



FILM: **EO**

FDG RATING: 3.0 😊😊😊○○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Jerzy Skolimowski: *director*
EO
Sandra Drzymalska: *actress, Cassandra*

DATE: April 23, 2023

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **EO**

If there was an Oscar for most endearing performance by an animal, the donkey EO (named for the sound of a donkey's bray), would win hands down. This very visual, minimal dialog, 2022 Polish film is EO's journey from circus performer to being sent to a farm, which he escapes from, and then continues his journey of encounters as he tries to find his way back to Cassandra, the young woman who took such good care of him, loved him, protected him, and performed with him in the circus. Animal rights protesters caused the circus to be shut down and the animals were relocated.

EO experiences the cruelty and brutality that animals suffer in a world of humans, and that humans inflict on each other. We are observers and he is the innocent, vulnerable victim but along with the worst of human nature, we also see the best as a vet at an animal hospital cares for EO's serious wounds after soccer team players, find him late at night, after they lost the game due to the donkey, wandering into their soccer match and baying during a critical penalty shot. The men angrily beat up the defenseless animal.

EO's trek across the Polish and Italian countryside, transport him to distant locations and introduce him to a priest, a Countess, a stable hand, a truck driver, (one discussion participant pointed out the connection between the truck driver hauling materials and EO being used to haul heavy items), hunters with laser scopes, and various non-human beings which form the fantasy aura of the film, aided by light filters that turn everything red. Many dream like scenes are EO seeing Cassandra in his mind as he desperately wants to return to her. "It's like a dark fairy tale," said one viewer. Another noted the beautiful cinematography, especially the mists in the forest, and parts that seemed like a ballet.

EO was inspired by Robert Bresson's 1966 French tragedy film, *Au Hasard Balthazar*, which follows a donkey as he is given to various owners, most of whom treat him callously. *Balthazar* is regarded as a work of profound emotional effect and is frequently listed as one of the greatest films of all time.

Far from it, commented one discussion participant who thought the film was pretentious with tragic opera music, and criticized the gratuitous violence, and strange use of red filtered light. Others disagreed, noting that horses are valued but the donkey was seen as only utilitarian pulling a cart in the circus performance and pulling a cart at the working farm. "The donkey represents down trodden humans", was an interesting observation. While most of us were completely engaged in the emotional aspects, some felt manipulated. Another comment was that EO, as the main character, naturally doesn't say a word, and yet communicates so much. One participant was reminded of silent films where every expression and gesture, even the slightest movement, can carry so much meaning. The silence is full of thoughts. An insightful interpretation was that the story of EO is about aging from infantile bliss to learning to survive adulthood.

Definitely more of an experimental approach to storytelling that engaged some of us from beginning to tragic end. But others thought the film was too disjointed. An observation of human nature; an odyssey that was absorbing as well as disturbing.

Nominated for an Oscar for best international film, EO struggled to find its way with a score of 3.0 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!
Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net
www.filmdiscussiongroup.com