



RE-RELEASES

Werckmeister Harmonies

Werckmeister Harmonies (Werckmeister Harmóniák)

Director: Béla Tarr

Co-director: Ágnes Hranitzky

©/Presented by: Goëss Film,

Von Vietinghoff Filmproduktion, 13 Production

Made with the support of:

Magyar Mozgókép Közalapítvány, ORTT, Magyar

Televízió, Nemzeti Kulturális Alapprogram, ZDF –

Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen, ARTE, Eurimages

Conseil de l'Europe, Fondation MonteCinemaVerità,

Rai Tre

Producers (Goëss Film): Franz Goëss, Miklós Szita

Producer (Von Vietinghoff Filmproduktion):

Joachim von Vietinghoff

Producer (13 Production): Paul Saadoun

Associate Producers: Ralph Cotta, Béla Tarr

Production Team: Gábor Koncz Csövi,

Gábor Téni, Lajos Gerhardt

Collaborators: Nathalie Amoreux, Csaba Bagossy,

Csaba Banckhardt, Tamás Bánki, György

Berghoffer, József Buczkó, Kornél Csima, Csaba

Csuti, József Dene, Peter Doherty, István Erdei,

Csaba Eröss, David Evans, István Faragó, Sue Ellen

Foy, Károly Gaál, Éva Gáldi, Mária Havasi, Istvánné

Hegedüs, Sándor Kállay, Béla Kálmán, András

Kassai, Magdi Kondorosi, Ottó Korencsy,

Ágnes Kökönyei, Tamás Krausz, Dr Anita Kricsfalvi,

Előd Kürtös, Ferenc Laczkó, Ottó Lázár, Attila

Martonosi, Sándor Mátrai, Zsigmond Molcsán,

István Ősz, Zsuzsa Pellei, Iván Pohárnok, Judit

Poprádi, Judit Propper, Tibor Putnoki, Erzsébet

Rácz, István Sánta, Júlia Schüller, György Simon,

László Sudár, Sándor Szabó, Péter Szekeres,

Miklós Szemes, András Szeredás, Mihály Szula,

Marius Tabacu, Rudolf Takács, Gyöngyi Takácsné

Salgó, András Tóth, József Trombitás, Tamás Uglik,

Gábor Ugron, József Varjú, Orsolya Vercz,

Ferenc Ziaja

Assistant Directors: Sebestyén Kodolányi,

Jeroen Frantzen, Roland Vranik

Screenplay: László Krasznahorkai, Béla Tarr

Collaborators on Dialogue: György Fehér,

Péter Dobai, Gyuri Dósa Kiss, Lars Rudolph

Based on the novel by: László Krasznahorkai

Photographed by: Gábor Medvigy, Jörg Widmer,

Patrick de Ranter, Rob Tregenza, Emil Novák,

Erwin Lanzensberger, Miklós Gurbán

Lighting: Miklós Hajdú

Camera Assistants: István Decsi,

Géza Pásztor, Tibor Oláh

Grip: János Tóth

Technicians: Zoltán Pataki, László Mong

Whale Maquette: Iván Pohárnok

Editor: Ágnes Hranitzky

Assistant Editor: Éva Szentandrás

Artistic Consultant: Gyula Pauer

Set Dressers: Sándor Katona, Béla Zsolt Tóth

Sculptors: Éva Karczag, András Rose

Costumes: János Breckl

Music: Mihály Víg

Sound: György Kovács

Boom Operator: László Szentmihályi Györffy

Sound Editor: Brigitta Kajdácsi

Stunts: Tamás Wichmann

Whale Specialist: Emese Kazár

Cast:

Lars Rudolph (János Valuska)

Peter Fitz (György Eszter)

Hanna Schygulla (Tünde Eszter)

János Derzsi (man in broad-cloth coat)

Djoko Rossich (man in Western boots)

Tamás Wichmann (man in the sailor-cap)

Béla Tarr's films since 1987, in collaboration with screenwriter/novelist László Krasznahorkai, may be challenging in their often extreme use of duration, but they are hardly short on narrative drive or solemn romanticism. *Werckmeister Harmonies* – based on Krasznahorkai's novel *The Melancholy of Resistance* – is Tarr's first truly gothic film, introducing an element of the fantastic, even the supernatural. Yet there is no spectacular illusionism involved – the fabulous whale from a visiting circus is a prop as transparently theatrical as the rhino in Fellini's *And the Ship Sails On*, and all we see of the apparently satanic Prince is a dwarfish shadow on a wall.

As a metaphysical horror story, *Werckmeister Harmonies* deserves to be Tarr's breakthrough with a cult audience, especially since its atmosphere bears comparison with early David Lynch. The hermetic world Tarr creates is ineffably mysterious, yet the film's representation is rooted in a scrupulously mundane naturalism (Tarr started out making dramas of working life beside which the Dardennes' films look wilfully baroque).

Werckmeister Harmonies is a collaborative film par excellence: the opening titles credit it jointly to Tarr, Krasznahorkai and editor Ágnes Hranitzky, Tarr's wife and long-time collaborator. The strength of their collective vision is proved by a remarkable unity of tone and look, despite an extended production period that involved seven cinematographers (including Rob Tregenza, a specialist in slow-take cinema in his own right). Throughout, the film maintains its harsh chiaroscuro and a style of camera movement that creates a forever shifting space: closed to the outside world, the small town where the action takes place contains endlessly explorable interiors, such as the cavernous, Wellesian expanses of György's house, unfolded by a roaming camera.

