

“THE ECCENTRICS”

“ON THE SUNNY SIDE OF THE STREET”

A film by JANUSZ MAJEWSKI



SYNOPSIS

“Eccentrics” is an incredible story of a jazzman Fabian(Maciej Stuhr) who comes back to Poland from England at the end of the 1950ies. With a group of eccentric musicians he starts a swing big-band. Modesta (Natalia Rybicka) becomes the star of the band and they become very successful. The musician quickly falls head over hills in love with the femme fatale singer. They soon start an affair. As king and queen of swing they start touring Poland and their life takes a colourful turn. Will their feelings last?

ABOUT THE FILM

End of 1950ies. Fabian (Maciej Stuhr), a war immigrant and jazzman decides to come back to Poland from England. He played the trombone on a Polish transatlantic ship before the war. He comes to see his sister Wanda (Sonia Bohosiewicz) in Ciechocinek, in order to play swing again. What he doesn't know though is that is bound to find love too.

From both professional and amateur musicians he forms a swing big band. They are a group of very eccentric people whose mutual meeting brings out many funny and unexpected situations. We have a music-hater piano-tuner named Zuppe who sees a homosexual in every musician (Awarded for Best Actor at the Gdynia Film Festival - Wojciech Pszoniak), a distinguished doctor Mr Vogt (Jerzy Schejbal), a clarinet amateur (Adam Ferency), a police officer who played the trumpet before the war (Wiktor Zborowski) and a group of young beatniks (Wojtek Mazolewski and his musicians). They are being joined by Fabian's sister - a used to be famous jazz singer and a secret femme fatale Modesta (Natalia Rybicka). They practice their repertoire for weeks in a guesthouse run by Mrs Bayerova (Anna Dymna), once an owner and today a tired albeit not deprived of sense of humor host. Finally they give their first public performance and they are a huge success. The brightest star of the band is the seductive and beautiful Modesta. She makes Fabian fall in love with her instantly and they become lovers. As they become king and queen of swing they start to lead a very colorful life. Will their feelings turn out to be true?



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Jazz was a religion for my generation. In the first years after the war, before the Stalinist era, we had access to western press the radio and to American films and with the films we could listen to this amazing music. I went to see "Sun Valley Serenade" with the great Glen Miller Band eleven times! This was the era of swing and big bands and of the boogie-woogie. For us,

growing young men this was the music of hope and happiness, the music of our future which was supposed to be bright and colorful after years of traumatic war. In 1948 this was put to an end. Jazz was called the decadent enemy and the symbol of the imperialistic West and it became the underground music to which of course we never stopped listening. Willis Conover's voice in "Time for jazz" from Washington indoctrinated us with all the contemporary jazz musicians of that era: Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington and Count Basie only to name a few.

Finally Stalin died, Krustschev took all our hopes away but in the Gomulka era jazz came back in all its glory and became the symbol of freedom as well as of the Western civilization.

At about the same time, circa 1957 Fabian, our protagonist decides to go back to Poland. He left the country before the war, he used to play the trombone in a dance orchestra on the Polish transatlantic ship. He comes back as a musician obsessed with jazz that helped him overcome his personal trauma of losing his family and his native town of Lviv. He believes that jazz will help him as well as other depressed citizens of Poland under the communist rule.

I wanted to make a film about the power of optimism about the belief in the independent spirit about the darkness and cruelty of that era about the music and love and the ugliness of lies and hypocrisy. I wanted it to be funny but not silly and I wanted it to transport us to the time I know from my life experience. With this film I want to say goodbye to the ideals of my youth and my generation and sadly also the craft that I have been mastering for over half a century i.e. to film directing.

DIRECTOR'S BIO

Born in 1931 in Lviv.

Graduate of Architecture at the Polytechnics in Cracow (1955) and Film Direction at Film School of Łódź (1960). He began his career as production designer for films. Member of Polish Film Academy. Chancellor of the Warsaw Film School since 2012.

DIRECTOR'S MOST FAMOUS FEATURE FILMS TO DATE

"SUBTENANT" 1966

"CRIMINAL WHO STOLE A CRIME" 1969

"LOKIS" 1970

"JEALOUSY AND MEDICINE" 1973

"ENCHANTED STATIONS" 1975

"THE GORGON CASE" 1977

"DEAD LANGUAGE LESSON" 1979

"C.K. DESERTERS" 1985

"DESERTERS' GOLD" 1998

"AFTER SEASON" 2005

"THE RITE OF PASSAGE" 2010

MAIN CHARACTERS

FABIAN APANOWICZ (Maciej Stuhr) - jazz musician, plays the trombone, performed at Polish transatlantic ships before the war. Great dancer, a lightheaded womanizer. Comes back from England to stay with his sister in Ciechocinek. Starts a swing big band.

