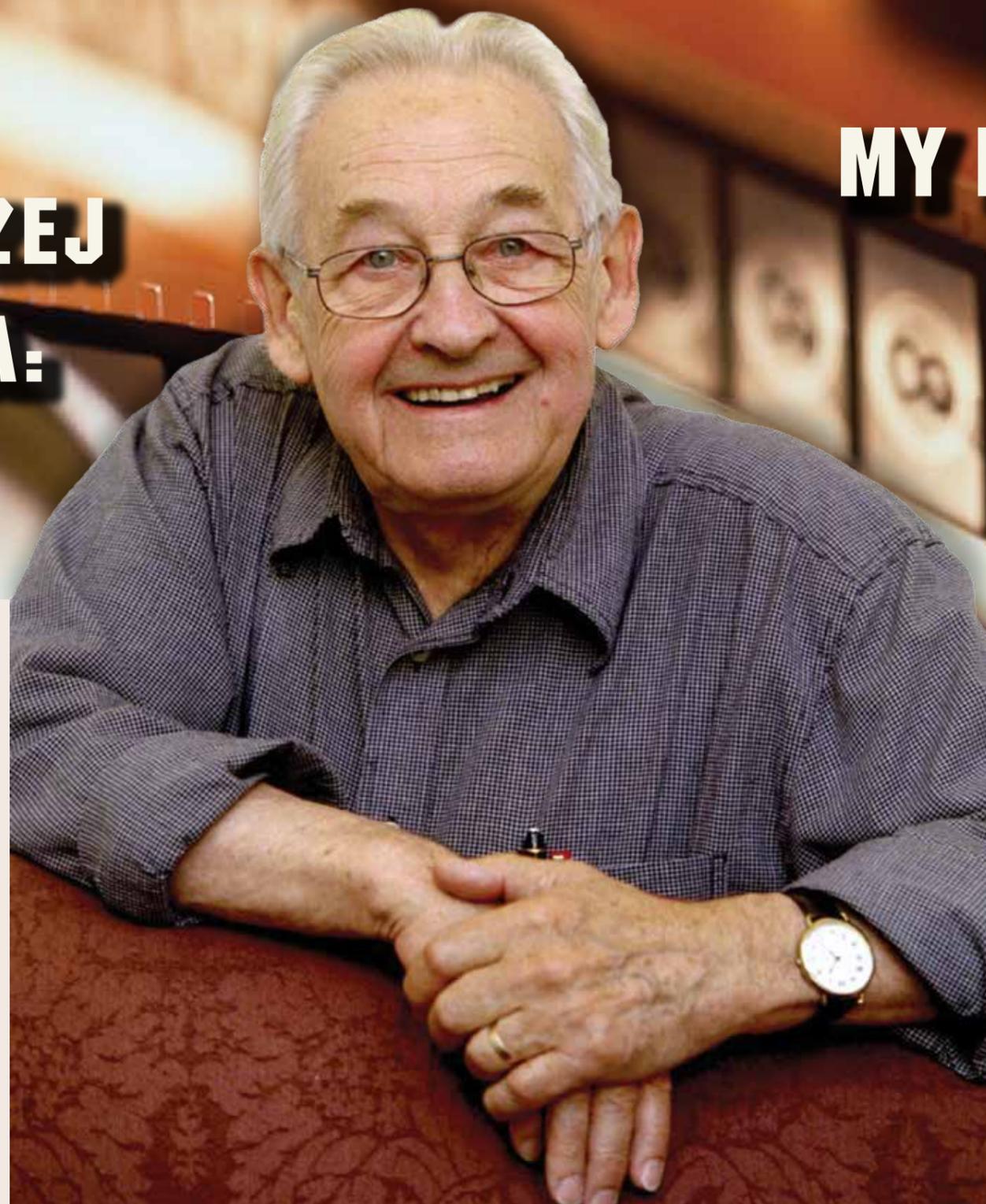


POLAND

# ANDRZEJ WAJDA:

# MY BEST FILM IS STILL AHEAD



**N**ew film *Walesa. Man of Hope* by famous Polish director Andrzej Wajda has hit the screens of world film festivals of late. It tells the story of the leader of Solidarity (Solidarność) trade union since the '70s of the last century when an ordinary electrician began the struggle for the rights of workers up to 1989 when he enjoyed world fame and delivered his famous speech in the US Congress.

