASE NOTE: High definition images can be downloaded from the 'press' section of
<http://www.wildbunch.biz>

SYNOPSIS

A gifted and well-qualified young teacher takes a job teaching natural sciences at a grammar school in the country.

Here he makes the acquaintance of a woman and her troubled 17-year-old son. The teacher has no romantic interest in the woman but they quickly form a strong friendship, each recognizing the other's uncertainties, hopes and longing for love.

When the teacher's ex-boyfriend comes to visit from the city, he quickly realizes that nobody in the village knows that the teacher is gay and harbors a secret affection for the teenage boy. His jealous actions set in motion a series of events that will test the inner strength and compassion of the teacher, the woman and her son to breaking point.

A beautifully shot, powerfully acted, profoundly moving story of desire, responsibility, forgiveness and the need to belong, from the internationally-acclaimed director of SOMETHING LIKE HAPPINESS and WILD BEES.

CAST

<i>Teacher</i>	Pavel Liška
<i>Marie</i>	Zuzana Bydžovská
<i>Boy</i>	Ladislav Šedivý
<i>Boyfriend</i>	Marek Daniel
<i>Popsie</i>	Tereza Voříšková
<i>School Principal</i>	Miloš Černoušek
<i>Mother</i>	Zuzana Kronerová
<i>Father</i>	Miroslav Krobot
<i>Old Lady</i>	Zdena Kučerová
<i>Jožin</i>	Miloslav Vokatý
<i>Jarda</i>	Jaroslav Viček
<i>Brothers</i>	František Prošek Josef Prošek
<i>Waitress</i>	Anna Vladyková
<i>Bartender</i>	Pavel Vladyka

CREW

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY	Bohdan Sláma
PRODUCERS	Pavel Strnad Petr Oukropec Karl Baumgartner Thanassis Karathanos
DP	Divis Marek
PRODUCTION DESIGNERS	Václav Novák Petr Pištěk
COSTUME DESIGNER	Zuzana Krejzková
MAKEUP ARTIST	Veronika Riehs
ORIGINAL MUSIC	Vladimír Godár
SOUND MIXER	Stephan Konken
SOUND DESIGNER	Jan Čeněk
EDITOR	Jan Daňhel
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Pavel Čechák
STILLS PHOTOGRAPHER	Martin Špelda

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

We tried to shoot a film about intimate, personal things, the kind of things that are similar everywhere, wherever people live. Looking for love is a never-ending battle which defines and forms men, an essence within every story, and unrequited love hurts the same everywhere, whatever your geographical location. In this story, there are three main characters, each of whom has a fissure in his or her life, a fissure to do with love. Marie is in love with the teacher, the teacher is in love with her son who, in his turn, is being dumped by his first love. In such a chain of unrequited love our characters don't have a chance to find any kind of fulfillment, and it is this they must set right. Love takes many forms, as many as there are people, and every relationship between two individuals has absolute value in itself. Recognizing this value is difficult because it makes us accept things we don't always understand, and forgive even when we feel betrayed. Our characters may not find romantic love per se, but they can find a deeper friendship and they can grow from this. If someone is to mature, he must be capable of forgiving. The ability to forgive is one of man's greatest faculties. The ability to forgive restores faith in the meaning of life.

– Bohdan Sláma

BOHDAN SLÁMA

DIRECTOR / WRITER

Born in 1967 in Opava, Czech Republic, he studied film directing at Charles University's film school FAMU. His student film, GARDEN OF PARADISE, won a number of prizes at student film festivals and his graduate film, WHITE ACACIAS, despite its short running time, was presented theatrically within the Czech Republic. His debut feature, WILD BEES, won a Golden Tiger upon its international premiere in Rotterdam in 2002. His follow-up feature, SOMETHING LIKE HAPPINESS, premiered internationally in 2005 at the Donostia San Sebastian, winning both the Main Prize and Best Actress Award, and has been sold worldwide.

FILMOGRAPHY

A COUNTRY TEACHER - 2008

SOMETHING LIKE HAPPINESS - 2005

WILD BEES - 2001

INTERVIEW WITH BOHDAN SLÁMA

A COUNTRY TEACHER came about as a co-production between Czech production company Negativ, Pallas Film GmbH from Germany, the French firm Why Not Productions, and the Paris-based international sales company Wild Bunch. What was it like to have so many partners?

