

October 23rd - 29th

The Ironic Curtain★



Designed by František Kašík/SSS and Laura Blum. Pink Tank by David Černý

★ Czech Cinema since the Velvet Revolution

partners



Co-curated by The Film Society of Lincoln Center and Laura Blum, in collaboration with the Czech Film Center. Special thanks to Koh-I-Noor and Czech Center New York for their support of the series. Additional thanks to the Consulate General of the Czech Republic in New York; Bohemian Citizens' Benevolent Society; Jeff Hush; Michael Walkowitz; the William Petschek Family; Jacob and Ruth Blum; and National Film Archive in Prague.

In the fall of 1989, something happened that many never thought could happen: the Iron Curtain, the sphere of influence and control the Soviet Union maintained over many of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, was finally brought down. Nowhere was that process of liberation more dramatic than in Czechoslovakia. Responding to a brutal police suppression of a peaceful protest march, millions of Czechs and Slovaks took to their streets, the final proof (if any were still needed) that the "people's government" represented little more than those who ran it.

Within months, Václav Havel, a dissident playwright who had become the best-known symbol of resistance to the Soviet-backed regime, was elected president of a new, multi-party democracy. Czechoslovakia, which would soon split into separate Czech and Slovak entities, was once again free to carve out its own path, make its own mistakes, and establish the role of a small nation in the middle of Europe and a rapidly globalizing world.

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution—so-called because of the impressive lack of violence that accompanied the toppling of the Communist government—this series presents some of the finest Czech films made since 1989, including several international prizewinners and box-office successes. This brief panorama provides powerful evidence of the ingenuity and irreverence of today's Czech cinema, in which hilarity, horror, and humanity converge all at once to brand a distinctly Bohemian take on irony.

In addition to these contemporary films, a sidebar of key Czech classics honors the country's rich filmmaking tradition. Included in this pre-'89 collection is a rare screening of **Voyage to the End of the Universe**, a work long rumored to have been an inspiration for the creation of **Star Trek**. Many of the screenings will be complemented by discussions with filmmakers, actors, and other distinguished guests.



The Kind Revolution



Citizen Havel

Citizen Havel / Občan Havel

PAVEL KOUTECKÝ AND MIROSLAV JANEK, CZECH REPUBLIC, 2008; 120M

Chronicling the private and public life of dissident playwright-turned-president Václav Havel, this Prague Castle confidential goes behind the tumultuous scenes of Czech politics from 1992 to 2003. Memorable moments include Havel primping for a 2002 NATO summit, Bill Clinton playing "Summertime" in a Prague jazz club, and Havel fumbling for keys to show the Rolling Stones the Castle balcony. Winner of the Czech Lion for Best Documentary, the film is a memorable tribute to Koutecký, a long-time friend of Havel's who died in a freak accident before filming wrapped. Czech Consul General Eliška Žigová will introduce the film.

Fri Oct 23: 6:30pm

Divided We Fall / Musíme si pomáhat

JAN HRĚBEJK, CZECH REPUBLIC, 2000; 122M

"In completely mad times, just holding onto your sanity can be an exceptional feat, and this excellent film shows how it's done." —Los Angeles Times

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Humor is rarely blacker than in this boudoir drama set in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia, where a couple reluctantly hides a Jewish escapee and a local Nazi collaborator with his romantic sights on the wife drops by whenever he gets the urge. Based on a true story, this gripping elegy to unwanted heroism offers no apologies for the strategies its characters use to survive. **Divided We Fall** swept the Czech Lions and was nominated for the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar in 2001.

Sun Oct 25: 2:20pm

Wed Oct 28: 6:15pm

Empties / Vratné lahve

JAN SVĚRÁK, CZECH REPUBLIC/UK, 2007; 100M
After striking cinematic pay dirt with the Oscar-winning *Kolya* in 1996, father-and-son team Zdeněk and Jan Svěrák returned with the comic tale of a natural curmudgeon who ditches his teaching career to land a job in a pivotal position in the Czech economy: the bottle return department of the local supermarket. Jan Svěrák's bittersweet tone never fully redeems his lead, while nevertheless letting us into his worldview. The approach worked with domestic audiences, who made *Empties* the biggest box-office success in Czech history. Producer Eric Abraham will introduce the Oct 24 screening.

