



THE
PAINTED BIRD

A FILM BY VÁCLAV MARHOUL



SYNOPSIS

Based on the acclaimed Jerzy Kosiński novel, *THE PAINTED BIRD* is a meticulous 35mm black and white evocation of wild, primitive Eastern Europe at the bloody close of World War II.

The film follows the journey of The Boy, entrusted by his persecuted parents to an elderly foster mother. The old woman soon dies and the Boy is on his own, wandering through the countryside, from village to village, farmhouse to farmhouse. As he struggles for survival, The Boy suffers through extraordinary brutality meted out by the ignorant, superstitious peasants and he witnesses the terrifying violence of the efficient, ruthless soldiers, both Russian and German.

In a defining scene, one of the peasants shows The Boy the flight of a captive bird, whom the man has painted and then released back into its own flock. The bird is immediately ripped apart because it is different from its fellows. That lesson reinforces all The Boy already knows and will soon know better: difference is fatal.

But there are rare moments of compassion: a German soldier spares The Boy, a priest intervenes on his behalf, and finally The Boy becomes the protégé of a Russian sniper, who is kind to the child, but ruthless with the enemy.

And there are signs of love. The Boy is seduced by an older girl, finally re-discovering the comfort of intimacy, only to realize that he has been used.

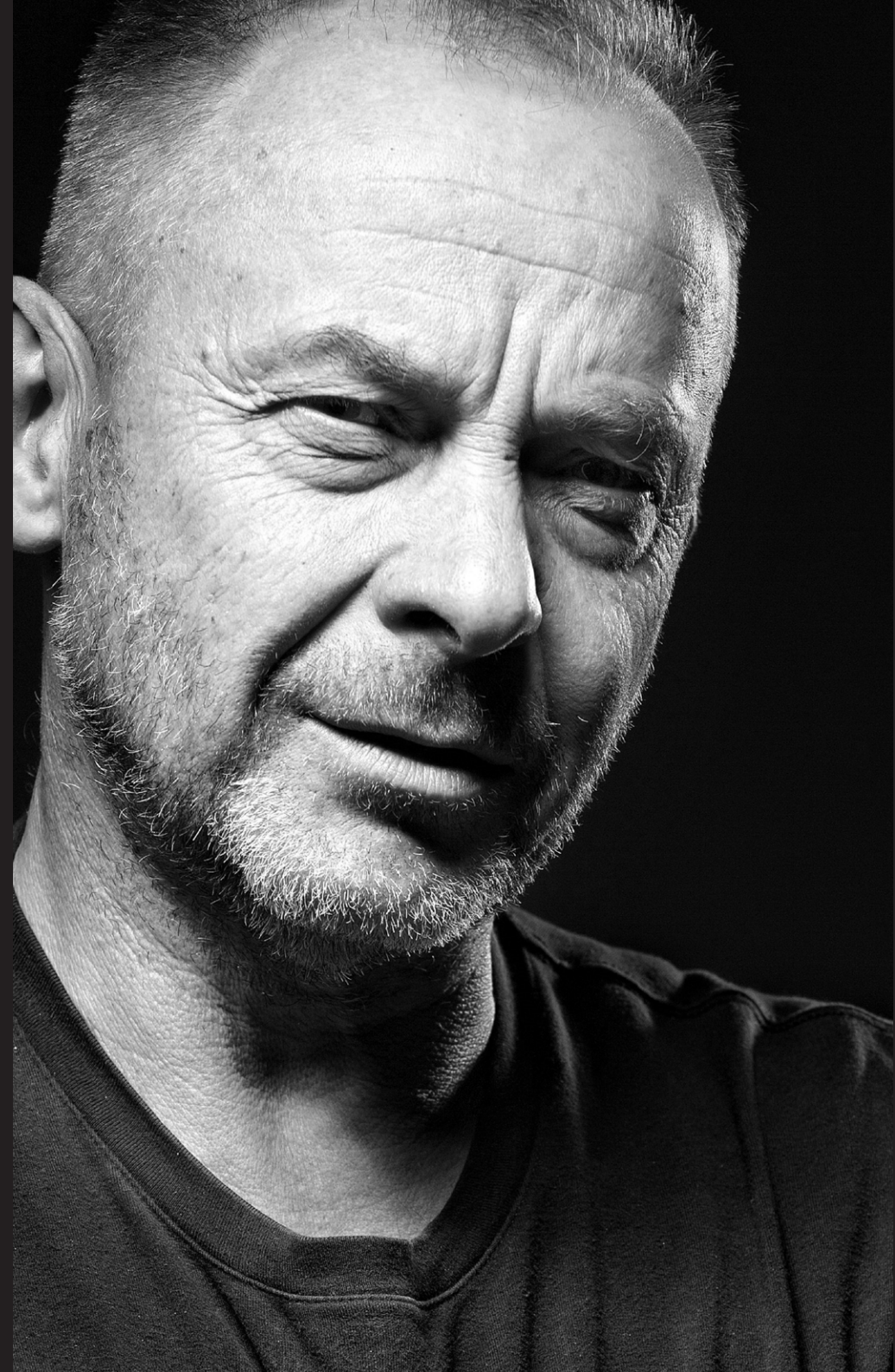
When he is miraculously reunited with his weakened father at the end of the war, The Boy is cold and impenetrable, hardened by his ordeal. Yet we can still glimpse something of the old, sensitive Boy behind the eyes of the new. Perhaps there is hope.

