

Watershed, 1 Canon's Road, Harbourside, Bristol BS1 5TX
Box Office: 0117 927 6444

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Polish filmmaker Andrzej Wajda is one of the great European film directors. His 60 odd years of filmmaking have produced some landmarks of world cinema from his early war trilogy in the 1950s – **A Generation**, **Kanal** and **Ashes and Diamonds** to his new film **Tatarak**, screened at this year's Berlin Film Festival. There is a nice echo here – in 1957 **Kanal** shared the Silver Palm in Cannes with Ingmar Bergman's **The Seventh Seal** whilst Wajda's newest film won the prestigious Alfred Bauer prize at Berlin. The latter is for "developing new ways of filmmaking" - not bad for an 86 year old!

Wajda first came to my attention at the end of the 1970s when I saw his great diptych **Man of Marble** – a broadside at Soviet propaganda and the myth of the valiant peasant and **Man of Iron**, about the Solidarity movement of the early 1980s in Gdansk, which incorporate real events and real people into the narrative. This was urgent, determined, political cinema.

Katyn, his most recent film to be released in the UK, forms the centrepiece of Watershed's forthcoming Polish film season – **Journey to Poland**. **Katyn** revisits the terrible and terrifying massacre of some 21,000 Polish military, police and intellectuals by the Soviet army in April 1940. This was not only a national tragedy but a personal one for Wajda whose father was killed. On discovery of the bodies some three years later, the Nazis used this as a propaganda wedge between the Soviets and the European Allies with the Soviets denying responsibility until as recently as 1990. For the Polish it was and is a massacre of the brave swept under the carpet of history and political convenience, and for whom the pain and betrayal is still raw.

Unlike **Man of Marble** and **Man of Iron** all those years ago, it has taken **Katyn** over two years to be released in the UK. It very nearly wasn't - being described as too old fashioned for contemporary audiences or too specifically Polish for UK audiences. It is a powerful account of an important European atrocity and Wajda gives prominence to the perspective of relatives searching for news of their loved ones. His film acts, in some kind of way, a public solace for the many still alive who are affected by the massacre as well as bearing witness to those who were murdered and conveniently forgotten for so long.

There is an older established Polish community in Bristol who escaped or fled the persecution in the Second World War and of course now there is the new generation who are moving freely around the new Europe. Here at Watershed we had been thinking about doing some kind of Polish focus. For a number of reasons really: over the past 3 or 4 years contemporary Polish short films have always been strong at Encounters Short Film festival indeed Anna Karajak who we focused on a year ago is one of the most exciting new filmmakers I have come across, Wajda along with Kieslowski and Polanski cast a long shadow across World, never mind European cinema, and we have been approached a couple of times by young Poles working in Bristol keen to see their rich culture projected and reflected in contemporary UK life.

The result is **Journey to Poland** which brings together a focus on Wajda with a selection of feature films not readily available in the UK and short films selected from the Krakow Film Festival and Encounters. All are accompanied by introductions or discussion. For more information see:

<http://www.watershed.co.uk/programmes/106/>