

## Document Citation

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| Title         | <b>Albert - Warum?</b>                             |
| Author(s)     |  |
| Source        | <i>Publisher name not available</i>                |
| Date          |  |
| Type          | press kit  |
| Language      | English  |
| Pagination    |  |
| No. of Pages  | 11   |
| Subjects      | Rödl, Josef (1949)                                 |
| Film Subjects | Albert - Warum? (Albert - Why?), Rödl, Josef, 1978 |



Die Geschichte eines zarten Riesen

# ALBERT - WARUM?

ein Film von **Josef Rödl**  
mit **Fritz Binner**

Michael Eichenseer Georg Schiessl Elfriede Bleisteiner  
Kamera: Karlheinz Gebwinde Ton: Hans Rödl

# ALBERT - WHY ?

|                        |                     |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| Producer and director: | Josef Rödl          |
| Camera:                | Karlheinz Geschwind |
| Sound:                 | Hans Rödl           |
| Assistant director:    | Angela Kifmann      |

## ACTORS:

|            |                      |
|------------|----------------------|
| Albert     | Fritz Binner         |
| His father | Michael Eichenseer   |
| Hans       | Georg Schießl        |
| Eva        | Elfriede Bleisteiner |

Shot in Darshofen/Upper Palatinate near Regensburg from October 1976 to June 1977. The film was completed after an interruption in October 1978.

All actors are amateurs from the village; the main actors already took part in Josef Rödl's first film and therefore had previous film experience.

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Production: Academy for Television and Film, Munich.  
Form: 35 mm / 1:1,35 / black and white / length: 106 min.

Blow-up Karl Kresling

ALBERT - WHY ? was honored with the German cinematic award "exceptionally valuable".

Josef Rödl received the German Film Award 1979 for best new director.

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World distribution:

PROKINO LTD. MUNICH, Ungererstr. 84, 8000 Munich 40, Tel: 36 50 81,  
telex: 52 159 35, cable: prokino Munich

## Contents

Newly released from a mental hospital, Albert returns to his native village in the Upper Palatinate. His elderly father has, in the meantime, handed over his extensive farm to his nephew Hans. Albert gets the feeling that he's merely there under sufferance, and moves into a tumble-down old building near the new farmhouse.

Only when Hans goes into hospital does Albert get the chance to prove that he, too, is capable of working as a farmer. But on Hans' return, Albert is again shunted out of the way.

The local people think of him as the "village idiot". Everywhere he goes - in the local pub, the discotheque or on the streets - he is ridiculed, mocked, insulted. His fumbling attempts to approach a woman are brusquely rejected. Alcohol, animals and the countryside provide his only consolations.

Albert develops defense mechanisms to protect himself, and eventually resorts to behaving in exactly the way a village idiot is expected to behave: he kills animals, steals rabbits and sets fire to a hut. His eccentric outbursts become increasingly frequent and extreme. The villagers become more and more uneasy about him. There is talk of having him put away again. Then, suddenly, Albert hangs himself in the village church.



## Bio/Filmography Josef Rödl

Josef Rödl, born 1949 in Darshofen/Upper Palatinate, car mechanic from 1964 - 1968, High-School graduation 1972 in Nuremberg (by way of later education), civil service until 1973, then studies at the Academy for Television and Film, Munich.

## Films

AM WEGE STEHN, UND NICHT WISSEN WOHN SICH DREHN  
was shown in 1976 during the 10th International Film Days in Hof,  
and in 1977 by the III. (educational) channel of Bavarian television.

## ALBERT - WHY ?

Released October 28th, 1978, at the 12th International Film Days in Hof.

Special performance during the International Film Festival 1979 in Berlin.

This was Rödl's last film at the Academy for Television and Film, Munich.

Budget: DM 30.000.-

First night cinema showing:

March 2nd, 1979 in the "Filmstudio am Ostentor", Regensburg.

