

# JAN KADAR AT RYERSON

by Janos Pannonius

Jan Kadar was born in Slovakia in 1918, raised in Budapest, studied law in Prague, and joined the Bratislava Film School in 1938. He later became an assistant director and producer at the Bratislava Short Film Studio. In a Nazi labor camp during the war, Kadar afterwards made an outstanding documentary short, *LIFE IS RISING FROM THE RUINS*, and joined Barrandov Studios as scenario-writer and assistant director in 1947. He met his long-time collaborator, Elmar Klos, while working on *DEAD AMONG THE LIVING* (1947), and made one independent comedy film, *KATYA* (1950) before joining with Klos in 1952.

Kadar and Klos made documentaries: *YOUNG DAYS*, *THE SPARTAKIADE*, *THE MAGIC LANTERN II*, *YOUTH* (multi-screen), *MUSIC FROM MARS* (1954), *HOUSE AT THE TERMINUS* (1957), *THREE WISHES* (1958), *DEATH IS CALLED ENGELCHEN* (1963), *THE DEFENDANT* (1964), *THE SHOP ON MAIN STREET* (1965). *SHOP* won the Czechoslovak Film Critics prize in 1965, and an Academy Award as Best Foreign Language Film in 1966.

In August 1968, when Soviet bloc troops invaded Czechoslovakia, Jan Kadar was in southern Slovakia directing *ADRIFT* for an American company. He and his wife took refuge in Vienna, and — after a brief return to Prague to obtain documents — flew to New York, where he now lives. In 1970 he made *THE ANGEL LEVINE*, with Harry Belafonte, Zero Mostel and Ida Kaminska.

His films have won numerous international awards including the Czechoslovakian State Prize, the New York Film Critics Award, First Gold Medal of the Moscow Film Festival, Grand Prix at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival, the David di Donatello Award, as well as the Oscar.

Jan Kadar recently visited Ryerson Polytechnical Institute to show *SHOP ON MAIN STREET* and to talk with the students about his films, filmmakers, and financiers. The major part of the evening was spent discussing in great detail *ADRIFT* and *THE SHOP ON MAIN STREET*. Unfortunately due to lack of space we cannot include this part of the question and answer session. (Maybe a some future date.) However, the highlights of his talk concerned the on-again, off-again project *LIES MY FATHER TOLD ME*, which it seems will actually go into production soon in Montreal. Kadar talked of how he has spent over a year trying to get money to make this film (It will star Zero Mostel) and the lesson he's learned along the way. He also gave his insightful observations on the Canadian motion picture scene. At last report, Kadar was on a farm somewhere near Toronto, rewriting the script of his first Canadian feature.

"Life without art is impossible. But somebody has to pay for it. Trying to do what I really want to do is very, very difficult. First of all, to make my living. To do something I can do, and not to be ashamed. You remember Alain Resnais? *HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR*, *LA GUERRE EST FINIE*, and *MARIEN*'s out of work. And he will be out of work for some time. I don't know if you realize it, how tough this world of filmmaking is, that you are studying. You must realize this, if you ever want to realize your dreams, which I presume you have." "I am a foreigner. I don't want to do a picture which an American can do better. Subjects which he knows more about. But I'm sure there are a lot of things about which I know more! (laugh-

hter, applause)"

"With *LIES MY FATHER TOLD ME* I've learned how difficult it is to have a picture come out. It's a small picture, basically. Nice idea. It can develop into a nice picture. For the writer, it is a picture about his childhood. The story concerns an old man and a small child. For me it's a picture about what truth is, whether it's poetry or art? Or where is reality?"

"I haven't met a man in this country — except maybe one today — who really wanted to do this picture. To give some money and get it done. All everybody looks for is TAX ADVANTAGES! (laughter) Really! Really! It made me really sick!"

"I dealt with this picture for one year, giving my name, and giving my credentials to it. And I was quite excited to do it. I'm becoming less and less excited, because I cannot fight it. The investors are not looking, any of them, to do a picture — I don't know if they are reading the script, I don't know if they can read — all they are looking at is how much they can save on the taxes. And the best for them is if the picture never appears. Because if the picture is a complete loss, they can deduct the whole goddamn thing! (big laughter)

"You asked me, and I'm really very angry. So angry that here in this country . . . the only one who is ready to give money is the CFDC. Under certain conditions. If this picture would be about the *Mafia*, if this picture would be about goddamn idiotic *Sex* . . . yes . . . but because it is about a boy and his grandfather, who is interested? Except as a tax

deduction.

"I don't know whether they know how to read, or when they read at all. I know they are very busy people. I know all of these gentlemen. I went to Universal, United Artist, Paramount, Columbia, all of them. I found out that we have a different kind of language. And I don't ever go to them and open myself up as I did when I first came. Now I try to find out who's around them, who their advisors are, and try to slink like a snake between them in a political sense, the same way I did in our country. There I had to learn how to zig-zag between the secretaries, directors, and ministers."