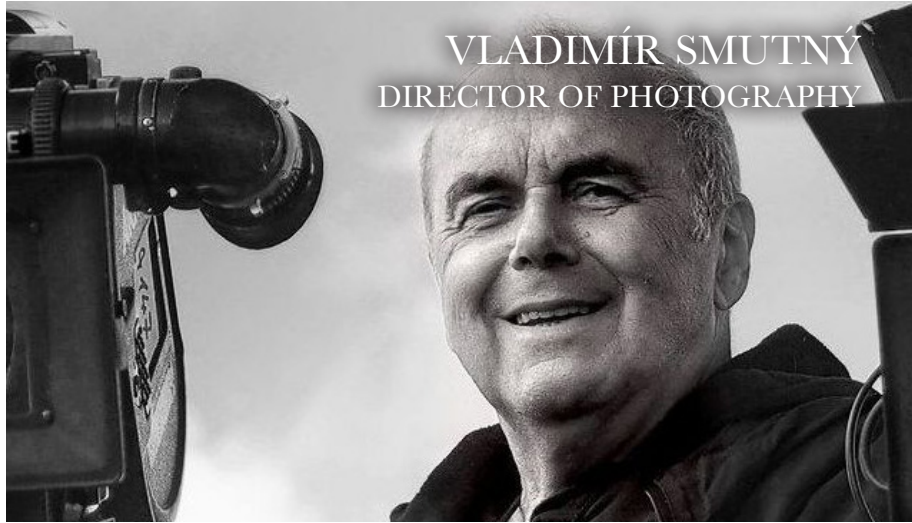
CREW BIOGRAPHIES

VÁCLAV MARHOUL

SCRIPTWRITER, PRODUCER, DIRECTOR

After graduation from the Prague Film Academy (FAMU) Marhoul worked for several years with the theatre group “Prague Five”, the artistic association “The Hardheads” (Tvrdohlaví), and most significantly the Barrandov Film Studios, starting as production assistant in 1984 and later as deputy production manager. As a producer, he was most notably involved with the films of director Tomáš Vorel, *The Prague Five* and *Smoke*. At the start of the 1990s, he was brought into the upper management of the studio, where he served for the next seven years as General Director. In 1997, he founded Silver Screen, whose primary focus is the production of feature films. In 1998, he distributed *The Bed* by director Oskar Reif while also serving as its producer. In 2003, his company created the feature-length film *Smart Philip*, which formed his debut as director and received awards from various festivals including the Houston Film Festival. In the following years, he wrote the screenplay and prepared for his second feature-length film *Tobruk*, which in 2008 received eight nominations for the Czech Lion awards of the Czech Film and Television Academy (CFTA) including Best Director, Best Screenplay and Best Film, as well as several awards at international festivals. He teaches on an intermittent basis at the Prague Film Academy, giving individual lectures at the Department of Film Production.





VLADIMÍR SMUTNÝ
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Born in 1942 in Prague, Smutny graduated from the Film Academy (FAMU) and then became an assistant cinematographer in the Barrandov studio. The first film on which he worked as DOP was *The Last Train* in 1982, and in total he has shot 58 feature-length films. Among his best-known achievements are *Kolya*, which won the 1996 Oscar as best foreign film, *A Dark Blue World*, *Tobruk* and *Smart Philip*. He holds several Czech Lions (the awards of the Czech Film and Television Academy- ČFTA) for *Lea* (1997), *A Dark Blue World* (2001), *Smart Philip* (2003), *King of the Thieves* (2004), *Tobruk* (2008) and *Flower Buds* (2011). For *Tobruk*, he received in 2008 the prize of the Association of Czech Cameramen (AČK).



JAN VLASÁK
PRODUCTION DESIGNER

After his studies at the Czech Technical University (ČVUT), Vlasak collaborated with architect František Vokřál on the film adaptation of *Blood Novel* (1993) by Josef Váchal. This work captivated him so much that he decided to continue in film design. He assisted on the settings of the films *World War II* (1994), *Immortal Beloved* (1994), *The Reef* (1996) and the Oscar-winning Czech film *Kolya* (1996). His first work as a designer came in 1998 on *The Spring of Life*, followed by Jan Svěrák's *A Dark Blue World* (2000) and *Smart Philip* (2003) by Václav Marhoul, for which he won the Czech Lion for Best Art Direction. Among his other credits as a designer are *Empties* (2006), or *Four Suns* (2012). For Václav Marhoul's *Tobruk* (2008), *In the Shadow* (2012) and *Three Brothers* (2015) he again won the Czech Lion for Best Art Direction. In addition to his work on feature-length films, he acts as an art director for commercials, television series and talk shows.



LUDĚK HUDEC
EDITOR

In addition to his work as an editor, Hudec is also an occasional writer for theatre and film. After graduating from the department of editing composition at the Prague Film Academy, he worked as an assistant editor in Krátký film Praha, where after four years he worked his way up to become chief editor. In 1993 he created his own company H.E.T., focusing on the editing of film and television productions. In 1997, he worked on the film *An Ambiguous Report about the End of the World*, for which he won the Czech Lion award in the category Best Editing. Another of his successes was Václav Marhoul's *Tobruk* (2008), for which his editing garnered a Czech Lion nomination and won the IFF LA Movie Award. In *Tobruk*, he also participated in the screenwriting. At present, he continues to work in film editing, special effects post-production and he occasionally lectures at the Film Academy on editing animated film and editing composition in animated film.

