



Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival

Festival Daily

THE OFFICIAL ENGLISH DAILY OF THE 43RD KARLOVY VARY INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

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PRÁVO

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All art strives to be like music

Former dissident Mueller-Stahl now an inspired character actor and painter

Will Tizard

Armin Mueller-Stahl, one of the busiest character actors in the movie business, will turn 78 this year and shows no sign of slowing down. On the contrary, having launched his painting career at age 70, with well-received shows at prominent European galleries, Mueller-Stahl is still branching out as an artist – and he radiates a quiet, almost mischievous, energy.

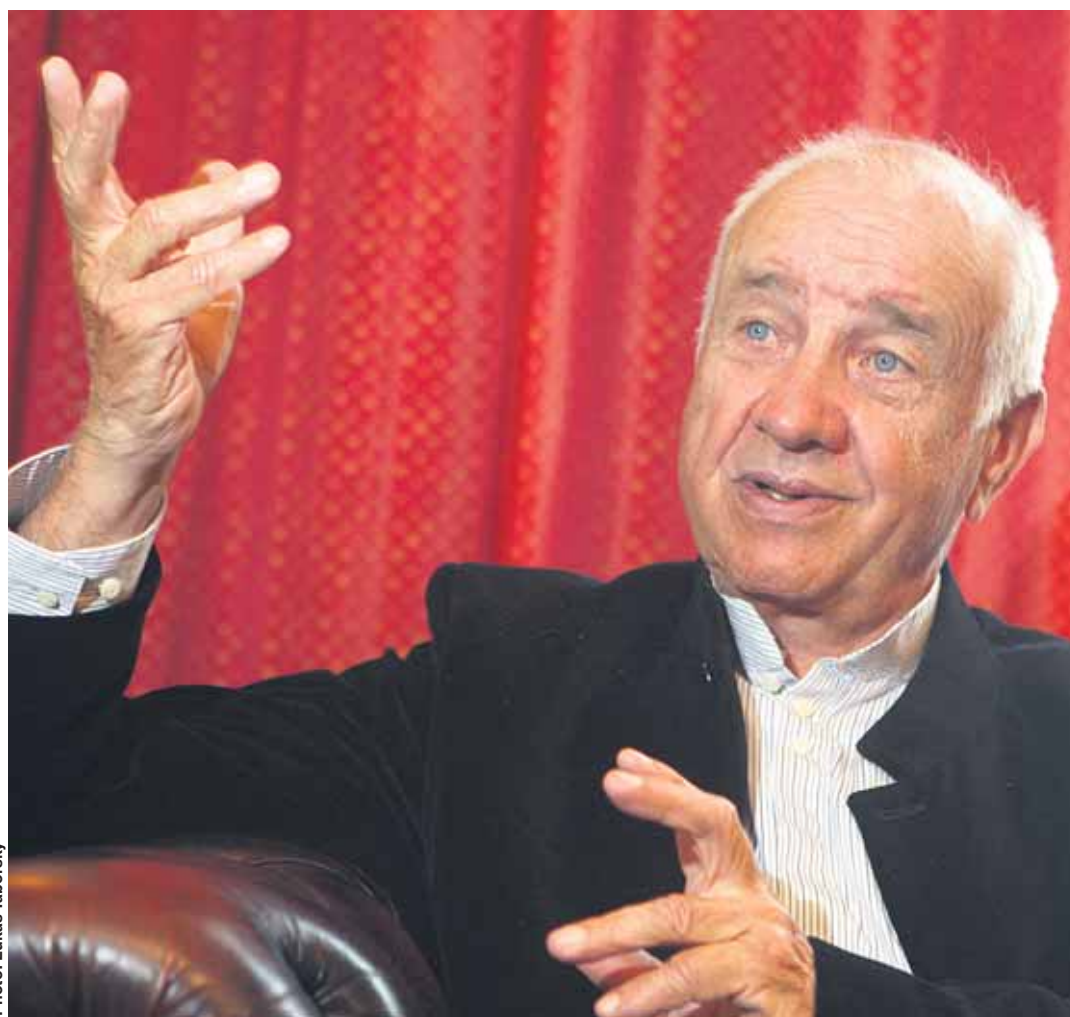
A film actor from age 20 in then East Germany, he emigrated west in 1980 after protesting communist cultural officials, then found himself working with Rainer Werner Fassbinder on films like *Veronika Voss*.

