

DEFIANCE AND COMPASSION: THE FILMS OF VĚRA CHYTILOVÁ



Tuesday 27 January 2015, London

The late great avant-garde Czech film director **Věra Chytilová** will be celebrated with a season of films at **BFI Southbank** from **1 – 17 March 2015**, marking a year since her death in March 2014. Aside from her experimental farce *Daisies* (1966), Chytilová's work is relatively unknown in the UK and this season offers audiences a rare chance to celebrate the life and work of a true original and a pioneer of Czech cinema.

Chytilová's early *cinéma-vérité*-style films *A Bagful of Fleas* (1962) and *Ceiling* (1962) introduced two main themes demonstrated across her almost 40 year career; the feminine point of view in a world dominated by men and a strong critique of contemporary society. A pioneer of women's cinema, Chytilová thought it natural to use her female perspective and experience, although she didn't see herself as a feminist. Never one to hesitate, she played on stereotypes associated with women, exploiting the fear of feminine hysterics and famously threatening to jump out of the window in front of state officials when she struggled to get her unorthodox films financed or released. Chytilová's best known film *Daisies* (1966), in which two teenage girls embark on a series of destructive pranks, so shocked the Czechoslovak government that it withheld its release for a whole year.

Strong social criticism and experimental form, together with Chytilová's active criticism of the Soviet occupation led to a ban from studios for six years. Choosing to stay in Czechoslovakia, preferring to 'battle the system from within its confines', she returned to work in 1976 after making a personal appeal to the Czechoslovak president Gustáv Husák, who gave her the green light to make *The Apple Game* (1976). This film was shown only sporadically, a fate similar to her social satire attacking the communist bureaucracy *Prefab Story* (1979) and further films such as *The Very Late Afternoon of a Faun* (1983) and *The Jester and the Queen* (1987). After the fall of Communism, Chytilová continued to uphold her strong moral stance. In her feminist comedy *Traps*, (1998), a prize-winner at the Venice Film Festival, she satirised the excesses of the new capitalism, while *Flights and Falls* (2000) illustrated her strong interest in the documentary form.

This season will open with a panel discussion exploring Chytilová's work, from her avant-garde early career to her role in women's cinema. The panel will include the head of the Czech National Film

Archive **Michal Bregant**, author and critic **Peter Hames** and critic **Carmen Gray**. The season will be complemented by a free Atrium exhibition *The Fruit of Paradise*, in which audiences can explore Chytilová's working process, as illustrated by her most stylised work, the film 'opera' *The Fruit of Paradise* (1969). This special display reveals the individual layers of the final film via trial prints and photographs which were newly discovered in the estate of Chytilová's husband, cameraman Jaroslav Kučera.



Season curated by Renata Clark, Czech Centre London

– ENDS –

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

SEASON LISTINGS:

The Journey Cesta

+ discussion with Michal Bregant, Director of the Czech NFA, and author and critic Peter Hames

Czech Republic 2004. Dir Jasmina Blažević. With Věra Chytilová. 58min. EST

In an intriguing mix of home movies, interviews and film clips, Jasmina Blažević records the life and views of Věra Chytilová – a director who explored the boundaries of film and once declared that if you don't take risks, you don't discover anything. Followed by an illustrated discussion of Chytilová's films which will consider her relationship to women's cinema, the avant-garde, the Czechoslovak New Wave, and her struggles with censorship, both political and commercial.

TUE 3 MAR 18:10 NFT3

Ceiling Strop

Czechoslovakia, 1961. Dir Věra Chytilová. With Marta Kaňovská, Julián Chytil, Josef Abrhám. 43min. EST

Chytilová first attracted international attention with these medium-length student films. The mixture of formalism and cinema vérité in Ceiling exposes the inner life of a fashion model in a manner that sometimes recalls Antonioni.

+ A Bagful of Fleas Pytel blech

Czechoslovakia 1962. Dir Věra Chytilová. With Helga Čočková. 42min. EST

Described as 'fictionalised documentary' and 'acted reportage', A Bagful of Fleas uses non-actors to portray girls' lives in the cotton mills of Náchod. Like Ceiling, its break with both genre and ideology charted a new path for Czechoslovak and Eastern European cinema.

