

THE GERMAN SOCIETY'S

Friday Film Fest Series



The Director:

Werner Herzog (Werner Stipetic) was born Sept. 5, 1942 in Munich. He grew up on a farm in the Bavarian mountains. After his parents' divorce, he moved to Munich with his mother, and attended high school there, graduating in 1961. Herzog later studied history, literature and drama in Munich and then in Pittsburgh on a Fulbright scholarship. He eventually broke off his studies and began to teach himself filmmaking. He never attended a film school and has no formal film education. In 1964 he won the Carl Mayer Prize for the screenplay that was to become his first feature film, *Signs of Life* (1967)/ *Lebenszeichen*, which was financed by the *Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film* and won the *Bundesfilmpreis* for best first feature.

By both circumstance and temperament, Herzog belongs to the *New German Cinema* (dominant in the Federal Republic of Germany 1965-1982), along with such figures as Rainer Fassbinder and Wim Wenders. The classical German film tradition represented by F. W. Murnau, Fritz Lang and others having been shattered by the Nazi era, Herzog and his contemporaries were starting from a "common ground zero" of new filmmaking. "We had no fathers, only grandfathers" says Herzog in reference to this lost heritage. Herzog, the so-called "visionary" of the New German Cinema, has said that "film is not the art of scholars, but of illiterates." Accordingly, in his films the visual is said to predominate over the verbal, where the audience is able to "see" the film emotionally or spiritually rather than "read" it analytically.

Synopsis - Brian Conboy

The slaves will sell their masters and grow wings...

The key word for this film by Werner Herzog is "SLAVERY". America, as a society, has struggled with its heritage of slavery since the founding of the country. The much used theme in contemporary America of the "Middle Passage" has recently been captured in the film "Amistad" by Steven Spielberg with the American view of the slave trade. However, Herzog, a European from a society that had only short contact with African slavery and colonization presents an Afro-Centric view of a revived 19th century slave trade in a former Portuguese colony. His themes are "culture wars" African style in nineteenth century Africa.

Cobra Verde

Credits:

Director: Werner Herzog

Writing Credits: Bruce Chatwin (novel), Werner Herzog

Cast: Klaus Kinski (Francisco Manoel da Silva a.k.a. Cobra Verde), King Ampaw (Taparica), Salvatore Basile (Captain Fraternidade), José Lewgoy (Don Octavio Countinho)

Running Time: 111 minutes

Also known as "*Slave Coast*"

The story source of Herzog's film is the fictional account called ***Viceroy of Quidah*** by Bruce Chatwin. The actual plot is that a notorious rebel thief in the 19th century frontier of Portuguese Brazil takes an employment opportunity with a sugar plantation owner as his slave foreman. The character **Cobra Verde** is played by Herzog's favorite, **Klaus Kinski**. As you know, Kinski, in Herzog films portrays madmen on the edge and Cobra Verde is not an exception. The next element of the plot is that Cobra Verde impregnates all three of the plantation owner's daughters at once. The result is a behind-the-scenes-deal with the governor that sends Cobra Verde alone to restart the slave trade to Brazil from one of the Portuguese African colonies that provided slaves in the past. Against the greatest of odds, Cobra Verde, with cunning and luck, confronts the African tribal society ruled by a king who is insane. By quirks of local political intrigue, the white Cobra Verde wins for a while. Then the politics change again "Africa-style" and our Cobra Verde is isolated and abandoned by fate.

The tone of this film is angry and rebellious, and shows with a "documentary style" the cultural contrasts of European and traditional tribal African society making contact. An important statement made in the film is that "Black people believe that the devil is white". Another Herzog element is atmospheric. The scenes of dry land, dead animals, bones, etc., and the seascapes and the slave trade fort all are visually powerful in this film.
