



## **The Maids of Wilko** Panny z Wilka

Director: Andrzej Wajda

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Presented by: Zespół Filmowy 'X',

Pierson Productions, Films Molière

Production Manager: Barbara Pec-Slesicka

France Production Manager: Tony Molière

Production Assistants: Alina Klobukowska,

Henryk Wloch. Tomasz Bek, Maciej Skalski,

Jolanta Jarzecka, Wanda Helbert, Elzbieta Kotynia

Assistant Directors: Krystyna Grochowicz,

Magdalena Holland, Marek Netzel, Jolanta Jedynak

Script Supervisor: Boleslaw Michalek

Screenplay: Zbigniew Kaminski

Original Novel: Jaroslaw Iwaszkiewicz

Director of Photography: Edward Klosinski

Camera Operators: Janusz Kalicki,

Ireneusz Hartowicz

Assistant Camera: Bogdan Borewicz,

Jerzy Tomczuk

Stills Photographer: Renata Pajchel

Editor: Halina Prugar

Assistant Editor: Barbara Grodner

Art Director: Allan Starski

Assistant Art Director: Maria Lubelska-Chrolowska

Set Decorator: Maria Osiecka-Kuminek

Assistant Set Decorators: Malgorzata Dipont,

Zenon Wilk, Jozef Runo

Costumes: Wiesława Starska

Costume Assistants: Anna Plochocka,

Dorota Czerwik

Make-up: Anna Włodarczyk, Grazyna Dabrowska

Laboratory:

Wytwórnia Filmów Dokumentalnych w Warszawie

Music: Karol Szymanowski

Concert Violinist: Karol Szymanowski

Music Consultant: Anna Grabowska

Sound: Piotr Zawadzki

Cast:

Daniel Olbrychski (*Viktor Ruben*)

Anna Seniuk (*Julia*)

Christine Pascal (*Tunia*)

Maja Komorowska (*Yola*)

Stanisława Celinska (*Zosia*)

Krystyna Zachwatowicz (*Kazia*)

Zofia Jaroszevska (*Viktor's aunt*)

Tadeusz Białoszczyński (*Viktor's uncle*)

Paul Dutron (*Yola's husband*)

Zbigniew Zapasiewicz (*Julia's husband*)

Joanna Poraska (*mother*)

Andrzej Lapicki (*doctor*)

K. Brodzikowski

A. Rostkowska

K. Orzechowski

H. Michalska

J. Kozak-Sutowicz

K. Wolanska

W. Kaluski

E. Ozana

A. Szenajch

B. Stepniakówna

A. Grzybowski

A. Wachnickie

M. Wachnickie

F. Jasinski

Jaroslaw Iwaszkiewicz (*old man on train*)

Poland-France 1979©

118 mins

Digital (restoration)

**Andrzej Wajda: Portraits of History and Humanity**

# **The Maids of Wilko** **Panny z Wilka**

*The screening on Thursday 5 February will include a Q&A with Oscar-winning production designer Allan Starski and costume designer Wiesława Starska*

Between *Man of Iron* and *Danton*, Wajda announced he was taking a rest from politics and staged a production of *Hamlet* in Cracow. It's tempting to detect a preliminary excursion to Elsinore in the company of the intense and self-pitying figure of Olbrychski in *The Maids of Wilko*, made as it was just after *Rough Treatment* and before *The Conductor*. The *Wilko* story is a surprise for being neither bitter nor despairing, just rather mellow and regretful; it offers Wajda's most elegant meditation on what has been his most consistent theme. Ever since the Generation trilogy, he has dealt with the elusive glories of the past and the dubious heroics of sacrifice, ironically finding with *Man of Marble* that after 20 years his concern had a contemporary ring to it once more.

The attraction of *Wilko*, however, is that its polemic is personal and its manner undemonstrative; Wajda's symbolism is now of the simplest – candle flames, dinner tables, moving trains, a car with an open door – and his mood is one of convalescent amusement rather than anger. It's as if he had taken time off to look up some old friends, ranging from Turgenev to Andrzej Lapicki (Wajda's alter ego in *Everything for Sale*, here offering pre-credit medical advice), and found in their familiarity both comfort and reassurance. As with the performance of Maja Komorowska (the blonde sister), whose gestures all begin with the little finger of each hand, *Wilko* puts poses first, predicaments second. It's a film of costumes and theatricality, consciously charming – and charmed – with the fun of a recaptured, vaguely shapeless 1920s period, with its parasols, waltzes, and wind-up gramophones.

