



BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

MURDERING THE DEVIL (Vrazda ing. Certa) (12A)

Director: Ester Krumbachová

Starring: Jiřina Bohdalová, Vladimír Menšík

Czechoslovakia, 1970, 1 hour 15 minutes, Czech + English subtitles

Ester Krumbachová, production and costume designer, dramatist, artist, and screenwriter was right at the centre of the Czech New Wave, collaborating on films by Karel Kachyňa, Jan Němec (*Diamonds of the Night*, *The Party and the Guests*) to whom she was married for a period in the sixties, and Věra Chytilová (*Daisies*).

Her directorial debut was 1970's biting feminist satire, *Murdering the Devil*, originally conceived as a radio play, that offers the audience a similar feast for the senses as the film's protagonist, played by Jiřina Bohdalová, prepares for her insatiable guest, Mr Bohouš Čert (čert being the Czech word for devil), played by Vladimír Menšík. While Krumbachová could only ever use a few of her many talents, *Murdering the Devil* is a dense concentrate of everything that fascinated her and at which she excelled. The elaborate props, costumes and sets help to characterise the pair of archetypal characters, adding further layers of meaning to the central battle of the sexes.

Weaving together motifs from fairy tales, legends and other folk narratives, the film plays with audience expectations, as well as gender stereotypes. The casting of two stars of the period evidently helped in securing production of the provocative film. Instead of conventional comedy, however, audiences were treated to an ornamentally exuberant experiment which utilises alienating techniques found in avant-garde theatre and multimedia performances such as the magic lantern. Extracted from ***Murdering the Devil* Press Kit**

"Notwithstanding Němec's hand in the writing, this film was a veritable one-woman show, which Krumbachová not only directed, wrote, and designed, but for which she also (as Martin Šrajer recounts) personally sewed the clothes together, made the actors' jewelry, and "prepared the fine dishes that form an integral part of the story."

"Those fine dishes certainly are integral, as Krumbachová's signature concerns, including her food preoccupation, are all served to excess here. Even simpler in premise and smaller in scale than her films with Němec and Chytilová, this is another stylized fable, one that takes the proverb "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach" and turns it into an outrageous scenario about an assiduous domestic goddess who endlessly prepares gourmet dishes for the satanic suitor of the title. The domineering, chauvinistic, grotesquely gluttonous Mr. Devil is the ultimate monstrous avatar of a gallery of destructive, greedy, or tyrannical rogues." Jonathan Owen, **The Criterion Collection**

Notes compiled by Jo Comino

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WANDA

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