



FILM MOVEMENT®

presents

THE TEACHER

(Učiteľka)

A film by Jan Hřebejk

*“An intelligent and universally resonant crowd-pleaser...” – Alissa Simon, **Variety***



Slovakia, Czech Republic / 2016 / Drama, Comedy / Slovak with English Subtitles
103 min / 1.78:1 / Stereo and 5.1 Surround Sound

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Assets:

Official US Trailer: TBD

Downloadable hi-res images: TBD

FULL SYNOPSIS

In a middle school classroom in Bratislava in 1983, a new teacher, Maria Drazdechova (Mauréry), asks each student to stand up, introduce themselves and tell her what their parents do for a living. It slowly becomes clear that perhaps the pupils' grades are related to how willing their guardians are open to helping her out with her errands, her housecleaning, and other random services. After one of the students attempts suicide, however, the director of the school has no choice but to call for an emergency parents' meeting to remove the teacher, but because Ms. Drazdechova is also a high-ranking official of the Communist Party, parents are hesitant to sign a petition to transfer her out. In a classroom behind the Iron Curtain, the future of all the families are at stake, as the film examines how each family must wrestle with standing up for what they believe in or silently keep the status quo.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Directed by Oscar Nominated Jan Hřebejk (DIVIDED WE FALL, KAWASAKI'S ROSE) and loosely inspired by true events, the film is a very dark comedy about an elementary school teacher (played by Zuzana Mauréry, named Best Actress at Karlovy Vary) who uses her students to manipulate their parents for her own gain.

LOGLINE

A teacher you'll never forget.



CREDITS

CREW

Director	Jan Hřebejk
Screenplay	Petr Jarchovský
Director of Photography	Martin Žiaran
Editor	Vladimír Barák
Sound Design	Jiří Klenka
Music	Michal Novinski
Production Designer	Juraj Fábry
Costume Designer	Katarína Štrbová Bieliková
Make-up Artist	Anita Hroššová
Line Producer	Erik Panák

CAST

Marie Drazděchová	Zuzana Mauréry
Marek Kučera	Csongor Kassai
Václav Littmann	Peter Bebjak
Jaroslav Binder	Martin Havelka
Pensioner Řehák	Ondřej Malý
Hana Binderová	Éva Bandor
Iveta Kučerová	Zuzana Konečná
Karol Littmann	Richard Labuda
Filip Binder	Oliver Oswald
Danka Kučerová	Tamara Fischer
School Head Teacher	Ina Gogálová
Deputy Chvalovská	Monika Čertezni
Králová	Alexandra Strelková
Janitor	Martin Šulík
Hairdresser Bártová	Judita Hansman
Greengrocer Vojáčková	Ela Lehotská
Doctor Němec	Jozef Domonkoš
Judge Malinovský	Ladislav Hrušovský
Mr Kindl	Attila Mokus

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY - Jan Hřebejk



Born in Prague, Jan Hřebejk, who attended secondary school with his film collaborator and screenwriter Petr Jarchovský, studied screenwriting and dramaturgy at Prague's FAMU in 1987–1991.

While at school, he caught the attention of the public as the director of short films *CO VŠECHNO CHCETE VĚDĚT O SEXU A BOJÍTE SE TO PROŽÍT* / EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SEX, BUT WERE AFRAID TO EXPERIENCE (1988) and *L.P.1948* (1989), both self-produced. The films won prizes at student festivals, as did his first feature film, *NEDĚLEJTE NIC, POKUD K TOMU NEMÁTE VÁŽNÝ DŮVOD* / YOU DO NOTHING

BECAUSE YOU'VE GOT NO GOOD REASON, made for Czech TV. While still studying at FAMU, he co-wrote a comedy with Petr Jarchovský set at a summer camp, *PĚJME PÍSEŇ DOHOLA* / LET'S ALL SING AROUND (1990), which became the first film of director Ondřej Trojan.

His career as a respected and popular director was launched by the film musical *ŠAKALÍ LÉTA* / BIG BEAT (1993), set in the '50s and adapted by Petr Jarchovský from a novel by Petr Šabach. In 1996, he made the children's TV show *KDE PADAJÍ HVĚZDY* / WHERE STARS FALL which was shown in many European countries.

1999 was the year of the premiere of Hřebejk's megahit *PELÍŠKY* / COSY DENS, an enormously popular retro-comedy from the '60s about one historical generation. Hřebejk's next film, *MUSÍME SI POMÁHAT* / DIVIDED WE FALL (2000), the story of a couple hiding a Jewish refugee in their home during World War II, was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. His next highly successful retro-comedy takes place in the eighties: *Pupendo* (2003). One year later, Hřebejk returned with the bittersweet *HOREM PÁDEM* / UP AND DOWN, a modern-day story that was recognized by the Czech Academy of Film and TV as Film of the Year.

Jan Hřebejk is one of the most prolific and successful Czech filmmakers and the winner of numerous prizes at international festivals. Since *KRÁSKA V NESNÁZÍCH* / BEAUTY IN TROUBLE (2006), which won the Jury Award at the International Film Festival Karlovy Vary, he has been making roughly one film per year (*MEDVÍDEK* / TEDDY BEAR; *U MĚ DOBRÝ* / I'M ALL GOOD; *NESTYDA* / SHAMELESS; *KAWASAKIHO RŮŽE* / KAWASAKI'S ROSE; *NEVINNOST* / INNOCENCE; *SVATÁ ČTVEŘICE* / 4SOME; *ODPAD MĚSTO SMRT* / GARBAGE, THE CITY AND DEATH; *LÍBÁNKY* / HONEYMOON; *ZAKÁZANÉ UVOLNĚNÍ* / ICING). In between making feature films, Jan Hřebejk has directed several TV shows, documentaries, music videos, and commercials, as well as working in theatre. His latest feature film, *UČITELKA* / THE TEACHER made its world premiere as part of the main competition of the 51st International Film Festival Karlovy Vary. In 2013, Hřebejk won the Best Director Award from Karlovy Vary for *LÍBÁNKY*.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

“When I think of THE TEACHER, I see it as a carefully organized and engrossing analysis of how a society can slowly grow numb and browbeaten to the point of losing hope of effecting any change at all. It is a film about how collective lethargy can lead to tragedy. And a film about the hope contained in refusing to stand idly by, about overcoming one’s own fears. This is something that I find extraordinarily topical, and if it is well filmed, it always will be!” – Jan Hřebejk

INTERVIEW WITH JAN HŘEBEK

With its atmosphere, style, and themes, THE TEACHER seems somehow related to your earlier film, DIVIDED WE FALL. What was so interesting about the screenplay that you decided to make this film?

I’ve known the story roughly since the time when it happened, because Petr Jarchovský related it to me in the early eighties when it was still quite recent... This is simply our main topic: fear, opportunism, human dignity and things like that.

This time you’ve moved on from an analysis of partnership to the broader themes of strength and the quality of human character. Do you think this is what people are interested in today?

It’s what we’re interested in! If we weren’t, we wouldn’t have made this. This film can be powerful. When we show it to random audiences, it has quite an emotional effect, they keep returning to it for days afterward. It’s not primarily a political film, but it’s difficult to avoid that label. We call it “*Pupendo* with a story.”

It’s a relatively small-scale story. Was that deliberate?

Yes, we wanted the whole thing to be as tight as possible. To make sure the stylization is pure and natural.

Were you inspired by any specific films when making this one?

Not really, but we won’t mind at all if it reminds anyone of *ENTRE LES MURS* or *12 ANGRY MEN*.

How important was the casting of the child actors? How did you manage to find child actors so expressive, yet so authentic?

That is, of course, the key with a story like this, particularly for the emotional effect. I’m indebted in particular to Ingrid Hodálová who did the casting and recommended the actors, including the children.

How did you find the actress who would play THE TEACHER?

The cinematographer Martin Žiaran knew it would be Zuzana Mauréry long before we actually cast her. His intuition was correct.

Is it just coincidence that the boy playing Kája is the grandson of Marián Labuda, or did someone point him out to you?

I'm told Richard Labuda is relatively well known as a child actor. This isn't his first role. His grandfather is a legend, and his father is a key person in the Astorka theatre today. I've met them both and admire them both as actors, but I've only worked with Richard.

Do you have any personal experience with similar kinds of manipulation or intimidation? Did you bring any of your own experiences into the film?

It wasn't just a feature of the Communist era; similar moral dilemmas, manipulations, and ambiguities are something we must all face every day. You'll find several Czechoslovak films addressing these themes – *OBCHOD NA KORZE / THE SHOP ON MAIN STREET*, *KACHYŇA*, or Svoboda's movies from the eighties. There's Najbrt's *PROTECTOR* and more...

Did you consult any of the issues, such as bullying of pupils by teachers, with psychologists, etc.? What's the main subject of *THE TEACHER*?

THE TEACHER is not about a teacher bullying students! Today we even hear about cases where the opposite is true. Our main theme is fear as a test of character. Just like *DIVIDED WE FALL* wasn't about the Holocaust or Nazism, this film is not about Communism or bullying by teachers.

Do you think similar stories take place in schools also today, where teachers paradoxically tend to lose respect and are often the victims of bullying by the children, or even their parents?

Yes, everything repeats itself and keeps coming back. All adults and most children have experienced the feeling where something that might benefit you now might also be the wrong thing to do. Or the other way around: that following your conscience or moral code may be difficult or very disadvantageous.

Your story is very timeless, because it can be applied to many different environments even today. Do you personally feel that our contemporary society is more easily corrupted than it was under socialism?

Human nature doesn't change. Things were more dramatic back then. This makes the story even more poignant, since today many such situations are kept out of sight.

You have cast actors who are relatively unknown on the film screen, which is rather refreshing. Was that deliberate?

The main reason for that is that we decided to shoot the film in Slovakia. Of course it was refreshing for me because I don't have these actors connected with any other roles, their social presence etc. I had only worked with Csongor Kassai before on *Divided We Fall*; he was still a student back then. At the start of the shooting, we agreed it would be great if we managed to do as good a job as last time.

What do you think makes *THE TEACHER* stand out from your other films?

That it's in Slovak!

FESTIVALS

Winner - Best Actress - Karlovy Vary Int'l. Film Festival

Winner - Best Art Direction – Gijon Int'l. Film Festival

Winner - Best Soundtrack – Gijon Int'l. Film Festival

Official Selection - Chicago Int'l. Film Festival

Official Selection - Hamptons Int'l. Film Festival

Official Selection - Busan Int'l. Film Festival

Official Selection - Tokyo Int'l. Film Festival

Official Selection - Warsaw Int'l. Film Festival



About Film Movement

Launched in 2002, Film Movement is a North American distributor of award-winning independent and foreign films based in New York City. Film Movement has released more than 250 feature films and shorts culled from prestigious film festivals worldwide, and this year it had its first Academy Award-nominated film, THEEB. Film Movement's theatrical distribution strategy has evolved to include promising American independent films, documentaries, and an even stronger slate of foreign art house titles. In 2015, Film Movement launched its reissue label Film Movement Classics, featuring new restorations released theatrically as well as on Blu-ray and DVD, including films by such noted directors as Eric Rohmer, Peter Greenaway, Bille August, Marleen Gorris, Takeshi Kitano and Ettore Scola. For more information, please visit www.filmmovement.com.