

KING OF ŠUMAVA

PHANTOM OF THE DARK LAND

VOYO

KING OF ŠUMAVA

PHANTOM OF THE DARK LAND

A THREE-PART MINISERIES FROM THE VOYO ORIGINAL EDITION

The King of Šumava: The phantom of the dark land, 1st series

Winner of the BEST TV MOVIE/MINISERIES AWARD at FINÁLE Pilsen 2023:

„TV show which has exceptional cinematic execution, great acting and well-written script - even though it is a historical series, the characters, their emotions and the obstacles they are facing have been resonating very well with current situation.“

Winner of the Student Jury Award for the best non-serial TV and internet production at FINÁLE Pilsen 2023:

“For a gripping and realistic depiction of the life stories of not only National Security Corps border guards.“

It is spring 1948. The joy of peace is yet to have subsided and the East and the West are already worrying about World War Three. Both worlds are separated from one another by the dense woods of the Bohemian Forest. The twenty-four-year-old cook, Josef Hasil, is serving in the National Security kitchen corps in Zvonková. A wild young man. He was old enough to experience the war in a German work camp and as a contact between the partisans. Now, he most desires fun, adventure and liberty. Politics is the last thing he's interested in. “When I joined the corps and went to the border, I thought I'd be catching Nazis, werewolves and other such scum. Not our people who just wanted to leave,” is how Josef Hasil summed it up in one of his few post-revolution interviews.





David Ondříček, the recipient of a Czech Lion award, directed this three-part miniseries for Voyo based on David Jan Žák's bestselling novel, *The Return of the King of the Bohemian Forest* (Návrat Krále Šumavy).

"IT'S A STORY OF DARK FORESTS AND MOORS. A BOYISH ADVENTURE THAT DETERIORATES INTO A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE, FREEDOM AND JUSTICE. IT WAS A CHILDHOOD DREAM COME TRUE." DAVID ONDŘÍČEK

DAVID ONDŘÍČEK

director

The King of Šumava: The Phantom of the Dark Land underwent a rigorous audience test with those best placed to do so, namely people from the environs of Josef Hasil's birthplace. How did they like it?

Josef Hasil is a true legend in the Bohemian Forest (Šumava). Legends also come with a range of contradictory emotions. Some people adore Hasil, while others hate his guts. Hasil guided many people across the border and that also led to certain consequences. The communists retaliated against their families and friends. The descendants of the victims of communist repression often blame Hasil and feel that the suffering was because of him. I went to see the screening, even given the risk that the miniseries might not be accepted. Happily, that didn't happen and I would even say that the opposite was true, so Michal Reitler, the creative producer, and I left there somewhat euphoric.

How tempting is it to retell a story that millions of people have already seen in the cinema, albeit this time unbur-

dened by pro-regime ideology? You yourself have also said that you are a big fan of Karel Kachyňa. What was the main driving force behind your decision to take on this project?

It's true that the film of the King of Šumava from 1959 had always fascinated me. It's wonderfully filmed and very well written. At the same time, it is a real product of the period in which it was made. The thing that fascinated me about Josef Hasil's story, as written in David Jan Žák's book *The Return of the King of the Bohemian Forest*, was the opportunity to set history straight in an exciting way. It's a story of dark forests and moors. A boyish adventure that deteriorates into a struggle for life, freedom and justice. It was a childhood dream come true.

What do the three episodes from the miniseries reveal to us about Josef Hasil's life? Where does the story take us?

The first three episodes deal with the early part of Hasil's service on the border. This includes his first

border crossings, love, victories and disappointments. It basically involves the exposition of the story, the birth of a legend. The King of Šumava is an adventure story about a young man who wanted to ride motorbikes, pick up girls and enjoy life a little, but the circumstances made him into a hero. We make practically no adventure films in this country.

How should one approach this type of topic or genre under domestic conditions? What are the specific characteristics?

I don't think it was only the circumstances. Hasil was an element of nature and he loved adventure. He was well aware of the danger of his undertakings, but he crossed the Rubicon and there was no way back. Hasil was full of energy and a very visceral person. Danger attracted him and gave him the physical feeling that he was alive.

You also worked on the King of Šumava with the creative producer Michal Reitler. Your cooperation with him on *Dukla 61* led to the Czech Lion

award for the best television film of miniseries. How do you and Michal complement each other best and did you have any differences of opinion regarding the phenomenon of the King of Šumava?

I work very well with Michal. We very often have differing points of view and that is how we complement each other. We're bound by the fact that we love our work. Whenever we meet, we tend to be swamped with ideas rather than not knowing how to proceed. That's what brings us together

In recent years, you have especially dealt with topics associated with history or with the period from the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century (Zátopek, In the Shadow, Dukla 61). Is there something about that period that attracts you?