"They are in the same way full of fear as in our country the secretaries and the bureaucrats who are afraid what the next person on top of them will say. These men here are afraid, they're always trying to find out who wants their job. Mr. Bob Evans of Paramount is now the GOD because he did one lousy picture that made money, LOVE STORY, and he did now again a tremendously successful, well-made crap, THE GODFATHER. (laughter, applause) But who will be the next god? Who will take his place?"

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"When I was home in Czechoslovakia, I only knew of Canadian documentaries, especially those made by Mr. Grierson. And I liked the films of Mr. McLaren. We didn't know about any Canadian features. But last year I was invited as a member of the jury here in Toronto for the Canadian Film Awards. That was the first time I saw Canadian features. I saw *Mon Oncle Antoine*, Paul Almond's first film *Isabel*, and *Goin' Down the Road*. These are the films I liked very much, these very subjective films. They're the kinds of pictures you should produce. I'm always embarrassed to speak about somebody else's film. My feeling is that Canada is a big country, a rich country, a tremendously interesting country, and is ready to have her own film industry. No reason why not. Now these films are going in the right direction. *ANTOINE* was a revelation for me about Canada, about the Québécois people. It is worthless for you to try to compete with Americans who do bad commercial pictures. It is necessary to have a big tradition in that, to try to imitate them doesn't make any sense. A subjective film about Canadian history like *Mon Oncle Antoine* is a better picture. Everybody will remember it as a Canadian film."

"I'm completely opposed to, when I see made in Canada very bad sex pictures!"

(laughter) First of all, you are not a sexual nation! (laughter, applause) Let's leave these kinds of pictures to India or Japan, countries that have a culture and tradition in the expression of love. But when I saw these so-called "skin-flics" (laughter) at the film festivals, and moreover when I found out that these pictures were subsidized by government institutions, I was shocked. Because, I didn't know, with whom are these people competing? Buy the bad Danish films, in this case, they are no better, but the Danish are completely asexual. The Swedish are so free only in their pictures! And as far as Mr. Bergman is concerned, he did something great, but he left it. He's doing something completely different right now. I'm not against love-making! (child cries out in audience) He's right! (laughter) I'm not against anything on the screen. But it has to be good. It has to have a purpose."

"I saw a picture not long ago, made by one of my friends, a Brazilian director called Nelson Pereira dos Santos. An excellent director. He did a picture about the Brazilian Indians from the sixteenth century. When the country was just in the first state of colonization. The actors are playing the whole picture in the nude! But completely! Women, men, absolutely without clothes, as they are, completely nude, without hiding anything. After five minutes of looking at this picture (COMO ARE GOSTOSE O MEU FRANCES — My Frenchman Was Very Tasty) I forgot that these people are nude! It was an honest picture, a tremendously excellent picture, about Indian cannibals. And there you can see the naked bodies, the individual body as it should really be seen. You could show this picture to minors, to twelve-year-olds, you don't have to give an X to this picture. Because if something is good, something is honest, it makes sense. So therefore I'm not a friend of Canadian skin-flics. I'm a friend of *Antoine*, of *Goin' Down the Road*, of *Isabel*. There are some others. These I like, and I like very much more so the documentaries, which are really excellent."

"I think that this is a big country. Nobody can tell me that this country is not able to produce features. You are twenty million people. You are making films in two big world languages — English and French — which means you have a big market. But you are always afraid, here in Canada of being swamped by English and American pictures. This shouldn't be. It's just a question of quality. On the other hand, there has to

be a certain quota made by the government. It's not enough to have a CFDC and have ten million dollars to subsidize certain productions. I don't want to criticize the CFDC, I don't want to criticize anyone. I am a guest here. But I think that it is necessary to do the same thing in Canada as the French are doing, the Italians are doing, the West Germans are doing; that they have for a certain amount of foreign pictures (allowed to be shown in the country), a certain amount of domestic pictures. A certain amount of Canadian pictures. You need governmental protection. Right now this is inadequate."

"Many people have asked me how the heroine of my picture *ADRIFT* came to be named *Anada*. There's something interesting about this. The names of the characters are from the book; Lajos Zilahy wrote the novel *Something is Adrift on the Water* upon which the film is based. Maybe you've heard of him, he's a famous Hungarian writer. I asked him, where did you get this name *Anada*. Because *Anada* as a name sounds really true, but it doesn't exist. Anna... Ana... *Anada*? Zilahy told me that when he wrote the novel thirty years ago he didn't know how to call this girl. He happened to have a globe next to his desk where he was writing, and he just glanced at the globe while thinking, and he saw that there was a fly-speck on the word Canada, and the C was covered by this fly speck... (big laughter) So that's what I'd like to tell you, that sometimes all these things are very simple, and that nothing is so BIG or sacred...."

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