Sat Oct 24: 6:00pm

Wed Oct 28: 2:15pm



Something Like Happiness

The Ferrari Dino Girl / Holka Ferrari Dino

JAN NĚMEC, CZECH REPUBLIC, 2009; 68M
Where were you when Warsaw Pact troops took Prague on Aug. 21, 1968? Seminal New Wave director Jan Němec was out capturing the invasion on camera, from tanks rolling through the streets to civilians battling Soviet soldiers. Incorporating that full, unedited footage, Němec's autobiographical thriller recounts his risky dash across the border—with an elusive young beauty—to broadcast the tragedy worldwide from Austrian television. Pavel Jech, dean of famed Czech film school FAMU, will introduce the film.

SCREENING WITH

The Kind Revolution / Něžná revoluce

JÍŘÍ ŠTŘECHA AND PETR SLAVÍK, CZECH REPUBLIC, 1990; 37M
On Nov. 17, 1989, riot police crushed a peaceful student protest in Prague. The mass demonstrations that followed signaled the beginning of the end of Czech Communism. A powerful manifesto of the ideals and non-violent philosophy that would define the new, democratic state, *The Kind Revolution*—the first film to document the events of the Gentle or Velvet Revolution—presents images captured over ten days by a single unit from Krátký Film. Martin Palouš, Czech Ambassador to the U.N, is scheduled to introduce and discuss the film.

Fri Oct 23: 2:00pm

Sun Oct 25: 7:00pm

The Karamazovs / Karamazovi

PETR ZELENA, CZECH REPUBLIC/POLAND, 2008; 100M
Director Petr Zelenka in person
A Czech theater troupe stages *The Brothers Karamazov* at a Polish steelworks, but the drama on stage is more than matched by the off-stage shenanigans of the cast and their hosts. Dissecting Dostoevsky's favorite themes of faith, doubt, and moral responsibility, ever-irreverent director Petr Zelenka situates the Velvet Revolution in the larger context of Eastern Bloc change wrought by the collapse of Communism. Life and death imitate art—or is it vice versa? Mr. Zelenka will discuss the film.

Thu Oct 29: 6:15pm



The Karamazovs



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The Return of the Idiot / *Návrat idiota*

SAŠA GEDEON, CZECH REPUBLIC/
GERMANY, 1999; 100M

Actor Aňa Geislerová in person

"One of the most original and inventive pics out of Central Europe in some time." - Variety

This loose adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* follows a wise fool who leaves an asylum and enters the lives of four romantically linked friends. What he lacks in ego and guile he more than makes up for in insight and goodness, but that's simply not enough to save the unhappy people around him. A contemporary, serio-comic, yet sensitive dissection of the human heart in the sticky thrall of relationships, *The Return of the Idiot* won five Czech Lions. Ana Geislerová, one of the top stars of the new Czech cinema, will introduce and discuss the film.

SCREENING WITH

Czech Peace / *Český mir*

FILIP REMUNDA AND VIT KLUSÁK,
CZECH REPUBLIC, 2004; 19M

The merry pranksters behind *Czech Dream* present a sneak preview of their newest documentary, a pre-war comedy about recent U.S. plans to install a radar base on Czech soil.

Sat Oct 24: 8:00pm

Tue Oct 27: 4:00pm

Some Secrets / *Výlet*

ALICE NELLIS, CZECH REPUBLIC/
SLOVAKIA, 2002; 93M

Personal and political histories intertwine during a family road trip to scatter a patriarch's ashes over the Czech-Slovak border. But with two wayward daughters, a mother who stretches the truth, and two generations of men orbiting the far side of comprehension, the family has more than one frontier to cross. Inspired by William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Nellis's prize-winning drama fearlessly confronts its political implications while allowing us to form our own opinions about the characters. Singer/actor Iva Bittová, who starred in another Alice Nellis film, will be on hand to introduce the film.

