

large part because he has assembled such a charming cast. Teo Gheorghiu, who was just shy of twelve when the movie was filmed in 2004, really was a child prodigy, so he didn't have to concoct whatever vibes are genuinely emitted by a boy wonder on the verge of slipping on the toga of manhood.

As the Tiger Mom, Julika Jenkins is menacingly crouched, poised to do battle in the interests of *Tigermomcity*, emitting a shifting mix of steely resolve and indefatigably suffocating motherhood. As a couple, Jenkins and Urs Jucker exude a convincing combination of muted ambition, *mittelständisch* manners and unintentional albeit fundamental decency. And Bruno Ganz? His *Opa* is a classic rendition, well nigh unimpeachable. He is restrained and understated, almost minimalist. But there is wisdom oozing from every grandfatherly pore. He is the archetypal *Alterchen*, the Grandpa upon whose lap we all long to clamber. One of Vitus' cardinal and redeeming virtues is his appreciation for his Grandpa.

In the interview done for the film, Ganz remarks: "I trust the camera because it loves me...". One is compelled to concede this point and this affection is infectious because the camera seems to love everyone in this film. So it is easy to settle in and enjoy a beginning which begins by proleptically peeking at the end and then proceeds to introduce the inaugural motif, which is the wonderfully wide eyed, achingly precocious Vitus *selbst*, a child who declares "I need to know now" and reads aloud about global warming to his kindergarten confreres. And it is even easier to fancy the episodically instructive middle of the story which moves Vitus along on his pubescently inflected adventures that in turn provide the narrative arc for this g-factor propelled *Bildungsroman*.

In this movie the end really was in the beginning, at least in part, and in the end Murer gives us the end again, in toto, and achieves a nice touch with it. Having gotten properly grounded and *normalisiert* after having escaped from his elite cocoon, Vitus knows it is now okay to soar. And just probably Grandpa is smiling down on him. So the obviously appropriate thing to do is to hijack an airplane. As Vitus taxis and gains speed, a stocky coverall clad Everyman is seen running alongside, yelling and gesticulating, desperately trying to get Vitus to stop.

Mr. Everyman is actually there for everyone (including the rest of us) declaring in no uncertain terms via the emphatic *Nein!* of his stodgily agitated *Korper-sprache* that soaring is not advisable for anyone, given that wings are usually overrated and often unreliable. Consequently, we can surmise that Mr. Everyman is certain that soaring should never be allowed at all. But Vitus knows better. Giving the man a jaunty thumbs up and a kindly smile, indicating the deep compassion he has for earth bound mortals, particularly those who have never even tested their wings, he lifts off and soars into his future.

# THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

## Friday Film Fest Series



## Vitus

By Fredi Murer

November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

Non-Members \$15, Members \$12

The German Society of PA

611 Spring Garden St.

215-627-2332

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# Vitus (2006)

## Credits:

Director: Fredi Murer

Producer: Christian Davi, Christof Neracher

Screenplay: Fredi Murer, Peter Luisi, Lukas Suter

Cinematography: Pio Corradi

Music: Mario Beretta

Spieldauer: 123 minutes

Release Date: 2006

Cast: Fabrizio Borsani (Vitus age 6); Teo Gheorghiu (Vitus age 12); Julika Jenkins (Mother); Urs Jucker (Father); Bruno Ganz (Grandpa); Kristina Lykova (Isabel age 12); Tamara Scarpellini (Isabel age 19)

Commentary: A. Krumm

## Soaring and Sauntering

*Wunderkinder* fascinate us because they are so wonderful. They make us suspect that life might be much easier and a lot more fun if we were that darn smart. *Wunderkinder* can also often be *Les Enfants Terribles*, although this correlation is not de rigueur. But whatever we think about them, what most *Wunderkinder* know is that to be one of the least frequent values on a bell curve is a very lonely business.

Tiger Moms frighten us, being devoid of doubt and always so ready to pounce. In contradistinction to regular Moms, they are better at inducing tears than wiping them away. We would like to forgive them, but there is something inescapably off-putting about them. The principles and practices of Tiger Moms are variegated and beyond analysis (although all of them are inverted Jeffersonians, being devoutly dedicated to the pursuit of unhappiness) while the goal of all Tiger Moms is the same: to make their offspring use their wings, or destroy themselves and those offspring in the effort. You cannot engage or dialog with a Tiger Mom, you can only get out of her way.

When a Tiger Mom has begotten a *Wunderkind*, the situation has already achieved critical mass, however latent. Perhaps an equation will provide some clarity in terms of the agonistic contest at hand:

$$\frac{[(\text{Tiger Mom} * (\text{Method} + \text{discipline}))^{ambition} + (\text{Wunderkind} * \text{growing pains})^{curiosity}]}$$

mutual incomprehension

= CRISIS. Or maybe not, since all of this is probably beyond rationalization, given that a Tiger Mom and a *Wunderkind* are among the terms. In any case, in the annals of *Wunderkindology* per se, Vitus is probably sui generis. His Swiss Tiger Mom insists that he soar while his utterly un-teutonic Panda Grandpa urges him to saunter. This sort of polarized *Sitz im Leben* can be perplexing, even angst inducing, depending on the power dynamics in play on any given day.

Instinctually inclined toward the *Weltanschauung* of Grandpa and moreover being entirely able but utterly unwilling to respond to mama's pawing and cuffing, it becomes obvious to Vitus that for a reluctant *Wunderkind* seeking release from his cognitive responsibilities, not to mention the opportunity to dwell in the world of his rather dimwitted but apparently happy *Zeitgenossen* and to imbibe his rightful share of their carpe diem sensibility, there is only one solution: lower one's IQ by about 60 points.



Vitus accordingly stages a leap of faith in order to escape into normality, where one can focus on things that matter such as *homie-handshaking* and the pursuit of older women like his former baby sitter Isabel, now a 19 year old cougar and Vitus' targeted inamorata, notwithstanding his somewhat rudimentary amatory techniques. And Vitus pulls it off, fooling everyone from his Mom to the psychologist.

Only Grandpa discovers the truth about Vitus' brilliant instantiation of the unexceptional, but he is predictably gleeful, expressing his admiration for Vitus' chutzpah and promising to remain mum. Yet when Papa's upward mobility begins to wane, Vitus needs to reengage his prodigious mental equipment to set the family finances in order. Of course this will again require Grandpa's connivance, but the latter is confident that Vitus can handle put and call options as easily as the Goldberg Variations. Unsurprisingly, Vitus proves him right.

Movies about captivating children, prodigies in particular, are always in danger of collapsing into cuteness. Fredi Murer manages to avoid this, probably in