

THE ENIGMA OF KASPAR HAUSER

(Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle)

Directed by Werner Herzog

West Germany 1974, 109 mins, Cert tbc

Winner: Jury Prize, Cannes Film Festival, 1975



**Back on the big screen from 5 July 2013 at BFI Southbank,
Filmhouse Edinburgh & selected cinemas nationwide**

20 May 2013 – Following the BFI's re-release of *Aguirre, Wrath of God* in June, a second masterpiece by visionary German director Werner Herzog – *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* – returns to the big screen on 5 July 2013.

Based on the remarkable true story of the founding Kaspar Hauser, this is an eloquent, deeply moving account of a grown man, barely able to walk or talk, who appears suddenly in the town square of Nuremberg, Germany, in 1828, clutching a letter which claims that his name is Kaspar. His origins are shrouded in mystery but it seems that he has been imprisoned without human contact since childhood. He learns to speak and some attempt is made to integrate him into society. He is puzzled over and examined by a series of learned minds, some sympathetic, some hostile, yet he seems to defy analysis.

Although his film is partly based on research, Herzog did not set out to create a factually accurate historical drama or to speculate on Kaspar's mysterious background. "What really interested me was the story of someone who had not been influenced or contaminated in any way by society and outside forces, someone with no notion of anything whatsoever ... Kaspar's story is about what civilisation does to us all, how it deforms and destroys us by bringing us into societal line."¹

In a typically inspired piece of casting, Herzog found a mesmerising non-actor, Bruno S. (whom he had seen in a documentary about Berlin street musicians) to play the part of Kaspar. A troubled and enigmatic character himself, Bruno had spent many years in children's homes, mental hospitals and prisons. Unsurprisingly, Herzog had considerable difficulty persuading the film's financial backers to accept his choice, but his leap of faith was ultimately rewarded with a performance of powerful authenticity. As Bruno had a Berlin dialect, getting him to speak conventional German was not easy, but his halting, emphatic diction perfectly reflects the character's struggle with language.

A hauntingly beautiful film of great poetic and philosophical resonance, ***The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*** picked up three awards at the Cannes Film Festival in 1975: the Grand Prize of the Jury, the FIPRESCI Prize and the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury. The film is dedicated to Lotte Eisner (1896–1983), the great film critic and historian (author of major studies of Fritz Lang and F. W. Murnau) who befriended and encouraged the young Herzog.

Other films have been made about Kaspar Hauser (and numerous magazine features, books and plays have been written about him over many years), but Werner Herzog's affecting, sensitive interpretation is surely the best of them.

¹From *Herzog on Herzog*, edited by Paul Cronin and published by Faber and Faber (2002)

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For further information please contact:

Jill Reading, BFI Press Office

Tel: 020 7957 4759 or jill.reading@bfi.org.uk

Lucy Aronica, BFI Press Office

Tel: 020 7957 4833 or lucy.aronica@bfi.org.uk

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Notes to Editors

- The BFI's re-release of *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* coincides with a complete retrospective of Werner Herzog's films at BFI Southbank running throughout June and July.

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences