

Na Samote u Lesa

("Seclusion Near a Forest")

Czechoslovakia : c1972 : dir. Jiri Menzel : Barrandov

: ? min

prod: : scr: Zdenek Svěrák, Ladislav Smoljak & Jiri Menzel : dir.ph.:

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Josef Kemr; Zdenek Svěrák; Dana Kolářová; Ladislav Smoljak; Nada Urbánková; Jan Triska;
Alois Liskutin; František Řehák

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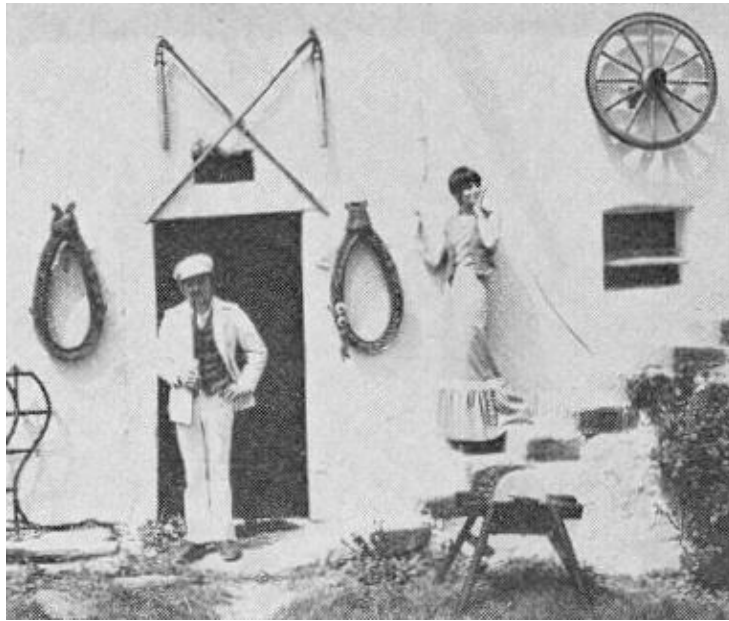


If that's a stopwatch, the mind boggles as to what daddy might be timing.

Excerpt from verbose Sight & Sound – Winter 72/73 – review:

“... In **"SECLUSION NEAR A FOREST"**, the illusion is simply the charm of rustic simplicity. With a view to buying a summer cottage, a young couple venture forth with their two children from the familiar bustle of the city (the first image in the film is of a red traffic light) into an alien picture-book

paradise of green fields, bosky woods and thatched cottages enfolded by sheltering foliage. "How romantic!" they murmur ecstatically. But their guide through this old world is, like themselves, a refugee from the new; known as "The Miller", proud caretaker of a museum piece, he religiously assumes the meerschaum pipe and peaked cap of his trade (pre-dusted with flour from a shaker) before sallying forth to explain how this fine example



of a flour-mill, now preserved in amber, once used to work.

The world we then gradually enter is one self-consciously submitting to metamorphosis. Cows still have to be milked and haystacks built, but with one eye on their prosperous city brethren, the peasants mostly spend their visible hours in picturesque celebration (a funeral, a family feast) or regaling visitors with rustic lore (how to throw a sweat-stained waistcoat over an adder – "The snake gets a shock" – before killing it with your bare hands). Literally dying away, the ageing peasantry presents a choice of cottages for prospective buyers; and these cottages are quickly subjected to improvement by all mod cons., with barns modernised into suburban villas and unwanted fields turned over to the local co-operative for development. Catch 22 for romantic exiles, however, is that the occupants craftily reserve the right to go on living in their homes until they die.

In one such cottage open warfare has been declared, with the new owners blocking chimneys and digging moats by the front door, while the old ones retaliate by mixing nails (death to car-tyres) with the chicken-feed. Newer at the game, the hero and heroine simply wait politely for their 70-year old host to die (their hopes considerably crushed by an encounter with his remarkably hale 92-year old father); and the longer they wait, the more inextricably the old man, delightedly annexed by the children as a grandfather, becomes part of the family. As one of the children puts it

with unwelcome candour in a school essay, "He's very kind, but he's in the way".

Kept embedded almost out of sight within a non-stop stream of jokes, as the characters obviously pursue their private eccentricities while two cultures clash in amiable opposition round them, this problem finally surfaces to be resolved by a pirouette. The old man succumbs to a bout of pneumonia; arriving to mourn, his tenants find him totally restored; and half-delighted, half-bemused, they are left to contemplate further seasons of shared occupancy. But, though sustained by the sense of reconciliation in this final scene, the romantic illusion remains shadowed by the suspicion that by next year, in spite of everything, trouble will be brewing over embers of frustration and improvements will already be mooted.

"Once upon a time," runs the fairy-tale in the old man's favourite radio programme, "there was a kingdom and its inhabitants were all really happy people." In this kingdom, which might well be Menzel's, the king's three sons set out to find a wise man; and like them, Menzel can only find people who are "neither wise nor stupid, cowardly nor brave, bad nor good". His charm is that he realises the extent to which each of them, in an unfriendly world, retains his reasons, his humanity, and his private experience of magic." – Tom Milne

20th London Film Festival (1976) programme review:

“Jiri Menzel was a solid figure during the extraordinary surge of filmmakers in Czechoslovakia from 1963-68. He appears back in form with this new, deceptively simple comedy of a family trying to find a country house. The flair for character, the probing of the mixture of generosity and selfishness in people, and a sly underlying look at a growing affluent city class against the more settled country folk make this a film of charm, insight and revelation and entertaining to boot.

Despite its seemingly simple surface ease, it could find universal chords abroad and might emerge a sleeper as did his 1976 Oscar-winning tale of an innocent in the War, **"CLOSELY OBSERVED TRAINS"**. The mixture of reality and sudden shafts of comedy, almost surrealistic summing up of character, remind one of the better days in the Czech cinema. A family visits a friend in the country who has converted an old mill into a

house. They look for one and settle for that of an old man who says he will sell his livestock and go to live with his family. But after they move in and begin to renovate they find he wants to stay on and his 92-year old father seems in good health.”

– Gene Moskowitz, **Variety**

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "Bloomsbury Foreign Film Guide", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Radio Times Guide to Films", "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"]

No further information currently available. Screenplay by Zdenek Svěrák, Ladislav Smoljak (both among the cast) and Menzel, from a story by Svěrák and Smoljak. Previously exhibited at the 1976 Karlovy Vary and San Sebastian Film Festivals. It's probably only of peripheral interest here, although the fact no mention is made of the children in these reviews does not mean they may not be very evident on screen. *Nostalgie de la boue*, or the tribulations of city folks adjusting to quaint rustic ways, is an old source of film comedy, as in **"PLEASE DON'T EAT THE DAISIES"**, and more rarely of drama, as in **"CROSS CREEK"**. More characteristically, it arrives as a portmanteau of gentle anecdotes and cameo pieces, as in **"DONGDONG DE JIAQI"** ("Summer at Grandpa's") or **"LA GLOIRE DE MON PERE"**.

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