Sun Oct 25: 4:45pm

Wed Oct 28: 4:15pm

Something Like Happiness / *Štěstí*

BOHDAN SLÁMA, CZECH REPUBLIC
/GERMANY, 2005; 102M

Actor Aňa Geislerová in person

"A thoughtfully performed, gently quirky human drama about choices made and their often surprising consequences." -The Hollywood Reporter

Three friends who came of age in the same housing project grapple with loneliness and unrequited desires. Their strained companionship is made

even more complicated when a fragile young mother (Aňa Geislerová) is institutionalized and forced to give up her children. *Something Like Happiness* is one of the most perceptive, and deeply affecting looks at the first post-communist generation. Winner of eight Czech Lions and screened at the 2005 New York Film Festival. Ms. Geislerová will introduce and discuss the film.

Fri Oct 23: 9:10pm

Thu Oct 29: 2:15pm



The Return of the Idiot



Empties



Ferrari Dino Girl

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60'S SIDEBAR



The Cremator /Spalovač mrtvol

JURAJ HERZ, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1969; 95M
What better way to enjoy Halloween than with this creepy black comedy set in a Czech crematorium in the '30s? The titular antihero relishes his fiery métier, which he claims frees hide-bound souls from earthly suffering. The camera refracts his chaotic mind and country, as Nazism's rise parallels his psychotic descent. Hallucinatory editing and deep-focus mise en scène combine with an indelibly ghoulish performance by Rudolf Hrušínský to make this study in dark shadows a masterpiece well worth discovering.

Tue Oct 27: 9:00pm

Daisies / Sedmikrásky

VĚRA CHYTILOVÁ, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1966; 74M
"One of the most exhilarating stylistic and psychedelic eruptions of the '60s."

—Jonathan Rosenbaum, Chicago Reader
An avant-garde romp that launched Věra Chytilová as a symbol of the avant and the bane of the guard, this story of two sisters extravagantly misbehaving was banned by Communist authorities for its subversive high jinx (not to mention food wastage). It remains one of the high points of the Czech New Wave: episodic, chock full of Dadaist antics and a veiled study in implied social criticism. In short, the perfect foil to an authoritarian regime. Michal Bregant, dean of FAMU International, will introduce the film.

Tue Oct 27: 2:15pm

Thu Oct 29: 8:50pm

Loves of a Blonde /Lásky jedné plavovlásky

MILOŠ FORMAN, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1965; 88M

A breakthrough film for both Milos Forman and Czech cinema, *Loves of a Blonde* chronicles the misadventures of a naive teen after she sleeps with a piano player passing through her hick town on a gig. This gently rebellious satire breaks with the Socialist realism of state-approved studio

fare to take a Truffautesque look at pre-adult life in all its glorious awkwardness. Forman's film school classmate and fellow New Wave pioneer Ivan Passer co-wrote the screenplay. Nominated for Best Foreign Language Film Oscar.

SCREENING WITH

The Death of Stalinism in Bohemia / Konec stalinismu v Čechách

JAN ŠVANKMAJER, UK, 1990; 10M

Working in stop-motion clay animation and documentary, master image-maker Jan Švankmajer serves up a phantasmagoria of sights and sounds that survey Czech history from the end of World War II to the fall of the Communist regime. Time flies when Švankmajer is having fun.

Fri Oct 23 4:15pm

Wed Oct 28: 8:40pm

Voyage to the End of the Universe/Ikarie XB 1

JINDŘICH POLÁK, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1963; 87M

It's 2163 and Starship Ikarus XB 1 is off in search of intelligent life in the Alpha Centauri solar system. Along the way, the would-be colonists encounter all manner of unforeseen dilemmas, including internal dissent, UFOs, computer malfunctions, and a mind-frying black hole. Czechoslovakia's maiden foray into sci fi so resembles *Star Trek* that Gene Roddenberry must have seen it beforehand. Stanley Kubrick allegedly did, while experimenting with effects technology for 2001: A Space Odyssey.

Sun Oct 25: 9:15pm

Thu Oct 29: 4:20pm

SPECIAL EVENT

Ecstasy / Extase

GUSTAV MACHATÝ, CZECHOSLOVAKIA/AUSTRIA, 1933; 87M

An unhappily married Eva falls for a seductive young Adam in this "adult" classic that made Hedy Lamarr a *succès de scandale* prior to her Hollywood debut. Much of the whispering about the film was stoked by a scene in which a very nude Lamarr swims in a lake and prances through a forest, often cited as the first nude scene in cinema history. Or did it come from the sustained close-up of her face during orgasm? Either way, *Ecstasy* remains a notorious middle step between silent films and talkies, pre-Code cinema and the censorship era.