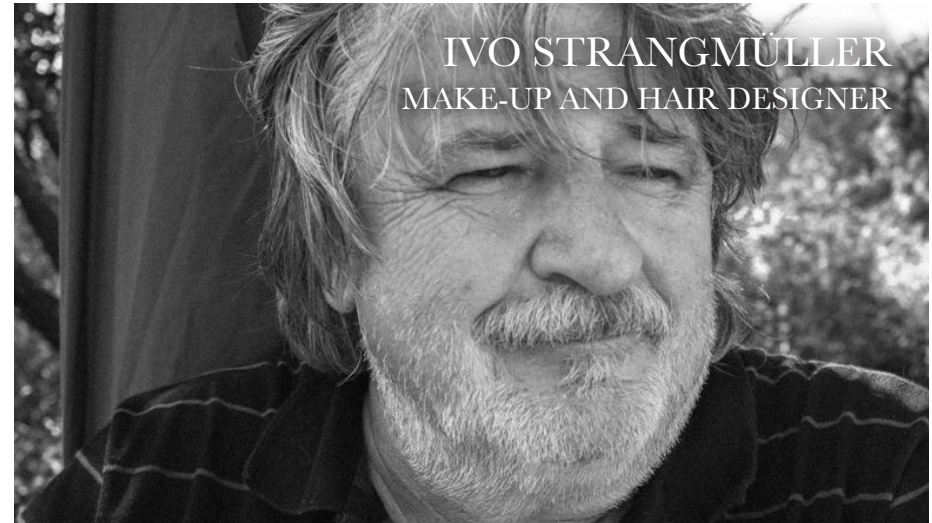


PAVEL REJHOLEC
SOUND DESIGNER

The author of the soundtracks for dozens of feature films and other audio-visual works in a wide range of genres, Rejholec originally studied biochemistry at the Charles University Faculty of Natural Sciences. He later graduated from the Prague Film Academy (FAMU) in sound (1997). Since 2003, he has been executive director of the company Soundsquare. He served as dubbing supervisor for Lucasfilm in Parts two and three of *Star Wars*. He is the holder of five Czech Lion awards for Best Sound, along with two nominations in the same category. In addition to his work with the recording studio Soundsquare, he is also an instructor at FAMU, lecturing in the Department of Sound.



A graduate of the Clothing Trade School in Prague, Rovna has worked since 1985 in films as costume supervisor. For several years, she worked with international productions, such as the films *Anne Frank: The Whole Story*, *The Mists of Avalon*, *The Barber of Siberia* or *The Brothers Grimm*, where she was the personal costumer for Monica Belluci. The film *The Painted Bird* is her debut as a costume designer. Currently, she is working on projects for Czech Television.



Experienced in several television series and full-length films, Strangmüller worked in 1994 on the film *Too Loud a Solitude* with lead actor Philippe Noiret. He is also known for his work on the films *The Illusionist* (2006) and *A Royal Affair* (2012). The film *The Painted Bird* is his second collaboration with director Václav Marhoul. In 2008 he was a make-up artist for the film *Tobruk*.

CAST BIOGRAPHIES



A non-actor, essentially an ordinary boy from the town of Český Krumlov, Kotlar was discovered through pure chance by director Václav Marhoul. As soon as Marhoul saw how young Pěťa was so confident and brave, so outgoing and open, his first acting role in his life was decided.



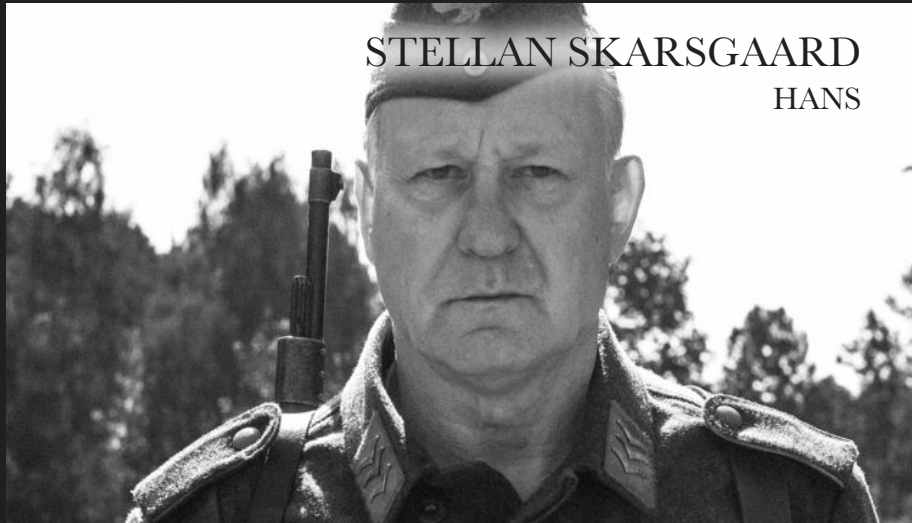
Born in Germany during World War II, Kier decided to leave his homeland at age 18 and settled in Britain, where he slowly built up an acting career. He entered the awareness of filmgoers with his role in *Flesh for Frankenstein* in 1973. Most often, his name is linked to that of director Lars von Trier, with whom he worked on the films *Dogville*, *Melancholia* and *Nymphomaniac*. Udo Kier has repeatedly won awards at international festivals for his artistic achievements, and can boast of roles in over a hundred films in various genres.



