



Andrzej Wajda: Portraits of History and Humanity

The Conductor Dyrygent

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Director: Andrzej Wajda

©: Film Polski

Production Company: Zespół Filmowy 'X'

Production Co-ordinators: Alina Klobukowska,
Tomasz Bek, Maciej Skalski, Jolanta Jarzecka,
Wanda Helbert

Production Manager: Barbara Pec-Slesicka

Assistant Directors: Jakub Rucinski,
Andrzej Kazanecki, Jolanta Jedynak

Screenplay: Andrzej Kijowski

Based on stories by/conversations with:

Andrzej Markowski

Director of Photography: Sławomir Idziak

Camera Operator: Piotr Kwiatkowski

Assistant Camera: Piotr Stankiewicz,

Jerzy Tomczuk

Stills Photographer: Renata Pajchel

Editor: Halina Prugar

Assistant Editors: Barbara Grodner, Ewa Smal

Art Director: Allan Starski

Assistant Art Directors: Maria Lubelska,
Joanna Lelanow

Assistant Set Decorator: Józef Runo

Set Decorator: Maria Osiecka-Kuminek

Costume Designer: Wiesława Starska

Assistant Costume Designer: Anna Plochocka

Make-up: Anna Adamek, Grazyna Dabrowska

Laboratory:

Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych w Warszawie

Music Director: Stanisław Wisłocki

Music Consultant: Malgorzata Jaworska

Sound: Piotr Zawadzki

Assistant Sound: Dorota Tucholka,

Wacław Borawski, Stanisław Hojden

Cast:

John Gielgud (*Jan Lasocki*)

Krystyna Janda (*Marta Pietryk*)

Andrzej Seweryn (*Adam Pietryk*)

Jan Ciecierski (*Marta's father*)

Tadeusz Czechowski

Marek Dabrowski

Józef Fryzlewicz (*town official*)

Janusz Gajos (*Warsaw dignitary*)

Stanisław Górka

Jerzy Kleyn

Mary Ann Krasinski (*Marta's American friend*)

Anna Lopatowska (*Anna, violinist*)

Elzbieta Strzałkowska

Marysia Seweryn (*Marysia, Marta's daughter*)

Jerzy Szmidt

Mewis Walker (*Lilian, Lasocki's wife*)

Wojciech Wysocki

Stanisław Zatłoka

Orkiestra Symfoniczna Centr

Zespołu Artystycznego

Polish Army

Poland 1979©

102 mins

Digital (restoration)

Restored by Fixafilm

The screening on Mon 9 Mar will be introduced by
film critic and scholar Michał Oleszczyk

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An internationally renowned conductor of Polish descent (played with gusto by John Gielgud) returns to his family's homeland to conduct a provincial orchestra after meeting the orchestra's violist – the daughter of an old love. Beloved by Ingmar Bergman, *The Conductor* comments on the moral decay and stagnation of a society and its artists. It's a beautifully performed, sensitively directed drama.

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Although he freely admits that records and concerts do not mean a great deal to him, Wajda has recently completed a new film, *The Conductor*, that deals intensely with the world of music, and stars none other than Sir John Gielgud, alongside Krystyna Janda, the nervy, sardonic blonde from *Man of Marble*. 'It's the story,' says Wajda, 'of a young violinist who wins a scholarship to study in New York. There she meets a great conductor of Polish birth, and they fall in love. He comes to her small hometown in Poland and wants to give his Golden Jubilee concert there. But the provincial orchestra is not exactly ready for such a big occasion, and as the young girl's husband is the local conductor, there is both a private and a public conflict in the making. The tension and the resonances of the drama are further heightened by the disclosure that the Gielgud character had conducted this very orchestra almost 50 years ago, at the outset of his career, when the first violinist was none other than the girl's mother. The theme of emotional history repeating itself, and the clash between youth and age, appear central to *The Conductor*. Just as Wajda declares himself stimulated by the proximity of young filmmakers in his unit, so his celebrated conductor is inspired by his love for the girl violinist to spur his orchestra to fresh heights.

Gielgud's dialogue is only partially dubbed, says Wajda, so that his splendid voice may be heard to best effect in English.

