

PRESS-KIT

We Must Help Each Other

a new film by
Jan Hřebejk and Petr Jarchovský

Director: **Jan Hřebejk**
Story by: **Petr Jarchovský**
Screenwriter: **Petr Jarchovský**
Director of Photography: **Jan Malíř**
Music by: **Aleš Březina**
Editor: **Vladimír Barák**
Art Director: **Milan Býček**
Costume Designer: **Katarína Hollá**

Cast:

Boleslav Polívka - Josef Čížek
Anna Šišková - Marie Čížková
Jaroslav Dušek - Horst Prohazka
Csongor Kassai - David Wiener
Jiří Pecha - František Šimáček
Simona Stašová - Eva Šimáčková
Martin Huba - Albrecht Kepke
Jiří Kodet - Doktor Fischer
Vladimír Marek - SS Officer
Richard Tesařík - Captain

Production by:
Total HelpArt T.H.A Film Company
Executive Producer:
Ondřej Trojan

Producers:
Total HelpArt T.H.A. - Ondřej Trojan
Czech Television, Pavel Borovan Creative Group

Slated for release: March 2000

The film received a grant from
the Czech State Fund for the Promotion and Development of Czech
Cinematography.

SYNOPSIS

A dramatic story of a hero against his will...
The film is set in a small Czech Town occupied by German forces during the last years of the Second World War.

Josef and Marie Čížek are a childless couple. She yearns for a child, but unfortunately, he is infertile.

One day, by chance they come across David, a Jewish young man to whom they offer a refuge in their little house.

This is when their dramatic fight for survival begins.

To divert the attention of the German authorities and to protect the whole street from the danger of death penalty, the couple becomes more and more entangled with representants of power and arbitrary rule. Moreover, there is Horst Prohazka, a unsavoury Czech-German Nazi collaborationist who often comes to see Anna, and whose frequent visits only increase the danger of David being discovered. During one tragicomic scene, Anna harshly refuses Prohazka's advances. Prohazka decides to take his revenge on the Čížeks. His plan is to move Nazi clerk Fridrich Kepke into Čížek's house.

The desperate Čížek makes his wife become pregnant with the refugee who thus, paradoxically, repays his debt to those who saved his life.

The story culminates in May 1945, when the baby is about to be born. Again, the family is threatened - this time by self-appointed judges and those who want to take revenge on Nazi collaborationists.

In the closing, ghostly absurd scene, a strange bunch of Fates gathers around the new-born baby: a Czech soldier who fought at Eastern front, a Russian front soldier, a Slovak partisan, David, the Jewish refugee, the Czech-German Horst Prohazka and Čížek, the false father and hero against his will...

We Must Help Each Other is a black comedy full of unexpected twists, a comedy about heroes out of compassion, about decent people and traitors, about thirst for life and apathetic passivity. In this story, based on real events, all the main characters in a way or another manage to save their lives. Here, heroism and collaboration with the enemy, generosity and cowardice overlap, making it difficult - if not impossible - to pass categorical judgements.

WHY MUST WE HELP EACH OTHER?

At the time the successful film *Cosy Dens* by director Jan Hřebejk has for several weeks been filling-up Czech cinemas, the same film crew finds refuge in a small town of Josefov to make a new feature film. After successful shooting on location, the crew moves to the Barrandov Studios to shoot the most powerful scenes of this unusual, dramatic story with good deal of black humour, a story about human dignity, heroism, cowardice, forgiveness...

We Must Help Each Other is a new project by director JAN HŘEBEJK and screenwriter PETR JARCHOVSKÝ (his short novel of the same name was published in 1998) who have already co-operated on several successful feature films, notably the musical *BIG BEAT* and, first of all, the successful family comedy *COSY DENS*.

"The idea is based on real stories several people told me," says screenwriter **Petr Jarchovský**. *"The first impulse came from writer Petr Šabach who had heard about people who, during the Second World War, were hiding a Jewish young man, thus risking their lives and those of their neighbours, a theme we both considered powerful. A story of simple human heroism that stems from basic decency, but that, at the same time, carries with it a terrible fate."* Jan Halas and the bizarre circumstances of his birth on 9th May 1945, was Jarchovský's inspiration for the second line of the story. *"First of all, I wanted a timeless topic with a close relationship to our times: what are heroism and cowardice, and where they overlap. The Second World War, a mere catalyst in the story, can seem a distant past, but only several hundred kilometres from here a contemporary war is raging..."*, adds the screenwriter.

