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Bábolna
(HUNGARIAN-DOCU-B&W/
COLOR)

A Hungarofilm presentation of a Mafilm. Hunnia Studio, Hungarian Television production. Written and directed by Sándor Sára. Camera (color), Sándor Kuruez; editor, Mihály Morelli; sound, György Fék. Reviewed at the Budapest Congress Center (Hungarian Film Week, in competition), Feb. 10, 1986. Running time: Part 2 - 102 MINS.; Part 3 - 82 MINS., Part 4 - 80 MINS.

Budapest — This major undertaking by leading cameraman and director Sándor Sára attempts to trace the history of Hungary from 1945 until today through a series of six feature length documentaries on the fate of the cooperative farm of Bábolna. In the heyday of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, this was an important center for breeding the finest studs in that part of the world. After the war, as the profile of the society and its needs changed, so did the farm, and Sára sees it in development a faithful reflection of the political, economical and moral struggles of his country today.

Judging by the three episodes shown by the Hungarian Film Week, Sára is trying to combine the history of the place with incisive social comment, using as much archive footage as was available on the subject and adding interviews with witnesses who were involved in shaping the profile of the place. The second episode contains some scorching commentaries about well-intentioned incompetents who were allowed to bungle their jobs only because they held the right party cards, and some not-so-well intentioned political troublemakers who exploited every bit of unrest to further their interests and settle accounts with opponents. All this, while the farm itself was falling to pieces, for lack of adequate know-how on the managerial level.

The third episode, unfolding the transformation of the stud stables into chicken coops by the early 1960s, consisting mostly of talking heads interviews dealing with the intricacies of the Hungarian economy, starting to look for support outside the limited horizon of the Socialist countries. The fourth episode goes on to elaborate on that same theme, and the frictions resulting therefrom.

Evidently prepared for tv, it seems now that the importance of the document is such, it will be preserved for theatrical purposes as well, even if outlook is definitely limited. A non-Hungarian audience would have to be very dedicated to sit through it all, but as an unusual attempt to establish audio-visual history, this may well turn into a work of reference that many archives and film schools could use.

—Edna.