

Angel Films præsenterer

Il Boemo – En mesters storhed og fald



Premiere: 7. marts

Længde: 143 minutter

Censur: 11 år

Instruktør: Petr Václav

Premierebiografer: Øst for Paradis, Café Biografen Odense, Nordisk Film Biografer Dagmar, Park Bio, Gentofte Kino, Værløse Bio, Kinorama Sønderborg, Valby Kino, Nicolai Bio

Synopsis:

I femten år skrev Josef Mysliveček (1737–1781), kendt som 'Il Boemo', musik til alle de italienske hoffer og byteatre, fra Napoli til Firenze, Torino og Venedig. I Italien møder han tilmed den unge Mozart, som han bliver venner med og agerer mentor for. Udover sine musikalske evner er Josef begunstiget med et charmerende væsen, og da han tiltrækker sig opmærksomhed fra en velhavende ung kvinde, bliver det starten på en utrolig rejse, der vil gøre alle hans musikalske drømme til virkelighed. Det er historien om en ekstraordinært talentfuld operakomponist; om passion, kærlighed og musikkens kraft!

Trailer og fuldt pressemateriale kan hentes på: <https://www.angelfilms.dk/ilboemo>

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THE LIFE OF JOSEF MYSLIVEČEK

A native of Prague, Josef Mysliveček (1737–1781) became one of the leading musical personalities in the whole of Europe, in spite of all expectations. In his time, he was the most sought-after opera composer in Italy and can be described without exaggeration as having been the most celebrated artist of Czech origin in the 18th century. He collaborated with the vocal stars of his time and influenced Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart himself. His music continues to fascinate listeners to this day with its energy, ingenuity, and emotional depth.

Josef Mysliveček was most likely born in Sova Mills in Kampa on 9 March 1737. His father Matěj Mysliveček was a wealthy and influential miller, and his mother Anna Terezie also came from a family of millers. In addition to a twin brother, Jáchym, Mysliveček also had a sister, Maria Anna, who entered a convent in adulthood. Jáchym made a living as a miller in Prague until his death. We know for a fact that the family was wealthy and materially secure. Josef probably attended the Dominican school at the Church of St. Giles, where he also likely received music lessons. After this, he appears to have switched to the Jesuit college in Klementinum, where great emphasis was placed on the musical prowess of students. We know that he enrolled at Charles-Ferdinand University but left after the first year because he “made no progress in logic”. He subsequently learned the trade, studying hydraulics and mathematical subjects, among others, as required of the millers of that time. He completed his studies, was admitted to the Prague Guild as a master miller, and began working in the family mills.

CAREER IN ITALY

Until he was twenty-five, Mysliveček did not focus on music to any great extent. At that stage, he decided to change his path in life and become a composer and violin virtuoso. He first completed his musical education in Prague with František Václav Habermann and Josef Seger and began writing his own compositions surprisingly quickly – his oldest surviving work is the successful Symphony in C Major. Italian education, however, was indispensable for opera composers of that time. Mysliveček left for Italy in the autumn of 1763. He made for Venice, probably because the Italian operas which were performed in Prague and the vocalists who sang in them were often of Venetian provenance. During his time in Italy, Mysliveček travelled from city to city, composing for various theatres. He was primarily associated with Teatro San Carlo in Naples, the most

prestigious European stage of its time, and it was in this esteemed theatre that more of Mysliveček's operas were performed than anywhere else.

Mysliveček's first opera for Naples, *Il Bellerofonte*, met with enthusiastic reception. The main roles were performed by tenor Anton Raaff and soprano Caterina Gabrielli, two of the most famous opera stars of the age. The positive response to the opera led to commissions for many other Italian theatres, including Florence, Rome, Venice, Turin, and Bologna. Mysliveček also achieved great success in Munich. In 1777, he presented his opera *Ezio* at the local court and also his oratorio *Isacco, figura del redentore*, that "the whole of Munich" was still talking about six months later, as Wolfgang Mozart noted in a letter.