An actor in theatre, film and television as well as a singer-songwriter, Dyblik was born 63 years ago in Poland. After graduating from a building trade school, where he created his own amateur theatre company, he studied acting at the National Academy of Theatre Arts in Krakow. In the 1980s, immediately after completing his studies, he became part of the Warsaw National Theatre company while also acting in over sixty films, including cult Polish comedies (Kiler, Superprodukcja, Show), critically acclaimed dramas (The Wedding, House of Darkness, Rosa, At the Guardian Angel) and the historical spectacular With Fire and Sword directed by Jerzy Hoffman. Thanks to his knowledge of English, French and Russian, he has appeared in international films including Rembrandt's Night Watch by Peter Greenaway.

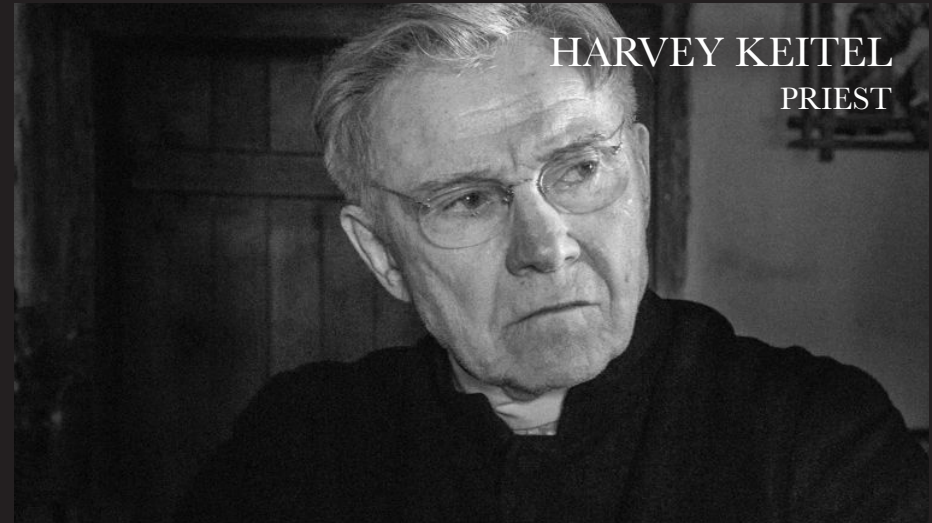


A Czech actress, Cvancarova first studied at a secondary school for the building trades. In 2000, she completed her studies at the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno in the field of musical theatre. In the same year, she was also nominated for the Thálie Prize in the operetta category for her role as Sandra in the musical World Full of Angels. On the television screen, she made her name through the role of Hanička in Constables' Humoresques, followed by several other TV and film roles. Currently, she is a guest performer at several theatres in Prague and Brno, and appears in various film and television projects.



STELLAN SKARSGAARD
HANS

Born in Sweden, he started his career in theatre, primarily as a Shakespearian actor. In Sweden, he worked with the great screen icon Ingmar Bergman. His first success came with the film *The Simple-Minded Murder* (1982), where in the role of mentally handicapped Sven he won the Silver Bear as best male actor, though his wider public reputation grew with the films *Breaking the Waves* and *Good Will Hunting*. He has frequently worked with director Lars von Trier (*Breaking the Waves*, *Dancer in the Dark*, *Dogville*, *Melancholia*), but also appears frequently in commercial films, such as *The Avengers* and *Thor*. Skarsgard has won many awards around the world including the European Film Academy's Outstanding Contribution to World Cinema prize in 1998.