Sun Oct 25: 12:30pm



» WHAT'S PLAYING WHEN

Friday, October 23

2:00 The Ferrari Dino Girl
+ The Kind Revolution
4:15 Loves of a Blonde, preceded by
The Death of Stalinism in Bohemia
6:30 Citizen Havel
9:10 Something Like Happiness

Saturday, October 24

6:00 Empties
8:00 The Return of The Idiot,
preceded by Czech Peace

Sunday, October 25

12:30 Ecstasy
2:20 Divided We Fall
4:45 Some Secrets
7:00 The Ferrari Dino Girl +
The Kind Revolution
9:15 Voyage to the End of the Universe

Tuesday, October 27

2:15 Daisies
4:00 The Return of The Idiot +
Czech Peace
9:00 The Cremator

Wednesday, October 28

2:15 Empties
4:15 Some Secrets
6:15 Divided We Fall
8:40 Loves of a Blonde, + The Death
of Stalinism in Bohemia

Thursday, October 29

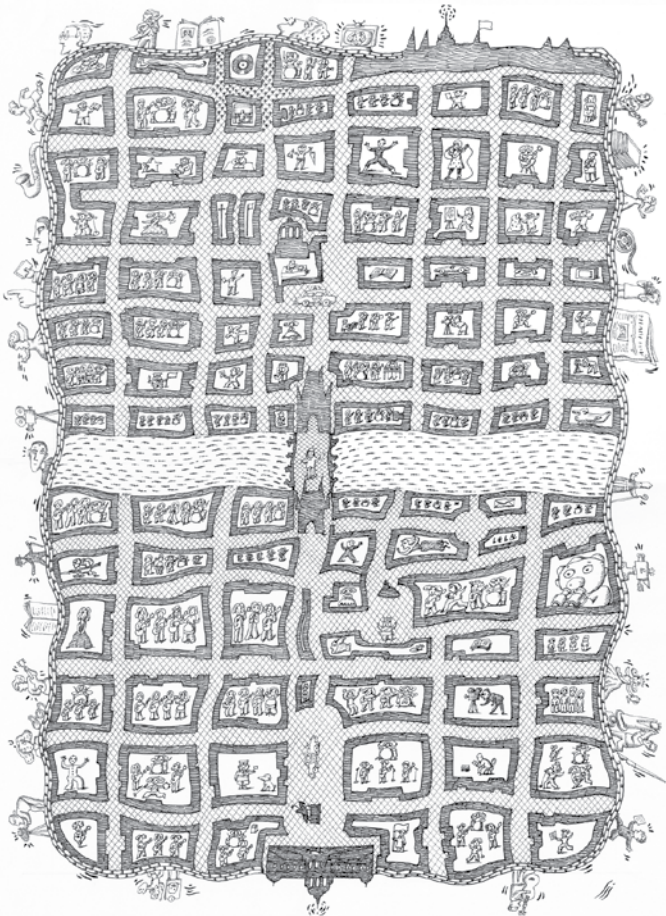
2:15 Something Like Happiness
4:20 Voyage to the End of the Universe
6:15 Karamazovs
8:50 Daisies

OPENING AND CLOSING NIGHT: Reception to follow, catered by the Bohemian Hall and Beer Garden and Pilsner Urquell.

FRIEDA AND ROY FURMAN GALLERY

OFF THE WALL: The Art of Peter Sís

Off the Wall: The Art of Peter Sís is an exhibition of drawings from the émigré author/illustrator's beloved book, *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007). *The Wall* portrays Sís's coming-of-age struggle to preserve artistic freedom in Communist Prague—where he drew in secret and read banned books—and his eventual liberation through art. Praised by publications from *The New York Times Book Review* to *The Wall Street Journal*, Sís's book is, to quote former Czech president Václav Havel, "about the will to live one's life in freedom, and should be required reading for all those who take their freedom for granted." Peter Sís will attend the Oct 23 Opening.



From *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain*, 2007. Courtesy of the artist and Mary Ryan Gallery, New York.

Special thanks to Koh-I-Noor; Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association; Farrar, Straus and Giroux; and Mary Ryan Gallery for their support of the exhibition.

October 23rd - November 19th