MYSLIVEČEK and MOZART

The surviving correspondence tells us of a number of meetings between the two composers. Mysliveček first met Mozart and his father Leopold in Bologna in 1770, when the fourteen-year-old Wolfgang was working on the opera *Mitridate, re di Ponto*, which was to be performed in Milan. Theirs was a very friendly relationship, the young Mozart admired Mysliveček and was grateful for the experience that the older artist was passing on to him about composition. Mysliveček even tried to use his contacts to secure commissions for Mozart in Italy.

Mysliveček and Wolfgang Mozart met for the last time in Munich, by which time Mysliveček was already seriously ill. Mozart visited him in hospital and wrote about the meeting in a letter to his father in great detail and with strong emotion. The friendship between Mysliveček and the Mozarts cooled off later on when Mysliveček was unable to fulfil his promise of getting Wolfgang a commission for an opera at Teatro San Carlo. Mozart returned to the genre of opera seria at the end of his life, when he composed the opera *La clemenza di Tito*, which premiered at the Estates Theatre in Prague in 1791 on the occasion of the coronation of Leopold II as Bohemian king. Mysliveček had set the same libretto some seventeen years earlier. A comparison in terms of recognition is inescapable. The Czech, a generation older, achieved stellar success in Italian theatres in his own lifetime. Although Mozart later attempted to do the same, he never managed to achieve a breakthrough in Italy. Again, their posthumous fates were almost entirely the opposite, only this time the other way round. While Mozart became one of the world's most renowned composers after his death, Mysliveček was almost completely forgotten for more than two centuries.

FINAL YEARS

In the final years of his life, Mysliveček suffered from major health problems and pain caused by progressive syphilis. In spite of this, however, he continued to compose operas and instrumental music. Three years before his death, he presented one of his best operas of all, *L'Olimpiade*, which was played in honour of the name day of the King of Spain. Apart from his illness, Mysliveček also faced financial difficulties and had to resort to taking out several loans from a paupers' bank. It is not known exactly when he died, but there is a record of his funeral in Rome, in the Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina, on 4 February 1781, a date which soon came to be accepted as the date of his death. He left behind virtually no possessions, and the priest who recorded his funeral took Mysliveček to be a 65-year-old man, when in reality the composer did not even live to the age of forty-four.

MAKERS OF THE FILM

PETR VACLAV, DIRECTOR AND SCREENWRITER

Petr Vaclav is a graduate of the Film and TV School at the Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU) in Prague. For his film *Paní Le Murie* (*Madame Le Murie*), he was nominated for a student Oscar. His debut feature, *Marian*, won a number of international awards in 1996, including a Silver Leopard at the International Film Festival in Locarno and prizes for direction in Angers, Belfort, Tehran, and Bratislava, and it was also nominated for a Czech Lion award.

His next film, *Paralelní světy* (*Parallel Worlds*), was a finalist in the NHK Award — Sundance scriptwriting competition and was screened as part of the competition section at the festival in San Sebastian. His film *Cesta ven* (*The Way Out*) was shown in the ACID section at the Cannes Film Festival in 2014, becoming the first Czech film to premiere at this most prestigious film festival in 23 years. It was awarded seven Czech Lions, including Best Film, Best Screenplay, and Best Director. The drama *Nikdy nejsme sami* (*We Are Never Alone*) (2017) won the audience Tagesspiegel Award at the Berlinale Festival and the prize for artistic contribution at the Cairo International Film Festival. The documentary *Zpověď zapomenutého* (*Confession of the Vanished*) then won the Fipa d'or Award at the Biarritz Festival. Vaclav's most recent work, the road movie *Skokan* (*The Jumper*), arrived in Czech cinemas in June 2017.

You tell the story of a historical figure: the composer Josef Mysliveček. Who was he? Josef Mysliveček was born in 1737 to a Prague miller. He studied milling and became a member of the millers' guild in Prague. It wasn't until the age of twenty-five that he dared to defy the wish of his long-dead father that he should look after the mill. He also disappointed the expectation of his mother and his twin brother that he would remain in Prague with them. He disappeared abruptly to Venice, and after four years of residing in Italy he got his first incredible commission to write an opera for Teatro San Carlo in Naples. This was the largest opera house at this time, and the most renowned singers sang there. There are no historical sources which record how this rapid progress in his career occurred. My film begins in Venice where the young Josef is trying to find his way around in foreign surroundings. It captures the events which led to his first major commission, and it goes on to describe the life of an artist who builds a dazzling career, but then loses it. It is an Icarian story of a rise and a fall. Mysliveček's suffering and death are tragic. Even so, my film is the story of great fortune because Josef became a major composer. He achieved the artistic destiny he desired. His life was short. But it was a full one. He achieved self-fulfilment, and he left behind his music which still speaks to us even after 240 years of oblivion.

