

Document Citation

Title	Passions, insights
Author(s)	Irving R. Cohen
Source	<i>Pacific Sun</i>
Date	1976 Jul 02
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	25-26
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle (Every man for himself and God against all), Herzog, Werner, 1974

Film

Passions, insights

By Irving R. Cohen

Whenever I mourn about the variety of films which the average film-goer is denied, I tend to slip in a title: *Fata Morgana*, a film by Werner Herzog which was shown at the San Francisco Museum of Art some years ago.

Herzog is back with a new film, one of those shown recently at the Pacific Film Archives. The title is *Every Man for Himself and God Against All*; it is playing at the Lumiere and I urge you to see it before economic necessities require its removal.

The film is the story of Kaspar Hauser, a young man who was found in a village square in Germany in 1828, closer to creature than human in his inability to walk, talk comprehensibly, sit or even eat anything but bread and water. He had been chained in a cellar since early childhood and knew no more of his origins than anyone else in the village.

The townspeople, and especially various ranks of authorities, try to resolve what they see as the important questions: Is he an idiot? Is he depraved? They do not know what to do with him; he is jailed, helped by a local family, displayed as a carnival attraction and eventually brought into the home of a well-to-do resident of the village. In this home, as in that of a poor family, he is treated with both patience and kindness as he learns about the new world surrounding him.

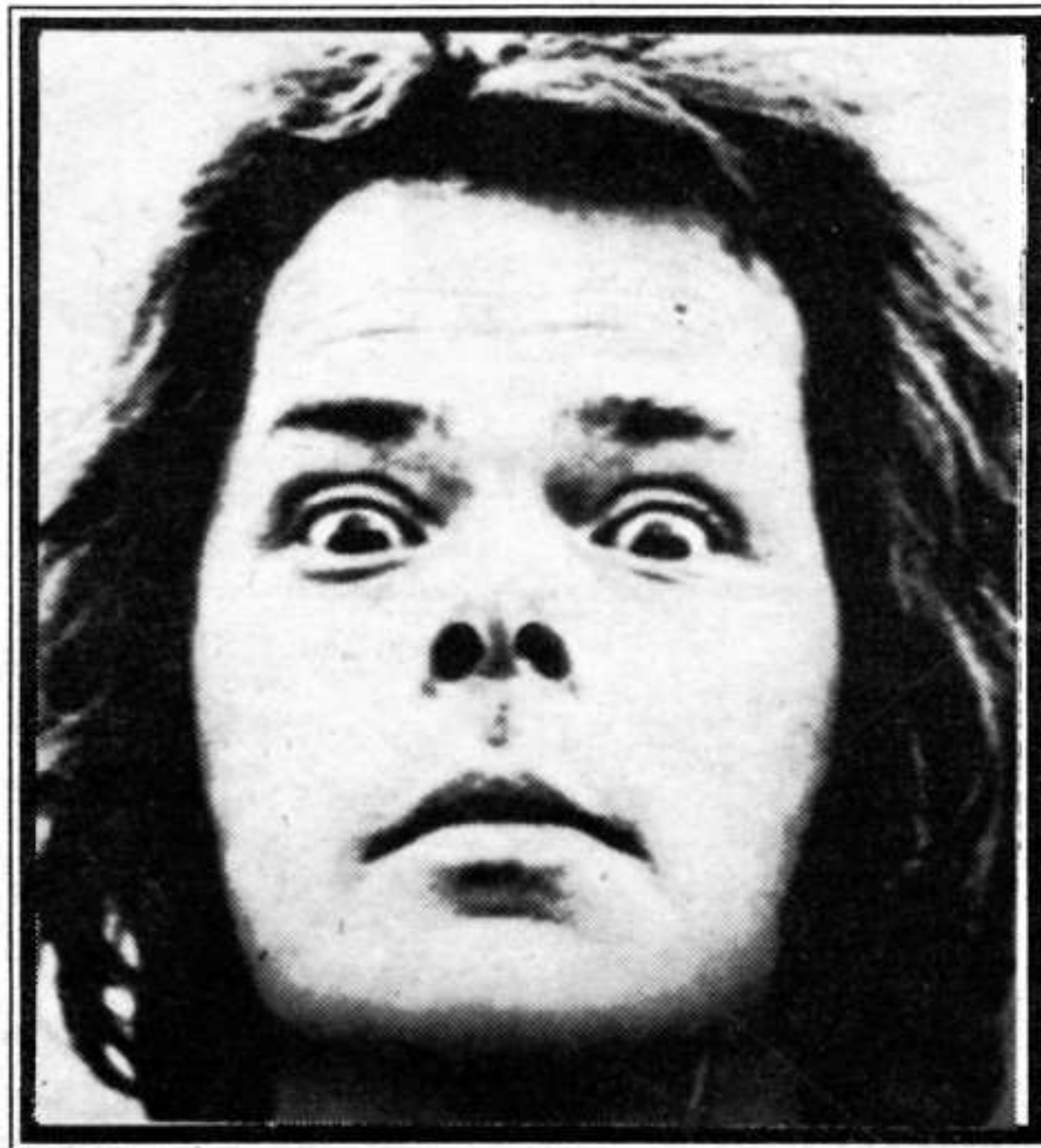
He learns to sit, eat well, play the piano, write (he begins an autobiography), talk, garden, but all in a universe which he views as hostile to him with cause.

To the authorities and scientific minds, he is less a human than object. Clerics demand he give up reason for faith; logicians dismiss his answer to a riddle because it is not what they have decided is the only correct one, although it meets the requirements of the question. There are mysterious attacks upon him; when he is killed, the circumstances are as shrouded as his origins.

This is the story Herzog tells, building upon it a structure of magic and revelations sometimes exquisite in their beauty, sometimes almost literally breathtaking in their emotional content. Early, Kaspar says to the woman of the poor family:

continued on page 26

Kaspar Hauser



Bruno S. as Kaspar Hauser

Passions, insights

continued from page 25

"Mother, I am far from everything," and for a fleeting moment, it is possible to understand the pain of existence in an incomprehensible universe.

In an astonishing sequence, Kaspar describes a dream he has had of the Caucasus. Accompanied by Albinoni's lovely "Adagio for Organ and Strings," the screen offers a strange and mysterious landscape, not surrealistic, but the wistful distortions of a spirit attempting to visualize the unknown. There are a number of moments of great visual beauty (but without the self-consciousness of *Barry Lyndon*), artful use of music and a small gallery of excellent portraits.

But all these are dwarfed by the performance of Bruno S. in the main role. Since he is not a professional actor (he is a man who himself lived in an insane asylum), he requested anonymity. The performance is remarkable, not for these reasons, but in itself.

The slow development of Kaspar from a creature that must be taught to walk to one who can play a piece by Mozart is a superb journey of understanding. He sits stolidly through a pretended sword attack, but is terrified by a chicken. He is given a burning candle, an object he has never seen. He puts his hand to it; when burned he utters no sound, but sits in uncomprehending agony, crying silently. And again the viewer suffers with him.

Every Man is a brilliant film by a brilliant director. I take pleasure in his relative youth since it is a promise of more films to come from a creative talent with large passions and subtle insights. You will be richer for having seen this film.