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Akrobat Schö-ö-ön

Tobis, 1943. 16mm. Black and white. 85 min.

Directed and written by Wolfgang Staudte.

Cinematography: Georg Bruckbauer.

Set Design: Erich Grave and Hans Luigi.

Music: Friedrich Schröder and Paul Hühn.

With: Charlie Rivel (Charlie), Clara Tabody (Monika), Karl Schönböck (Orlando), Käthe Dyckhoff (Bibiana), H.H. Schaufuß (Krause), Fritz Kampers (Roto), Werner Scharf (Fred Martoni), Nina Raven (Lydia), Einar Björling (Bruno Martoni), Hans Junkermann (director), Henry Lorenzen (secretary), Adolf Ziegler (theater director), Oskar Höcker (stage master), Karl Kahlmann (variété servant), Edgar Pauly (door-man), Hella Thornegg (property attendant), Klaus Puhlmann (Peter), Herta Worell (mother), Walter Schramm-Dunker (man with bass voice), Karin Lüsebrink (first secretary), Ursula Herking (second secretary), Rello Marlo (artiste), Heinz Wemper (first stageworker), Harrie Münch (language instructor and first guest), Ruth Buchardt (elegant lady), Karl Heinz Reichel (assistant director), Charlie Rivel's children, Bela Kremo, Jockel Stahl, the Hiller Ballet.

Wolfgang Staudte started his career as an actor, going on to make short advertisements before directing features. His credo during the Third Reich was in any event to keep a low profile. *Akrobat Schö-ö-ön* is one of a handful of the era's productions which warrant the appellation "aesthetic resistance." Its performer-hero does not speak German and reminds one of Chaplin, Keaton, or perhaps Harpo Marx. Charlie appears immature, somehow not fully constituted; his art is one of control over his seeming lack of control. His presence brings the unexpected, the spontaneous, the disruptive; his lithe and expressive movements pose a sharp contrast to the machine-like precision of the era's idealized armored bodies. Unlike almost every other Nazi hero, he exists on equal terms with female performers who neither threaten nor diminish his person. The acrobat, in short, is a corporeal subversive and an existential innovator—and a far cry from the German soldier male.