WANDA APANCZOWICZ-PATRAS (Sonia Bohosiewicz)- Fabian's sister, a dentist. Once a jazz musician, after big war trauma moved from Lviv to Ciechocinek. Lives in an abandoned guesthouse. Thanks to swing music that she starts to perform under the influence of her brother she comes alive again.

MODESTA NOWAK (Natalia Rybicka) – a mysterious femme- fatale that appears in Fabian's life right after his arrival in Ciechocinek. English teacher at the town school. Uses Fabian to practice her English. After Fabian discovers her vocal talents – she starts doing vocals along with his sister Wanda. Soon she becomes Fabian's lover.

LUDMIŁA BAYEROVA (Anna Dymna) – representing the-soon to be destroyed by Stalinism town bourgeoisie, Ludmiła used to be the owner of the guesthouse Zaświecie in Ciechocinek. Fabian rents one of the rooms in her guesthouse and soon also starts his band rehearsals there.

ZUPPE (Wojciech Pszoniak) a used to be piano tuner, a wasted true musical genius. An old fashioned elegant gentleman wearing mainly tuxedos or frock coats. Ironic skeptical and eccentric. The most versatile musician in Fabian's band.

STYPA (Wiktor Zborowski) – a Jew who managed to escape the Holocaust. Lives in Ciechocinek under a false name. A police officer. Played the trumpet in dance orchestras in Warsaw. Starts to play with Fabian as the first musician.

DR VOGT(Jerzy Schejbal) – an intern and balneologist. Musician- amateur joins Fabian's band. Handsome intelligent restrained middle-aged man. Finds it hard to face communist reality.

HABERTAS (Adam Ferency) – former owner of diner Współczesna. Amateur saxophone player. Joins Fabian's big band.

**INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR
JANUSZ MAJEWSKI**

The film is based on a novel by Włodzimierz Kowalewski called “Eccentrics”. Where did the idea to make a film out of it come from?

I read the book and knew immediately it was film material. The film I made I mean because you can obviously imagine a completely different movie made out of the same text.

The music, the most important component of this film, was composed by Wojciech Karolak, how did your cooperation start?

We’ve known each other since we were kids, we have always had similar musical taste and I always admired him as a musician. He was very pleased with the songs I chose and I was very pleased with his arrangements. Plus we were also joined by the most amazing Polish conductor-Wiesław Pieregórka. They made up a whole swing big-band of the most amazing Polish jazz musicians of different generations and that is a value in itself.

The production design in your film is very lively and colorful. Nothing like the era of the 1950ies where the film is based. Was that deliberate, to lose all the grey colors?

Well obviously it is no coincidence. We made this decision very deliberately based on two things basically: first the greys during the Communist Era in Poland are nothing but a stereotype, it was all made up by the gloomy historians. Grey you say? And what about fantastic colorful posters (these days you have to pay 1000 USD for my movie poster at a Museum in Australia!), what about the colorful clothes designed by Basia Hoff?! What about the colorfully dressed writers like Iwaszkiewicz. We created the production design from 1950ies from what it was, how we remember it. Second of all I was sick and tired of how this era was portrayed in Polish cinema thus far. The greys, the sadness the misfortune the evil. I really wanted to show it the way I still see it when I close my eyes.

You have gathered together a truly impressive cast ensemble. How did you manage to convince someone like Anna Dymna to play such a controversial part?

We’ve known each other for ages. Anna played in some of my previous features and also was the protagonist of my TV show back in the 90ies back when she was already a mature but still very attractive woman. And then we met by accident when I was already completing my cast and when I saw her I thought that Ludmila Bayerova could have looked exactly like her! A woman who aged and has been through a lot but who once was the queen of every party. Anna was not afraid of this part at all, she loved the fact that we would make her look ugly etc. These are the kind of actors I work with.

Is the film a very faithful adaptation of the book or can we find your life’s chapters in it as well?

Oh well, you know how it is with being faithful to adaptations. It is so hard to place an entire novel in a film’s timeline, it’s impossible, we had to take shortcuts naturally. And as per my personal life well there was more than a few inspirations for sure but especially this one: when Fabian reminisces how he heard old black jazz musicians while in NYC that is my truest memory from my first visit to the US in 1977. I genuinely felt like I had come back home because jazz is in fact my second home and that is why I had to make a film about it.

“Eccentrics aka on the sunny side of the street” – what do these lyrics mean to you?

