

# The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

NO. 88  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## GERMAN FILM DIRECTOR RE-EVALUATED WERNER HOCHBAUM EVOKES ARTISTIC AND POLITICAL UPHEAVAL OF THE THIRTIES

Three decades after his death, Werner Hochbaum, a forgotten, neglected German film director of the thirties, has been re-evaluated, his reputation restored through the preservation efforts of the Staatliches Filmarchiv of the German Democratic Republic (DDR). Herbert Holba, the film scholar, is responsible for the special tribute to Hochbaum paid by the Viennale of 1976 and a later one he arranged together with David Robinson, the British film critic, given by the National Film Theatre of Great Britain. Now, in the first American retrospective of Hochbaum's films, The Museum of Modern Art, from September 21 to October 5, will present his oeuvre of 1929-1939, films which convey the aesthetic trends of that tumultuous decade.

In his own time, Hochbaum was recognized by his own countrymen only after his acclaim in foreign countries, when his best-known film, "The Eternal Mask," won a prize at the 1935 Venice Film Festival and was brought to the United States by pioneer importers Arthur Mayer and Joseph Burstyn. Here, though made by a German director, the picture was considered a Swiss production, having been financed with Swiss funds and produced by an Austrian company with an Austrian cast. Because it was a Swiss-Austrian venture, it was removed from the run of National Socialist films rejected at that time in America.

"The Eternal Mask," a psychological study of a guilt-ridden doctor, was well-received by American critics and named by the National Board of Review as the Best Foreign Film of the Year (1937). It became a succés d'estime here; however, in German film circles, it was felt that critics

outside the Reich had overemphasized the film's "Jewish tendencies and Freudian psychoanalysis." Nevertheless, Hochbaum was grudgingly accepted by the Nazis, only to be singled out later as a spy before his death at the age of 47.

Hochbaum started his career as a political activist, and his first picture, "Brüder," was a re-enactment of the Hamburg dock strike with non-professionals portraying a worker's family. According to Holba and Robinson, it was "unequivocal in its attack on capitalism and its warning of imminent danger of fascism: a shot of a rich man changing his suit for a military jacket and swastika is without parallel in propaganda films of this period."

When they were not political, Hochbaum's subjects were often psychological--the director had an obsessive interest in the divided personality--and his expressionistic style admirably suited such themes. On the whole, his films reveal certain consistent qualities, as noted by Robinson, who refers to "his musical pacing and structure, his astounding control of mood and atmosphere and ability to make tangible as no other director was able to do the whole feeling of Germany in the early thirties."

In particular, Hochbaum's films, influenced by Eisenstein, Von Sternberg, Renoir and Chaplin, show Hochbaum's fascination with the low life of big cities and seedy bars and brothels and cabaret cafes. An example is "Razzia in St. Pauli," made with the participation of the police, gangsters and "girls" of Hamburg in the dubious St. Pauli quarter, an underworld of tarts and thieves serving as a metaphor for a dying society. The license for this picture was cancelled by the authority of the National Socialist censorship.

The films in this program are in German, without English subtitles, except for "The Eternal Mask." However, a synopsis will be available

at each showing and Adrienne Mancina, Curator in the Department of Film, believes the films will be comprehensible even to non-German-speaking viewers because of their absorbing images. She cites as a film of particular interest "Shadows of the Past" (1936), starring the Austrian actress, Luise Ullrich. This picture was remade in 1939 in America with Elizabeth Bergner and was called "A Stolen Life;" another version was made in 1946, starring Bette Davis.

This retrospective program, made possible with the cooperation of the Staatliches Filmarchiv of the German Democratic Republic (DDR) and the National Film Theatre of London, continues through October 5, and the schedule follows:

- BRÜDER (BROTHERS). 1929. Silent film with music and sound effects. In German. 60 min. Thursday, September 21 at 6:00 and Friday, September 22 at 2:30.
- DIE EWIGE MASKE (THE ETERNAL MASK). 1935. With Mathias Wieman, Olga Tshechowa. In German, English subtitles. 81 min. Thursday, September 21 at 8:30 and Sunday, September 24 at 5:00.
- RAZZIA IN ST. PAULI (RAID). 1932. With Gina Falkenberg, Friedrich Gnass. In German. 73 min. Friday, September 22 at 2:30 and Saturday, September 23 at 2:30.
- ZWEI WELTEN (TWO WORLDS). 1929. Silent film, German titles. 15 min. Saturday, September 23 at 5:00 and Monday, September 25 at 2:30.
- MORGEN BEGINNT DAS LEBEN (LIFE BEGINS TOMORROW). 1933. With Erich Haussman, Hilde von Stolz. In German. 75 min. Saturday, September 23 at 5:00 and Monday, September 25 at 2:30.
- VORSTADTVARIETE (SUBURBAN MUSIC HALL). 1934. With Luise Ullrich, Mathias Wieman, Oskar Sima, Hans Moser. In German. 94 min. Monday, September 25 at 6:00 and Thursday, September 23 at 2:30.
- LEICHTE KAVALLERIE (LIGHT CAVALRY). 1935. With Marika Rokk, Fritz Kampers, Heinz von Cleve. In German. 88 min. Tuesday, September 26 at 6:00 and Friday, September 29 at 2:30.

(over)

September 1978

For further information, please contact Lillian Gerard, Special Projects Coordinator (212) 956-7296, or Andrew Marum (212) 956-7504, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019.

- SCHATTEN DER VERGANGENHEIT (SHADOWS OF THE PAST). 1936. With Luise Ullrich, Gustav Diessl. In German. 75 min. Thursday, September 28 at 6:00 and Saturday, September 30 at 5:00.
- DER FAVORIT DER KAISERIN (THE CZARINA'S FAVORITE). 1936. With Olga Tschewowa, Anton Pointner, Trude Marlen, Adele Sandrock. In German. 81 min. Thursday, September 28 at 8:30 and Monday, October 2 at 2:30.
- SCHLEPPZUG M17 (TUGBOAT M17). 1933. With Heinrich George, Bertha, Drews, Betty Amann. In German 65 min. Saturday, September 30 at 2:30 and Thursday, October 5 at 6:00.
- MAN SPRICHT UBER JACQUELINE (TALK ABOUT JACQUELINE). 1937. With Wera Engels, Albrecht Schoenhals, Sabine Peters. In German. 82 min. Sunday, October 1 at 2:30 and Monday, October 2 at 6:00.
- DREI UNTEROFFIZIERE (THREE NCOs). 1939. With Albert Hahn, Fritz Genschow, Wilhelm H. Konig, Ruth Hellberg, Claire Winter, and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf as "Carmen." In German. 92 min. Tuesday, October 3 at 6:00 and Thursday, October 5 at 2:30.