

Published March 28th, 2012

'Young Goethe in Love' Premieres at Orinda Theatre

By Sophie Braccini



Photo provided

Is "Young Goethe in Love" historically accurate? No. "It is more a mixture of facts and fiction," answered Director Phillip Stoelzl to German media when his movie about the most famous German poet and philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was released in 2010. The film will be shown for one week as part of the Orinda Theatre's International Film Showcase series beginning April 6.

The film stirred a bit of controversy when it was initially released in Germany. No film had yet depicted the life of the almost universal genius who invented such things as roller skates and discovered the pharyngeal bone. Yet with such a rich history, the film depicts the man at the beginning of his adult life. The young man is shown as an insecure poet who has just failed his law exams, during a time of self-doubt and self-discovery - a defining moment in his life.

The story begins with the description of the life of a trifling, unsuccessful poet named Johann Wolfgang Goethe. He is sent by his father to a little sleepy town where he falls in love with beautiful Charlotte Buff. The film gives a great depiction of their fresh young love. But things take a turn for the worst and Goethe ends up in prison.

Desperately, he starts writing, and from that source of inspiration comes "The Sorrows of Young Werther," the novel that made Goethe the first almost-overnight literary superstar in Europe.

The book started "Werther-fever" all over Europe, with young men dressing like young Werther. This may be why Stoelzl directed the movie to appeal to a younger audience.

The dialogues are snappy with a mix of modern and old-fashioned language, the pop-music is good and

definitely modern. Stoelzl's Goethe is light years from the literary icon he became. Instead, he is shown with all the urging of a hot-blooded lover. He runs wild in the woods and under the rain with his beloved, he suffers, fights; he is made of real flesh, suffering in the throes of passion.

The film is directed with great mastery by Stoelzl, the rhythm is fast, and the overall esthetic is quite enchanting. Alexander Fehling, who plays Goethe, is very believable when he falls for Miriam Stein, who plays Lotte Buff, a real natural beauty who can play with a very large emotional range.

While the movie might make some scholarly and literary purists turn up their noses, others can get to know Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as an entertaining movie hero.

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