I also worked as the executive producer on the film Anthropoid. I have always enjoyed history. It's not by chance that I have sought out these topics. I enjoy the psychology of the characters in different historical periods. The second half of the 19th century was extremely dark for our nation. The people were subjected to enormous pressure, it was terrible. I try to show that in some of my films and I truly hope that there will be more.

Filming the King of Šumava was extremely physically demanding for the actors. Some of them had to learn to ride a motorbike, while others had to learn how to shoot. How was it demanding and what did it teach you?

I had to adapt to television budgets in the King of Šumava. It taught me to be quick and I hope I didn't skimp on anything. At the same time, it was exciting filming the drama in the forests. I personally enjoy physically demanding film shoots. It's a kind of sport and it keeps everybody on their toes.

If you had to rank Josef Hasil among the historical figures of the second half of the twentieth century, who would you put him with?

I can't think of anybody. Hasil was a fearless maverick. His deeds are intertwined with legends and he himself is a mysterious figure. The phantom of the dark land.

“THE ROLE OF THE KING OF ŠUMAVA WAS EXTREMELY DEMANDING. THE MAN TRULY THOUGHT ABOUT FREEDOM AND OPTION OF MAKING ONE’S OWN CHOICES. AND HE WAS ONE THAT OFFERED PEOPLE THAT OPPORTUNITY.”

OSKAR HES

the actor playing the main role of Josef Hasil

How would you describe who Josef Hasil was?

A legendary guide across the border, whose active career started in 1949 and lasted about five years. I guess he led two or three hundred people across the border. A young guy who knew the area he was moving in. A border guard who thought differently to the communists and mainly a truly happy person. His son, Josef Vávra, really emphasised that to us. That’s how he wanted us to interpret him.

You mean as an optimistic person?

Exactly. He loved life and enjoy every last second of it. He loved nature and was happy there. He always emanated a kind of amiable, positive energy. He enjoyed life, he enjoyed women and he mainly enjoyed being in his own environment and being able to do what he was good at, namely guiding people across the border, because it was dangerous. He adored adrenaline. When I look back at him, then he seemed to me to be happy, clever and especially an upright person who had come from poor origins. From a goat-herding family, which meant that he was raised on goat’s milk and they were considered a lower caste of people.

Did he see himself as a hero?

No, he didn’t. Maybe later. Retrospectively, once he knew how many people owed him their lives. He realised that his deeds were heroic. At the moment when he was guiding people across the border, he believed, I think, the idea that people should be able to do whatever they want to and mainly wherever they want to. And that they could live wherever they wanted. And I really like that about him. The fact that he stuck to his truth. In some ways that makes him a hero. He stood up to evil, despite its enormous superiority of numbers and the danger. He risked his own life and that of his loved ones.

Heroes are often archetypes, almost like the figures from posters...

Josef Hasil was a regular person with both good and bad characteristics and he most certainly did not only do good. But he at least always meant well, even though that may not have been how it turned out. For example, he was always a kind of philanderer where women were concerned who didn’t worry about long-term relationships and changed girlfriends at will. He didn’t worry about the fact that he had a wife somewhere and a

mistress somewhere else. He didn’t realise that he could hurt somebody by doing that.

What did you most enjoy about portraying him?

I enjoyed his inexhaustible positive energy, which occasionally even irritated me, because I don’t personally know anyone who could be so positive. Whenever I had a tendency to dramatize a specific situation, David Ondříček would start to “chase” me back again and to say that there always had to be a smile on my lips, even if I had a long monolog about serious things. Even if I was dealing with difficult and demanding things.

Could it be called guilelessness?

It probably could. He always finished everything very quickly, he never thought about anything much. Which I find appealing, because I’m the opposite and I constantly think too much and go over things in my mind, are they good, are they bad and should I do it or not. Hasil simply said that something seemed like the right thing to do and he did it. He followed his intuition and emotions.



What did you know about Josef Hasil beforehand?

Nothing. I knew almost nothing about the cross-border guides, apart from the fact that there were guards at the border and that units were "deployed" there.

Have you seen Karel Kachyňa's original film of The King of Šumava?

I've seen Kachyňa's film. I liked it a lot. But it is understandably a piece of propaganda. Even though I watched it at home on my laptop, the atmosphere absolutely fascinated me. Then I read the book by David Jan Žák, with whom we consulted throughout the filming. The what, how and why of everything, so that we were historically accurate.

Did you ever meet Josef Hasil's son, Josef Vávra?

Yes, I was very pleased that he was able to meet us. And he was very proud of the fact that his father's

story was finally being told and "straightened out". He was very grateful. He said to me and Gabča Heclová, who played his mother, that he only had one comment and that was that we should depict his parents as good people, that their goodness should be palpable.


Do you think that the new miniseries will have the power to change the perception of Josef Hasil?