They're addressed to the viewer, they say that you should always look at life with a certain dose of optimism, that you can feel like Rockefeller even if you have no pennies left in your pocket. I decided to place it as our film's second title and judging by the viewers' reactions I think we have reached our goal.

INTERVIEW WITH MACIEJ STUHR FABIAN APANOWICZ

On screen we watch you play the trombone and conduct an entire orchestra. How did you prepare for this part?

I suppose it won't be that big a lie if I say that I was actually preparing for 8 years because that is how long my music school education lasted. I majored in piano though but without years of this kind of education it would have been impossible for me to play Fabian – a brilliant jazz musician. It was a hard job. The entire crew went to bed and I stayed up long nights practicing on my trombone and my conducting skills. But it was also so much fun! More than that actually, conducting a swing big band was my dream come true. Plus we had singing and dance classes so no procrastinating there mister!

How did your cooperation with the director Janusz Majewski go about?

Despite the age difference I managed to find many things in common with him. We went to the same schools, had almost the same addresses! And above all we share the same life philosophy- I also prefer to walk on the sunny side of life.

The film takes place in the 50ies and 60ies, it's the first time we see you in a part placed in that era. How did you feel playing Fabian?

What I loved most about my character is that he comes from England and he's just overloaded with the British style. Well dressed, well-mannered and most of all he owns a red Cabriolet.

Did you base your character on someone in particular?

Well I must say I thought a lot about my grandpa. He was about Fabian's age back in the day, he dressed a lot like him and he had the exact same kind of restraint.

“Eccentrics” is also a love story on many levels. How does your character go about love in the film?

Well, he is really loving women isn't he. His story without the love theme would only be a story of a jazz musician wouldn't it? Thanks to love he turns from musician to artist. I also noticed that whenever he sees Modesta he becomes a real talker as opposed to with other characters when he's merely a listener.

“What does the lyric of the song “On the sunny side of the street” mean to you?

It means that despite the hardship people must have had in the 50ies they kept smiling and singing and dancing. I am pretty much an ambassador to this motto as well.

INTERVIEW WITH SONIA BOHOSIEWICZ
WANDA – FABIAN'S SISTER

In the film pretty much everything revolves around music. You managed to create a wonderful duo with Natalia Rybicka. How did you prepare for the part?

It took me a few months to prepare and I mean not just for the part itself but mostly vocally. I used to sing at festivals, tv shows etc but when I came to my first lesson with the voice coach and she heard me sing she was like “ok stop stop, how much time do we have?” and I was like “a few months” and she was like “maybe we’ll manage”...I understood that jazz singing had nothing to do with any other type of singing. You need to hit every note perfectly, there’s no room for showing off or bad improvising. Luckily once we were done everyone was congratulating me so it couldn’t have been bad 😊

Is Wanda’s character in any way similar to you?

To be quite honest not at all. She is an introverted single middle aged woman. She is actually quite my opposite. I am a very cheerful loud and happy person most of the time. I guess the only thing we had in common was the love for jazz music. I love playing parts that have barely anything to do with me, it’s so much more fun than playing versions of yourself over and over.

Maciej Stuhr is portraying your brother. How was it to play his sister?

We go back a long way. All the way back since Cracow when we were both doing stand- up shows. I was really happy when I found out we were going to work together again. It’s our third film together. Before we played a married couple twice so we always had “bed scenes” together. We joked at this film set that it almost feels weird that we weren’t going to go to bed together 😊

What was the ambiance like on set?

I feel like we all absolutely loved coming to the set. Janusz Majewski invited a whole bunch of his very close friends to work on this film and you could feel it every day. And it wasn’t just about creative atmosphere, it was about being together and enjoying each other’s company. We created this entire eccentric family 😊

What would you say distinguishes Janusz Majewski from other directors?

We began the shootings with bottles of champagne. He said he hoped we would work well and that there will be no misunderstandings on set. He asked everyone to come directly to him if we had any problem. Next he asked anyone who was still with him on a Sir basis to change that so that there wouldn’t be any inequalities. What distinguishes him is that he is a true gentleman. He’s got style and class.

What does the lyric “On the sunny side of the street” mean to you?

*I don’t think this requires any explanation. **Sonia starts singing the lyrics.** It’s all in the song!*

INTERVIEW WITH NATALIA RYBICKA MODESTA

We can watch on screen how well you did vocally in the film. How did you prepare for the part?

Well, the preparations were very fast and intensive because as you know I got the part after the originally chosen actress broke her leg. I really had no more than a few weeks to prepare the vocals and until the last moment I was not sure whether they were going to use my voice in the film so I am very proud that they actually did ☺

Modesta is a very mysterious and seductive woman. Did you find you had a lot in common with her?