The slightly suspect nostalgia is of course perfectly in tune with the story, whose participants are all cherishing a 15-year-old memory and hoping, by dress and manner, to resurrect it. Viktor's sudden arrival back in their midst is the miraculous answer to the sisters' dreams; gathered round the table, they gaze at him incoherently with blame and gratitude for what his memory has done to their lives. The scene is beautifully handled, both by Klosinski's tabletop camerawork and by Wajda's team of actresses, each performance building in preparation for the confessions to come. And each later exorcism is a delicate, immaculate fusion of skills, from the tremulous removal of owlsh spectacles in the forlorn hope of a kiss to the fluttering of a hand in agitation when a kiss arrives, from the curling of a body when a distant act of love is recalled to the curling of a lip when the disenchanting presence of the lover is dismissed.

As the ladies of Wilko grow and change, as their suitor's weaknesses gradually emerge, one is reminded as much of Bergman as of Chekhov, as if *Cries and Whispers* and *The Three Sisters* were chronicles from the same family. Like Bergman, Wajda has let the faces do the talking (he even has Bergmanesque twins thumping out a duet on the piano), and the result is hypnotic theatre, from the captivating Christine Pascal (the youngest sister) retreating like her relatives into a blighted future, to the equally enchanting Zofia Jaroszevska (the aunt) who welcomes with rueful enthusiasm the brief rejuvenation of Wilko and reprimands her nervous maidservant for seeking a tiny share of the event.

#### With thanks to

Marlena Łukasiak, Michał Oleszczyk,  
Jędrzej Sabliński

Presented with the ICA and Ciné Lumière, who will  
also be hosting screenings of Wajda's works in  
February and March



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Theatrical interlude or not, *The Maids of Wilko* offers the final satisfaction of being as substantial as one could wish from Wajda. Politics may have been set aside, but colours are flying just the same from the film's mast. As he leaves Wilko for the second time in his life, Viktor's eye is caught by an old man sharing his railway carriage. There is a close-up of the man's face, his glance wandering momentarily straight into the camera lens, and as a tribute appears on the screen, and as the landscape through the train window becomes a tunnel of darkness, we realise this is the writer of the novel on which the film is based. The recognition is unimportant, probably meaningless to audiences outside Poland for whom Iwaszkiewicz is unknown, but the relationship between the faces of the fellow travellers is neatly and globally eloquent.

Here are the present and future Viktor, rushing together into the night, their partnership confirmed, their isolation analysed, understood and even – with a humorous melancholy – welcomed. Here too is any other sentimentalist who might persuade himself that the past can be preserved intact with all its promises, ready to be reactivated when convenient. Here is any expatriate convinced that the mere fact of his absence from a place will guarantee its perpetuity. And here too is any European who fought a war to defend a way of life only to find, regardless of his effort, that it became outmoded just the same. Wajda went on to make the same point in the very different context of *The Conductor*: the trouble with the past is that it never changes, while the trouble with the present is that it never stops.

Philip Strick, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, May 1983

The film is unique in Wajda's filmography in that it contains superb portraits of women. Here, women are the mainstay of order and graces exemplary members of society, responsible for themselves and for others. That is why everything that these women do – cook and fry, some red currants, raspberries with cream, they lay out flowers, sometimes play the piano, they read something to children in French – all of this is important. It is something that we desperately miss and need, while all this selflessness disappeared under the brutal stamp of contemporary life.

*The Maids of Wilko* is generally considered one of the most beautiful and mature films produced by Wajda. In it, Wajda's feeling for the beauty of the Polish landscape, his maturity in the treatment of life and death, and his feel for the passage of time contribute to the formation of a richly subdued portrayal of life, with all of its complexities. Music, colour, and *mise-en-scène*, all essential but non-excessive, create an atmosphere of peace and contemplation. Thanks to the film's slow pace Wajda allows the women to play themselves and to improvise during the prolonged, serene scenes. In this film, the director does not present any thesis or didactically try to teach his audience what to do or how to behave. Rather, he lets the cameras roll and leisurely account for the events in front of and around them.

Janina Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda: History, Politics, and Nostalgia in Polish Cinema*  
(Berghahn Books, 2007)