I think so. Mainly because we depict the characters as real people who have their problems. But we have the key idea of free thought and a conviction about freedom in and of itself. And that seems to me to be the strongest and most consequential idea from Hasil's story. The fact that this man truly thought about freedom and the possibility of choice. And he was the one that offered people that opportunity. He was able to do it and never gave a thought to the fact that he could receive something in return and he did it the whole time based on

his own convictions. He wanted to help people and he did so despite the pitfalls that awaited him.

Sub-title The King of Šumava: The Phantom of the Dark Land: A person is not born a legend, but becomes one. When do you feel that the turning point came and he became a legend?

I know exactly when. It was the moment when Hasil was guiding one of the first groups of people and a person asked him why he was doing it. And he simply answered: "So, you want to live over there and not here: why should I stop you from doing that?" And I think that this retort is absolutely fundamental to him. It's all about the idea of freedom and why should anybody be able to forbid me from doing anything. After all, what was it all about? Where was the disruption? This sentence reveals the socialism and communism of the day to be absolutely absurd.



THE KING OF ŠUMAVA: THE PHANTOM OF THE DARK LAND (SEASONS 2 AND 3)

The critically and audience acclaimed miniseries and Voyo Originál The King of Šumava: The Phantom of the Dark Land, which has been nominated for a Czech Lion in two categories, will live to see two further three-episode seasons. Damián Vondrášek will take over the role of the director from the author of the first season David Ondříček, who will remain in the role of the supervising director and dramaturg. In the second season, audiences will be able to watch Josef Hasil's never-ending struggle to find a way out of the communist work camp that he had been sentenced to spend nine long years in, as well as the story of his beloved Maria. Her love for the King of Šumava is severely put to the test. Not only does she have to deal with the interrogations and the disdain of her neighbours and her own father, but she also begins to be surrounded by men who would prefer it if she forgot all about Josef. He therefore has to find a way out of the camp as soon as possible, while he still has someone to go home to. The

third season will follow Hasil's fate after he escapes to Germany and becomes a western intelligence agent.

"We know the further fates of the characters. We know what awaits them, what the gain and what they pay. I was looking forward to when the first of the hatched from the husk of their literary form into living characters. We saw them desire, win and lose. We decided to invite the exceptionally talented director Damián Vondrášek to cooperate on the further episodes. You'll view the King of Director differently when you're fifty to when you're thirty. And this project deserves to preserve the one and be enhanced by the other," says the creative producer of the King of Šumava and Director of Development at TV Nova and Voyo, **Michal Reitler**.

"The thing about the King of Šumava that most affected me was that it is full of tenacious characters, whom enormous challenges await. And we know from the historical sources that fate was in no way kind to them. The life story of Josef Hasil verges on the unbelievable and the viewers can look forward to the highly charged continuation of the series. I am very pleased to be able to follow on from the successful first season and I am very much looking forward to it. David Ondříček has been a great support for me in this endeavour. My goal is to continue the excellently commenced story and to further view our past in a contemporary manner and to give viewers the chance to experience the kinds of dilemmas we would have had to have faced at the beginning of the 1950s and why is so important to care for the freedom that we now have," says the director **Damián Vondrášek**.

director: Damián Vondrášek // **supervising director and dramaturg:** David Ondříček // **Voyo creative producer:** Michal Reitler // **LMP producers:** Daria Špačková, David Ondříček // **LMP executive producer:** Luděk Valchař // **script:** Pavel Gotthard // **camera:** David Hofmann // **architect:** Ondřej Lipenský // **costumes:** Tereza Hrzánová // **music:** Beata Hlavenková

KING OF ŠUMAVA

PHANTOM OF THE DARK LAND

directed by David Ondříček // produced by Lucky Man Films: David Ondříček, Daria Špačková // creative producer Voyo: Michal Reitler // director of photography: David Hofmann // screenplay: Tomáš Vávra, David Ondříček // Head of production: Alžběta Noll // Literary text: David Jan Žák // architect: Ondřej Lipenský // set design: David Fryč // music: Beáta Hlavenková // costume designer: Tereza Hrzánová // make-up artist: Michaela Kickov // sound master: Pavel Rejholec // post-production: PFX, Soundsquare // executive producer: Luděk Valchař // cast: Oskar Hes, Vojtěch Vodochodský, Gabriela Heclová, Jan Jankovský, Kristýna Ryška, Kryštof Mucha, Vojtěch Vondráček, Denis Šafařík, Samuel Toman, Ronald Prokeš, Judit Pecháček (Bárdos), Ladislav Hampl, Jan Nedbal, Petr Forman, Andrei Toader, Jaroslav Plesl, Halka Jeřábek Třešňáková, Anna Marhoulová, Anna Čtvrtníčková, David Jan Žák and others

Jakub Fürst

PR Coordinator

jakub.furst@novatv.cz

VOYO ORIGINAL

novagroup.cz, pressweb.nova.cz

© 2022, TV Nova

TV Nova s.r.o., Kříženeckého nám. 1078/5, 152 00 Praha 5
tel.: +420 242 464 115, e-mail: tiskove@nova.cz