KINONIK

FORBIDDEN GAMES (1952)

Directed by René Clément

WEDNESDAY MARCH 26th - ONE NIGHT ONLY

Wednesday 3.26 7pm



"What's wrong with your dog?"

"He's dead."

Thus begins the friendship between young Michel and Paulette, a peasant French boy and a Parisian war refugee, and sets the foundation of their relationship. They are children within a war, among adults who hold to the same tried (though questionably true) habits and rituals to weather it, coming to terms with death and love. Able to encounter the absurdity in a way the adults around them cannot – though no less equipped to process it – the two children strive towards comfort, safety, and joy by way of building an animal graveyard with stolen crosses.

The challenging nature of the story troubled its realization. **Forbidden Games** (1952) started as a screenplay by French writer Francis Boyer; unable to sell it, he adapted it into a novel, The Secret Game, which sold so well in the United States that Rene Clement adapted it back into a screenplay with the assistance of Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost. Originally intended as a short to be accompanied by two companion pieces, it was retained and expanded when the larger project lost financing. The result – which, similar to the novel, did better abroad than in its home country – was initially rewarded and well-regarded, but swept into semi-obscurity after Francois Truffaut lambasted Aurenche and Bost's ouvre as "stultifying". Unfairly taken down with the rest, **Forbidden Games**' delicate, at times humorous approach to the social realities of war is far from the dull old-school movie-making Truffaut labeled it as.

Rene Clement's masterpiece, shot with such a clear eye that "every shot achieves the quality of fate," is a landmark piece of both French and war cinema. Michel and Paulette are allowed to be children, strange and out of step with the assumed morals of their caretakers, not reduced to saccharine sweethearts for the comfort of the audience. Georges Poujouly and Brigitte Fossey deliver excellent performances, particularly in view of their youth. Their naturalistic acting is juxtaposed against adults directed to deliver near-goofy renditions of the rustic trope, a repeated re-emphasis of the children's role as intuits and seekers while the adults around them go through the same rehearsed motions. Michel and Paulette may achieve no more understanding of our strange reality than their parents did, but like all children, they must try. **Forbidden Games** gives them the playground on which to do so.

Trivia:

After Fossey's audition, Clement changed Paulette's age from nine-years-old to five to keep her for the role.

The TV screening of the film on Turkish public television was abruptly cut short for blasphemy.

Fossey's actual parents play her parents in the film. It was their only acting role.

It won an Honorary Oscar for Best Picture in 1953.