

**Up and Down**  
**Horem Padem**  
(Czech Republic)

A Falcon release of a Total HelpArt production, in co-production with Falcon, Czech TV.  
(International sales: Menemsha Entertainment , Los Angeles.)  
Produced by Ondrej Trojan. Executive producers, Trojan, Milan Kuchynka.  
Co-producers, Jaroslav Kucera, Jan Bradac.  
Directed by Jan Hrebejk.  
Screenplay, Petr Jarchovsky, Hrebejk.

Martin - Petr Forman, Vera - Emilia Vasaryova, Frantisek - Jiri Machacek, Miluska - Natasa Burger, Otakar - Jan Triska, Hana - Ingrid Timkova, Lenka - Kristyna Liska-Bokova, Eman - Pavel Liska, Lubos - Marek Daniel, Milan - Jan Budar, Goran - Zdenek Suchy, Plukovnik - Jaroslav Dusek, Himself - Vaclav Havel, The Colonel - Jaroslav Dusek

By EDDIE COCKRELL

Current Reviews...

In the first of their five fruitful collaborations over the last decade to tackle contemporary issues, "Divided We Fall" director Jan Hrebejk and screenwriter Petr Jarchovsky have delivered a vibrant, immediate treatise on love and cultural identity in a complex new world of fluid borders and deep suspicions in the stunning new Czech drama "Up and Down ." Producer Ondrej Trojan, helmer of recent Czech foreign film Oscar finalist "Zelary," plans a fall rollout at major fests .Theatrical prospects beyond planned mid-September Czech bow are excellent for a bracing, eloquent film that will resonate with audiences worldwide, with tube and homevid deals sure to reap generous rewards.

In the dead of night, somewhere near the Czech-Slovak border, lowlifes Milan and Goran (Jan Budar, Zdenek Suchy) are chagrined to discover their truckload of illegal Indian immigrants have left a baby behind. Meanwhile, in a cramped city flat, childless couple Frantisek (Jiri Machacek) and Miluska (Natasa Burger) cling to each other; he's a muscular, slow-witted but fundamentally decent guy whose probation as a result of soccer hooliganism prevents him from adopting, while she's emotionally frail and incapable of conceiving. One day, as Franta marks time working as a security guard, she cashes in their savings and buys the child from an urban pan shop that fronts a den of thieves including pickpockets Eman (Pavel Liska) and Lubos (Marek Daniel).

The final piece in this human puzzle is the most convoluted. Brisbane-based Martin Horecky (Petr Forman, son of helmer Milos) makes his first trip to Prague in 20 years, on news of the death of his professor father (Jan Triska), a man he never knew. Once there, he discovers, that mom Vera (Emilia Vasaryova) is a bitter racist and that dad has an 18-year-old child, Lenka (Kristyna Liska-Bokova), with Martin's former girlfriend Hana (Ingrid Timkova), a social worker who promised to follow the son to Australia but never did.

As in all the team's films, dinner tables become war zones. Here, it's the Horecky reunion dinner. Full of emotional recriminations and confrontations, it's also shot through with dark humor and catharsis. The sequence is an explosive masterpiece, as is the almost random chain of events that throws Martin and Frantisek together in a misunderstanding with heartbreaking results.

In lesser hands, the melodramatic storylines would collapse under their own weight. Yet Jarchofsky and Hrebejk display an unerring command of complex material, nuanced with an abundance of character detail. Standard-length pic is the shortest Jarchofsky and Hrebejk have made together, yet covers an immense amount of narrative ground. Inevitably, the storylines intersect, and the elegant logic with which they play out underscore the difficulty of redemption, the fragility of relationships and the lurking xenophobe within even the most well-intentioned citizen of a world with liquid borders of the land and the heart.

Though each performance is a triumph of conflicted emotions, vet Vasaryova holds center stage as a woman who no longer recognizes the world in which she lives, yet refuses to let go of a marriage that's ceased to be. And in much the same way Bolek Polivka's Josef Cizek was the tragicomic heart of "Divided We Fall," Machacek gives an extraordinarily multi-faceted performance as a thick yet noble Everyman. Nothing in the onscreen resume of Machacek, who's lead singer of the popular Czech band MiG-21, hints at the depths of feeling he connects with here. Hrebejk regular Jaroslav Dusek makes the most of his handful of scenes as a racist soccer thug.

Director of photography Jan Malir's hand-held camera is always in the right place at the right time, with the strong widescreen color palette marred only by an almost fluorescent color saturation during the few Australian sequences. Ales Brezina's broad-ranging score, Milan Bycek's lived-in sets and Katarina Beilikova's character-defining wardrobe all contribute tangibly.

As ever, Hrebejk and Jarchofsky remain fond of using cliches and puns to title their work; Czech nonsense phrase "Horem padem" means "from all sides," or "sometimes you're up, sometimes you're down" (for a time pic was titled "Loop the Loop"). Typically cheeky, it's their method of hiding profound truths behind irreverent facades.

Camera (color, widescreen), Jan Malir; editor, Vladimir Barak; music, Ales Brezina; production designer, Milan Bycek; costume designer, Katarina Beilikova; sound (Dolby Digital), Michal Holubec.

Reviewed at Karlovy Vary Film Festival (extra screenings), July 3, 2004.

Running time: 108 MIN.

(Czech, English, Russian, German dialogue)