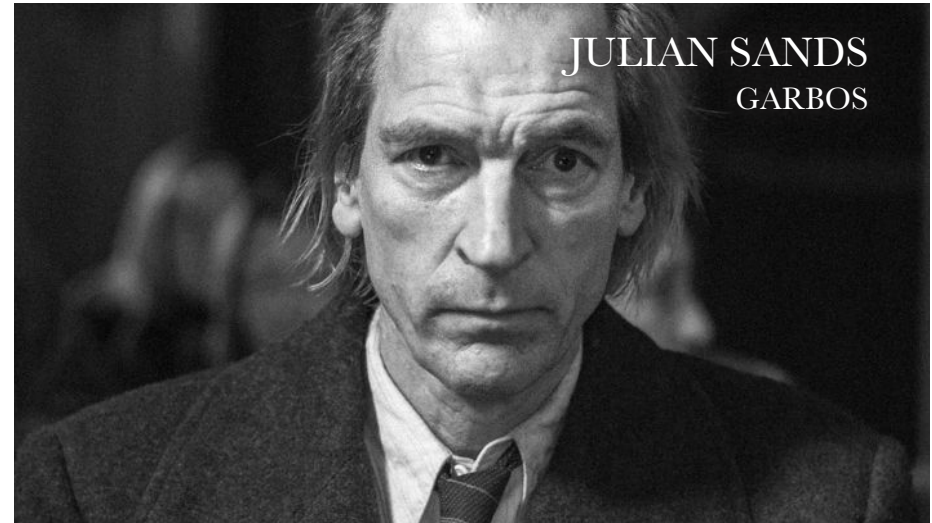


HARVEY KEITEL
PRIEST

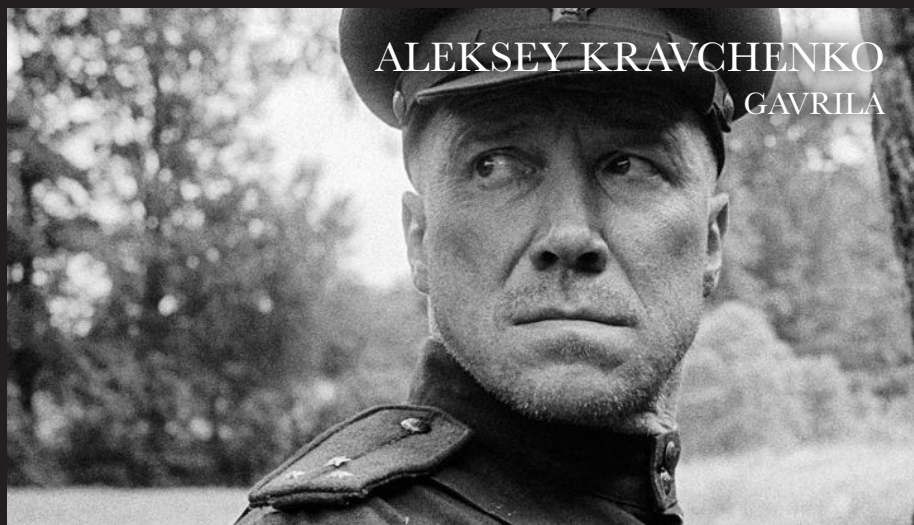
American actor and producer Harvey Keitel was born on May 13, 1939 in Brooklyn, New York City, to Miriam (Klein) and Harry Keitel. An Oscar and Golden Globe Award nominee, he has appeared in films such as Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver*, Ridley Scott's *The Duellists* and *Thelma & Louise*, Peter Yates' *Mother, Jugs & Speed*, Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*, Jane Campion's *The Piano*, Abel Ferrara's *Bad Lieutenant*, Robert Rodriguez's *From Dusk Till Dawn*, James Mangold's *Cop Land*, Paolo Sorrentino's *Youth*. He is regarded as one of the greatest method actors ever. Along with actors Al Pacino and Ellen Burstyn, he is the current co-president of the Actors Studio.

Keitel studied under both Stella Adler and Lee Strasberg and at the HB Studio, eventually landing roles in some Off-Broadway productions. During this time, Keitel auditioned for filmmaker Martin Scorsese and gained a starring role as "J.R.", in Scorsese's first feature film, *Who's That Knocking at My Door*. Since then, Scorsese and Keitel have worked together on several projects. Keitel had the starring role

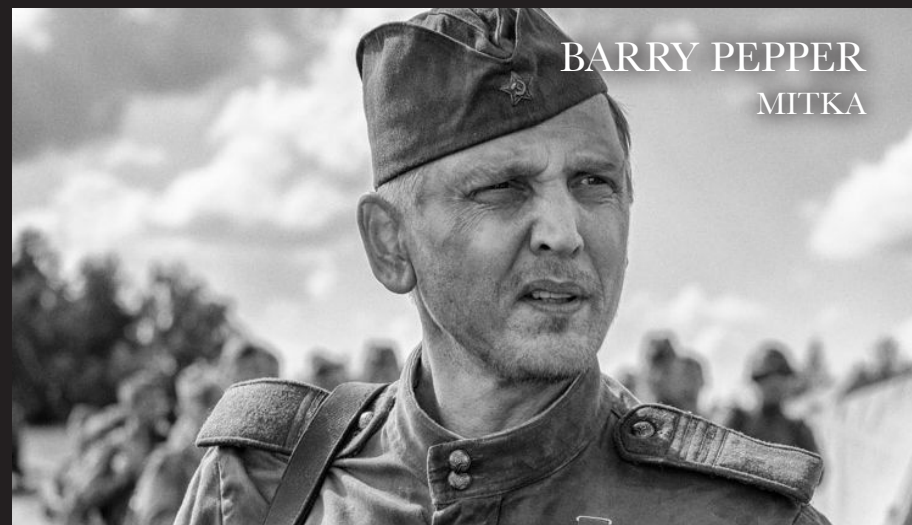
in Scorsese's Mean Streets, which also proved to be Robert De Niro's breakthrough film. Keitel re-teamed with Scorsese for Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore, in which he had a villainous supporting role, and appeared with Robert De Niro again in Scorsese's Taxi Driver, playing the role of Jodie Foster's pimp. Keitel has received 18 nominations and won 26 awards in various categories at film festivals across the globe.



A British actor whose mysterious appearance has led him largely to embody villainous figures or ambiguous eccentrics, Sands started in the theatre from the age of six before studying acting at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London. His first appearances were in supporting roles or television films; the path to Hollywood opened up from his role in the Oscar-winning drama *The Killing Fields* (1984) and then the romantic *A Room with a View* (1985). Confirming his talent were the later roles in the now cult classic *Boxing Helena* (1993) and *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995). Before participating in *The Painted Bird*, he had a role in the film *A Doll's House* (2018) based on Henrik Ibsen's classic stage drama. Over his career, he has taken roles in over 120 films.



Born in 1969 in Russia, Kravchenko made his debut at age 16 in 1985 in the world-renowned war film by Elem Klimov, *Come and See*. From 1991 to 1995, he studied at the Boris Shchukin Theatre Institute, and in 2007 joined the company of the Moscow Art Theatre (MHAT), one of the largest and most internationally prominent venues in the city. In addition to acting, Kravchenko is an accomplished musician. He has been awarded many Russian acting prizes, most notably the title National Artist of the Russian Federation, which he received in 2007.