ABENDZEITUNG, Munich:

"He is the German film discovery of the year: Josef Rödl, student at the Academy for Television and Film in Munich, presented his first feature film 'ALBERT - WARUM ?' during the renowned Film Days in Hof - and was celebrated as the sensation of the Festival. Public and critics were unanimous in their exultation. Meanwhile it has been decided that the film will be released in the cinemas after showing at the International Film Festival 1979 in Berlin. Rödl draws from the sources of his native land - he describes what he knows. The AZ sponsor's award was given in support of his aims."

DIE WOCHE, Regensburg:

"The tragedy of a ridiculed, slighted and despised outsider was helped along by a whole village: Darshofen near Parsberg. The young film maker Josef Rödl (29) now harvested praise for this shocking and deeply moving masterpiece. His exposing, penetrating backstage view of an idyllic Bavarian village scene was the sensation of the Hof Filmdays."

DIE ZEIT, Hamburg:

"I recall a face, which I shall not forget ... Just like Boris Karloff, Fritz Binner is a gentle giant. One notices quickly how uncomfortable he feels about his own strength, how misfitted this huge body is to his gentle nature. Fritz Binner is Albert, whom the villagers reject as "village idiot" because he's been in a "madhouse" and stutters ... Never before in Hof did the silence after a film last so long, was the applause afterwards so overwhelming."

FRANKFURTER RUNDSCHAU:

"Accurate, tender yet unsentimental ... A direct, if not ethnographic recourse into the rustic-rural life, a naturalistic submersion which does not, however, remain naturalistic in this emphatic epic about a Bavarian people and their roots, despite the dialect which is spoken and the rustic performers who act out their own selves. The reason is that ALBERT - WHY? can only produce the intense sympathy and emotions which it arouses in the spectator because Rödl succeeded in narrating the story in pictures and sounds which possess a coersive, defining and associative evidence and open our eyes and ears."

Josef Rödl in a discussion with Prokino

P: You didn't make a film about an outsider, but rather told a story of a rural community which cannot come to terms with this outsider Albert from your own, almost neutral position. Since you grew up in Darshofen, you virtually experienced such a story yourself.

Rödl: The association of reality and fiction is obvious. In his real life as Fritz Binner, Albert was in this situation; his life was only different in individual details. I wanted to illustrate on the example of a person, how the rules of social life function in such a community. Someone who is weak and can't defend himself feels these rules especially intense.

P: There are outsiders in every type of society. In a small village where everyone knows each other, an outsider is far more exposed to attacks or even humiliations.

Rödl: The story is transferable to other areas - for example, to a small town. In a city, one can retreat into complete solitude and isolation; this isn't possible in a village, where one can't just take off. In general one can say that a community always needs a scapegoat, which then serves as an alibi for the weaker ones in this community. A similar function was allotted to the Jews in Nazi Germany. One needed someone whom one could put the blame on.

Given the situation of a small community, this means laying hold of a person on whom its members can freely rid themselves of their own aggressions and inability to cope with anything strange.

The alternative for Albert - in our village story - to live his life differently, would mean that he would have to be strong - a prerequisite, which even Albert couldn't fulfill. If there were people who understood his situation, one would surely be able to improve it. But this presupposes a certain political awareness and conscience. The representation of the nature, essence and function of this rural community is the political content of this film. Thus, Albert is a political figure.

P: How did his real situation as a human being affect your working together, since he was also a large-scale actor? How good was your team-work, set against this background?

Rödl: One can't reduce that to a normal cooperation between actor and team. It rather touches upon the whole working method in which we have produced the film. All members of our small team come from this community. We weren't



ALBERT - WHY ?

- 5 -

strangers, but rather a part of it, which, although it developed in a completely different direction, was still understood as belonging - something very essential for our work. Our function was merely that of a kind of concentration factor, of a team which sets something in motion, in which the others are included. Therefore this concentration factor expands and finally encompasses this whole village and Albert (since he is also part of it), whereby our team-work had to be centered very much on him, since, due to his own special situation, he did not possess quite the strength someone else might have to work consequently over such a long period of time. There were days when it was physically simply impossible for him to work; on the other hand, he enriched the work with an enthusiasm, eagerness and even a particular kind of strength, which can be easily ascertained in the film. He displayed an acting ability which no one, not even I at first, thought him capable of.