SUN 1 MAR 18:30 NFT2

WED 4 MAR 20:50 NFT2

Something Different O něčem jiném

Czechoslovakia 1963. Dir Věra Chytilová. With Eva Bosáková, Věra Uzelacová, Josef Langmiller, Jiří Kodet. 82min. EST

In her first feature, Chytilová tells the parallel stories of a woman gymnast, Eva Bosáková (filmed as documentary), and an ordinary housewife (filmed as fiction). The two strands never meet but provide a progressive comment on each other and the differing roles of the women. An absorbing and important work for women's cinema, it also features striking camerawork from Jan Čuřík.

+ The World Cafeteria Automat svět

Czechoslovakia 1965. Dir Věra Chytilová. 20min. EST

This adaptation of the story by Bohumil Hrabal (author of *Closely Observed Trains*) is set in a café near his flat. The plot involves a wedding and a suicide and features Hrabal's friend, the 'explosionalist' artist Vladimír Boudník.

SUN 1 MAR 20:40 NFT2

THU 5 MAR 18:10 NFT2

Daisies Sedmikrásky

+ intro by Peter Hames, author and critic*

Czechoslovakia 1966. Dir Věra Chytilová. With Ivana Karbanová, Jan Klusák. 95min. EST. 15

Chytilová's neo-dadaist farce is full of extravagant visual effects, sensuous décor and fascinating experiments with colour. Two teenage girls stumble through a series of happenings, exploit middle-aged men and engage in orgies of eating, interspersed with sun bathing. Full of enthusiasm and joie de vivre, the film mixes social observation, feminist comment and formal experiment in one exhilarating journey.

MON 9 MAR 20:45 NFT2*

TUE 10 MAR 18:20 NFT2

The Fruit of Paradise Ovoce stromů rajských jíme

Czechoslovakia-Belgium 1969. Dir Věra Chytilová. With Jitka Nováková, Karel Novák, Jan Schmid. 95min. 35mm. EST

In her most experimental work, Zdeněk Liška's music, Jaroslav Kučera's cinematography and Ester Krumbachová's design combine in a unique celebration of form. The film is nominally based on the story of a murderer, with the characters symbolising Eve, Adam and the Devil against a background of the Garden of Eden. While the narrative is challenging, the process of audience interaction is entirely pleasurable.

WED 11 MAR 20:40 NFT2

SUN 15 MAR 18:30 NFT2

The Apple Game Hra o jablko

Czechoslovakia 1976. Dir Věra Chytilová. With Dagmar Bláhová, Jiří Menzel, Jiří Kodet, Evelyn Steimarová. 92min. 35mm. EST

After six years of enforced silence following the Soviet invasion, Chytilová returned with this lively farce about a nurse seduced by a philandering doctor (played by fellow New Wave director Jiří Menzel). Its feminist perspective hits some predictable targets, while its comic approach to the battle of the sexes convinces through its irreverence and free approach to film form.

FRI 6 MAR 20:40 NFT2

SUN 8 MAR 15:20 NFT3

Prefab Story Panelstory

Czechoslovakia 1979. Dir Věra Chytilová. With Lukáš Bech, Antonín Vaňha, Eva Kačírková. 96min. 35mm. EST

Chytilová's multi-level portrayal of contemporary life is a blunt and aggressive confrontation with the 'normalised' society in which she lived. Set against the background of a high-rise estate, the film

examines the nature of contemporary morality and materialist preoccupations. One of the few genuinely critical works of its time, *Prefab Story* received limited release and was denied international exposure.

SAT 7 MAR 15:50 NFT2

FRI 13 MAR 20:50 NFT2

The Very Late Afternoon of a Faun *Faunovo velmi pozdní odpoledne*

Czechoslovakia 1983. Dir Věra Chytilová. With Leoš Suchařípa, Libuše Pospíšilová, Ivan Vyskočil. 100min. 35mm. EST

Chytilová adapted Jiří Brdečka's story about a middle-aged lecherous man and 'determined erotic', and in doing so focused on the gap between sexual fantasy and reality. As pensioners claim the man as their own, the young ladies he picks up increasingly differ from his hopes and expectations. It was Chytilová's only post-invasion collaboration with writer-designer Ester Krumbachová, who worked with her on *Daisies* and *The Fruit of Paradise*.

