

Hitlerjunge Quex

("Quex the Hitler Youth")

Germany : 1933 : dir. Hans Steinhoff : UFA

: 96 min

prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:

Jürgen Ohlsen; Rolf Wenkhaus; Hans Richter

Hans Richter; Heinrich George; Berta Drews; Herman Speelmans; Claus Clausen

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	∞	M	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
2650a	3.5	3	2	1,463	-	-	-	-	-	No	unseen



Eager acolyte "Quex" (centre) is embarrassed at his father's (Heinrich George, right) Jewish Communist outbursts. Father doesn't much like the sort (Claus Claussen, left) his son is hanging about with. Source: Moving Picture Boy

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"Adapted from the book by K.A. Schenzinger, this is a laughable little propaganda piece about the wicked plans of communists to torch a new Hitler Youth hut, after which the brave little boy Quex is murdered in cowardly fashion by a communist commando. Goebbels was well satisfied because old rot Steinhoff delivered a professional work. *1/2 "

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"Audiences might have accepted this movie as a portrait of a boy bewildered by opposing political views at a volatile time in Germany's history, for although it is fatuous, its propaganda is a mite more subtle than the other Nazi films, which isn't saying much. The opposing forces are the communists, a seedy lot, and of course the Nazi Youth, well-drilled¹, patriotic and *gemütlich*. The boy is

¹ They ought to have been...

played by an anonymous member of that movement and his unworthy parents by Heinrich George and Bertha Drews.”

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Ohlsen:

“One of the few amusing things about the Third Reich was the trouble it had in finding the right "image" to project to the German people and the wider world. The fact that Josef Goebbels had a club foot and looked like one of the cruder anti-semitic caricatures in "Der Stürmer" (and that a leading Nazi was called Rosenberg) was awkward. So were the party's problems with heroes: the first famous Nazi "martyr", Horst Wessel, was known to be a pimping thug.

In a nation teeming with blond, blue-eyed children, it's similarly ironic that the great boy-icon of the Nazi cinema was played by a boy with a Danish surname. (Later, when they wanted a "perfect German boy" for propaganda films in the 1940s, they chose the Swedish-born Gunnar Müller. One would almost have thought they were exercising positive discrimination in favour of racial minorities - blond ones, of course.)

"HITLERJUNGE QUEX" (from a book of the same name) was based on a real-life killing which had shocked Berlin a year earlier. A 12-year old schoolboy called Herbert Norkus, out in the streets at dawn sticking up posters for a forthcoming Nazi meeting, was viciously set upon, knifed and left to die by a group of Communist roughs. Goebbels instantly spotted the propaganda potential of a boy martyr; he made a moving oration over Herbert's grave and hailed him as a model for the idealistic youth of Germany.

The Nazi cinema badly needed a success after the flop of its first "emblematic" film, **"S.A. MANN BRAND"**, earlier in 1933, from which all but the already converted stayed away in droves, and which was generally considered fatuous. **"HITLERJUNGE QUEX"** was to be another matter: based on a true case which lingered in the national memory, and directed by the expert Hans Steinhoff.

Who was to play "Quex"? (This, short for "Quecksilber" - quicksilver, from his tireless zeal for the Party - was the nickname of the film's young hero, Heini Völker, poor Norkus's



Rolf Wenckhaus, circa 1931

Source: The Moving Picture Boy

reincarnation.) A teenage actor called Hermann Braun was picked for the part, but fell ill just as filming started and was replaced, with glamorous mystery, by a boy billed simply as "ein Hitlerjunge", though referred to by those in the know as "Jürgen".

This was Jürgen Ohlsen, a boy a year or two younger than Braun, who had been spotted sunbathing by the Wannsee. He was suitably blond and handsome, but with a disarmingly gentle, innocent air which was a propagandist's godsend. He had never acted, but played his scenes with expressive simplicity. Even in his H.J. uniform he looked the perfect sacrificial lamb. (Still photographers had a job producing the defiantly heroic image which ended up on the posters.)

