

Press release

The Three Brothers

directed by Jan Svěrák

The new fairy tale *The Three Brothers* is the first feature-film collaboration of the trio of renowned Czech film-makers Svěrák – Uhlíř – Svěrák. The epic, premiered on 14 August, involves a multitude of well-known actors and popular tunes to reinvigorate the classic Central European fairy tale genre.

The musical film *The Three Brothers* (Czech: *Tři bratři*) is the second feature film for children from director and producer Jan Svěrák, following *Kooky* in 2010. “While raising funds for the production we were frequently asked why we chose a fairy tale,” Jan Svěrák says. “The answer is simple. We wanted to give the classic Czech fairy tale back the self-confidence that it has lost in the past years due to the pressure of Hollywood blockbusters, which it tries to emulate with fantastic figures and tricks.” The director, an Academy Award winner for the film *Kolya* (Best Foreign Language Film, 1997), reckons that many fairy-tale adaptations offer a pop-culture mutation of traditional fairy tales, which distracts from their essence. “Classic stories should be passed on in their original form. I wouldn’t want my children to watch warped fairy-tale motives, like having Little Red Riding Hood fight vampires with a flame-thrower. Children need the fairy tale essentials.”

The Three Brothers continues the rich cultural tradition of the folk stories of Central Europe. Adaptations of fairy tales have been used in Central European cinema for the last sixty years. Many generations have been influenced by these moral fables and folk stories from life in the village and in the castle.

The film has a complex genesis. It started with the idea for a live-action film with animations, this developed into the concept of a film with digital effects and 3D tricks, and ended up as a live-action film with live animals and an enormous, oversized puppet. The film is a Czech-Danish co-production, which made it possible to obtain the expertise of Danes Niclas Bendixen, the choreographer of films such as *A Royal Affair* or *Love Is All You Need*, and sound master Claus Lynge.

The story is based on a series of mini-operas that were staged by the National Theatre in Prague. These were penned by the famous Czech duo of screenwriter Zdeněk Svěrák and composer Jaroslav Uhlíř, who are renowned for their myriad works for children. Over the years these mini-operas have entered the popular canon and have become standard repertoire for children in schools and nurseries. The musical element is fundamental to every fairy tale. “When I was searching for the subject matter for my film, I found that all the classic fairy tales have been done before. But never with such music,” the director adds. This is no surprise, seeing as Zdeněk Svěrák and Jaroslav Uhlíř have collaborated on a number of Czech fairy tale films to create some of the best-loved Czech soundtracks ever.

Even so, screenwriter Zdeněk Svěrák was set before the daunting task of connecting *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Twelve Months*, and *Little Red Riding Hood* into one story: *“It was intriguing work to weave the notorious fairy tales into verse and to sing them through. It made me realise how robust the stories are. Children don’t mind that they already know the ending. It was as if the music had filled the tales with a gleam of magic. What was funny in the spoken narrative became even funnier, and what was touching became heartbreaking. Weaving three fairy tales into one film was a tough nut to crack. We wanted them to fit together, and so we bound them up in a fourth, unsung one, like a plait from four strands,”* says Zdeněk Svěrák. The third and final version of the screenplay solved the matter in the form of three brothers, who are sent into the world by their parents to learn a few lessons and rid themselves of their bad personality traits (rashness, indecisiveness, absent-mindedness), so that they can take up responsibility for the family farm. On their journey the brothers enter the stories of three fairy tales, their female counterparts being Rose, Marian, and Little Red. *“The main story is that of the three brothers, who learn something new from their experience with the notorious fairy tales. That is the most valuable,”* summarises actor David Matásek, who played the role of Rose’s royal father.

The film’s soundtrack also benefited greatly from its theatrical source. The original music by Jaroslav Uhlíř was taken up and rewritten for film by Slovak composer Michal Novinski, who had done the same for the teddy-bear adventures of *Kooky*. *“Although ninety per cent of the harmonies and melodies remained unchanged, the original songs had been composed for theatre, not for film. It was necessary to give the music a dramatic tension that is missing in children’s theatre,”* says Novinski, who was the first Slovak composer to win the prestigious Czech Lion Award (for the films *In the Shadow* and *Kooky*).