SAT 7 MAR 18:10 NFT3

TUE 17 MAR 20:30 NFT3

Jester and the Queen *Šašek a královna*

Czechoslovakia 1987. Dir Věra Chytilová. With Boleslav Polívka, Chantal Poullain, Jiří Kodet, Vlastimil Brodský. 111min. 35mm. EST

A caretaker at a medieval castle often abandons reality to live a second life as a clown to a beautiful but cruel French queen. Based on the mime play by Boleslav Polívka, the film juxtaposes two realities while featuring disorienting camerawork by Jan Malíř. Chytilová again tests formal (and political) boundaries in a film little seen outside Czechoslovakia.

SAT 7 MAR 20:40 NFT2

SUN 15 MAR 15:50 NFT3

Traps *Pasti, pasti, pastičky*

Czech Republic 1998. Dir Věra Chytilová. With Tomáš Hanák, Miroslav Donutil, Zuzana Stivínová. 124min. 35mm. EST

Described as a 'feminist black comedy,' Chytilová's post-communist film continues the confrontational approach of *Prefab Story* with the subject of a woman who is raped by two men. Unfortunately for them, she's a veterinary surgeon practised in techniques of castration. Also a political commentary attacking male power, it shows Chytilová treating capitalist morality with the same enthusiasm previously reserved for 'socialist' compromise.

SUN 8 MAR 20:30 NFT2

SAT 14 MAR 20:30 NFT3

Flights and Falls *Vzlety a pády*

+ intro by Peter Hames, author and critic*

Czech Republic 2000. Dir Věra Chytilová. With Zdeněk Tmej, Václav Chochola. 108min. EST

Chytilová's highly impressive but little-known documentary provides a fascinating and atmospheric journey into a hidden culture, one in which she herself participated. Chytilová investigates the lives of three Czech photographers (Václav Chochola, Karel Ludwig, Zdeněk Tmej) from the 30s to the present, and also embraces the submerged world of 50s culture and the work of novelist Bohumil Hrabal and artist Vladimír Boudník.

SAT 14 MAR 18:00 NFT3*

MON 16 MAR 20:50 NFT2

Věra Chytilová and Jaroslav Kučera: The Fruit of Paradise

Explore Chytilová's working process, as illustrated by her most stylised work, the film 'opera' *The Fruit of Paradise*. This special display reveals the individual layers of the final film via trial prints and photographs which were newly discovered in the estate of Chytilová's husband, cameraman Jaroslav Kučera.

FRI 27 FEB – MON 16 MAR, ATRIUM

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £11.00, concs £8.50 Members pay £1.50 less on any ticket. Website www.bfi.org.uk/southbank

Tickets for FREE screenings and events must be booked in advance by calling the Box Office to avoid disappointment

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The benugo bar & kitchen

Eat, drink and be merry in panoramic daylight. benugo's décor is contemporary, brightly lit and playful with a lounge space, bar and dining area. The place to network, hang out, unpack a film, savour the best of Modern British or sip on a cocktail.

There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archival collections, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you.

***** PICTURE DESK *****

A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting BFI Southbank screenings can be found at www.image.net under BFI / BFI Southbank / March 2015 / Vera Chitylova

Jester and the Queen Šašek a královna

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SAT 14 MAR MON 16 MAR

18:00 NFT3* 20:50 NFT2

Vera Chytilová and Jaroslav Kučera era: The Fruit of Paradise

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FRI 27 FEB – TUE 17 MAR

ATRIUM

Polish Film Posters: 1954 – 1970

Since exploding onto the graphic design scene in the late 1940s, Polish film posters have attracted international admiration. Framed by a culture of Cold War politics, the posters skilfully integrate image and text, referencing everything from folk art to Pop Art. Drawn from the BFI's Special Collections, this exhibition charts the Polish School's response to British films which spoke to the very human emotions and challenges faced by those across the world.

RUNS UNTIL 25 MAY 2015

MEZZANINE