I'm grateful for our international partners. Without them, the film couldn't have been made. It also gives you more confidence. It reinforces the belief that our film will find an international audience.

The film is full of long takes which concentrate on the characters and their environment.

For me, this is the most natural method of filming. I have a deadly fear of cutting in the middle of a scene. In an uninterrupted shot, you get a huge accumulation of emotion and energy from the situation, and this is what really works for me. Of course, that means every shot is a battle because every little mistake wastes everyone's efforts. Such a method requires amazing timing on the set. The whole crew and cast need to concentrate for the entire scene. Often, it takes you to the brink of what's possible, which can be uncomfortable, but the satisfaction is incredible when that shot goes off just right.

Did you write with particular actors in mind?

I have been in love with Zuzana Bydžovská for a long time and have wanted to work with her. Her character, Marie, is a strong person who holds the story together. I often thought of Zuzana when I was writing and needed inspiration, secretly drawing strength from her in order to continue writing. As for Liška, we worked together on my previous two features. I know that his acting potential is huge but I was surprised by the fact that during rehearsals he interpreted his role in a very different way than he has done before. For the entire shooting period he was absolutely concentrated, he was completely absorbed by his role and gave the character the truth and depth that I badly wanted to have.

As director, which scene was most difficult for you?

There's a scene in which the teacher can't resist his longing, he breaks a taboo and attempts to have sexual contact with the teenage boy, who's asleep at the time. I came to realize that the film would stand or fall depending on the effectiveness of this scene. If done badly, the whole film would be bad and nothing could have saved it. When we shot the scene I felt a great sense of relief because I could see that it was working, that it was convincing, tender and cruel at the same time.

PAVEL LIŠKA

THE TEACHER

Born 29 January 1971, he studied at the Janacek Academy of Musical Arts; during his studies he became a member of the HaDivadla Theater. Presently he is a member of the repertory company of Prague's Na Zabrli Theater. His film career began in 1999 when director Sasa Gedeon cast him in the lead role in RETURN OF THE IDIOT (Navrat idiota). He has worked with director Bohdan Sláma on all of his features.

FILMOGRAPHY

A COUNTRY TEACHER - 2008
THE VISITOR - 2008
LUNACY - 2005
SOMETHING LIKE HAPPINESS - 2005
UP AND DOWN - 2004
SMART FILIP - 2004
BORED IN BRNO - 2003
PUPENDO - 2003
THE DEVIL KNOWS WHY - 2003
WILD BEES - 2001
EXPULSION FROM PARADISE - 2001
RETURN OF THE IDIOT - 1999

INTERVIEW WITH PAVEL LIŠKA

To what extent before shooting did you and the director discuss your part?

It's not a written rule, but when working with Bohdan it's a matter of fact – in fact it's a necessity – to analyze both the characters and the entire story well ahead of time. We start approaching the material as he writes the film. There are many intimate and gentle elements, seemingly composed of trifles which, at first glance, may seem undramatic, but really underpin the whole story. Maybe that's why the effect of Bohdan's films is so sincere. They're made up of ordinary things, such things as people's lives are made up of. As for the role of the teacher, we spoke about it for probably a year, but the process was a bit different from our work on the previous film, SOMETHING LIKE HAPPINESS, where we were in discussion from the concept phase. This time, Bohdan was already much further along. I was handed a first draft of the script. It was Bohdan's child and I really had to battle it out with him before he let me read it. I remember this as a very sensitive period after which we began to work on the story together. For me it wasn't just my character that was important but the whole story. I was growing into every aspect of my character, I had to understand him.

In this love story, you are involved in a rather original erotic scene which plays out in a single shot.

I don't know if it's original, but it was a very important scene for me, the key to my whole approach, not only to the character but to the story as well. And it really didn't matter to me if I shot that scene with a man or a woman. Acting is truly a perverse occupation. You live through strange fates, strange plights which become a daily part of you. You cry, you smile craftily, you suffer like an animal, you murder, you fart... and also, often, you love. And sometimes you love things which, in real life, you don't. And yet you find a way to approach them, to love them. I think that I know how a man can love another man. The same as a man loves a woman.