This special approach to the musical side of *The Three Brothers* is confirmed by Danish choreographer Niclas Bendixen, who created the film’s dance routines: *“When the music begins to play in the film, everything must change. You cannot count on the usual laws of physics. It is one big dream, and the musical numbers remind us that we are not in the real world. It unleashes a sackful of fantasies.”*

The main roles of the three brothers are taken up by accomplished actors Vojtěch Dyk (Joey), Tomáš Klus (John), and Zdeněk Piškula (Matthew). Not only do Vojtěch Dyk and Tomáš Klus have experience in acting, but they are also backed up by successful music careers and they are two of the best-known young Czech artists. The youngest of the three, Zdeněk Piškula, has appeared mostly in TV series, but his musical training makes him perfectly suited to the role of Matthew. *“To play in a fairy tale in this day and age is a cathartic and invigorating event. At a time that lacks a sense for happy endings, you can suddenly experience something that is true to your heart. If someone decides to film a fairy tale, it means they’ve managed to stay a child, and that means they’re a very rich person who enriches those around them simply by being – by their creative approach to life. Consequently those ‘people around’ – and I have the honour to count myself among them – aren’t so morose, and in fact everyone feels better around such a person. I’d like to thank Jan Svěrák*

for some lovely childhood moments,” says actor and singer Tomáš Klus, looking back at the making of the film.

The female heroines are played by the multi-talented Lucie Maria Štouračová (Little Red), debutante Kateřina Kosová (Rose), and Sabina Rojková (Marian). The rest of the cast include David Matásek (King), Zuzana Norisová (Queen), Jiří Lábus (Swamp Hag), Oldřich Kaiser (Daddy), Gabriela Míčová (Mummy), Ivana Chýlková (Stepmother), Alena Doláková (Holene) and others.

Fairy tales need lavish wardrobes. For this reason, the internationally-acclaimed Barrandov Studios workshop was commissioned to create a collection of 28 original costumes, shoes, and accessories prepared by costume designer Simona Rybáková, costing more than \$50,000: *“A fairy tale film is one of the nicest tasks for a costume designer. In keeping with the script of The Three Brothers, the creative team and I agreed on a simple style with a pinch of humour, which would tie in with the best of Czech classics. I tried for an overall attractive and credible visual impression by using a combination of costumes, assembled from many beautiful outfits from the Barrandov collection, suitably aged by time and use, and contrasted with the newly-made ones, which employ unusual materials and flamboyance,”* Rybáková describes.

Filming was started in January 2013 by a pre-shoot of the winter scenes from the fairy tale The Twelve Months on location in the Prague open-air museum Řepora and among the sandstone formations of the Adršpach Rocks. Principal production took place in summer 2013 at twenty different locations in the Czech Republic and comprised the fairy tales of Little Red Riding Hood, Sleeping Beauty, and the story of the three brothers. The locations include the historical chateaux of Hluboká and Žleby, the Benedictine monastery in Kladruby, a swamp lake near Borkovice, the table mountain Děčínský Sněžník, and a South Bohemian mill in Hoslovice. A mild winter delayed the post-shoot of The Twelve Months until February 2014, when a hurricane allowed for some practically Siberian shots. The film was post-produced by the studio UPP in spring 2014, which added some two hundred special effects. The music was recorded under the supervision of Michal Novinski and conductor Oskar Rozsa in the sound studios of the Czech National Symphonic Orchestra (Prague), LOFT (Bratislava), and Mikrobos (Bratislava).

The film’s budget amounted to \$2,000,000. Funding was provided by co-producers Biograf Jan Svěrák, Novinski, and Phoenix Film (Denmark). The film was supported by Barrandov Studios and a subsidy from the Czech State Cinematography Fund.

Credits

Director:	Jan Svěrák
Story:	Zdeněk Svěrák
Screenplay:	Zdeněk Svěrák
Cinematography:	Vladimír Smutný
Film Editing:	Alois Fišárek
Music:	Jaroslav Uhlíř, Michal Novinski
Sound:	Jakub Čech, Claus Lyngé

Costumes: Simona Rybáková
Choreography: Jana Hanušová, Niclas Bendrixen
Producer: Jan Svěrák - Biograf Jan Svěrák
Co-producer: Eric Abraham – Portobello Pictures
Christian Husum – Phoenix Film

Filmography of Jan Svěrák

2014 The Three Brothers (Tři bratři)
2010 Kooky (Kuky se vrací)
2007 Empties (Vratné lahve)
2004 Daddy (Tatínek)
2001 Dark Blue World (Tmavomodrý svět)
1996 Kolya (Kolja)
1994 Accumulator 1 (Akumulátor 1)
1994 The Ride (Jízda)
1991 The Elementary School (Obecná škola)
1988 Oil Gobblers (Ropáci)