

JAROSLAV LOPOUR / 31. 3. 2016

Jana Rybářová

She was one of the most distinct actresses of her generation. Although she acted for three short years and appeared in just six feature films and in one school etude, her fragile acting and ethereality mainly in the lyrical films by director Václav Krška made her a great Czech cinematic force of the 1950s.

Jana Rybářová was born on 31 March 1936 in Prague. She was the younger of two children, and her father was an electrical engineer. Since her childhood in the Prague quarter of Střešovice, she gravitated toward art, and her mother supported her in this passion. She studied piano privately, and from the age of ten took ballet lessons at the Smetana Theatre. Although she transferred to a French lyceum when she was in grade five, the post-February education system reform forced her to go back to basic school. She attended school in the Prague neighbourhood of Pohořelec, where she tried acting for the first time as part of a drama club.

Here she became enthralled with drama, so much so that she decided to study it. As the Drama School did not accept students until they were 18, she applied at 15 to the Dance School, where she was accepted and from which she graduated in 1955. She then joined Zdeněk Nejedlý's Realistický Divadlo, where she managed to appear in eight plays [e.g., *Zapadlí vlastenci* (*Remote Patriots*), *Křídla* (*Wings*), *The Imaginary Invalid* and *Bouřlivý rok* (*The Turbulent Year*)] over a two-year period before her untimely death. Be it on the stage, in front of a film or television camera or speaking into a radio microphone, Jana Rybářová was always an exciting representative of young, pure, charming, fragile, sensitive, emotional and ethereal women.

While still in her third year of dance school, she was chosen by director Václav Krška to play one of the leads in the lyrical film *Stříbrný vítr* (*Silvery Wind*, 1954), based on the novel of the same name by Fráňa Šrámek, because of her delicate girlish looks and dark brown eyes. In the film, she played "obsessed" Anička Karasová, into which

student Jan Ratkin (Eduard Cupák) falls in love. Anička first only flirts with the poet, but for a short time she thinks she feels something for him. In the end, the rule-abiding girl from a good family chooses a well-off, older pharmacist (Valentin Knor) to be her husband. Although her acting technique gave away the fact that she was an acting novice, audiences were enchanted by her beauty and naturalness.

Although *Stříbrný vítr* was filmed in 1954, it was not released into theatres until November 1956 for political reasons. In the meantime, cinema audiences had the chance to see Jana Rybářová in two smaller roles, again in films directed by Václav Krška: for the first time as the slightly prim young writer Eliška Krásnohorská in the biographical film about Bedřich Smetana (Karel Höger) *Z mého života* (*From My Life*, 1955); and for the second time as Jitka, the foster child of Dalibor z Kozojed (Karel Fiala), in the film version of Smetana's opera *Dalibor* (1956). The operatic part was sung for the actress by soprano Libuše Domanínská.

In 1956, Václav Krška was involved in a Czechoslovakian-Bulgarian coproduction: two exotic fairy tales with exteriors filmed in Bulgaria. The first of the films was called *Labakan* (1956), based on the fairy tale by Wilhelm Hauff. In it, Jana Rybářová played the temperamental flower girl Fatma, who loves the title hero, Labakan (Eduard Cupák), a lazy apprentice to a tailor. The second film was called *Legenda o lásce* (*A Legend about Love*) based on Nazim Hikmet's play. Here she played the beautiful Širín, who waits ten years for the love of her life, the painter Ferchad (Apostol Karamitev). Director Krška shot the Bulgarian version of this film with the same crew and the same cast, but with the role of princess Širín played by Emilija Radeva instead of Rybářová.

Until that time, Václav Krška was the only director to have directed the actress. After doing five of Krška's films, Jana Rybářová took an offer from director Otakar Vávra to play in the third instalment of his monumental Hussite trilogy *Proti všem* (*Against Everybody*, 1956). In it, she plays novice Marta nee Jana, who, as the story unfolds, becomes a follower of the Hussites because of her love for the knight Ondřej z Hvozdna (Petr Haničinec). The films *Labakan*, *Legenda o lásce* and *Proti všem* did not premiere until a few months after the actress's death. To complete the list of Jana Rybářová's filmography, the school production *V ulici je starý krám* (*There is an Old Shop in the Street*, 1955) directed by Jan Valášek, needs to be mentioned. In it, she

plays student Jana alongside Eva Očenášová, Štěpánka Haničincová and Rudolf Jelínek.

Jana Rybářová chose to deal with her sudden, unexpected popularity and complicated relationship with opera singer Přemysl Kočí by killing herself with blue gas in Prague on 12 February 1957. She was laid to rest among other famous people in the Vyšehrad cemetery. Her untimely death shortly before her twenty-first birthday shook society at the time. Poet Jaroslav Seifert dedicated the poem *Mladičká Jana Rybářová* (*Young Jana Rybářová*) to her posthumously in his collection of poems *Koncert na ostrově* (*Concert on an Island*, 1965).

According to director Jiří Weiss's memoirs, Jana Rybářová took part in camera tests for the main role of novice Jana in his psychological film based on Jarmila Glazarová's novel *Vlčí jáma* (*The Wolf Trap*, 1957). Weiss was considering her or Jana Brejchová for the role. When he finally decided for Rybářová and wanted to inform the actress about his decision, the actress had already been dead for several hours. She had also been slated to play in one of Ján Kadar and Elmar Klos' films and was considered for the role of Princess Dišperanda in Josef Macha's film *Hrátky s čertem* (*Playing with the Devil*, 1956) based on the Jan Drda's play, a role that was then given to Alena Vránová.

Her life was filmed by director Marek Bouda in the documentary *Nelze umírat štěstím* (*You Can't Die of Happiness*, 2000) from the television series *Nevyjasněná úmrtí* (*Unexplained Deaths*). For Czech cinematography, Jana Rybářová – along with Zorka Janů, Jarmila Horáková, Soňa Danielová, Libuše Zemková, Eva Čeřovská and Zuzana Ondrouchová – remains a once talented and promising actress, whose film portrayals of young women full of life have never aged on the screen.