What aspects of his life and works, unknown to the public, did you particularly want to capture in the film? I wanted to tell the story of a man who followed a vital urge to live his life, to become somebody, to achieve self-fulfilment. I also endeavoured to incorporate some of his best arias in the film, representing different aspects of his skills as a composer. The entire film is about how his career grows, and how he loses it.

How would you describe the era in which your film is set? Josef grew up in the occupied and bombarded Prague of the Seven Years' War. We are all familiar with this conflict from the film Barry Lyndon. Three years after Mysliveček's first great success at Teatro San Carlo in Naples, Marie Antoinette marries Louis XVI, her sister having married King Ferdinand of Naples two years prior. Mysliveček wrote his greatest operas for the royal theatre in Naples. The queen of France and the queen of Naples were both sisters of Austrian Emperor Joseph II. The general public knows him from the film Amadeus. Mysliveček dies eight years before the French Revolution. At that time, Beethoven is nineteen years old.

What was special about Josef Mysliveček's relationship with Wolfgang A. Mozart? Josef Mysliveček was thirty-three and was writing his eighth Italian opera when he met the thirteen-year-old Mozart and his fifty-one-year-old father, Leopold. It happened in Bologna during the Mozarts' Grand Tour. The father and son were travelling around Italy, looking for contracts. Leopold also secretly hoped that with his son's success, the whole family would move to Italy and never return to Austria, where they felt unappreciated. Leopold showed great interest in Mysliveček, both as an impresario and a father: he wanted to understand how this German-speaking foreigner from the other side of the Alps, a citizen of the Austrian Empire, essentially their compatriot, had managed to make such a great career in Italy. He undoubtedly wanted advice. Wolfgang was more interested in Mysliveček's music. The overture to his first opera, *Mitridate*, is influenced by Mysliveček's overture to his Bologna opera, *La Nitteti*. We can even say that it directly borrows some musical ideas. Josef and Wolfgang respected each other greatly. The only psychological description of Mysliveček we have is contained in one of the letters Mozart wrote to his father. In it, he describes Mysliveček as a man full of fire and passion. After meeting in Bologna and Milan, the two composers did not see each other again for six years. After Mozart had escaped from Salzburg at the age of twenty-one and had failed to find employment in Germany, Mysliveček attempted to get him a position in Naples. He did not succeed, however, because there had been a change in the management of Teatro San Carlo at that time, and "il Boemo", who was also gravely ill, lost his influence over the new directors. I think we can say without exaggeration that Mysliveček had achieved the career and lifestyle which Mozart himself was seeking seeking and never got. As an adult, Mozart did not receive a single commission in Italy, and he never returned there.

What were the main sources that you used to find out information about Mysliveček's life? The amount of materials available which relate directly to Mysliveček is not great. Czech musicologist Stanislav Bohadlo collected existing sources in his book, *Josef Mysliveček v dopisech* (Josef Mysliveček in Correspondence). American scholar Daniel E. Freeman followed up on his work in the monograph *Josef Mysliveček, the Man and His Music*. Daniel became a great ally and dedicated advisor to me, and we exchanged hundreds of pages worth of emails. I read various texts from Paris libraries which had been printed during Mysliveček's time. I needed to have publications from that time. To feel that period close-up, in my own hands. I consulted numerous interesting texts about venereal diseases, travel journals... I studied many books: Charles Burney,

the memoirs of Goldoni, Gozzi, Casanova's monumental *Histoire de ma vie*. I read memoirs of anyone I could get hold of, correspondence, the literature of the time. Of course, one of the greatest sources for understanding the music world of that time, and also the world in general, is the correspondence of Mozart. I also read many of the latest expert treatises and met a number of the authors of these works.