Canadian by birth, Pepper first studied marketing and design before taking several acting classes. Eventually, he headed to Hollywood, where his notable roles included the sniper Jackson in *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and prison guard Dean Stanton in *The Green Mile* (1999), both Oscar-nominated films. He was also featured in *Enemy of the State* and *We Were Soldiers*. In 2002, he was nominated for a Golden Globe for his appearance in the television film *61**.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

After reading the original novel “The Painted Bird”, many people are shocked by the descriptions of violence and brutality. Jerzy Kosiński’s conception of violence can be disturbing, but it is not one-dimensional, or even two-dimensional. For Kosiński, violence unveils and frames the essence of humanity.

For the filmed version of this classic novel, my goal was to create a series of tableaux that, cumulatively, takes our protagonist on a journey to the very heart of the dark human soul. Each part of the series is a visual clue, a sort of lost fragment of a larger painting, a canvas that draws the protagonist irrevocably toward a final catharsis. It is intended as a kind of gradual peeling away of layers so that, by the end, the viewer has arrived at the very core of our central character, who has discovered a hard-won truth. The soul of “The Painted Bird” is poetry. It’s the story’s spirit of the ballad, its quiet urgency, the vivid internal world of our central character, the Boy, whose nature is beautiful despite the horror

around him. It’s also the story of the historical and geographical setting, and the characters the Boy encounters. It’s not always important that we love these characters or mourn their fate. What is important is that we see them and bear witness.

I tried to resolutely avoid pathos, and to eliminate well-worn clichés, exploitative melodrama and music that attempts to evoke artificial feelings. Absolute quiet can be as stark and more emotionally charged than any music.

We shot the film on 35mm black-and-white film at a 1:2.35 aspect ratio. Cinemascope is a richly emotive format. No other format can capture, with such accuracy and force, both the beauty and the cruelty playing out on screen. The quality of the digital image still lags behind the tactile properties of the classical negative, most especially because the digital image loses its rawness. And we filmed in black-and-white because color

would have failed to capture the essential truthfulness and urgency of the images.

The style of storytelling is not verbal, it's cinematic. There is no interior monologue or explanatory narration. And to preserve the sense of reality, we filmed in story order, so that the growth of the child actor mirrors the progression and growth of the central character.

In his novel, Kosiński never stated precisely where the story is set. The locality is described only as a place somewhere in Eastern Europe, where a special dialect is spoken. And so I chose to film in a mixture of all Slavic languages, while German and Russian soldiers speak in their native tongues. We were determined not to film the dialogue in English, because then the story would lose its credibility.

The tempo of the film was set by the pace of a flowing river, unpredictable and continually shifting in its rhythms. This directorial approach forces the viewer to experience the events unfolding on screen, to essentially live both moments of great emotional tension and moments of resolution.

Filming “The Painted Bird” and striving to capture the essence of the novel was an exceptionally difficult task. I want the cinema audience and the novel’s readers to come away with the same questions. It is my most profound hope that I have found the key to the door named “Kosiński’s ‘The Painted Bird’”.

As a final note, obviously I am fully aware the controversies surrounding both the authorship and the relationship between Kozinski’s autobiography and the plot of “The Painted Bird”. I have simply chosen to treat the novel as what it is: an independent entity, a masterpiece for the ages. I leave the story of Kosinski, tragic as it was, to others.





Q&A WITH VÁCLAV

Why “The Painted Bird”? What does Jerzy Kosinski’s book mean to you?

Kosinski’s novel affected me very strongly and deeply. As a scriptwriter, director and indeed, equally as a producer, I make my decisions from the heart. I never calculate, never speculate. Immediately after finishing the book, I said to myself: “I have to film this. I have to.” “The Painted Bird” is not a war film, nor even a Holocaust film. I believe that it is a completely timeless and universal story - of the struggle between darkness and light, good and evil, true faith and organized religion and many other opposites. The story forced me to ask myself many unpleasant questions and to struggle, alone, for the answers. I was left in doubt about the purpose and fate of Homo sapiens as a species and these doubts hurt so much that I had to hang on to anything positive.

And this is precisely where the magic lies: only in darkness could I see light. Through confronting evil, I arrived at the unshakeable conviction that good and love must necessarily exist. At least, this is how I read “The Painted Bird”. I believe shining through all the horror is hope. My challenge was to take the viewers of the movie on that journey, to lead them to that hope. It was a life-or-death challenge for me.

The book was seen as autobiographical, but then, Kosinski was accused of having invented most of the situations, of writing a work of fiction and imagining horrifying situations that he himself never experienced.

Yes, I know. Kosinski during his lifetime made a mistake when he said that it was his personal autobiography. This was not true. But to

understand why he did it, it is necessary to know his life, his spirit and his thoughts. For me, whether the book reflects his own experiences or not is completely irrelevant, because the essential element of a work of art is not its biographical truth, but its truthfulness. Even movies that make the valid claim “based on a true story” are not reality. Without imagination, whether deliberate or not, art is impossible. At the end, every creator arrives at some degree of aestheticization.

During preparations, I read many books, fiction and non-fiction, that would help me to understand this era and this setting. In particular, I should cite one by historian Timothy Snyder, “Bloodlands”, which describes factually and contextually everything that happened over seventy years ago in Eastern Europe. Terrible horrors... Such a very powerful read. The events it describes can’t even be found in “The Painted Bird” and even worse yet, it’s not a literary fiction; the book simply relates the dreadful, deadening facts and the knowledge that all of this really happened, and will happen again. No artwork can deliver such raw reality. That is not its purpose and it will always fail. But art is capable of treating these stories empathetically, and above all truthfully.

