



Monday 13 June at 6:30 pm

The Strange Little Cat Das merkwürdige Kätzchen Germany 2013

Director/Screenplay/Editor: Ramon Zürcher
Producers: Silvan Zürcher, Johanna Bergel
Production co: DFFB
Photography: Alexander Haßkerl
Music: Thee More Shallows, Stephane Leonard

With: Jenny Schily (mother), Anjorka Strechel (Karin), Mia Kasalo (Clara), Luk Pfaff (Simon), Matthias Dittmer (father), Armin Marewski (uncle)

72 mins, Blu-ray. PG
In German with English subtitles

Ramon Zürcher's miniature debut, *The Strange Little Cat*, is one of the most confident and unusual first features in recent memory. It's also one of the most aptly titled; its perspective – intimate, but removed, and often as intrigued by what's just off-camera as by the action on-screen – seems ineffably feline. Organized around oblique and sometimes mismatched angles, with every composition suggesting a torn-off piece of some larger map, the movie invests its cramped setting – a middle-class Berlin apartment, seen over the course of an afternoon and evening – with suspense, absurdist humor, and a wholly authentic sense of hectic, disorderly family life. Writer-director-editor-sound-designer Zürcher is a rigorous formalist with a light, humane touch – a seeming contradiction in terms, though fitting for the director of such a paradoxical little movie. – Ignaty Vishnevetsky, *The AV Club*

From the very first shot, we are clued in that there are depths of strangeness to be plumbed in even the smallest and most banal interactions. A little girl (Mia Kasalo) sits at a kitchen table, writing something on a pad of paper, and occasionally opening her mouth to scream at the top of her lungs, timing her screams to the roar of the blender (off-camera). Grown-ups pass around her, their heads above the frame, their conversations droning and banal, not acknowledging her. What we are seeing is a regular family morning, but the framing from cinematographer Alexander Hasskerl creates an enormous amount of tension. That tension lasts throughout the film, a strength of its relatively short running time. – Sheila O'Malley, *rogerebert.com*

The family's evident, yet unspoken acceptance and love for each other's eccentricities, makes it for us a heartwarming, if mischievous, tribute to family life, a heightened version of that feeling we all got as kids staying in a friend's house for the first time and discovering rituals different to our own: wow, their house smells weird! Wait, they're allowed have the TV on during dinner?

This kind of vérité surrealism doesn't come along very often, and the glorious oddness that Zürcher manages to infuse into even the most routinely domestic activities is really the gift the film keeps on giving. Apparently based on an idea workshopped at a program run by Bela Tarr (he gets a credit namecheck), it takes a little while to work its magic, and you need to go with the flow, but we heartily recommend you do. – Jessica Kiang, *The Playlist*



Monday 20 June at 6:30 pm

The Cabinet of Dr Caligari Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari Germany 1920

Director: Robert Wiene
Production co: Decla Film-Gesellschaft
Screenplay: Carl Mayer, Hans Janowitz
Photography: Willy Hameister

With: Werner Krauss (Dr Caligari), Conrad Veidt (Cesare), Friedrich Fehér (Francis), Lil Dagover (Jane Olsen), Hans Heinrich von Twardowski (Alan), Rudolf Lettinger (Dr Olsen)

74 mins, Blu-ray, silent, tinted. PG some scenes may scare very young children

The first thing everyone notices and best remembers about *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* is the film's bizarre look. The actors inhabit a jagged landscape of sharp angles and tilted walls and windows, staircases climbing crazy diagonals, trees with spiky leaves, grass that looks like knives. These radical distortions immediately set the film apart from all earlier ones, which were based on the camera's innate tendency to record reality.

The stylized sets, obviously two-dimensional, must have been a lot less expensive than realistic sets and locations, but I doubt that's why the director, Robert Wiene, wanted them. He is making a film of delusions and deceptive appearances, about madmen and murder, and his characters exist at right angles to reality. None of them can quite be believed, nor can they believe one another. ...

A case can be made that *Caligari* was the first true horror film. There had been earlier ghost stories and the eerie serial *Fantomas* made in 1913–14, but their characters were inhabiting a recognizable world. *Caligari* creates a mindscape, a subjective psychological fantasy. In this world, unspeakable horror becomes possible.

Caligari is said to be the first example in cinema of German Expressionism, a visual style in which not only the characters but the world itself is out of joint. I don't know of another film that used its extreme distortions and discordant angles, but its over-all attitude certainly cleared the way for *The Golem*, *Nosferatu*, *Metropolis* and *M*. In one of the best-known books ever written about film, *From Caligari to Hitler*, the art historian Siegfried Kracauer argued that the rise of Nazism was foretold by the preceding years of German films, which reflected a world at wrong angles and lost values. In this reading, Caligari was Hitler and the German people were sleepwalkers under his spell.

I don't believe the films caused Nazism in Germany, and whether they predicted it depends a great deal on hindsight. What is certain is that the Expressionist horror films created the most durable and bulletproof of genres. No other genre has box-office appeal all by itself, although film noir, also deeply influenced by Expressionism, comes close. All a horror film need promise is horror – the unspeakable, the terrifying, the merciless, the lurching monstrous figure of destruction. It needs no stars, only basic production values, just the ability to promise horror. – Roger Ebert, *rogerebert.com*

To speak of cinema without *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* would be to speak of filmmaking without Thomas Edison's invention of the light bulb. Today's dramas, horrors, noirs and thrillers have undoubtedly benefited from the infinite mastery of Robert Wiene's staple showpiece. Approaching 100 years since its inception, this work of art debunks its historic sell-by-date. Its recent digital restoration is a testament to its inability to age. – Tom Watson, *Cine-Vue*.