Not at all ☺ She is my exact opposite. But it was a great challenge to play someone I am not. Plus it turned out I actually know how to seduce so that was something new as well ☺

How was it to work with Janusz Majewski for you?

It was very interesting. Everyday we'd literally walk the sunny side of the street. He's a man of great class, knows precisely what he wants from an actor, made us feel very safe on set. We were all very focused and had no misunderstandings.

The film is set in the 50ies. How did you feel about that?

The costumes designed by Elżbieta Radke and Aneta Brzozowska made it very easy for me to enter my part and Modesta's world. It was exquisite to change sneakers for stilettos. As you know the 50ies weren't exactly the most fun era for our country but the jazz and the colors and the beautiful corner streets of Ciechocinek proved otherwise.

Your partner on set was Maciej Stuhr. How did you manage to create such great chemistry on set?

Well, maybe it had something to do with the fact that we're actors ☺ Maciek in addition is a really good one. We worked together for the first time. It was a very good and interesting experience. He's also a good friend hence probably how we managed to be credible on screen as well.

INTERVIEW WITH ANNA DYMNA LUDMIŁA BAYEROWA

Bayerowa is a very eccentric character. She likes to drink and smoke, she's far from being a lady. Weren't you afraid of playing a character such as her?

She is a very tragic character. She carries the huge burden of a person whose world had suddenly fallen apart. She once was a lady and owned a famous elegant guesthouse. She hosted the best parties and guests, drank the best wines and played the piano. Suddenly all this was taken from her by the communist regime. She fell apart completely. Lost her sense of life. Tries to run from the nightmares of her past. She spends her days drinking smoking and swearing her life away. She's like a sick wounded animal, full of rage and anger and hopelessness. Was I scared? I always have plenty of doubts and fears. I did my best so she wouldn't be just vulgar. But I didn't hesitate for one minute. I knew that if Janusz Majewski wants me to play this character then he believes that I can do it.

Janusz Majewski is a legend of Polish cinema. How was it to meet him on set yet again?

I have known Janusz nearly my entire acting life. We communicate practically without words. He's very sensitive and delicate. Once he hires an actor he gives him all the trust and safety you can get. When he offered me the part he was afraid I would reject it. He really moved me when he asked: "Ania, would you consider playing an old fat vulgar lady who becomes a toilet lady?" This part demands a lot of courage. To show how time goes by and how beauty is lost on the way. The work was very intense and not easy. I did my part on the first three days of shooting. My mouth hurt from all the cigarettes and the weird substances that played alcohol. But it was absolutely wonderful.

What would you say is the most important in this movie?

That it's about the most important things in life. About freedom, happiness and joy that music can give you despite darkness surrounding you everywhere. I also think it's very up to date. In these chaotic fast paced crazy times we can only try and find peace in art theatre music. The music is what's probably greatest about this film, it stayed with me for a long time after the screening.

The film is very colorful and cheerful. How do you remember those years?

I was only a few years old back then. I had a wonderful colorful childhood full of adventures and nature. I was never bored I never complained. Even though we didn't have much at home. Money and material things didn't matter. We only had chocolate twice a year but My God how it tasted! I had my first banana when I was 16! And then I plunged into the artistic world and I couldn't care less for the evil communist regime ☺ I guess the film is about that as well.

**INTERVIEW WITH WOJCIECH PSZONIAK
FELICJAN ZUPPE**

You were awarded at last year's Gdynia Film Festival for the part of Zuppe. He is a true eccentric. How did you go about building your character?

Well, I had to be very careful not to make Zuppe look like a cartoon character. My goal was to make him part of the world depicted in the movie. I didn't want him to be exaggerated. I wanted the costume his body language to work exactly as they should.

You worked with Janusz Majewski on several occasions, first time in 1977. How did your cooperation change throughout the years?

We have been work colleagues and friends for many years now. I really admire his work style, his culture – you can see it in his films. Actually apart from the fact that we got older not much has changed.

In the film you become a jazz musician in a big band. Is the music world of that era close to you in any way?

I love jazz. This film is actually like a personal memory of mine. I used to play the saxophone. Jazz was always a symbol of freedom Anyone who listened to jazz at the time treated it like an oasis of freedom.

What do the lyrics of the song “On the sunny side of the street” mean to you?

They mean a lot. Especially bearing in mind what's been happening in Europe lately! I really appreciate the fact that I can watch this film and leave the cinema smiling and happy!

