VITUS

All grown-ups were once children - although few of them remember it.
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry – The Little Prince

Directed by Fredi M. Murer

Starring:

Teo Gheorghiu, Julika Jenkins, Urs Jucker and Bruno Ganz

Official Swiss selection for the 2006 Best Foreign Language Film Academy Award

Running time: 123 minutes

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Preliminary Press Notes

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CAST

Vitus (age 6)	Fabrizio Borsani
Vitus (age 12)	Teo Gheorghiu
Mother	Julika Jenkins
Father	Urs Jucker
Grandfather	Bruno Ganz
Luisa	Eleni Haupt
Isabel (age 12)	Kristina Lykowa
Isabel (age 19)	Tamara Scarpellini
Hoffmann jr.	Daniel Rohr
Hoffmann sen.	Norbert Schwientek
Gina Fois	Heidy Forster
Conservatory Director	Daniel Fueter
Kindergarten teacher	Livia S. Reinhard
Primary school teacher	Susanne Kunz
Doctor Thomas	Mathys
Neurologist	Ursula Reiter
Headmistress	Annelore Sarbach
Mathematics teacher	Adrian Furrer
Dr. Knaak	Frank Demenga
Landlord	Stephan Witschi
Jens	Stefan Schertenleib
Airplane mechanic	Andreas Krämer

CREW

Director	Fredi M. Murer
Producers	Christian Davi, Christof Neracher, Fredi M. Murer
Script	Peter Luisi, Fredi M. Murer, Lukas B. Suter
Casting	Corinna Glaus
Camera	Pio Corradi
Set Design	Susanne Jauch
Costumes	Sabine Murer
Make-up	Ronald Fahm / Martine Felber
Sound	Hugo Poletti
Light	Ernst Brunner
Editor	Myriam Flury
Music	Mario Beretta
Production Manager	Marlis Stocker
1st Assistant Director	Marcel Just

Director's Statement

In the foreword of "The Little Prince", author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote: "All grown-ups were once children - although few of them remember it." And Vitus' (pronounced Veetus) parents are no exception. VITUS is a universal story of the struggle children face growing up, whether to choose the safe and secure future mapped out by parents determined to "do what's best," for their child, or answer to the calling they discover inside themselves. As a gifted piano player, and a brilliant mathematician, precocious Vitus finds himself in this same situation, his parents want him to cultivate his talents and become highly successful – just as they have done. But something inside is pulling Vitus in a different direction, and he must choose between obeying his parents and following his dreams. Ultimately however, VITUS is first and foremost a declaration of love to the inspiring and healing power of music.

Synopsis

Vitus is a boy who almost seems to be from another planet: he has hearing like a bat, he plays piano like a virtuoso and studies encyclopaedias at the age of five. It is no wonder his parents begin to anticipate a brilliant future for him. They want Vitus to become a pianist. However, the child prodigy prefers to play in his eccentric grandfather's workshop. He dreams of flying and of a normal childhood. Ultimately, with one dramatic leap, Vitus takes control of his own life.

Director's Comments

The idea

Making a film that paints a realistic portrait of childhood has been on my mind for many years. Many different versions of the script have been drafted since 1999. In this process the fictitious childhood narrative changed over and over again, with one exception, the name of its protagonist: Vitus. In the course of this long writing process, the name Vitus somehow became a metaphor for "survival" and at the same time a synonym for "artist".

Is VITUS a Fairy Tale?

Even if the film tells the story of a highly gifted child, I did not intend the story to be a fairy tale but rather to offer a funny and realistic representation of our time. VITUS is first and foremost a declaration of love to the inspiring and healing power of music. Furthermore, it is a declaration of love for life at its purest, liveliest and most individual form: childhood.

Youth in the Fast Lane

Each generation determines the issues of their time. We tried to shed some light on the booming youth culture, an irritating and at the same time stimulating phenomenon of our society.

Children and teenagers have become an important economic factor. Nowadays, teenagers rely less on their parents to experience the world than on their globally linked computers. The traditional way of passing down knowledge from one generation to the next has lost its significance as it is the younger generation who helps their parents and grandparents to understand the fast moving digital and virtual world.

VITUS tries to fathom the limits of normality from a different perspective. It focuses on the general trend of dumbing down in our society and the way we deal with people who are considered exceptionally gifted. Vitus has to lead a double life under the cover of ordinariness to be accepted the way he is.

The Computer Game of Life

The digital generation, born in the 80's has already overtaken the older generation. This development has left its marks on society and work. Today's children have in a way become their parents' educators on the electronic age. For the computer non-savvy parents, money and work are traditionally connected, whereas the digital generation of their children sees "money" and "work" as mere antagonists in a computer game.