Director **Jan Hřebejk**: *For me, the story of the film is my personal reflection on the strength of human dignity. It shows that even a small demonstration of decency can be a great heroism. And, the other way round, sometimes a small indecency can be a big tragedy. I would like to tell this serious story from the Second World War in an entertaining manner. I think I can succeed first and foremost thanks to the actors.*

The new film **We Must Help Each Other** is - like *Cosy Dens* - a co-production of producer and film director **ONDŘEJ TROJAN's** film company Total HelpArt T.H.A., and Czech Television's **PAVEL BORO VAN** Creative Group.

"When I read the script for the first time, I felt the power of the theme, its fatality," says producer Trojan. *"I think this will be a milestone in the work of Hřebejk and his team. I am glad they found the courage to address such a powerful subject, the times we live now are ripe for such a story, no need to be afraid of it."* The producer adds that he has no doubts about the success of the film and confesses that he and his company are preparing more feature films.

A film that has received a grant from the State Fund for the Promotion and Development of Czech Cinematography is looking for investors: *"The project **We Must Help Each Other** was lucky enough to be partly funded as early as during the shooting of *Cosy Dens*, which was the film that helped us a lot in this respect. I believe*

*in the strength of the topic and I would like the implementation to be smooth and flawless. Unlike Cosy Dens, this is a very demanding film with many complex outdoor scenes, full of period weaponry and extras. It is therefore understandable that it is not a cheap film. Our available funds will cover the entire shooting and the first stage of the post-production. For the final mixing, the production of release prints and the publicity we are looking for further investors - Czech and foreign sponsors or, possibly, a strong foreign television company for pre-sale of broadcasting rights, or a film distribution company with world-wide reach. Our ambition is to distribute **We Must Help Each Other** not only throughout the Czech cinema network, but at least also throughout Europe", says Trojan. "We welcome proposals by all potential investors whom I assure that the success of this film will at least match that of Cosy Dens..., adds the producer, whose film has been breaking all Czech records since last spring.*

PEOPLE (AND CURIOSITIES) AROUND WE MUST HELP EACH OTHER

JAN HŘEBEJK was musing about We Must Help Each Other even before the implementation of the starry Cosy Dens. For his new film he succeeded in putting together an exceptionally strong cast.

The main character, Czech Václav Čížek is played by

Boleslav Polívka.

Polívka admits that Čížek reminds him of his father. "He, too, was such a poor thing. Before the war he was a chemist. After the war, the nationalisation came. He loved amateur theatre; it was amateur theatre that helped him keep going. He resembled Čížek in how he is half broken and unhappy and still, how he conserves his gentlemanly humour. I think of him a lot during the shooting, and I draw inspiration from my memories of him."

Actor **Jaroslav Dušek** (Horst Prohazka) praises the co-operation with Hřebek: *"Our co-operation is excellent. What amuses me is his unquenchable curiosity and urge to dissect the screenplay, the situations. He is not a director who comes and knows everything beforehand. We search together..."*

In the film, Dušek plays the ambiguous Czech-German Prohazka whose slogan "We must help each other" helps him in his dirty schemes, in pursuance of good living and career, or in saving the lives of his family. "Actually, I do not know Prohazka is a collaborationist", Dušek pretends to be surprised. "Hřebek keeps me believing I am playing a nice guy. I don't know how a collaborationist should generally be played, I try to understand his motivation, the circumstances and reasons for him to be what he is. And because it is me who is playing him, I take sides with him and try to find a good side to him", Dušek confesses.