Peter Cowie, 'Wajda Redux' in *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1979/80

Given Wajda's fresh status as a political commentator, one listens carefully to *The Conductor* for echoes of the Solidarity debates that were reaching a crescendo even as the film was being completed. The only resonance to emerge with audible clarity, however, is the suggestion that in the world of music the provincial is no match for the international, and it would appear to stretch a point unreasonably to detect within this theme an allegory about the extent to which Poland might take inspiration from the West.

Certainly, the film's opening sequences suggest a hymn to all that New York has come to represent, although this quickly grows discordant when Marta tries to help a recumbent form on the pavement ignored by other passers-by. One of the film's best scenes shows pressure being brought to bear on the young conductor by the party representative who has already decided just how and where the concert is going to be performed; in the urbane chill of government manipulation can briefly be felt the sub-zero temperatures of *Rough Treatment* and *Man of Marble*, with their revelations of bland historical reconstruction. But Wajda seems in the main to have avoided any opportunities for proclaiming the essential Polishness of his characters' predicament – the implications, for example, of the maestro's 50-year absence from his

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The Conductor Dyrygent

Thu 26 Feb 20:55; Mon 9 Mar 17:50 (+ intro by film critic and scholar Michał Oleszczyk)

The Ashes Popioły

Sat 28 Feb 16:25 (+ intro by writer Michael Brooke)

The Solidarity Trilogy: Man of Marble

Człowiek z marmuru

Sun 1 Mar 12:10

The Solidarity Trilogy: Man of Iron

Człowiek z żelaza

Sun 1 Mar 15:00; Sun 15 Mar 18:00

The Solidarity Trilogy: Wałęsa: Man of Hope

Wałęsa. Człowiek z nadziei

Sun 1 Mar 18:20; Mon 16 Mar 20:30

Korczak

Mon 2 Mar 19:10 (+ Q&A); Fri 13 Mar 20:45

Katyn Katyń

Thu 5 Mar 20:30; Tue 10 Mar 18:15 (+ pre-recorded intro by film critic Carmen Gray)

Rough Treatment Bez znieczulenia

Mon 9 Mar 20:20 (+ intro by film critic and scholar Michał Oleszczyk)

The Promised Land Ziemia obiecana

Wed 11 Mar 18:45 (+ Q&A with actor Daniel Olbrychski)

Afterimage Powidoki

Thu 12 Mar 18:20; Wed 18 Mar 20:40

With thanks to

Marlena Łukasiak, Michał Oleszczyk,
Jędrzej Sabliński

Presented with the ICA and Ciné Lumière, who will also be hosting screenings of Wajda's works in February and March

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homeland. Instead, he seems more interested in examining the intimacies of family stress via a duet for three. Throughout the film, Marta rushes between elder and younger conductor, an emotional soloist in search of a key; neither proves to have any great musical truths to offer, and in exasperation she takes the lead herself in the final scene.

Recalling the frequency with which Wajda's male protagonists sink into self-pity and defeat (and both men in *The Conductor* have their big scenes of mortification), one is reminded by Krystyna Janda's owl-like glasses and rapacious gaze of the man-eating feminists in Wajda's *Hunting Flies*, a reminder which sheds a quite different, non-political illumination. Marta emerges as an ardent parasite, feeding off other reputations for the possible elevation of her own, a role which might also be related to Janda's investigating journalist in *Man of Marble*.

When the reflected glory in which she luxuriates at last loses its glow, she has absorbed enough to shine for herself. But if the argument has any justification, it is muffled by the authentic presence imparted by Gielgud; although not particularly convincing when waving gently at Beethoven's Fifth, he simply dominates the film with his familiar, elegant eccentricities even when dubbed, occasionally and awkwardly, into Polish. Whether complaining long-distance to his medical adviser in order to discard, with contempt, the recommended tablets, or reaching hastily for a drink (for himself) when a hysterical girl bursts into his hotel room, he makes a superbly complete display of the declining celebrity, all outward confidence and inner panic.

Aside from some technical lapses (there's the odd instance of the scar that comes and goes on Adam's face), *The Conductor* is an engaging collection of the stylish and the disparate: husband and wife hurrying home to bed, only to quarrel to such an extent as they strip off that with approaching nudity they're no longer interested; the angry young conductor trying to make the supreme gesture of contempt but unable to snap his baton, and so on. Through Gielgud, however, it makes its most enduring mark as another portrait in Wajda's gallery of isolated misfits for whom events have passed beyond control – a subject which, after all, proves to be not without a certain currency.

Philip Strick, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, December 1981