

Martin Duba's Little Piece of Heaven

A stark picture of life in a 1950s prison in former Communist Czechoslovakia

Above: Director Petr Nikolaev

The new Czech feature film **Kousek nebe (A Little Piece of Heaven)** is based on the novel of the same name by Jiri Stransky, the Czech writer, scriptwriter and President of the Czech P.E.N. Club, who was himself a political prisoner half a century ago.

Shot in 28 days on location in Kutná Hora and a deserted former prison at Mladá Boleslav, the dramatic tale centres on an innocent young boy called Luboš (played by Jakub Doubrava), who is incarcerated by the Communists. As he talks to his fellow prisoners, he discovers that there is a separate cell block for women and he learns of the place where they go to wash their clothes. One day, as he surreptitiously watches them, he sees a beautiful girl called Dana (Taňa Pauhofová). With the help of his prison comrades, he manages to smuggle letters to her and, as time goes by, they meet and their relationship deepens. When the Communist authorities decide to transfer the male prisoners and some of the females to another prison, they are herded into the buses together and, by a quirk of fate, Luboš and Dana find themselves reunited... if momentarily.

Sad atmosphere

Director of Photography Martin Duba used Kodak Vision 500T 5279 film for both night and daylight shots, with 2kW and 6kW HMIs and 3200° Kelvin lighting. "5279 isn't the latest stock, but I can rely on its sharpness, as well as its sensitivity and contrast," he remarks. "It performed really well, with good detail even in the deepest

shadows and the darkest prison interiors - and I could overexpose it quite dramatically without any worry. It gave a texture to the shots and coped perfectly, without any problems." With a Moviecam Super America 35mm for 90% of the shots and an ARRIflex IIIC for the crane sequences, Duba used a set of Zeiss Opton HS F lenses (18mm, 25mm, 35mm, 50mm and 85mm), a Zeiss Planar Distagon lens (f16 135mm) and an Angenieux zoom (f25 250mm). "An EF-81 filter helped me to change the true colour rendition, particularly red, to a chillier tonality that corresponded with the fearfulness of the characters and the sad atmosphere."

A stuntman covered a character's fall from the prison roof, which Duba shot with the ARRI fixed on a crane. "We moved the camera over the edge of the roof and shot downwards to evoke dizziness and convey his fear of heights and it came out fine, as did the symbolic moment at the top of the roof when Luboš reaches the red Communist star and looks out towards Prague. We were under considerable pressure to complete the film in a short space of time, which meant that Director Petr Nikolaev had to be tough with the actors and demand a lot from them," adds Duba.

What aspects will Duba recall in years to come about the making of **Kousek nebe**? The DP had no hesitation in telling *InCamera*. "I have collaborated with Petr on several films since 1996 and always

treasure any opportunity to work with this great humanitarian. I must also say that the film has helped me to appreciate the fear that innocent people must have felt when they were thrown into Communist prisons."

The FAMU graduate, who has many features to his credit, received the Association of Czech Cinematographers Award for Best Camera Work on **Zapomenuté světlo (The Forgotten Light)**, a film directed by Vladimír Michálek that earned an OSCAR nomination in 1997 for Best Foreign Film. More recently, he has made **Báječná léta pod psa (The Wonderful Years That Sucked)** and **Císař a Tambor (Emperor and Drummer)**. In his latest production, **Správce statku (The Farm Keeper)**, he is also the Scriptwriter, Director, Composer and Editor.

Kousek nebe (A Little Piece of Heaven) will be premiered in the Czech Republic in February 2005 and distributed by Falcon a.s. ■

