



DVD press release

Jan Švankmajer The Complete Short Films

The most comprehensive DVD collection ever assembled of all 26 short films by the legendary Czech Surrealist filmmaker-animator Jan Švankmajer is released by the BFI on 25 June. Technically and conceptually astonishing in their own right, these films are also as remarkable for their philosophical consistency as for their frequently mind-boggling imagery.

Drawing on a tradition of Surrealism based in the capital of magic and alchemy – Prague – Švankmajer uses a range of techniques, combining live action, puppet theatre, stop-motion and drawn animation, claymation, cut-outs, re-edited archive footage and montage.

With nearly eight hours of material, compiled on three discs and packaged in a deluxe digipack with a 56-page illustrated booklet, the DVD is a truly must-have item for any Švankmajer fan. Its release follows a visit by the director to BFI Southbank on 29 May to discuss his work, after a preview of his latest film *Lunacy*. *Lunacy* opens for a two-week run on 1 June, part of a complete Jan Švankmajer retrospective season at BFI Southbank from 1 – 16 June, a selection of which will then go on tour.

Compiled by BFI Screenonline's Michael Brooke, who also produced last year's highly acclaimed release *Quay Brothers: The Short Films 1979-2003*, the DVD collection spans almost 30 years, from *The Last Trick* (1964) to *Food* (1992). All the classics are included – *Punch and Judy*, *The Flat*, *Jabberwocky*, *Dimensions of Dialogue*, *Down to the Cellar* and both versions of *The Ossuary* (with the original banned tour-guide soundtrack and the replacement music track), alongside many British video premieres. It even contains the music video made for former Stranglers front man Hugh Cornwell (*Another Kind of Love*) and two 'Art Breaks' created for MTV.

The third disc of two-and-a-half hours of extra material includes a bonus short, *Johanes Doktor Faust* (1958); the original 54-minute version of *The Cabinet of Jan Švankmajer* (1984) with a brand new introduction by the Quay Brothers; the French documentary *Les Chimères des Švankmajer* (2001); interviews with Jan and Eva Švankmajer and examples of their work in other media. There's also a chance to see some Švankmajer special effects, created for commercial Czech features when he was banned from making his own films. The 54-page booklet includes an introduction to Švankmajer by Michael O'Pray; detailed film notes by Michael Brooke, Simon Field, Michael O'Pray, Julian Petley, A.L. Rees and Philip Strick; notes on the extras and much more.

Extras (full details below)

- *Johanes Doktor Faust* (Emil Radok, 1958)
- *Nick Carter in Prague* (Oldrich Lipský, 1977 excerpts)
- *The Cabinet of Jan Švankmajer* (Keith Griffiths, 1984)
- *Les Chimères des Švankmajer* (Bertrand Schmitt/Michel Leclerc, 2001)
- Czech TV Interview (2001)
- *Lunacy* trailer (2005)

Release date: 25 June 2007

RRP £29.99 / cat. no. BFIVD632 / cert 15

Czech / 1964-1992 / colour and black & white / 7 hours 44mins / ratio 4:3 and 2.35:1 (Cinemascope) / Czech, French and English dialogue, with optional English and Hard of Hearing subtitles (including extras)

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BFI DVDs are available from the Filmstore at BFI Southbank, all good DVD retailers, by mail order from 0845 458 9910 or online at www.bfi.org.uk/video

Notes on the extras:

Johanes Doktor Faust (d. Emil Radok, 1958)

This 16-minute puppet adaptation of the Faust legend contains Švankmajer's first screen credit (as a puppeteer), and was directed by Emil Radok, who became Švankmajer's first great creative mentor at the famous Laterna Magika theatre, where Svankmajer worked in the early 1960s.

Nick Carter in Prague (d. Oldrich Lipský, 1977)

Five excerpts from a popular Czech comedy-fantasy featuring a Švankmajer-designed man-eating plant with a tongue as distinctive as a signature. He was banned from filmmaking between 1973 and 1979, and worked as a special effects supervisor at Prague's Barrandov studios.

The Cabinet of Jan Švankmajer (d. Keith Griffiths, 1984)

The original 54-minute version of this documentary about Švankmajer's short films and creative philosophy, as broadcast by Channel 4 in June 1984, after which 40 minutes of clips and talking heads were jettisoned and the Quay Brothers' animated links recompiled as a 14-minute short (included on their own DVD). Also features a newly-shot 3-minute introduction by the Quays.

Les Chimères des Švankmajer (d. Bertrand Schmitt/Michel Leclerc, 2001)

58-minute French documentary about the creative partnership of Jan and Eva Švankmajer. Includes interviews with both artists and their creative collaborators, loads of examples of their work across multiple media, scenes of Švankmajer at work on *Little Otik* (plus clips from his earlier films, including the first three features), and glimpses of their legendary house.

Czech TV Interview (d. Ales Kisil, 2001)

9-minute extract from this massive 13-part Czech TV series about the nation's visual art. Mostly incorporates an interview with Švankmajer, focusing on his fine art, but there's also a short sequence about Eva Švankmajerova's paintings.

Lunacy trailer (2005)

... Just to ensure that the collection contains footage from all five features.

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