



HOPE (NADZIEJA)

Autumn
Season
2008

Written by Boyd van Hoeij, *european-films.net*
This review contains some 'spoilers'.

Stanislaw Mucha's *Hope (Nadzieja)* is the last film in a trilogy from erstwhile Kieslowski screenwriter Krzysztof Piesiewicz, after Tom Tykwer's *Heaven* and Danis Tanovic's *L'enfer*. The three films represent not only the Dantesque concepts of heaven, hell and purgatory but also the Christian ideals of love, faith and hope. In Piesiewicz's story of Franciszek, an angelic youth bent on forcing an art thief to return a stolen religious painting, it becomes clear that the hope for redemption (which is what purgatory is all about) is not as straightforward as it seems -- every deed done to make amends may cause irreparable collateral damage of its own. Beautifully acted and shot and with a thought-provoking screenplay that is vintage Piesiewicz, *Hope* looks all set for an international career in the finer arthouses around the world.

There is a fine line between playing God and being an angelic vessel of goodness and it is never clear whether the young Franciszek (newcomer Rafal Fudalej, impressive), with his large head of blond curls, is just following his instincts or is led by some higher power or innate incapacity to accept that the world is not only made up of good-doers.

After using a borrowed camcorder to film the nightly removal of an enormous altarpiece from the church that he opens every morning for his organist father (Zbigniew Zapasiewicz, *Persona non grata*), Franciszek goes to see Benedykt Weber (Wojciech Pszoniak, *Vipère au poing*), the local senator and art dealer that supervised the theft and whom Franciszek has been following around for a while. "You have committed a theft," he tells him. "I want to help you."

Helping him turns out to be not exactly what the art dealer might have had in mind: Franciszek asks for the immediate return of the painting to its original location. There is never an indication of the boy's motives, and when asked he at one time replies: "I don't know, maybe I like the painting".

One thing is certain: the determination and fearlessness of Franciszek is such that even when Weber orders the boy's olive-green car to be blown up at night, he persists. "I expected it," he tells his father, who nods wearily, apparently used to his children's unusual behaviour and still numbed by the death of the children's mother some fifteen years earlier -- shown by Mucha in an enigmatic prologue.



Though persistent, Franciszek is not completely reckless and the next day he distributes copies of a tape that contains all his proof surrounding the theft to his water-and-soap girlfriend Klara (Kamila Baar) and his suicidal older brother Michal (Grzegorz Artman, *The Pianist*), who is in jail. Then he goes back to Weber to demand the return of the painting -- and a new, olive-green car with the exact same mileage as his own.

Getting the painting back will not be an easy task for Weber, as the work -- which looks suspiciously like Melozzo da Forli's Music-Making Angel, a fresco of a violin-playing angel with a large head of blond curls that is currently in the Vatican -- has already passed from him to another intermediary, who is not about to give it back.

Mucha lets the story unfold as a combination of a thriller, a moral tale and a drama with an occasionally humorous touch. A documentary-maker by trade, the director never allows the story's tone to waver despite its mix of genres and effortlessly integrates Krzysztof Ptak's sumptuous cinematography, the score by Max Richter and the precise work of editor Jacek Tarasiuk to create a clean, carefully constructed style that nevertheless feels natural -- and more often than not recalls the films Piesiewicz made with Kieslowski, including the *Decalogue* and the *Tree Colours* trilogy.

Like in much of Kieslowski's work that Piesiewicz wrote or co-wrote, there is also a sense of cosmic order and chaos at work in *Hope*. Many elements seem mysteriously connected: the death of Franciszek's mother, the fall of his father from celebrated conductor to church organist, his brother who is in jail and Franciszek's own obsession with the court house, the police and order in general. There is also the question of whether forcing someone to undo a wrongdoing is of any use if in reality the person is just scared of the consequences of not making amends -- as Weber clearly is. Yes, the church will have its painting back, but will Weber have learnt something and feel truly sorry for his actions?

Why, if Franciszek had been following Weber around for several weeks and was in the church to film the entire event, did he not prevent the theft from happening in the first place rather than coming back to haunt the guilty after they committed the crime? There is not only a price to be paid by Weber for his actions, but also, indirectly, by Franciszek, though he tries to right a wrong.

In the tragic unfolding of its latter scenes, *Hope* suggests that purgatory is perhaps a place from where no one can escape unharmed. Not exactly a hopeful thought, but surely a powerful idea brought to thrilling life in this dense drama that feels effortless.

Thomas Dawson, BBCi:

An enigmatic art theft thriller-cum-morality tale, the handsomely shot *Hope* unfolds in a sleek contemporary Warsaw and concerns an angelic-looking young man, Francis (Rafal Fundalej), who attempts to blackmail a gallery-owner Weber (Wojciech Pszoniak), the man responsible for stealing a precious painting from a church. Scripted by Krzysztof Piesiewicz, most famous for his collaborations with the late Krzysztof Kieslowski, this maintains its mysterious atmosphere throughout, yet it's muted in its emotional impact.



Despite being called *Hope*, this is a film haunted by despair. The pre-credits sequence shows a woman killed in a road accident, and it later transpires that the victim was Francis's mother. His father is so affected by the bereavement that he gives up being a renowned orchestra conductor and is now humble organist at the very church from which the prized painting was removed. And Francis's suicidal older brother is in jail, having killed two men.

The central mystery here is why Francis pursues an extortion campaign against the dangerously well-connected Weber, given that he doesn't want any money for his troubles. Perhaps he relishes the idea of playing God and of helping a perceived sinner atone for his wrongdoing. Or perhaps he relishes the thrill of risk-taking, like he does with his skydiving at a local airfield. Director Stanislaw Mucha makes imaginative use of bold colours to convey a sense of heightened reality, and elicits convincing performances from his cast. But one somehow remains strangely detached from these characters.