

Oscar winning director Jiří Menzel passed away

One of the leading figures of the Czechoslovak New Wave, director of *Closely Watched Trains* (Best Foreign Language Film at 1968 Oscars), passed away on Saturday. Jiří Menzel was 82.

Czech film director, theatre director, actor, and screenwriter Jiří Menzel was born in Prague, 1938. He studied directing at the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (FAMU) and his teacher was another legendary Czechoslovak author Otakar Vávra.

Menzel started his directing career with an adaptation of a novel by Bohumil Hrabal, *Closely Watched Trains* (1966), and his feature debut became also his most acclaimed film because two years later earned the director an Academy Award for best foreign film. This World War II drama was also nominated for Golden Globe at the same year and later also for BAFTA.

After the success of *Closely Watched Trains*, Menzel shot another adaptation, this time Vladislav Vančura's *Capricious Summer* (1967), which was screened at the Cannes Festival and won the Crystal Globe at the Karlovy Vary festival. Two years later was released Menzel's infamous film *Larks on a String*, which was banned by the Czechoslovakian government and finally released in 1990 after the fall of the Communist regime. The film about the crimes of totalitarianism won the Golden Bear at the 40th Berlin International Film Festival.

In 1970s and 1980s, Menzel continued coworking with Bohumil Hrabal (*Cutting it Short*, 1980, *The Snowdrop Festival*, 1983) and regularly teamed up with scriptwriter Zdeněk Svěrák (writer of Oscar winning *Kolya*) for comedies *Secluded*, *Near Woods* (1976) or *My Sweet Little Village* (1985), which earned director the second Oscar nomination. Both films acquired domestic cult status which still lasts.

After the Velvet Revolution, Jiří Menzel was slowly retreating from his glory. Still he shot two films that received an international attention. At the Venice Film Festival, Menzel premiered *Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Private Ivan Chonkin* (1994), and at the Berlinale, Menzel premiered his last adaptation of Bohumi Hrabal, *I Served the King of England* (2006).

Jiří Menzel died on Saturday after long-term illness surrounded by his family at the age of 82.

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