

Animated film

The history of a glorious era in Czechoslovak animated film did not begin to be written until after the Second World War. The most significant artists include Jiri Trnka, Karel Zeman and Hermína Týrlová.

The **nationalization of the film industry** helped the rapid development of Czech animated film. Not less important for the development is the joining of the ranks by **Jiri Trnka**. Trnka had an extremely successful beginning to his work at Prague's Atelier filmových triku (Film Special Effects Studio, or AFIT).

In 1946, he won the **main prize at Cannes for the film Zviratka a Petrovsti** (The Animals and the People of Petrov – this film by an internationally unknown artist triumphed over such names in the world of animation as Walt Disney, Norman McLaren and Paul Grimault). In subsequent years, Trnka and his collaborators (who were later also very important figures in Czech film, such as **Bretislav Pojar, Jiri Brdecka, Eduard Hofman** and others) supplied a whole series of successful films.

The AFIT company was divided into a **studio for puppet films**, where Trnka worked, and a **studio for animated cartoons – Bratri v triku**. At the end of the 1940s, Jiri Trnka immediately made three animated feature films and several short films in record time. This was more than could be managed by anyone else in the world during that period. Trnka's projects had a **lot of state support** for their success, even after the accession of the communist dictatorship.

In the 1950s, a number of successful films were produced in Trnka's workshop such as *Bajaja* (1950), **Stare povesti ceske** (Ancient Czech Myths, 1952), **Sen noci svatojánske** (A Midsummer Night's Dream, 1959) and others. These earned Trnka the honor of being dubbed the Walt Disney of the East by the world's film critics. Jiri Trnka's last film, *Ruka* (The Hand), from 1965, is one of his most celebrated works.

Two of Trnka's collaborators, **Jiri Brdecka** and **Bretislav Pojar** gained worldwide popularity. Jiri Brdecka applied himself to directing animated cartoons. Bretislav Pojar is another important figure in Czech puppet film. His first independent short film, **O sklenicku vic** (A Drop Too Much, 1954) was an immediate international success (**main prize at the Cannes festival**). Pojar's most famous films include a series about playful bears **Pojďte pane, budeme si hrát** (Come Sir,

Let's Play) and **Zahrada** (The Garden), based on books by the aforementioned Jiri Trnka. Since the 1990s, Bretislav Pojar has been head of the Animation Department at Prague's FAMU school.

Another center of Czech animated film was located in **Moravia**. The central figures of the Zlin studios were **Karel Zeman** and **Hermina Tyrlova**. Incidentally, Tyrlova made her first films even before Jiri Trnka. Her films are primarily intended for a children's audience. The most famous of these includes **Vzpoura hracek** (Toy Rebellion, 1948).

The films of Karel Zeman are celebrated for their irreproducible poetics based on a combination of live actors with animated models and a drawn background. The themes of his films often concern themselves with the work of Jules Verne. Zeman's most renowned film, **Vynalez zkazy** (A Deadly Invention) was based on Jules Verne's work.

Zdenek Miler also originally started at the Zlin studios, but he soon relocated to the newly established Bratři v triku in Prague. Miler is the creator of the **animated character Krteček, or the Little Mole**, whose stories have become hugely popular, and not just in the Czech Lands. (Miler's first film with Krteček, *Jak krtek ke kalhotkám přišel*, or *How the Mole Got His Trousers*, won the **main prize at the Venice festival** in 1957). Krteček has become one of the symbols of Czech animated film.

Another conspicuous figure at Bratři v triku was **Josef Kabrt**, who also came to Prague from Zlin. His most celebrated work is his participation in the French-Czech feature-film project *La Planète Sauvage* (1973), with graphic design by Roland Topor and direction by René Laloux.

A subsequent generation of celebrated distinctive artists is represented in puppet film – **Lubomir Benes, Jan Svankmajer** and **Jiri Barta**. Lubomir Benes had major international success with his puppet variation on the themes of the classic tale of King Midas, **Kral a skritek** (The King and the Goblin, 1980). The slapstick series of bedtime stories **A je to** (Well Done!, generally known as Pat and Mat in English) also won audiences' hearts.

Jan Svankmajer originally came to film from his work at *Laterna magika* where he collaborated on projects poetically combining acting, dance and film. He is known as a filmmaker with one of the most original film styles around, which carries distinct traces of surrealism. He made his first films in the 1960s and is today one of the most famous living makers of animated films, even beyond the borders of the Czech Republic.

Jiri Barta's most striking feat is *Kryšar* (The Pied Piper, 1985), a puppet film on the old German legend adapted by Czech writer Viktor Dyk.

The grace with which the makers of animated films managed to overcome the pitfalls and constraints of the totalitarian regime is astonishing. It was undoubtedly a huge battle. Many projects could not be realized. Others were censored, denounced or banned. Nevertheless, the light of so many extraordinary works shone through everything. To this day, many are jewels in the treasury of the world's film heritage. Successes abroad helped filmmakers such as Trnka, Pojar, Zeman, Švankmajer and others make films according to their own ideas.

One advantage of nationalized cinematography under communism was the major **financial support** from the state, which Czech animated film was deprived of after the fall of communism and the subsequent privatisation of the film industry.

At present, only a limited number of animated films are being produced. Filmmakers who have managed despite this to assert themselves not only on the Czech scene but on the international stage as well include **Jan Švankmajer** (*Neco z Alenky*, or *Alice*, 1992; *Lekce Faust*, or *Faust*, 1996), the director of puppet films **Aurel Klimt**, the total animation experts **Pavel Koutsky** – e.g. *Curriculum vitae* (which won a Golden Bear at the Berlin Festival) and **Michaela Pavlatova** – her film *Reci, reci, reci* (*Words, Words, Words*, 1992) was nominated for an Oscar.

An American Academy Award was won by another Czech, **Jan Pinkava**, who makes films at the American Pixar studio (a pioneer in the field of computer animation). He received the award for the short film *Geri's Game* (1998).

Nevertheless, Czech animated film is not simply living off its illustrious tradition. It can still boast many talented and original artists, who are waiting for their opportunity to present the renowned art of Czech animation in the field of international film.

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