The haunted, bony features of German actor Lars Rudolph, who plays lead protagonist János, may suggest a Dostoevskian holy fool, but the tone of Krasznahorkai's novel – radically stripped down in his and Tarr's screenplay, its verbal torrents reduced to a chill autism – is closer, as W.G. Sebald has suggested, to Gogol. The universe of *Werckmeister Harmonies* is ruled by the Gogolian quality of *poshlost*, best described as a transcendental crassness and incarnated here by the fearsome Tünde, played by Hanna Schygulla (dubbed, like Rudolph, into Hungarian).

The film is dominated by a brooding atmosphere of apocalyptic unrest, though it is implied that the cosmic 'evil' pervading the town is the product of bourgeois paranoia. Tempting as it may be to relate the story to political changes in Hungary in the last days of Communism (Krasznahorkai's novel was published in 1989), Tarr has insisted that his films contain no allegory. Yet the narrative is certainly one of anxiety about the breakdown of an old, enfeebled order and the explosive release of repressed popular energies. Little in recent cinema is as terrifying as the sequence in which the masses attack a dilapidated hospital, beating up patients as they go: the violence, in an eight-minute shot, is accentuated by the ghostly placidity of the camera's drift along passageways and round corners, like a distracted onlooker. At last the hordes stop dead at the sight of a skeletal, naked old man – the decrepit earthly remnant of God, perhaps? – and lumber out like George Romero zombies while Tarr holds a close-up of János's stare.

Ferenc Kállai (*director*)
Mihály Kormos (*factotum*)
Dr Putyi Horváth (*porter*)
Enikő Börcsök
Éva Almási Albert (*Aunt Piri*)
Irén Szajki (*Mrs Harrer*)
Alfréd Járai (*Lajos Harrer*)
György Barkó (*Mr Nabadán*)
Lajos Dobák (*Mr Volent*)
András Fekete (*Mr Árgyelán*)
Gyuri Dósa Kiss
Józsi Mihályfi
Péter Dobai (*chief constable*)
Géza Balkay
Kati Lázár (*sorter*)
Péter Tóth
László Felugossy (*housepainter*)
Gyula Pauer (*Mr Hagelmayer*)
Barna Mihók (*coachman*)
Lois Viktor (*loader*)
Béla Máriáss (*Mr Má dai*)
Mátyás Dráfi (*man in fur-cap*)
József Ropog (*man beside the man in fur-cap*)
Sándor Bese (*The Prince*)
Erika Horineczky Béla Nagy, Lajos Bulucs, Ferenc
Gazdag, Gyula Herpai, Tibor Komáromi, Géza
Kósa, József Szántó, Miklós Vaszlavik, János
Váradi, Ágnes Kamondy, Péter Magyar, Dóra
Kováts, Gábor Werner
Tamás Bolba (*voice of János Valuska*)
Péter Haumann (*voice of György Eszter*)
Marianna Moór (*voice of Tünde Eszter*)
Attila Kaszás (*voice of The Prince*)
Hungary-Germany-France-Switzerland-Italy 2000©
145 mins
Digital 4K

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Yet it is impossible to determine the ultimate cause of the chaos. From the very start rumours are rife about the universal disruption heralded by the anticipated eclipse. But is any of it really caused by the arrival of the whale, or is the huge dead creature, with its glassy eye, simply the impotent witness to human destructiveness? Is the supposedly demonic demagogue Prince anything more than an impotent, robotic-voiced homunculus? The one truly identifiable centre of malevolence is Tünde, a reactionary opportunist exploiting superstition to gain power in the name of order. It may even be that her musicologist ex-husband György, obsessed with the theories of 17th-century German composer Werckmeister, has himself contributed to disturbing the harmonic order of things by withdrawing from any active involvement; at the very least he is a representative of an enfeebled intelligentsia, vainly fiddling with abstractions while the world burns.

The other great enigma is János's role in events. Seemingly an innocent treated with gentle indulgence, he has an implicit megalomania: directing a bar of drunks in a re-enactment of cosmic motion in the opening scene, he plays not only a beer-parlour deity but also a film-director figure within the fiction. He is characterised above all as a seer, gazing at the world, whether staring into the inscrutable eye of the whale or as a mute witness to violence. But his part in the terrible night remains unclear: when he reads a diary account of events we never quite know whether he's reading a narrative of his own involvement or whether he has 'authored' the events in a more oblique way – whether he has somehow, if only by passive collusion with Tünde, catalysed the apocalypse.

Explaining the cosmos to his drunks, János pleads, 'All I ask is that you step with me into the bottomlessness,' and that is essentially Tarr's invitation to the viewer. The enigmatic harmonic preoccupations alluded to in the title suggest that this film – rich in movement, low on dialogue – aspires, as the old phrase has it, to the condition of music. But Tarr's true achievement is to attain the condition of silence, and of bottomless, awesomely inscrutable nightmare.

Jonathan Romney, *Sight and Sound*, April 2003