You've worked with Bohdan on his first film WILD BEES and then on his second, SOMETHING LIKE HAPPINESS, and now on his third, A COUNTRY TEACHER. What do you think of his films?

They're honest. For me, all Bohdan's films are precious in that, at the end of the journey in each of them, there is light, a deeper meaning, even if, at first glance, it doesn't look that way. In A COUNTRY TEACHER I felt this most distinctly and deeply. This film is very much about forgiveness. It's a journey not just into these characters and their lives, but into oneself as well. Maybe this all sounds banal and maybe it really is, but it's an honest journey, very honest. And it's this kind of honesty that makes me like Bohdan so much as a director and as a person.

MAREK DANIEL

BOYFRIEND

Born 1971, he studied at JAMU, the acting academy in Brno, the Czech Republic's second largest city and was, for 13 years, a member of the HaDivadlo theater's repertory company there. He also performed at other theaters in Brno and Prague, and has appeared in a number of local television series. He made his feature film debut in Jan Sverak's international hit KOLYA.

FILMOGRAPHY

A COUNTRY TEACHER - 2008
SOMETHING LIKE HAPPINESS - 2005
OVER AND OVER! - 2005
UP AND DOWN - 2004
FATHERLAND - A HUNTER'S DIARY - 2004
BORED IN BRNO - 2003
EXPULSION FROM PARADISE - 2001
PARALLEL WORLDS - 2001
WILD BEES - 2001
KOLYA - 1996

INTERVIEW WITH MAREK DANIEL

In the film, you play the ex-boyfriend of the main character. How did you approach playing a gay character?

A number of my close friends are homosexual so I have been able to talk with them and to hang out with them. I have been able to observe all kinds of attitudes and actions. It was very important for me not to generalize by mimicking but to find inspiration for an original individual because all of us are original, regardless of sexual orientation. At the same time, I must admit it was a bit comical to get used to Pavel Liška as my boyfriend because we've known each other for so many years. In rehearsals we giggled a bit, but by the time shooting started we were very comfortable. I'm glad I tried to play a character different from the ones I've played before. It was interesting.

What do you like most about working with director Bohdan Sláma?

I enjoy everything, but one of the best parts I guess is how Bohdan is able to combine actors with non-actors. Some people think that, if a non-actor enters the scene the wrong way or does something he shouldn't, the process is going to be more difficult. I find it much more enjoyable. And with Bohdan's films, I have the additional joy of seeing how smooth and natural the final product is.

ZUZANA BYDŽOVSKÁ

MARIE

Born 1961, she made her professional acting debut at the age of 11. She studied at the State Conservatory in Prague and very early on was one of the most sought-after television actresses. However, she always had a preference for theater. She performed for ten years at the Na Zbradli Theater and then for another ten years at the National Theater, before returning to Na Zbradli where she still performs to this day.

FILMOGRAPHY

A COUNTRY TEACHER - 2008
THE CAN - 2007
WRONG SIDE UP - 2005
AN ARK FOR VOJTU - 2000
BOUQUET - 2000
BUTTONERS - 1997
THE DANCE MASTER - 1995
HELMADOE - 1994

INTERVIEW WITH ZUZANA BYDŽOVSKÁ

Bohdan Sláma has said that he wanted to work with you for a long time and that he wrote the role of Marie for you.

I think I was the last to know that I was so esteemed by Bohdan, that he had this idea of writing a role for me. Right to the end, Pavel Liška and Bohdan acted like a couple of conspirators. Pavel would drop by the theater while I'd be rehearsing and say, "Bohdan says hi"... It was all very cryptic. I first met Bohdan more than ten years ago when I acted in his graduate film, WHITE ACACIAS.

What kind of feeling did you have when you first read the screenplay?

For me, it was first of all a film about forgiveness. At Bohdan's house in the country, we probed the script as if we were in a laboratory. I must say, I pressed Bohdan hard to flesh out his ideas. I very much wanted to understand what he thought, and from that find a way to play Maria.

What was the most difficult thing during the shooting?

There was always something difficult. Of them all, though, maybe it was that it was amazingly hot but, no matter what, you had to stay cool. When you see the final product, you don't think about those difficulties. We shot the scenes on the well over the course of two months but when you watch it, it all matches so beautifully. I was amazed by that. And that's Bohdan, his way of working, how perfectly he sees it all.