P: Was Alberts own voice used in the film?

Rödl: No. We had to synchronize him later on. We don't have the original sound anymore. A lot of work went into the synchronizing, which was incredibly exhausting and really too much in view of the production conditions. I recorded the original sound on tape, played it again at the scene of shooting, and we had every sentence synchronized bit by bit.

I felt very uncomfortable about having to synchronize, but certain scenes simply had to be shot, despite the fact that there were construction workers nearby - which was something I couldn't stop. I had arranged with Binner that we synchronize these parts after completion of editing, but then he died, and it was no longer possible. That way the film has lost something very valuable, because his voice simply belongs to this character.

P: We are interested in how you handle the esthetics of cinematic means. Some people compare your film to the early products of Italian neorealism. Have you worked out your own concept here as far as the esthetics are concerned?

Rödl: There was a time when I was incredibly fascinated by this Italian neorealism, and I've seen most films which were created during this era, even though I've never actually seen a lot of films. I really can't say now if it's become a certain style in the meantime - time will tell.

I've made the attempt to show an environment, the character of a community and people of a particular region in pictures which don't have the glossy finish of familiar Hollywood esthetics. In order to do this, one simply



needs different camera work and a different sequence of representation.

One must also take the conditions into consideration: there were a lot of cuts, since amateur actors only have enough acting stamina over a certain limited period of time. The necessity to shoot in a special way just resulted from these conditions - and this then had an effect on the esthetics.

P: After completion of shooting, you worked very hard on the editing?

Rödl: Yes. This was surely one of the most important tasks. To begin with, I had to check at the cutting table, which results the theoretic concept, the fiction of the script had produced. If one wants to show reality - and film material is only an image of reality -, it's not absolutely necessary to have realistic pictures, but rather to produce a cinematic reality by way of cutting that yields as concrete an image of true reality as possible. For example, certain scenes had to be changed, others had to be completely eliminated because they partially misled from the actual plot, did not fit into the rhythm of the story or because they would have changed the character of these people, who don't have the tendency to discuss things in lengthy details. In my opinion, editing is virtually the most basic essential - and also something which is simply underrated at the Academy for Television and Film.

P: One can almost say that your film is a super-low-budget production, if one considers the fact that normal low-budget films cost between DM 250.000.- and DM 800.000.- How was work possible at all under the conditions which you were faced with?

Rödl: Since we had already made a film before, we did have a certain experience, which I'd already put to use during writing of the script. Therefore I knew a few things from the beginning on: that I only had enough money for the filmmaterial and for the gas to get to the scene of shooting in the first place. Working methods, production methods and lastly the product itself are determined to a great extent by the financing and producing conditions. It was only possible to make this film under the particular conditions I was faced with and which one can't generalise. For example, that finally one uses a whole village just to save one's own money and thus actually exploits the work of others. And this type of production method in it's crassest form I dare say should not be repeated, because that really would be exploitation.



But with this film you proved that destitute production conditions do not necessarily signify the poor quality of a film, but rather that there is a sound guide-line into which these production conditions just happen to fit.

On the other hand, especially German film is faced with the battling of financial difficulties. Most films made by people who are unable to exceed a budget of DM 400.000.- or DM 500.000.- show considerable flaws in the dramaturgy and technical skills, which can apparently only be overcome if or when these people get a chance to make a film for 1 1/2 million. One could almost say that you have opened new doors, as far as the young German film is concerned. How do you see your own position in regard to these people whom one still calls the "young" German film makers?

Rödl: In my opinion, it is necessary for German film to move in a new direction. Under no circumstances should one copy the American cinema scene with its economic possibilities and potentials. In the area of American film efficiency, subjects which these film makers deal with and how they treat them, the German film simply cannot compete; it will always play a secondary part.

I believe that now, since the generation of "young" German film makers such as Faßbinder, Herzog, ect. has aged somewhat, the German cinematic situation should be approached from an entirely different point of view. These young film makers have done preparatory work which was very important indeed, but actually did not change the basic situation in Germany. I believe that a new generation has to follow now and I hope that there is some sort of movement developing - that the new generation thinks about what these producers have achieved, what kind of a foundation they have built and in which new directions the German film can go, where it can begin - because it simply needs new impulses. I also - if not exclusively - put my hopes in the Academy for Television and Film, since this is the place where they might best be fulfilled.

