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## Aktorzy Prowincjonalni

(Provincial Actors)  
(POLISH-COLOR)

5-21-80

Cannes, May 10.

A Film Polski Production, Group "X," Warsaw. Features entire cast. Directed by Agnieszka Holland. Screenplay, Holland, Witold Zatorski; camera (Color), Jacek Petrycki; music, Andrzej Zarycki; assistant director, Bogdan Soelle. Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (Critics Week), May 10, '80. Running time: 108 MINS.

Cast: Halina Labonarska, Tadeusz Huk, Iwona Biernacka, Ewa Dalkowska, Slawa Kwasniewska, Kazimierz Nogajowna, Janina Ordezanka, Krystyna Wachelko, Zaleska.

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One of the most talented directors to emerge from East Europe during the past decade, Agnieszka Holland has yet to hit her full stride, but will be watched closely hereafter by international critics after her second feature, "Provincial Actors," which opened Critics Week at the Cannes Film Festival. Her debut pic, "Sunday Parents" (1978), won recognition at San Remo, while her segment in the omnibus film, "Test Shots" (1978), featured her in one scene together with her mentor, Andrzej Wajda, for whom she also wrote the script for "Rough Treatment" (also known as "Without

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Anaesthesia"), unspooled at last year's Cannes fest in the competition.

"Provincial Actors," like "Sunday Parents" before it, is a comedy that has the aura of the Prague Film School (FAMU) about it, where Holland studied — and apparently learned a great deal from Milos Forman in the process. It's about the life, times, cares, and foibles of playing theatre in the deepest provinces, so true to life that the viewer laughs and cries at the same time during some scenes. And because everything is taken in dead earnestness at times, one feels a great deal of compassion for these "born losers" who, despite ignominy and defeat after defeat, refuse to give up even when the odds are, once again, stacked against them.

The setting is a small town near Warsaw, to which a young up and coming legit director comes to produce a classic in a modern vein. Everyone in the production gets his usual stereotyped role, as expected from the theatre manager, but the aging matinee idol of the ensemble senses opportunity knocking at his door — he will give the performance of his life, given half the chance, that is. The young director, however, knows that everything is already in the bag — in fact, a friendly Warsaw critic attends the first discussions on the production.

What follows is agony and travail for our leading man, however, as he tries to fatten his role by restoring cut lines and imposing his own vision on the director by discussing key scenes in detail. Meanwhile, his all-suffering wife listens to his fears, complains, and frustrations, while resigning herself to a fading career behind the scenes of a children's puppet theatre (part of the troupe). The manager is also fearful of losing his "star," while other actors go through similar stomach pains during rehearsals for the production.

Best of all, "Provincial Actors" offers a rib-tickling metaphor on the cultural scene in Poland, or any country — even the political arena, if one accepts the saying that "the whole world is a stage." There are also deeply profound and human scenes. There's one in which the wife-puppeteer meets an old friend, now well-to-do, in Warsaw. They discuss over tea and in cryptic phrases the course of their lives, the "actress" in actuality giving the performance of her life. There's also a premiere — with a naked woman in a mask ascending a modernized set.

Great fun — and a memorable film. —Holl.