In 1989 he gave up a comfortable and remunerative career in German television to try his luck in the US, where he was almost unknown. Roles in *The Music Box*, *Avalon*, *Night on Earth* and *Shine* followed, as directors like Costa-Gavras, Barry Levinson and Jim Jarmusch fell under the spell of the softspoken native of the Prussian city of Tilsit.

Currently working on *Angels & Demons* with Tom Hanks, Mueller-Stahl is in Karlovy Vary opening an exhibition of his portraits at the Karlovy Vary Art Gallery.

■ **You've painted all your life. Is there something about doing portraits on canvas that prepared you for a career in acting? Both are really about discovering a character visually, no?**

To a certain extent, yes. Sometimes I'm going to draw some images and I say, 'Oh yeah! That's exactly the man I want to play.' You know, it's some kind of



German actor and artist Armin Mueller-Stahl whose paintings can be seen at KVIFF.

evidence of how someone behaves. And it's sometimes very quickly done because I'm a quick drawer. That's what I've done all my life. But 40 years ago, there was a friend of mine who said, 'Why don't you make exhibitions? I can arrange it.' I said, 'No, I won't do it. I will do it when God gives me a long life.'

When I become 70 I will do it. Then I became 70, and then I did it. And it was at a film museum in Potsdam and it became a big suc-

cess. And it was a surprise because I didn't expect it. That was a wonderful present I got in my late life.

■ **You've worked with some great film artists as well. What were some of the issues when you made your films with Fassbinder after you escaped to West Germany?**

He was always crossing the border – in all ways. Even in his sexual life... even between life or

death. When he took drugs, sometimes in the morning people came to see can we shoot this day. It was like: "Oh yeah, he's still breathing." And one day they came and he was gone. He told me once, "Life has to be full, not long."

■ **From concert violinist in your youth to an actor with over 130 credits between film and television roles, what's the key to your incredible energy?**

I ask myself, 'What's the purpose to my life on this planet? What can I do best? What should I do? I can best be creative. That's music, that's writing, acting, and painting. And every art wants to become music. Painting is very funny. If you have a pen in your hand, it's going to be concrete. Color makes it abstract. Color's always trying to push on the edges. And abstract is going to be music again. It's like composition.'

■ **And was your musician-ship of use to you in terms of preparing for your film roles? In adjusting the tone and rhythm of your lines and dialogue?**

Absolutely. That's so important. To listen to the other guy you're playing with. I remember when Bernstein told one flautist, "Just listen to the other guy, to what he's playing. Answer him. That's everything." On a film set, you never know what will happen. Your partner may speak slow, so you have to speak quick. If he's very quick, you can have your pauses. You have to feel how it comes together.

■ **You've said you believe in building a character from the outside in. Have you always been suspicious about the New York method school of acting so loved by Americans of the Al Pacino generation?**

That's always a danger. I know everything about such actors. If the person revealed all his secrets now he's open – too open. That was the wonderful thing about Kafka. They're still trying to discover things about Kafka. Now they're discovering he was even laughing. They didn't know. And I love to laugh.

The Lowdown

As KVIFF gets into full swing, the incidents and accidents that make up **great Lowdown items** are beginning to flow in earnest. Keep up the good work, kids – remember: this column's for you, after all. (Who doesn't need **engaging stories to recount at the bar or industry party?**)

One that's fascinated the international press involves a "terrible science teacher," according to *Variety's* executive editor for features, **Steven Gaydos**. While picking up an award at the KVIFF opening ceremony, given for his work in helping discover and promote new European filmmakers through the **Variety Critics' Choice: Europe Now!** film section, Gaydos paused to thank the many people who have made this series a success for 11 years.

