**Czechoslovak New Wave Cinema**

The Czechoslovak New Wave was a 1960s film movement, which flourished in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic during a period of general liberalization in the country’s politics that inspired a general blossoming of the arts. It shared stylistic and thematic traits with the other European New Wave movements of the time, but it also specifically rejected Socialist Realism. This was the Soviet film policy that demanded optimistic depictions of anything Communist, and condemned formalist elements, such as montage, that called attention to the making of the film rather than its story. The Czech New Wave (also called at the time “the Czech Film Miracle”) began in 1963 with the feature debuts of Milos Forman’s *Černý Petr* (*Black Peter*), Vĕra Chytilová’s *O néčem jiném* (*Something Different*), and Jaromil Jireš’ *Křik* (*The Cry*).

Czechoslovak New Wave films typically contained wry satires of the Communist party and Czech society, a willingness to deal with sexual themes, the casting of non-professional actors, and the use of documentary techniques to present fictional stories. In addition to not capitulating to the demands of Socialist Realism, the Czech New Wave cinema was also distinctive for its filmmakers’ collaboration with the country’s foremost writers, such as Bohumil Hrabal, Milan Kundera, and Arnošt Lustig.

Most of its young filmmakers had trained at FAMU, the renowned Prague film school, where they were exposed to non-Soviet, non-Marxist films from the rest of Europe and even from America. Though filmmaking in Czechoslovakia had been nationalized for decades and virtually all the country’s live-action features were made at the government-run Barrandov Studios, the political climate in the 1960s meant that no one really took responsibility for what was being produced there, so the filmmakers enjoyed a remarkable freedom in terms of what and how they could film.

Films of the Czech New Wave rapidly gained a significant presence at international festivals and won numerous honors. Two films won Academy Awards for Best Foreign Language Film: Jan Kadár and Elmar Klos’s *Obchod na korze*  (*The Shop on Main Street*, 1965) and Jiří Menzel’s *Ostře sledované vlaky* (*Closely Watched Trains*, 1966); Forman’s *Lásky jedné plavovlásky* (*Loves of a Blonde*, 1965), and *Hoří, má panenko* (*The Firemen’s Ball*, 1967) also received nominations. Jan Kadár is the only Slovak director in this New Wave who has achieved much recognition in the West.

A major turning point in the Czech New Wave’s (and the country’s) history came when Warsaw Pact forces invaded the Czechoslovak Soviet Socialist Republic on 21 August 1968 to end the so-called Prague Spring (a period of accelerated liberalism under the Communist Party’s new reformist First Secretary, Alexander Dubček). Director Jan Nĕmec took to the streets to film the tanks moving through Prague (his cameraman was shot in the face while filming), and his images figured significantly in telling the story to the outside world. The Czech New Wave did not actually end until 1970, when the government installed a new repressive management at the Barrandov Studios. Some films just completing production were banned, and others, already released, were retroactively banned. Several directors, including Nĕmec, could no longer make films in their home country. Some filmmakers escaped to make careers elsewhere—most notably Forman, who has become a major Hollywood director.

**References and further reading**

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**Selected Filmography**

Chytilová, Vĕra (1929-2014): *O néčem jiném* (*Something Different*, 1963), *Ovoce stromû rajských jime* (*Daisies*, 1966)

Forman, Milos (1932 --): *Černý Petr* (*Black Pete*r, 1963), *Lásky jedné plavovlásky* (*Loves of a Blonde*,1965), *Hoří, má panenko* (*The Firemen’s Ball*, 1967)

Kadár, Jan (1918-1979): *Obchod na korze*  (*The Shop on Main Street*, 1965), *Touha zvaná Anada* (Adrift, 1969)

Menzel, Jiří (1938 --): *Ostře sledované vlaky* (*Closely Watched Trains*, 1966), *Rozmamé léto* (*Capricious Summer*, 1968)

Nĕmec, Jan (1936 --): *Démanty noci* (*Diamonds of the Night*, 1964), *O slavnosti a hostech* (*A Report on the Party and the Guests*, 1966), *Mučednici lásky* (*Martyrs of Love*, 1967), *Oratorio for Prague* (1968)

Passer, Ivan (1933 --): *Intimni osvĕtlení* (*Intimate Lighting*, 1965)

Schorm, Evald (1931-1988): *Každý den odvahu* (*Courage for Everyday*, 1964), *Návrat ztraceného syna* (*Return of the Prodigal Son*, 1966)

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