A new base has to be found, also a political base, which must penetrate completely novel areas. It was actually my intention to introduce a new element. Even though I didn't expect such publicity and response, I saw the film as a base for such work. Of course I'm glad that people are interested - this confirms my convictions to continue my endeavors.

A change will take place in the way things are represented, and surely also a change in working methods. But the most important change - I hope - will be that the spectator gets the feeling: something new is actually beginning here, a new seriousness, which also means a new reality in the

ALBERT - WHY ?

- 8 -

cinematic field than was customary until now: the description of an environment and the character of a particular type of people, which have often only been described in a trashy way up to the present time.



**Albert — Warum?**  
(Albert — Why?)  
(WEST GERMAN-B&W-16m)

Hof, Oct. 28.

A Munich Film & Television Academy diploma film. Features entire cast. Written and directed by Josef Roedl. Camera: Karlheinz Geschwind. Sound: Hans Roedl, assistant: Angela Kufmann. Reviewed at Hof Film Fest, Oct. 28, '78. Running time: 115 MINS.

|            |                      |
|------------|----------------------|
| Albert     | Fritz Binner         |
| His Father | Michael Eichenseer   |
| Hans       | Georg Schiessl       |
| Eva        | Elfriede Bleisterner |

The highlight of the Hof Film Festival, Josef Roedl's "Albert — Why?" is a 16m diploma pic financed on a low budget by the Munich Film & Television Academy and lensed in the small village of Darshofen Oberpfalz in Bavaria near Regensburg, where the young helmer was born and raised. Roedl worked two years on the two-hour pic, using lay-actors from the village playing themselves and a small, intimate team of friends forming the production crew.

The title refers to a hulking giant of a man, a gentle soul who stutters when he speaks and can barely control the movements of his gangling body — he may or may not be slightly retarded, but in any case he is treated like an outsider, one who has spent some time in a "nut-house." Strangely enough, he has the movements and countenance of a Boris Karloff, but in fact he symbolically stands for the typical dim-wit common to village life and city neighborhoods. This is a true story.

Pic begins with Albert released from a mental asylum and picked up at the railroad station by his father with the farm tractor and trailer; his problem was drinking rather than "madness," caused principally by being an outsider in a cold, indifferent world. The main thread of the story deals with Albert's relationship to his family, relatives, and villagers, some detailed more than others in viewing him as a social misfit. Albert, however, is not too dumb to know that his gestures of kindness are returned with mockery and pranks, particularly by the young to whose company he gravitates for some kind of companionship and understanding.

He also understands that, during

**VARIETY**

**Wednesday, January 17, 1979**

his absence in the asylum, his aging father has signed over the farm to a family relative — and his cared-for pets are no longer there. In protest Albert refuses to live at home, taking quarters instead in a kind of chicken-coop where he keeps rabbits. Now more of an outsider than before, he becomes the village clown although some relief comes with "playing house" with small children. He takes to drinking again, is tantalized one day by a girl who bares her breasts to him, becomes more and more isolated — then hangs himself with a rope to the church bell which tolls his merciful passing from this world.

This is a document, not a fiction film nor a documentary. It tells the true story of Fritz Binner who plays the lead role himself and, indeed, died shortly after completing the film by drinking himself to death. Helmer Roedl was one of his few friends (thus the title), who shared a desk with him in his youth at the village school. The idea for the film came naturally and was developed slowly over a period of time (the dubbing of Binner's voice was necessary at the film's completion). It's as though often the camera just happens to be "there" as a scene takes place with little or no cuts or editing.

"Albert" deserves some kind of festival or forum to launch it, but it's so well done that it could find its way into a German Film Week and thereafter get recognition by film buffs nourished on Bresson and Dreyer, as well as the Flaherty tradition of the story-documentary. Here, too, is solid evidence that shortly the young directors in West Germany will be crowding Werner Herzog and others for a share of the spotlight. —Holl.