How is it possible that Mysliveček has been forgotten? First of all, he died of syphilis. Many people caught it at the time, but it was still considered a disease of immoral people. Mysliveček was undoubtedly condemned by many. This is evidenced in Leopold Mozart's letter to his son, in which he states that he is sorry for their friend, but that his misfortune was of his own making because he had led a wicked and shameful life and so it was no surprise that he had to bear the shame which all the world could see. Another reason why Mysliveček has been forgotten is the fact that he was a foreigner. He worked continuously and travelled across Italy from south to north, and from north to south, for over fifteen years. But he never had the time to settle anywhere. He wasn't married, his relationships were intermittent. Although he was famous, there was no-one who wanted to nurture his legacy. A third reason is that opera seria as a genre fell out of favour with the collapse of monarchies and disappeared. Mysliveček is not the only opera composer to who has been forgotten. Almost nobody knows of the wonderful Traetta. Cimarosa and Jommelli are well-known, but only in Italy and even so almost nobody plays their operas. Johann Christian Bach is really only known because he was Johann Sebastian's son. This phenomenon of oblivion is only really seen in the eighteenth century. Even Bach was not played for a long time, and he was basically rediscovered. And in Mysliveček's own time, Vivaldi was almost never performed. The history of music is to some extent the history of forgetting and rediscovering, a story of fashionable admiration and unjust damnation. Success is never won for ever but neither it is lost for eternity.

Is the issue of admiration and obscurity something which also affects the famous singers whom Mysliveček worked with? Definitely. Caterina Gabrielli, for example, who is one of the major characters in my film, was incredibly famous, all Italian theatres were fighting over her. Catherine the Great invited her to Russia. Gabrielli asked for a huge salary. Shocked, the Empress replied: "This money equals the pay of my generals." The singer calmly advised: "So call your generals to sing for you." The Empress was forced to surrender. Caterina

Gabrielli died fourteen years after her last opera performance. Nobody published any obituaries or articles about her.

The film also focuses a lot on the status of women in society in that era. Is that intentional? It is merely the direct consequence of the story. Women played a fundamental role in Josef's life. And they naturally bring with them the issue of their status in the social order at the time. On the one hand, we can see a free-spirited Venetian noblewoman, one that Casanova or Cardinal de Bernis could have described. On the other hand, we also see a woman who is ensnared by her despotic husband, and a young woman destroyed by her authoritarian father. We also provide a portrait of the most famous soprano of her time. In her case, we can get a sense of the special status enjoyed by an opera star who was wealthy, had no husband or guardian, and could do what she wanted. This was a woman who was lauded and feared, seen as a great artist but also as a woman of dubious morals and ill repute. At that time, the status of actors and dancers was a poor one, but not even a great opera star could escape the deeply ambivalent response of society, oscillating between admiration and suspicion.

How did you make use of Myslivoček's music? From the outset, I worked with Václav Luks, as one of the greatest experts on Baroque music, on the screenplay. He then recorded the music for the film with his orchestra, Collegium 1704. We filmed all the opera scenes live, although playback would have been common practice. Playback is cheaper and ensures technical cleanliness. But no singer can perform in playback what they experience when singing live. The art of singing depends on expression, on acting, but it's also a physical performance. That's what makes the profession so difficult and so thrilling. That's why there has always been so much admiration for singers. I wanted the live performance to convey the uniqueness which characterises each note, each moment of the singers' performance. But we also recorded some music in the studio so that I had additional material to edit in. We also used it for an upcoming CD with Myslivoček's music, which includes a number of arias nobody had studied since the composer's death. The only playback we had to resort to was for actress Barbara Ronchi, who plays Caterina Gabrielli. She had to learn to breathe, to sing, to perform. She worked very hard so that she could be completely credible.

What do you expect from your film? My first goal is to ensure that the film has an impact on the audience. Right after that, my second goal is definitely to ensure Josef Myslivoček comes out of obscurity. This process has already started, slowly, and I am convinced that our film will be of great assistance in

this regard. I think that this can surely be achieved in Mysliveček's home country, in the Czech Republic. But I'd also like to return him to Italy, the country where he was born as an artist. The return of Mysliveček's works to the global opera scene would be my ultimate dream.

