

Short Cuts

Best and Worst Dutchman

The troubled relationship between Ivens and The Netherlands continues to be tense and violent. Proof of this is the fact that Ivens was selected as one of the 200 candidates for 'the greatest Dutchmen ever,' and at the same time for a much shorter list of 'the worst Dutchman ever.' The competition for the greatest Dutchman, organised by public broadcasting, nominated Ivens because of his film merits, the selection being made by experts, historians etc. The competition for 'the worst Dutchman' was organised by a journalist from *HP/De Tijd* magazine. According to this journalist, Joris Ivens showed 'Russian agents in disguise' in *THE SPANISH EARTH* and the heroes of *KOMSOMOL* 'were in fact convicts.' For these kind of 'facts' the journalist refers to Hans Schoots biography *Living Dangerously* (1995), although in this text no proof can be found for these accusations.

Fahrenheit 9/11

The enormous success of Michael Moore's documentary *FAHRENHEIT 9/11* not only improved the popularity of the genre, but it also received a lot of criticism by his political opponents, who preferred to call it propaganda. Some journalists link Moore's style and approach to Ivens' way of political filmmaking. Indeed both filmmakers have a lot in common. They both attracted millions of people, did not want to provide objectivity, aimed at a change in political consciousness, used the compilation and expository mode with the use of a voice over to manipulate reality, used animation and graphics for educational and caricature effects, and created political pamphlets. The differences are also clear as Moore's style is much more rooted in the mass media of today, direct to camera, spontaneous interviewing, fast editing, humour - in short, political entertainment. For Ivens documentary was an art form, based in the aesthetics of modernity and the vanguard movement of the Twenties, rooted in idealistic and romantic realism.

Willem Bon The Flying Dutchman

In 1928 Willem Bon decided to become a filmmaker and started assisting Joris Ivens during the shooting of *WIJ BOUWEN* (*WE ARE BUILDING*). One year later Bon took over Ivens' film project *DE STAD* (*THE CITY*), a film about Amsterdam, and became a member of Studio Ivens for which he wrote a technical film course. Recently, a script was found at a second hand book market called *The Flying Dutchman*, written by Bon on 16 pages of an exercise book. The theme of a rebellious sailor who provoked God at Easter leading to eternal damnation, had already inspired Ivens and his friends Hendrik Marsman and Mannus Franken during the 1920s. According to Ivens' concept, which he had always wanted to film, this sailor was a revolutionary. In Bon's script, the condemned sailor of the phantom ship returns to his birthplace where a child makes him a better human being. *The Flying Dutchman* saves people who were drowning, through which the curse was lifted. Like many of Ivens' plans, this romantic melodrama was never realised.

Noordbrabants Museum

In the city of Den Bosch, the capital of the province of North Brabant, the regional museum opened a new permanent exhibition on aspects of 20th century daily life. One part concerns the history of Philips, the multinational electronics company, which has its roots in this region. Among objects such as radio's, bulbs, televisions, shavers and other electronic equipment, publicity films like Ivens' *PHILIPS RADIO* (1931), the first film containing sound made in the Netherlands, are continuously shown.

Renovation of Ivens' birth house

Two years ago the renovation of Ivens' birth house started, for which the municipality of Nijmegen provided a grant to cover part of the costs. The present owner, Mr Buwalda, studied photos and designs in the archives and asked the advice of architect Koos van Lith to restore the façade. to its authentic state. Originally the house was built by a stonemason who established his studio around 1890, before the Ivens family bought the premises in 1897. On 18 November 1898 Joris Ivens was born in a room, which previously had been used as a darkroom for developing photos. During the restoration some nice architectural details were discovered and restored. The opening of the building is planned for spring 2005.



The house where Joris Ivens was born being renovated.
© Photo Koos van Lith.



Restored detail of façade. © Photo Koos van Lith

Wim Verstappen

On 24 July 2004 the uncompromising, creative character Wim Verstappen, Dutch filmmaker, producer and president of several film institutions in Holland, died at the age of 67. He was a passionate member of the early generation of students from the Film Academy in Amsterdam in the beginning of the 1960's, the New Wave, who rebelled against the provincial and drowsy film culture in Holland. In Ivens, they recognised a supporter, someone with an international vision, wayward, controversial, and, like them, fighting against authorities who tried to oppress and censor them.



Wim Verstappen, 1964

These students invited Ivens to return to Holland in 1964 and visit the Academy. Verstappen played an important role in the reconciliation between Ivens and Holland. He edited a special issue of *SKOOP*, the youth film magazine, dedicated to Ivens for which he travelled to East Berlin to watch Ivens' films and get relevant material. Back in Holland, this visit to the GDR was the reason he was dismissed from military service at the Royal Air Force and was visited by the national intelligence service who tried to persuade him to become a spy. This autobiographical element was integrated into his first film, about a happening of radical students ('Provo's') entitled *DE MINDER GELUKKIGE TERUGKEER VAN JOSZEF KATÚS IN HET LAND VAN REMBRANDT* (1966).

When Ivens received a commission three years later from the Dutch Minister of Culture to make a film about 'The Flying Dutchman,' he asked Wim Verstappen (with Pim de la Parra / Scorpio Film) to produce the film, although it never came to fruition. Ivens and Verstappen shared a dedicated love for flying and a panoramic vision. In 1976 Verstappen, co-founder of the Netherlands Film Festival, nominated Ivens to receive the Golden Calf for his life's work. Stating his case, Verstappen said that Ivens should be considered the Gutenberg of Dutch cinema. During the worldwide conference of filmmakers in Madeira 1983, Ivens defended Verstappen in public, to promote political freedom and combat anti-American resolutions. Although Verstappen always opposed communism, he defended Ivens' personality and behaviour, reminding those who didn't know him well that Ivens was more liberal than everybody thought. In several articles and again during the speech delivered on the occasion of Ivens centenary in 1998, Verstappen described, using humour and anecdotes, his relationship with Ivens. 'All good filmmakers -like Ivens- are catholic, because they know what projection means'.



Joris Ivens during his first speech in Holland after his return in 1964, Stedelijk Museum. At the background Wim Verstappen in a characteristic posture and Pim de la Parra.