Director's Comments About The Four Main Characters

While writing the script, Vitus remained an artificial character like Oscar in the "Tin Drum" by Günther Grass or Alia in "Dune" by Frank Herbert or a kind of mix between Mozart and Einstein. To me, feature films are to a certain extent a documentary about the protagonist. With that in mind, we started our search to find the actor who would play Vitus.

Teo Gheorghiu, plays the twelve-year-old Vitus. Not only does he play the piano like a future maestro, but he also developed a talent for acting in a very short period of time. I found Teo at the Purcell School in London, a school for musically gifted children. Despite having a Canadian passport and being of Romanian origin, Teo was born and raised in Switzerland, and can speak perfect Swiss-German.

Fabrizio Borsani, plays the six-year-old Vitus. Although still in kindergarten, Fabrizio managed to come to the set well-prepared and developed into a professional actor as the filming went on. After one scene had been shot he asked me: "Is it okay like this, or would you like me to give you an alternative version?"

Julika Jenkins (Vitus' mother) is a well-known stage actress in Switzerland. I loved her subtle style of acting, and knew for a long time that Julia would be my first choice to play the role of Vitus' mother. And since Julia is half English, I turned her into a "full English" woman who is married to a Swiss man.

Filmography
2006 Vitus
2006 Body Rice
2005 Die Gerichtsmedizienerin
1994 Ab nach Tibet

Urs Jucker (Vitus' father) also worked on stage in Switzerland. His naturalistic and understated acting style suited the role of the scholarly father, an inventor with practical designs for his son's future.

Filmography
2006 Vitus
2004 Ricordare Anna
2003 Little Girl Blue
2002 Lücken Im Gestez
2002 Ferrari

Bruno Ganz (Vitus' grandfather),

Born in Switzerland in 1941, the award-winning Bruno Ganz is one of Europe's most prolific and internationally renowned stars. He is best known to American audiences for his portrayal of Hitler in the 2004 *The Downfall: Hitler and the End of the Third Reich.* Mr. Ganz will next be seen in Francis Ford Coppola's *Youth without Youth* and Theo Angelopoulos' *The Dust of Time.*

Director Fredi Murer explains, “Bruno Ganz was my first choice for the role of the eccentric grandfather from the very beginning. I told Bruno about it before I even had a rough script and Bruno instantly agreed. From time to time I gave him the latest versions to read which he graciously commented upon. Through this process, we developed the character of the grandfather together.”

Select Filmography

2007 The Dust of Time
2007 Youth Without Youth
2006 Vitus
2004 Der Untergang (The Downfall: Hitler and the End of the Third Reich)
2003 Luther
2000 Pane e Tulipani (Bread and Tulips)
1987 Der Himmel über Berlin (The Sky Above Berlin)
1981 Die Fälschung (*Circle of Deceit)*
1977 Der amerikanische Freund (The American Friend)

About Director Fredi Murer

One of the most renowned directors in his native Switzerland, **Fredi Murer** was born in Beckenried in 1940. His body of film work, started in 1967, includes shorts, feature length fiction films and documentaries. *Höhenfeuer* (*Alpine Fire*) won the Golden Leopard and the Ecumenical Jury Prize at the 1985 Locarno International Film Festival. *Vollmond* won the Grand Prix des Amériques at the 1998 Montreal World Film Festival. VITUS is Switzerland's official entry for the 2006 Best Foreign Language Film Academy Award.

Filmography

2006 *VITUS 123 min.*
2004 *DOWNTOWN SWITZERLAND* (co-director)
1998 *VOLLMOND*, (*Full Moon*) 156 Min.
1987 *SEHEN MIT ANDEREN AUGEN*, 40 Mins,
1985 *HÖHENFEUER (Alpine Fire)*, 103 Min.
1978 *GRAUZONE (Zones)*, 99 Min.
1974 *WIR BERGLER IN DEN BERGEN SIND EIGENTLICH NICHT SCHULD, DASS WIR DA SIND.* 108 Min.
1971 *PASSAGEN*, 50 Min.
1969 *SAD-IS-FACTION*, 75 Min.
1969 "*2069*" (Episode of *SWISS MADE*), 45 Min.
1968 *VISION OF A BLIND MAN*, 60 Min.
1966 *CHICOREE*, 27 Min.
1966 *BERNHARD LUGINBUEHL*, 23 Min.
1965 *PAZIFIK - ODER DIE ZUFRIEDENEN*, 60 Min.
1962 *MARCEL*, 35 Min.