VOJTĚCH DYK, LEAD ROLE

Vojtěch Dyk is a Czech actor and musician who studied at the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts (DAMU) in Prague, specialising in drama. He used to be a member of the Czech National Theatre and also cooperated with independent theatres. He became better known to the public after appearing in several television series and in the films *Ženy v pokušení* (Women in Temptation) by Jiří Vejdělek and *Tři bratři* (Three Brothers) by Jan Svěrák. Both films are among the most successful Czech films of recent years. In 2022, he appeared in the critically acclaimed film *Zpráva o záchraně mrtvého* (Saving One Who Was Dead), directed by Václav Kadrnka who main award at the International Film Festival Karlovy Vary in 2017. Music fans know Vojtěch Dyk as the frontman of Nightwork. In recent years, he performs with his own project, D.Y.K., and with B-Side Band from Brno.

Il Boemo wasn't your first major film role, but certainly the most challenging one. Did you realise that before shooting began? I didn't realise it at first, and to be honest it didn't even occur to me when I read the script, which I had in Czech. It was only after about a week when it occurred to me that everything I had read until that time in Czech I would have to learn in Italian. And I realised that it would be far from easy. But the real jolt didn't come until I actually started learning Italian and tried to "memorise" one scene. It took me a whole week, and there were 60 scenes like that in the script. At that point it finally hit me how hard it was going to be.

What did you know about Josef Mysliveček beforehand? Did you know his music? I didn't know his music or practically anything about Josef Mysliveček himself. Probably like most people in the Czech Republic. I knew that he was a composer and that he had a certain relationship to Prague and Italy. But that was pretty much it.

Director Petr Vaclav had been preparing the film for several years, down to the very last detail. What did he tell you about Josef Mysliveček beforehand to bring him closer to you? To exaggerate a little, in a way I am convinced that

Petr Vaclav chose this theme as a parallel to his own life. I actually told him that. Every time he talked about Josef Mysliveček, I'd say to myself, "You're talking about yourself, Petr. Or about who you want to be. Or about who you are deep down inside but aren't showing it just yet. Or you perhaps are showing it and I just don't know it." So, I have to admit that I drew a lot from the director's own personality. But Petr Vaclav was truly very inspiring, and an invaluable source of information. He knows the second half of the 18th century to perfection, so he can describe it in detail. Although there were clear rules that needed to be followed to the letter, we did on the other hand have considerable freedom in portraying Josef Mysliveček. There are not many records of his life, except perhaps for his correspondence with Wolfgang and Leopold Mozart. Our ambition was to show Josef Mysliveček as a normal guy, not just as an ambitious and career-driven man. Firstly, this would not gain him much sympathy, and secondly, we would also very likely be deviating from the truth. So, Petr and I talked in advance about how to deal with the main character and how to follow each other's thoughts and intentions. Petr is used to working with people who are not actors and often chooses professional actors depending on whether they are capable of what you might call "not acting". Which is an interesting change, because it's a slightly different way of expression, and I found it refreshing. We then dealt with the theme and the concept of the era behind the scenes, during the filming itself, because the environment of theatres and palaces again changed the atmosphere.

Filming Il Boemo was about striving for maximum authenticity. Did you find the shooting unusual in any way? The way the sets were lit and how cameraman Diego Romero was able to work with the light was particularly remarkable. I liked his approach very much, although it must have been very difficult for him. But candlelight was the only way to achieve authentic atmosphere. As a result, the film does not look poorly lit or dark on screen.

How was it for you to be shooting musical scenes with musicians from Collegium 1704 and with global opera stars? Fortunately enough, I've had enough experience of filming, so I wasn't nervous. But it was a pleasure to conduct stars like Philippe Jaroussky and Emöke Baráth. Of course, I started rehearsing for this sort of scenes back when I was twelve, when I conducted Carmen and Carmina Burana at home. There were other people present this time, of course, but I now have more experience to draw from. I still enjoy conducting and sometimes I conduct with a pencil in my hand. What is more, it is

essentially true that if the orchestra is good enough, there is no need for a conductor. The musicians just don't know it yet.