Slovak actress **Anna Šišková** plays the leading female part. *"My relationship with the role of Čížek's wife is very close. It is my first experience with Czech film and I am happy I can work with Hřebek and Polívka", says the charming Šišková.*

Musician and musicologist **Aleš Březina** is the author of the music. For this film, Březina composed an original music and combined it with archive German music. *"In the film you will find the most horrible kitsch and banal melodies of the period as well as the greatest classical art, gems of German music. For me, the Second World War is one of the biggest paradoxes, with its clash of a unique culture with barbarism and cruelty within one nation. This is the moment that interests me,"* adds the musician.

WHO IS WHO in WE MUST HELP EACH OTHER

Jan Hřebejk, film and TV scriptwriter and director

Petr Jarchovský, film and TV scriptwriter and script editor

Petr Jarchovský (*1966) and Jan Hřebejk (*1967) together studied at the Akademické Gymnázium and then, in 1987 - 1991, at the Department of Script Writing and Script Editing of the Film and Television Faculty of the Academy of Music Arts.

During his studies, Hřebejk directed his first short films that gained acclaim from the public and critics alike. His films won several prizes at student film festivals.

Jarchovský's debut, in co-operation with Hřebejk, was the screenplay for a film comedy from a young pioneers' summer camp called LET'S SING ALL AROUND (1990), directed by Ondřej Trojan, now the producer of We Must Help Each Other.

Hřebejk's feature film debut was the musical BIG BEAT (1993), based on a screenplay by Jarchovský. It is a retrospect comedy about the arrival of the rock and roll wave to Prague. Jan Malíř, a renowned cameraman, stood behind the camera. The film was well accepted by the public and won several prizes - including the Czech Lion for the best direction, and the prize for the best film of 1993. It was made by the same team that made the up to now most successful film Cosy Dens (1999), a comedy whose attendance breaks even the records of American super productions or the Oscar-winning Kolya by director Svěrák. Cosy Dens were chosen to represent the Czech Republic in the main competition at the International Film Festival in Karlovy Vary.

The film **We Must Help Each Other** is, for the time being, the last project of the Jarchovský-Hřebejk duo.

Screenwriter Jarchovský now teaches at the Department of Scriptwriting and Script Editing of Prague's FAMU. At the same time he is script editor in Czech Television, where he is preparing an adaptation of Škvorecký's novel THE COWARDS.

JAN MALÍŘ, director of photography

Jan Malíř (*1948) graduated from FAMU in Prague in 1972. He participated in the creation of several films in Krátký film; his credits include both TV and theatrical films, he worked with many directors the internationally acclaimed Věra Chytilová, Miloslav Luther, Jaromil Jireš, Radúz Činčera, Vít Olmer, Karel Smyczek.... His, for the time being last, biggest film success is Cosy Dens.

BOLESLAV POLÍVKA, Čížek

Bolek Polívka (*1949) became in 1972 one of the leading figures of the Brno Theatre on a String. Already his film debut - the role of the unctuous Magery in the film version of the musical THE BALLAD FOR A BANDIT gained him acclaim.

With director Věra Chytilová (with who he co-operated on most of the scripts) he made the following films:

CALAMITY (1981), THE JESTER AND THE QUEEN (1987), THE HERITAGE, OR KURVAHOŠIGUTNTAG (1992).

Polívka's most remarkable role was the priest in A FORGOTTEN LIGHT (1996, director Vladimír Michálek), for which he was awarded the Czech Lion and the Prize for Leading Male Role at the Karlovy Vary IFF. His Uncle in Hřebejk's film Cosy Dens is unforgettable

JAROSLAV DUŠEK, Horst Prohazka

Jaroslav Dušek (*1961) is a film and theatre actor, teacher, director and screenwriter. He excelled in a number of roles in Czech films of the 1990s. He played one of the most funny roles in Cosy Dens.

Contact: Total HelpArt T.H.A.

AB Barrandov, Křiženeckého nám. 322, 152 53, Praha 5

tel. +420-2-6707 3007 (2436), fax +420-2-6707 3836

E-mail: tha.vos@pha.inetnet.cz

CONTACT TO PRESS SERVICE:

(information, interviews + photos)

for the film **We Must Help Each Other**

by

Pavčina Fechterová:

voice mail: +420-2-0960960200181

fax: +420-2-61132407, Public Relations - Czech Television

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