

# RARE CINEMA EUROPE

Presented at The Cinema Museum

Friday 27<sup>th</sup> May 2022

## Life is a Dog (Život je pes) (Czechoslovakia 1933)

Plus: Historic footage of Old Prague in 1912



THE CINEMA MUSEUM  
LONDON  
[www.cinemamuseum.org.uk](http://www.cinemamuseum.org.uk)

*Life is a Dog* is a classical comedy directed by Mac Fric, based on screenplay by him and Hugo Haas who plays the double-character in this movie. It's a story of unsuccessful musical composer who falls in love with beautiful daughter of musical publisher. To obtain a job in the publishing company he starts to pretend to be his own uncle. This is a source of many comical situations which are often presented in short anecdotal episodes. The performances are great. Hugo Haas is funny, Adina Mandlová is attractive and winsome (and quite naive). The music is wonderful too, composed by Pavel Haas, brother of Hugo, an interesting composer whose best known works were written in the detention camp Theresienstadt. Sadly, Pavel did not survive the war.

Cast:

Hugo Haas as Composer Viktor Honzl / Professor Alfréd Rokos

Theodor Pištěk as Hynek Durdys

Adina Mandlová as Eva Durdysová

Světla Svozilová as Helena Durdysová

Ferdinand Hart as Ralph Morrison

Alois Dvorský as Landlord

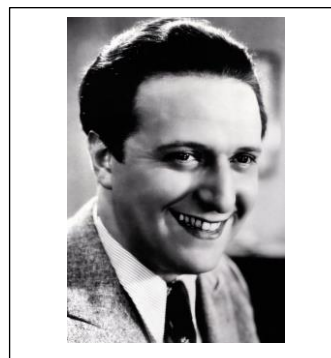
Jára Kohout as Man buying a record

František Jerhot as Officer

Antonín Hadr as Netušil

Karel Český as Customer

Přemysl Pražský as Forger



Hugo Haas

**Hugo Haas** (1901-1968): A portly, bohemian-looking character star, Hugo Haas was one of the most celebrated Czech actors back in the '30s, a comic star who only grew in stature as he delved creatively into writing, directing and producing. The Nazi invasion forced him to leave his beloved country and go to the United States. Like a fish out of water, he had to start small. Beginning as an announcer on US broadcasts to the Eastern Europe underground, he also offered his talents as a narrator of propaganda films. After the war, Haas revitalized his acting career in America with flashy, thick-accented support roles, often as a slick, seedy villain in lavish costumers in such films as *A Bell For Adano* (1945), *The Foxes Of Harrow* (1947) and *King Solomon's Mines* (1950). He enjoyed a certain amount of popularity and with the money he made, he began financing his own independent films in the 50s, taking total creative control with almost a Svengali-like obsession.

Haas was 50 when he turned to directing with *Pickup* (1951), a tense drama of a lonely railroad man (played by Haas) who marries a devious, gum-chewing, dame played by Beverly Michaels. Michaels is unforgettably nasty. She also improvised much of her own dialogue. Haas admitted in an interview that he simply asked the actress "to use language she thought appropriate to the situation." Haas followed with such lurid titles as *Bait* (1953), *One Girl's Confession* (1953), *The Other Woman* (1954), and *Edge of Hell* (1955). *Paradise Alley* (1962) starred Haas as an aging director who pretends to make a picture featuring the inhabitants of a seedy tenement but puts no film in the camera. Fittingly, this was Haas's swan song in movies. This underrated director, who described his projects as "offbeat stories other studios would reject," moved back to Europe and died in Vienna in 1968 of chronic asthma. Once asked what his greatest thrill from film production was, Haas replied: "Trying to make an A picture on a B budget. And, he said with a smile, "to plan to make a feature in 10 days and actually finish it in 9 1/2 days- that is a real challenge!"

