

Growing up in postwar Prague

by Pedram Fouladian

Jan Sverak's feature film debut *The Elementary School*, incorporates the political thinking and opinions of post-WWII Czechoslovakia, either through speeches by characters, or by the effective use of editing.

The plot concentrates on the ten-year-old Eda and his friend Tonda, who attend an elementary school in a town neighbouring Prague, the year World War II ends. They are part of an all-boy class where discipline is not part of the daily agenda.

The chaotic state of the class drives their principal teacher out of her mind. She is replaced by Igor Hnizdo: an alleged war hero, an authoritarian and a playboy.

The new teacher helps expose the socio-political message of the film. *The Elementary School* goes beyond a mere study of a group of pre-adolescent boys.

The film carefully scrutinizes these kids' behaviour which might seem typical of their age: their sexual/ voyeuristic adventures, their rebellion and relation to authority.

Undoubtedly, Zdenek Sverak's (who also plays Eda's father) episodic screenplay is a personal reflection on his childhood. But the universality of its theme makes *The Elementary School* more than a photographed diary.

Not only is the film a personal account of the young Eda's life, it also provides a forum for the events which took place around him. Eda, for the most part, is an observer. He is a witness to changing political situations, mentalities and attitudes.

Certain aspects of *The Elementary School* are reminiscent of the



Jan Triska, as a replacement teacher in Prague, after the Second World War. This is the last of the Festival reviews - we promise.

film
Elementary School
directed by Jan Sverak
with Vaclav Jakoubek, Zdenek Sverak, Jan Triska
produced by Barrandov Film Studios

films of French New Wave director François Truffaut. In other ways, it resembles Jean Vigo's *Zero For Conduct*. In spite of these associations and obvious influences, Sverak's movie is not another film about films.

At its best, *The Elementary School* is a humanist comedy that talks about human emotions without any trace of sentimentality or romanticism. The narrative is honest making it easy to believe it is coming out of the mouth of a ten-year-old child.

Hits 'n' Bits continued

Film

The **Euclid Theatre** (394 Euclid at Bathurst) has re-opened, freeing up some alternative screen space for films you wouldn't normally see anywhere else. Week three (Oct. 15 to 18) features a **Chilean Film Festival**, with nine contemporary films of varying lengths and styles, by different directors. Look for Silvio Calozzi's **Moon on the Mirror** (1990) - about a magical port of Valparaiso; **Tales About Lizards**, Juan Carlos Busmante's 1988 trilogy which searches the roots of violence, mental decay and hope; and **One Hundred Children Waiting for a Train** (1988), in which director Ignacio Aguero presents shanty town children who have never been to a cinema in their lives, going to their first movie theatre in the city's downtown. — LC

I do not say this with pride, but Woody Allen's **Husbands and Wives** is the first film I've ever seen that made me seasick. The hand-held camera is over-used, more an annoying intrusion than an invitation to get into the heads of the characters. And what characters! They all strike one note: **NEUROTIC**. As has become typical of his films of late, Allen largely

wastes a marvelous cast in order to make the same points he has been making about human nature for years. As a matter of prurient interest, **Husbands and Wives** is worth seeing for its parallels to Allen's personal life; otherwise, rent a copy of *Manhattan* or *Annie Hall*. — IN

Theatre

"I've killed before, I'll kill again" is a great romp through the next seven years of Canada's future, as seen through the eyes of St. John's Newfoundland's Lord High Executioner, Billy Bragg. **Factory Theatre's** season opener covers everything from the separations of Québec and British Columbia, to the executions of Sharon, Lois, Bram, and Brian Mulroney. Brian's assassination is the focus of the plot, as Satan sends Bragg back to 1993 to save the Prime Minister, and keep him out of hell for as long as possible. The one man show is both written and performed by Rick Mercer. Impressive multimedia usage of film throughout the show was both original and effective. With the referendum coming up, a play about Canada's disintegration is timely and provides food for thought. Plays at the **Factory** (125 Bathurst St.) until Nov. 1. — JM

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