Jürgen Ohlsen appeared a couple of years later, under his own name, in one more film: **"WUNDER DES FLIEGENS"**, in which he played a teenage glider pilot. He survived World War Two (unlike the hapless Hermann Braun) and was last heard of living in Austria.”



*Ohlsen: Young martyr to the Thousand Year Reich. Read the cruelty and coldness in those eyes – and this is a Nazi **self-portrait**, not a piece of wartime anti-German propaganda. This is the image of **themselves** they chose to project.*

Source: The Moving Picture Boy

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "The Critics' Film Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Holmstrom assumes [Ohlsen](#) to have been about 14, and his photo seems at first an unfortunate choice for the back dustcover of Holmstrom's excellent book – with so many hundreds of film boys to choose from, why the cold, dehumanised stare of this little fascist puppet? – but the juxtaposition with the front cover's saucy come-hither pose by Jackie Coogan is very telling. Both images of boyhood are a lie, and both contain an undeniable truth.

Aside from "**TRIUMPH OF THE WILL**", examples of Nazi propaganda are rarely seen today outside of Germany, and there probably least of all. Some German teenagers of my acquaintance had never seen documentary footage of a Hitler speech, for example, before I showed them an excerpt from the above. Just as "*Mein Kampf*" remains a prohibited book in many European countries, so the films of the Nazi period are kept in containment like some lethal political virus to which the public immune system has built up no defences.

It would be foolish to suppose that only totalitarian regimes of the right and left indulge in such shameless propaganda exercises, exploiting children and youth for base political ends. American cinema has been doing the same since its birth, though latterly the main engine of US cultural propaganda has been television.

What's more, the techniques of emotional manipulation refined by the likes of Riefenstahl and Eisenstein are now widely employed in pop videos and TV advertising, which are after all merely propaganda with a commercial motive, as well as more overtly in political campaign broadcasts. If it's not deemed offensive to broadcast heroic films of the British Raj, with their inherent patronising of the native peoples, or paeans to the "white man's burden" such as "**SANDERS OF THE RIVER**", then surely audiences can be deemed mature enough to watch "**HITLERJUNGE QUEx**" without reaching for the swastika armbands. Films of this ilk ought to be shown in schools, as textbook examples of manipulation. But then our society has no

interest in making kids resistant to these terribly useful conditioning techniques. We have our *own* cultural messages to transmit, don't we.

A later example (1944) of the same material was "[JUNGE ADLER](#)", featuring a young Hardy Kruger among Hitler Youth working at an aircraft factory and dreaming of glory with the Luftwaffe, but other examples I've glimpsed included "**HITLER YOUTH IN THE MOUNTAINS**" (33), "**OUR YOUTH**", and "**YOUNG EUROPE**" (43). For contrast, the American view of how it all fell together was expressed in films like "**HITLER'S CHILDREN**" (43), though actual children were by no means the focus of the plot..

Hans Richter was 14 and Rolf Wenkhaus 16. Both had featured in the popular 1931 film "**EMIL UND DIE DETEKTIVE**". Holmstrom kindly abstains from drawing conclusions about whether Wenkhaus himself was a Nazi, but he did appear in the very first (and less successful) Nazi propaganda film "**S.A. MANN BRAND**" (also 33) playing the son of the lead, again a Hitler Youth, and nine years later was killed in action with the Luftwaffe over Ireland. There's no reason to suppose he was dragooned into service, either as actor or pilot. Richter survived the war, and had a more prolific boyhood career in film. In "**HITLERJUNGE QUEX**" he apparently plays "the thieving 'unpatriotic' Communist boy". Other titles of his included "**DREI BLAUE JUNGS – EIN BLONDES MÄDEL**" (33), "**DER PAGE VOM DALMASSE-HOTEL**" (33) and "**DER SCHWARZE WALFISCH**" (34).

See subject index under **THE CHILD AS POLITICAL SYMBOL / PROPAGANDA TOOL, DEATH / DYING CHILDREN** and **SCOUTS / GIRL GUIDES / YOUTH MOVEMENTS**.