MUSIC IN THE FILM

Music is the main protagonist of the film. Or at least it's as important as the main actors. Wojciech Karolak is responsible for the soundtrack, he actually also appears in the film as the piano player in a bar. This genius jazz musician began his career in 1958 in a band called the Jazz Believers where he played with such geniuses as Jan “Ptaszyn” Wróblewski and Krzysztof Komeda. He later went on to play with such giants of the jazz music scene as Michał Urbaniak, Urszula Dudziak, Andrzej Kurylewicz and Jarosław Śmietana. The swing evergreens are performed by Big Collective Band, conducted by Wiesław Pieregórka, one of the biggest jazz names in Poland, artistic director of many music festivals in Poland.

What's interesting is that all the vocals have been recorded by the actors themselves. We can also appreciate the bright talent of Wojtek Mazolewski and his quintet on screen. This bass player was actually the co-inventor of the yass style. Today he is the leader of Pink Freud and Wojtek Mazolewski Quintet.

WFDiF – DOCUMENTARY AND FEATURE FILM STUDIOS

WFDiF was founded in 1949, initially as a documentary film production center for National Film Newsreel. Soon after, however, WFDiF became an important feature film production center. In the studios, editing rooms and laboratories of WFDiF movies by Andrzej Wajda, Jerzy Antczak, Krzysztof Zanussi, Krzysztof Kiesłowski and Jerzy Hoffman were created.

In recognition of the importance of WFDiF in the Polish audiovisual industry, by order of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, WFDiF was transformed into a national Institution of Culture in 2013.

At present, WFDiF is the leading producer of Polish documentary and feature films. Directors from all generations shoot their films there, among them: Wojciech Smarzowski (*Rose*), Janusz Majewski (*The Right of Passage*, *The Eccentrics*), Filip Bajon (*Damaged*), Jan Kidawa-Błoński (*In Hiding*, *Little Rose*), Krzysztof Łukasiewicz (*Viva Belarus!*, *Lynching*, *Karbala*), Ryszard Bugajski (*General Nil*).

WFDiF pays special attention to new directing talent by undertaking the production of debuts (among others: *Shopping Girls* by Katarzyna Rosłaniec, *The Lure* by Agnieszka Smoczyńska, *The Girl from the Wardrobe* by Bodo Kox or *Waterline* by Michał Orlowski). Since the beginning of the 90's, WFDiF as a co-producer has supported dozens of film productions including debuts, many of which have achieved significant viewership and artistic success.

One of the interesting initiatives at WFDiF is the Teatroteka Project – a series of screen productions of young Polish theater drama realized by young directors.

WFDiF is in the process of reconstruction and digitalization of its documentary films.

Since 2013, WFDiF has been conducting a screenwriting course – “The Script Factory” and, with great success, the “Movie Set” educational project.

FILM CREDITS:

DIRECTOR	JANUSZ MAJEWSKI
DOP	ADAM BAJERSKI
SCREENPLAY	WŁODZIMIERZ KOWALEWSKI
MUSIC	WOJCIECH KAROLAK
SOUND	KRZYSZTOF JASTRZĄB, MATEUSZ IRISIK
PRODUCTION DESIGN	ANDRZEJ HALIŃSKI
INTERIOR DESIGN	INGA PALACZ
COSTUMES	ELŻBIETA RADKE
MAKE-UP	ANETA BRZOZOWSKA
PRODUCTION MANAGER	TADEUSZ DREWNO
EDITING	MILENIA FIEDLER psm
PRODUCER	WŁODZIMIERZ NIDERHAUS
PRODUCTION HOUSE	WFDiF
CO-PRODUCTION	AGORA SA, POLISH TELEVISION
CO-PRODUCER	ROBERT KIJAK
CO- FINANCING	POLISH FILM INSTITUTE KUJAWSKO-POMORSKIE REGION
YEAR OF PRODUCTION	2015
DURATION	112 MIN.

CAST:

MACIEJ STUHR	Fabian Apanowicz
NATALIA RYBICKA	Modesta Nowak
SONIA BOHOSIEWICZ	Wanda Apanowicz-Patras
ANNA DYMNA	Ludmiła Bayerowa
WOJCIECH PSZONIAK	Zuppe
WIKTOR ZBOROWSKI	Stypa
WŁADYSŁAW KOWALSKI	Dr Garfinkel
JERZY SCHEJBAL	Dr Vogt
ADAM FERENCY	Habertas
PAWEŁ KRÓLIKOWSKI	Zagaj
MARIAN DZIĘDZIEL	Comrade Kusiak
AGNIESZKA MICHALSKA	Kusiak's secretary
MARIAN OPANIA	Generla Boryssowski
ARKADIUSZ DETMER	Aide-de-camp to the General
MAGDALENA ZAWADZKA	Buffet Lady