Do you think Josef Mysliveček was your breakthrough role? It was a certain breakthrough for me, yes. So far, I've only been given the roles of simpler men, partly on account of my age. But I've wanted to play a more complex character in a film for some time now. Nothing came up, so I just kept on taking the "undemanding" roles. After a time, I decided to change my approach to life, I began to reject this type of roles, and somehow subconsciously I created the space for something new. And that was when I heard from Petr Vaclav. I would really like to continue with such complex characters in the future, because the work is much more enriching for me.

COSTUMES

Dressing really well, even in the 18th century, was still very much the domain of the financially secure. Everything was naturally done by hand, from weaving the fabrics to sewing on the very last button. And with such care! What, though, if you want to stitch exactly the same clothes today, in the twenty-first century, using exactly the same fabrics and other techniques? Fortunately, there are still factories which have been working for several centuries without interruption that are able to produce the same fabrics worn by Josef Mysliveček and Caterina Gabrielli.

ANDREA CAVALLETTO, COSTUME DESIGNER

Andrea Cavalletto graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice in 2004 and the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome in 2007, where he was a student of costume designer Piero Tosi and scenographer Andrea Crisanti. He began his career in film and theatre productions as an assistant to costume designers Maurizio Millenotti and Alessandro Lai. In 2009, he made his debut as a costume designer in his own right for the film *Diecia Inverni*, directed by Valerio Mieli. The film won a Silver Ribbon, an Italian film award, and a David di Donatello Award, the Italian equivalent of the American Academy Awards (Oscars).

MUSIC

VÁCLAV LUKS, CONDUCTOR

Václav Luks is the founder and artistic director of the Prague Baroque orchestra Collegium 1704. He studied at Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in Basel, Switzerland. Under his leadership, Collegium 1704 quickly established itself as one of the elite world orchestras dedicated to the interpretation of 17th and 18th century music.

Global opera stars performing in the film: *Philippe Jaroussky* the most admired French countertenor of his generation. *Emöke Baráth* Hungarian soprano, much sought-after as a performer of Baroque music. *Simona Šaturová* soprano of Slovak origin who has achieved international renown as an interpreter of Mozart; for many years, she has been promoting and performing Mysliveček's music. *Raffaella Milanesi* Italian soprano, one of the most sought-after soloists in the field of Baroque music. *Juan Sancho* Spanish tenor who feels at home singing the Baroque repertoire and concentrates mainly on Bach, Handel, and Monteverdi. *Krystian Adam* Polish tenor with a broad repertoire – Monteverdi, Purcell, Handel, Mozart, Haydn, Gluck, and Schubert. *Sophie Harmsen* an internationally successful and respected mezzo-soprano of German origin.

writer and director: PETR VACLAV editors: PAOLO COTTIGNOLA, FLORENT VASSAULT starring: VOJTĚCH DYK, BARBARA RONCHI, ELENA RADONICICH, LANA VLADY producer: JAN MACOLA, MIMESIS FILM (CZ) co-producers: KATEŘINA ONDŘEJKOVÁ PRODUCTION GROUP – CZECH TELEVISION (CZ), DUGONG FILMS (IT), SENTIMENTALFILM (SK), LIBOR WINKLER (CZ), MAGICLAB (CZ), DANIEL BERGMANN (CZ), JAN MENCLÍK (CZ) camera: DIEGO ROMERO SUAREZ LLANOS conductor and orchestra: VÁCLAV LUKS, COLLEGIUM 1704 soloists: PHILIPPE JAROUSKY, EMÖKE BARÁTH, RAFFAELLA MILANESI, SIMONA ŠATUROVÁ, JUAN SANCHO, KRYSSTIAN ADAM, SOPHIE HARMSEN FLORENT MANGEOT architects: IRENA HRADECKÁ, LUCA SERVINO costumes: ANDREA CAVALLETTO sound: DANIEL NĚMEC, FRANCESCO LIOTARD artistic make-up: ANDREA McDONALD executive production: KLÁRA BOTLÍKOVÁ, VENDY FENCLOVÁ VFX supervisor: MICHAL KŘEČEK expert consultant: DANIEL E. FREEMAN in Czech and Italian.