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Miloš Macourek

Author and screenwriter Miloš Macourek is known especially as the author of sci-fi comedies and the children's animation series *Mach a Šebestová* (Max and Sally). His work, however, encompassed many more genres. On the occasion of his 90th birthday, we will commemorate briefly this extraordinary person.

He was born on 2 December 1926 in Kroměříž into a lawyer's family. He first studied at the academic high school in Místek (1939–1941) until it was closed by German occupational forces, forcing him to change schools and attend the music and drama conservatory in Ostrava. He was then forced to work for the occupational forces in Zákolany u Kladna and in Odolná Voda (1943–1944). After the war ended, he went back to school, but then moved to Prague in 1946. There he tried out several professions (as a printing house worker, stagehand, advertising printer, and publishing editor). After completing his mandatory military service (1948–1950), he worked for the Central Trade Union Council (1950–1954) and from 1954 as a lecturer at Department of Art and Literary History at the Central Trade Union School.

In 1959, he began working with the theatre Divadlo Na zábradlí as a writer. A year later, he entered the world of film. He began working as a script editor at the Barrandov Film Studio in 1960 and then as a screenwriter in 1963. In 1980, he began working freelance as a professional writer. He authored several dramas and dramatizations, novels, poems, children's stories and texts for catalogues and comic books. He also contributed to numerous periodicals, translated, worked with the theatres Viola and Divadlo v Nerudovce, organised the exhibition *40 years of Czech Political Caricature* (1961), but mainly wrote for film.

During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, he created dozens of animated films either as screenwriter or director. In addition to artists and animators Břetislav Pojar, Stanislav Látal and Jiří Brdeček, to name a few, he also worked in tandem with Adolf

Born and Jaroslav Doubrava. He thus created such extraordinary films as *Biliár* (*Billiard*, 1961), *Úvodní slovo proneše* (*A Few Word of Introduction*, 1962), *Špatně namalovaná slepice* (*Poorly Drawn Chickens*, 1963), *Jak si opatřit hodné dítě* (*How to Obtain a Good Child*, 1965), *Nebud'te mamuty* (*Do Not Wake Up the Mammoths*, 1967), *Piráti* (*Pirates*, 1979) and *Slepice* (*Chickens*, 1984). With Born and Doubrava he later created the to-this-day popular children's cartoons *Mach a Šebestová* (*Max and Sally*, 1976–1983), *Žofka a spol.* (*Sophie and Friends*, 1986–1988), *Žofka ředitelkou ZOO* (*Sofia, The Zoo Director*, 1996) and *Mach a Šebestová na prázdninách* (*Max and Sally on Holiday*, 1998).

In live action films, Macourek focused mainly on comedies (often with an air of craziness), sci-fi and children's films. His screenplays can be characterised as playful, optimistic, humorous (including black humour) and hyperbolic and contains hidden satire, paradoxes, unforced didacticism and lyricism. At the same time, they were diverse genre-wise and contained a hearty dose of fantasy, a sense of the comical and situation humour, making him one of the most original Czech film screenwriters of the second half of the twentieth century.

His made his first film together with screenwriter and director Václav Vorlíček, with whom he created most of his most successful and well-known films. They created the comics parody *Kdo chce zabít Jessii?* (*Who Wants to Kill Jessie?*, 1966), the sci-fi comedy about the switched brains *"Pane, vy jste vdova!"* (*"You Are a Widow, Sir!"*, 1970), the fairy tale *Dívka na koštěti* (*The Girl on a Broomstick*, 1971), the fantasy comedies *Jak utopit Dr. Mráčka aneb Konec vodníků v Čechách* (*How to Drown Dr. M. or the End of Water Spirits in Bohemia*, 1974) and *Což takhle dát si špenát* (*A Nice Plate of Spinach*, 1977), and the wine trilogy *Bouřlivé víno* (*Wine Working*, 1976), *Zralé víno* (*Mature Wine*, 1981) and *Mladé víno* (*Young Wine*, 1986), with Vladimír Menšík cast in the main role.

After 1989, the duo still managed to create three coproduction fairy tales – *Kouzelný měšec* (*The Magic Book*, 1995), *Pták Ohnivák* (*The Firebird*, 1996), and *Jezerní královna* (*Queen of the Lake* 1997) – and attempted to bring an animated series to the big screen: *Mach, Šebestová a kouzelné sluchátko* (*Max, Sally and the Magic Phone*, 2001). After Macourek's death, Vorlíček made use of the popularity of the fairy tale *Dívka na koštěti* and brought the film *Saxána a Lexikon kouzel* (*Little Witch on a*

Broomstick, 2007–2011) to cinemas. The duo also made a mark in television, creating the family series *Létající Čestmír* (*The Flying Cestmir*, 1983), *Křeček v noční košili* (*Hamster in a Nightshirt*, 1987) and *Arabela* (1979), *Arabela se vrací aneb Rumburak králem Říše pohádek* (*Arabela Returns or Rumburak the King of the Fairy Tale Kingdom*, 1993), and *Rumburak* (1984), which series was also brought to the big screen.

In the 1960s, Macourek also worked with director Oldřich Lipský. They created films that are unparalleled to this day in Czech cinema: the comedy about a husband who is cheated on *Happy end* (*Happy End*, 1967), which is told from the end to the beginning and backwards; the sci-fi comedy about time travel based on Josef Nesvadba's novel *Zabil jsem Einsteina, pánové...* (*I Killed Einstein, Gentlemen*, 1969); another comic book and gangster parody "*Čtyři vraždy stačí, drahoušku*" (*Four Murders Are Enough, Darling*, 1970); Eugén Labich's farce *Slaměný klobouk* (*Straw Hat*, 1971); and two comedy films for children about circuses, *6 medvědů s cibulkou* (*Six Bears and a Clown*, 1972) and the coproduction comedy *Cirkus v cirkuse* (*Solo for Elephant and Orchestra*, 1975).

Other directors brought his screenplays to the screen as well. Still in the 1960s, Miloš Macourek wrote the screenplay to Zbyněk Brynych's psychological drama *Já, spravedlnost* (*I, Justice*, 1967), about the idea of Adolf Hitler surviving the end of the war. He later wrote the satirical comedy *Hop – a je tu lidoop* (*Monkey's Playtime*, 1977), which was directed by Milan Muchna. He revisited time travel with Jindřich Polák, again based on Josef Nesvadba's work in the sci-fi comedy *Zítra vstanu a opařím se čajem* (*Tomorrow I'll Wake Up and Scald Myself with Tea*, 1977). At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, Macorak managed to add to his filmography the story about a youth *Hon na kočku* (*The Cat Hunt*, 1979) and the Yugoslav coproduction sci-fi horror *Monstrum z galaxie Arkana* (*Visitors from the Arkana Galaxy*, 1981).

After 1989, his screenplay for the absurd play *Král Ubu* (*King Ubu*, 1996) was adapted by F. A. Brabec. He co-authored the screenplay for the extraordinary transcript of K. J. Erben's *Kytice* (*Wild Flowers*, 2000), and helped create Romana Vávra's fairy tale *Čert ví proč* (*The Devil Knows Why*, 2002). His other work was occasionally brought to the TV screen [the series *Bambinot* and *Bubu a Filip* (*Bubu and Philip*) and the film *Skříň* (*The Closet*)]. In addition to festival and other awards (Barrandov Film Studio

Monetary Award, The City of Písek Award for Permanent Contribution to Enrichment of the Comedy Genre and the FITES Award), he became an Artist of Merit in 1977. Miloš Macourek died after a serious illness in Prague on 30 September 2002 at the age of 76.