**Adina Mandlova** (1910-1991) was a leading star of 1930s and 1940s Czech cinema. She was involved in a number of scandals and love affairs. Her film career started in 1932 thanks to a small part in film *Děvčátko, neříkej ne!*, where she performed as a model. In 1932 she met actor Hugo Haas, who became her partner. He cast her in his movie *Life Is a Dog* in 1933. Haas made her refuse the main role in Gustav Machatý's movie *Ecstasy* (1933), which made Hedy Lamarr famous. She broke up with Haas in 1937. Her 1939 movie *Holka nebo kluk?* (Girl or Boy?) was commercially very successful and made her the leading actress in Czechoslovakia. After the war she moved to England but was only able to gain small roles in a few films and television productions. In 1954 she married fashion designer Ben Pearson. On retirement they relocated to Malta and later to Canada.

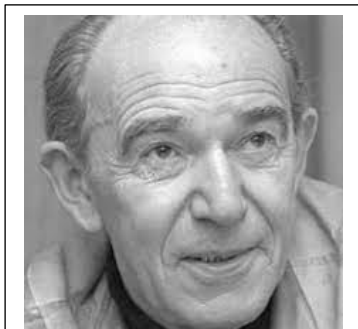
**Martin Frič** (1902-1968) left his middle-class Prague family at the age of 16 to follow the uncertain path of a cabaret performer, actor, and filmmaker, he was, by turns, an actor, a scenarist, a film laboratory worker, and a cameraman. Of crucial importance to the young Frič was his collaboration and friendship with Karel Lamac, the most influential director in Czech film. Lamac taught him the film trade and enabled him to become familiar with the film studios of Berlin and Paris.

In 1928 Frič made his debut with the film *Páter Vojtěch* (*Father Vojtech*) and followed it in 1929 with his most important film of the silent era, *Varhaník u sv. Víta* (*The Organist at St. Vitus*), the tragedy of a man suspected of murder. In the sound era Frič quickly gained a position of prominence through his ability to work quickly (making up to six films a year) with surprising ease and dexterity. Comedy became his domain. Often produced in two-language versions (German or French), featuring popular comedians as well as actors and actresses whose comic talent he recognized and helped to develop. First and foremost of these was Vlasta Burian, who appeared in the situation comedies *On a jeho sestru* (*He and His Sister*) with Anny Ondráková, *Pobočník Jeho Výsosti* (*Adjutant to His Highness*), *Dvanáct křesel* (*The Twelve Chairs*), and an adaptation of Gogol's *Revisor* (*The Inspector*).

Frič had much to do with shaping the film acting of Hugo Haas in such films as *Zivot je pes* (*A Dog's Life*—the first Czech screwball comedy with Adina Mandlová, *Ať žije nebožlák* (*Long Live the Deceased*), *Jedenácté přikázání* (*The Eleventh Commandment*), and *Ulička a ráii* (*Paradise Road*). Then, in 1939, came *Kristián* (*Christian*), a social comedy that is undoubtedly Frič's best work.

But Frič also demonstrated his directorial abilities in infrequent excursions into other genres. His *Jánošík*, a poetic epic about a legendary highwayman, is one of the pinnacles of Czechoslovak cinematography. Frič showed an understanding of the atmosphere of the time in his film rendition of *U snědeného krámu* (*The Emptied-out Grocer's Shop*), a story by the nineteenth-century Czech writer Ignát Hermann. Following the nationalization of Czechoslovak filmmaking in 1945, Frič aided in the development of filmmaking in Slovakia with his film *Varuj!* (*Warning!*). In 1949 he fashioned his next masterpiece, *Pytláková schovanka* (*The Kind Millionaire*), a parody of film kitsch.

At the beginning of the 1960s, after a period directing for television, he returned to the studios to make the tragi-comedy *Hvězda zvaná Pelyněk* (*A Star Named Wormwood*) and the comedy *Nejlepší ženská mého života* (*The Best Woman of My Life*), the premieres of which he did not live to see. Frič's demonstrated his talent in diverse genres from psychological drama to madcap comedy. He produced two masterful comedies, *Kristián* and *Pytláková schovanka*, which can be numbered among the world's best of the period. The proof of the quality of his work is the fact that almost a third of the films he made are still shown in the theatres of Czechoslovakia, where they bring pleasure to new generations of viewers. (Martin Frič biography by *Vladimír Opela*)



Martin Frič

Next **Rare Cinema Europe** show  
Friday 24<sup>th</sup> June  
**J'Accuse** (France 1938 – Abel Gance)