How did you acquire the rights to film the book?

Finding out who actually had the rights to the Jerzy Kosinski literary estate took eight months. It was by no means a simple task, but in the end, we found the authorised entity, headquartered in Chicago, - the “Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning & Leadership.” I wrote them a polite letter asking if it would be possible to start discussions. In all honesty, I didn’t really expect to receive any answer, so it was a very welcome surprise when an invitation to meet with them came to me in Prague. And so, in the spring of 2009 I found myself waiting in the reception area of their skyscraper office. I only had to wait two minutes before an assistant led me into the conference room, where minutes later three gentlemen showed up... And then the “interrogation” began. All the questions revolved around why I wanted to film the book. Why?



Why did I choose it? How did I plan to do it? Why did I have such conviction about the material? Looking back on this later, I decided that they needed to assure themselves that I wasn’t merely speculating financially, that I wasn’t interested in buying it to profit, or to leech off its controversial aspects, but that I took it seriously. One factor in my favour may have been that I was from Eastern Europe, so perhaps they thought I would likely have an affinity for the subject matter. The questions lasted about an hour. They left to confer among themselves, returned in ten minutes and said: “we’ll give it to you”. Over the next fourteen months we had to work out the conditions and the price: difficult but fair negotiations. In the end, acquiring the rights took twenty-two months.

Is the film different from the book? How long did you work on the screenplay?

A film, unlike a novel, is based not on words but on images and no adaption to film can match what been created in the imagination of the reader. The camera is absolutely uncompromising: it offers the viewpoint

of the director and no one else. An adaptation can only be successful if the aesthetic concept of the film, the narrative style and the message of the story re-create for the viewer the emotional and intellectual impact the book would have on its readers. I wrote seventeen versions of the screenplay, and this process took three years.

The book itself is full of cruel and disturbing scenes. How did you work with these often brutal forms of violence?

I tried to be measured and objective throughout. I wanted audiences to be able to bear the scenes of brutality. My hope was that the black and white images, the framing, the pacing and the expansive setting of the countryside, would give the viewers the emotional room to seriously reflect on the acts of violence that the boy sees and endures. I avoided shocking, fast effects (that reduce responsibility) as well as any gratuitous lingering (that would implicate the viewer too much). I trust the viewers will never feel trapped or that any of the events portrayed are inevitable.

The Painted Bird is a meditation on evil, but also, the opposite: goodness, empathy, love. In their absence, we inevitably turn to those values. When we do have glimpses of good and love in The Painted Bird, we appreciate their essence and we yearn for more. This is the positive message of the movie—the human longing for good. When The Boy cries: ‘I want to

go home!’, we too want to go home, to a safe place of love. Anything else seems absurd.

Of course, I am left very troubled by the questions the material raises. Are psychologists right when they say we will turn towards evil if there is no danger of punishment? Is evil inevitable within a struggle for life itself? What circumstances allow us to betray our principles? I still continue to look for answers to these questions, and especially in these times.

In “The Painted Bird” it becomes even more painful when such a cruel story affects a small child.

Adults have their own pasts, which they are aware of, and at the same time they can imagine a future. But this is not true for a child. The past is an unbelievably shallow body of water, where it’s not possible to swim. And the future cannot be imagined at all. A child, basically, can only think a few days ahead. What will happen in a month is unknowable. Several clinical psychologists have concluded that children, paradoxically, accept difficult reality far more easily than adults do. They take it as it is. And of course, this is the quality that helps children survive by allowing them to believe that the terrible things around them are normal. Something like this happens to our main character, The Boy, who is saved but perhaps



irrevocably damaged by the very resilience that allowed him to tolerate horror. Still, I am convinced that there is always a way back.

In the book, as well as in the film, The Boy is a kind of symbol, a representative of all those hundreds of thousands of children who lived through the war, wandered through ruined Europe, lost their parents and perhaps never saw them again. And it's just the same now across the entire world wherever military conflict is going on.

How did you film those disturbing and cruel scenes with your main actor?

In several of the most problematic scenes, the boy wasn't there at all. The camera views the action in his place and conveys his subjective vision. At other times, I used an adult double for scenes depicting both violence and sex.

Why was your film not shot in English?

From the very start, I was convinced that English would utterly destroy any authenticity in "The Painted Bird". Kosinski himself, in the foreword to his book, states that the story takes place somewhere in Eastern Europe where the people speak a strange dialogue. For this reason, I decided to use a kind of "Slavic Esperanto", a created language. Another reason for this decision was that I have never wanted any real Slavic nation in Eastern Europe to have a national identification with this story.

You used black-and-white 35 mm film stock. Why?

I'm one of those filmmakers who - even despite today's amazing possibilities of digital filming - is convinced that the negative is basically irreplaceable and that it gives film a kind of magic. The negative is more authentic, especially for something like "The Painted Bird", which is in black and white precisely to reinforce the basic narrative line. Filming it in colour would have been a catastrophe. It would have looked entirely unconvincing, fake, commercial.

The main role of the child is performed by Petr Kotlár, whom you didn't find through casting, but by a chance meeting. How did this happen?

It happened a few years before filming, in the beautiful medieval Czech town known as Český Krumlov, which is where I go to write all my screenplays. This place is almost magical, with an enormous genius loci. And there, one fine day, I saw him ... And I felt, literally felt, just as I did with the book, that casting this child would be the right decision. He was The Boy. Such a risk... Petr Kotlár, a non-actor, a little boy without any experience in front of a camera. I know that it sounds crazy, but that's just how it was.