They included respected critic **Derek Elley** and his august crew, the European Film Promotion organization, festival talent consultant **Tatiana Detlofson** and daughter **Natalia** for surviving a certain notorious middle-school teacher named Mr. Vanderveen. Said Gaydos later in the evening at the swanky **Grand Hotel Pupp** party, "Some Dutch people are upset." For the record, the terribly unpopular Vanderveen is all-American. OK?

Media attorney **Alan L. Grodin** had them laughing as well on Saturday at a panel discussion sponsored by Prague production company **StillKings Films**. Speaking to an audience of local filmmakers, Grodin claimed the **Sundance** festival was the best place to find indie film in the West. And what are the magic ingredients that get movies accepted there? "Most of the films are about death," Grodin suggested. "Sometimes sex – but not straight sex."

SEE YOU THERE

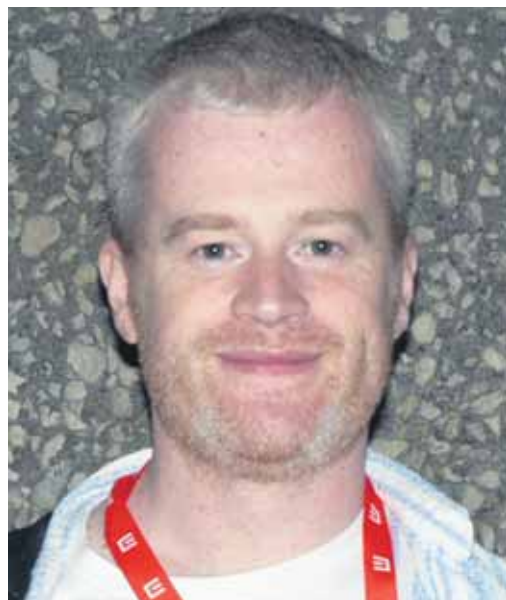
Macdara Vallely

Director of *Peacefire*

I'd like to go and see *14 Kilometers* because it's about immigrants. I'm an Irish immigrant myself, living in New York. I am interested in immigrant stories and I can relate to them. I would also like to see *Absurdistan*, because it sounds different and funny compared to the usual story we get from that part of the world [Central Asia]. I think getting more stories and diversity from that region would be a healthy thing

14 Kilometers screens today at 10am in the *Husovka Theater* and on 10 July at 10.30am in the *GH Pupp Cinema*. *Absurdistan* screens today at 2pm in the *Karlovy Vary Theater* and on 8 July in the *Richmond Cinema* and 12 July at the *Thermal Congress Hall*.

You can see *Macdara's Peacefire* on 8 July at 1pm in the *Espace Dorleans Cinema*.



THE KNOWLEDGE

KVIFF trailer gets a quirky makeover

The Karlovy Vary trailer, the mini-feature that screens before the films, is always much anticipated because it's usually done by one of the country's top directors. This year's offering – by the respected Ivan Zachariáš – is no exception. In fact, his three inspired black-and-white shorts christen a new and permanent format for the KVIFF trailer.

Each focuses on a past winner of the festival's vaunted Crystal Globe, and takes an ironic look at where the statuette may happen to be standing today and what purpose it's serving. Zachariáš found major stars like Miloš Forman, Danny DeVito, Harvey Keitel and Věra Chytilová surprisingly willing to perform short comic sketches with their awards.



"They were all shot in New York except for Věra Chytilová's in Prague and Miloš Forman's in Connecticut." As for the plot in each, he adds, "It was kind of random to be honest."

The Forman piece slyly uses a riff on his masterpiece, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, while the Keitel film was improvised in a Brooklyn neighborhood bar to

incorporate a real medical issue the actor was enduring, having just suffered through a foot operation.

"I was a bit scared of Harvey Keitel, the same with DeVito," says Zachariáš, but both films were shot in just two hours without a hitch."

The trailers, shot with small crews, "like shooting back at film school," were lean, mean productions done on the fly but will now be a template for future trailers.

So don't be surprised in the next year or so to see Robert De Niro or Sharon Stone popping up with new and original uses for their Crystal Globes. It's said they make great blunt objects with which to silence alarm clocks, for one thing...