How did you prepare Petr for such demanding film work?

I did only two things. First, we had camera tests. I had no idea whether he would even be able to go in front of the camera. Perhaps despite his clearly strong, extrovert nature and heart-felt desire to perform, he would just freeze. I called myself a fool, because I had to start shooting in a few months, and I had staked it all on him, intuitively. I didn't have anyone else in reserve. Then, thank God, I was helped enormously by a very



well-known Czech actress who worked with him the entire day. We tested the main emotions and her task was to help him create an atmosphere of fear, sorrow, laughter, tears... It worked out. Petr passed with flying colours. Secondly, I had him take psychological tests. And these too he passed without any trouble. For the entire period of shooting, for each of the 102 filming days in the course of almost two years, there was a chaperone with him who took care of him in between the scenes. There was not a second where he had to sit by himself and wonder what to do.

And I was able to guide him as a director through his beloved dog, Dodík. So when, for instance, I needed him to be sad, I'd suggest: "Petr, imagine that Dodík ran away somewhere and you can't find him."

Acting alongside Petr were many major international stars: Stellan Skarsgaard, Harvey Keitel, Udo Kier, Julian Sands, Barry Pepper... How did you get them to participate, were you ever afraid even to contact them?

As I was writing the script, I came to the figure of the German soldier Hans. Immediately, I felt the ideal person for this role would be Stellan. For a while, the notion whirled around inside my head, but then I realised that because the novel was so internationally acclaimed, I really could, without any embarrassment, make inquiries with any actor. And that's what I did. For some of them, I worked through an intermediary, the agent Tatjana Detlofson, but I contacted Stellan myself. In fact, we had met twenty-six years earlier in Prague, entirely by chance. Since then we hadn't seen each other and in the meantime, he'd become an international star. I got through to him on the phone, and when I introduced myself, he immediately said, "My God, Václav!" – and then he agreed that I could send him the screenplay, he'd read it and then we'd see. So Stellan was the first who confirmed an interest in acting in the film, and that interest was very important during the negotiations with all the others. Of course, the essential point for all of them was that, first of all, they must like the screenplay.

The only name actors who meet up in the same scene are Harvey Keitel and Julian Sands. All the others appear individually in the nine separate chapters of the film.

I hear that you developed a particular ritual to celebrate the final take of each key actor's work on the film?

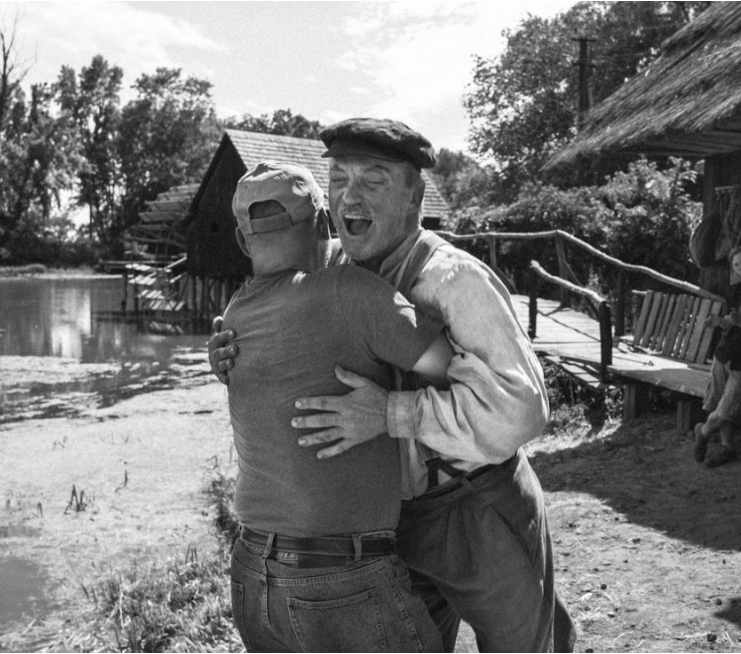
It happened completely by chance, after we finished filming the chapter titled "The Miller". After the final take, I and the entire crew said goodbye to Udo Kier. Something came to me suddenly, and I grabbed him around the waist, lifted him into the air, and shook him like a sack of potatoes. And then this became our ritual. For every male actor, after the final shot I always picked him up and shook him!

What was the most difficult challenge in these nearly eleven years?

Understandably, it was the financing, which lasted four years. I contacted dozens and dozens of producers across all of Europe without success. Honestly, there were times when I thought I'd give up, or at least in weaker moments, I flirted with the idea. But deep inside, I knew that I wouldn't do that. I could not do that. "The Painted Bird" was my love, that I had to work on it, that everything that I felt and feel about this book had to be on the screen.



LIFTING UP



Václav Marhouľ:

“It happened completely by chance, after we finished filming the chapter titled “The Miller”. After the final take, I and the entire crew said goodbye to Udo Kier. Something came to me suddenly, and I grabbed him around the waist, lifted him into the air, and shook him like a sack of potatoes. And then this became our ritual. For every male actor, after the final shot I always picked him up and shook him!”





FORMAT INFORMATION

Black & White
35 mm negative
Cinemascope 1:2,35
Length: 169 min
Dolby Atmos

LINKS

Homepage: <http://the-painted-bird.com>
IMDb: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1667354/>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ThePaintedBirdMovie/>

TRAILER

<https://youtu.be/Y8MEoL7wXwA>

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