**The 87-year old founder of the Polish cinematography told Amber Bridge in an exclusive interview about his new movie and modern and old films.**

*Walesa. Man of Hope includes numerous documentaries and the script was based on archive materials which also included original recordings of Walesa interrogations during arrests. Despite a close link to history the film is still called a movie. It is devoid of any political tints. Did you manage to shoot what you have designed?*

I could not fully avoid politics although the situation was completely different. It wasn't a talk between politicians but negotiations of the ruling party with revolting workers. Initially it looked like the problem could be resolved with money as workers

**STILL FRAME.** Andrzej Wajda was born in 1926 in Suwalki. The father of the would-be Oscar winner was executed in Katyn massacre in 1940. Wajda graduated from the Krakow's Academy of Fine Arts and the Łódź Film School. Already his second film *Kanal* (1956) about Krajowa Army fighters won a special prize at Cannes festival. *Ashes and Diamonds* which revealed the artistic talent of Zbigniew Cybulski is considered a classical movie. In late 1970s the film director turned to anti-Socialist issues. The result was *Man of Iron* movie that won Palm d'Or in 1981. Other major movies include *Landscape After the Battle*, *The Promised Land*, and *Holy Week*. Wajda is also a theater director and pays considerable attention to staging Dostoyevsky's novels. His latest blockbuster *Katyn* came out in 2007. Wajda was awarded several state decorations, including the French Legion of Honor and the Russian Friendship Order.

were supposedly demanding higher wages as food prices hiked again and working people were in a miserable plight.

The shipyard in Gdansk employed 16 thousand people. It was a whole city of Gdansk with families, children, and wives. When the strike began it was unclear whether it would focus on monetary issues or advance new political demands. It turned out the main thing

was the emergence of a trade union in a socialist country that was not subordinated to anyone besides itself and protected the interests of the working people.

*But your movie is about one man rather than the strike.*

I did not want to speak about the whole problem. I realized that *Walesa* was an ordinary electrician who was fired after ten years of work for interfering into various political affairs and bonding with the Committee for the

protection of workers. I knew I had to show it all through the prism of one man. *Walesa* had a positive trait which helped him assess the seriousness of the whole situation outside the shipyard. He realized that negotiations were the only way out. It was wrong to believe that a nationwide strike would help. He was sure it was necessary to strike only to mount pressure at the negotiating table.

GIFT OF ABSOLUTE EAR

GIFT OF ABSOLUTE EAR

*Did your personal recollections help as you also witnessed the developments of the years?*

I was there and remember how everyone felt the taste of victory. One of the workers came to me and suggested shooting a film about participants in the events. It meant that Man of Marble (about the '50s of the XX century - ed.) should be followed by Man of Iron. I could not say "No". We began to shoot right after the victory and the end of strike. I got bonded with the events and realized that Walesa played an enormous role in history.

*The film tells Walesa's story up to the end of the '80s. Many people noted that you did not go further to show all of his biography including the years when he became the president of Poland.*

I wanted to say that a politician is created for a certain period of time. In some developments he is at the top but not in others. I wanted to show Lech and what he has done not only by opposing authorities. He realized that talks were inevitable while the strike was additional motivation. He succeeded in everything - a ten-million strong Solidarity trade union emerged which we all joined, including me.

The final period when Walesa worked to implement what they have achieved during the strike and up to the martial law introduction is the second issue. He developed from somewhat peasant-minded electrician into the head of a huge trade union. Martial law was a very important moment. He was isolated but succeeded to stand the difficult trial. It was his second victory. The triumphant return home demonstrated that Solidarity did not vanish but was waiting for another chance to act.

Naturally, the end is important when our worker and electrician from Gdansk addresses the US Senate and says: "We are the people!" You know further developments and can shoot a film without me. I am not interested in the period after Walesa had already encountered problems in his biography. Let somebody else shoot the film. I am not the only film director in this country.

*Do you know what Walesa thinks about the film?*

Walesa is a very intelligent man. He does not want to speak to me about it. He did not

read the script, never visited the movie set, and has not seen the film to the end. The film is not only about one theme. You can see him both in political environment and at home. Walesa appears as a man with all his curious traits and I think he should be satisfied with it. It made the film lively. I was also lucky with actors. Robert Więckiewicz as Lech Walesa and Agnieszka Grochowska as Danuta Wałęsa are fantastic. I am happy Poland has such actors with who it is worth shooting movies.

*Walesa. Man of Hope has been nominated for Oscar award. What hopes do you pin on the nomination?*

I already have an Oscar. But I would be very pleased as we produced the film for long. We had a very good script and documentary materials which constantly emerged from various sources. There was something new now and then.

*Do you plan to widely show your movie at festivals in Russia?*

The film is already on at various festivals. There are a lot of them today. I do not reject anyone on condition the movie is out of the competition. It is a film from the heart and I want it to serve the good and be viewed not as mine, but of all those who I came to know in the '80s. It is an exceptional film. It is not fit for competitions. I like that audience applauds Walesa as it was he who created the situation which now allows us to go with a film anywhere and show it everywhere. He is not only the hero in the movie, he is a kind of its creator.

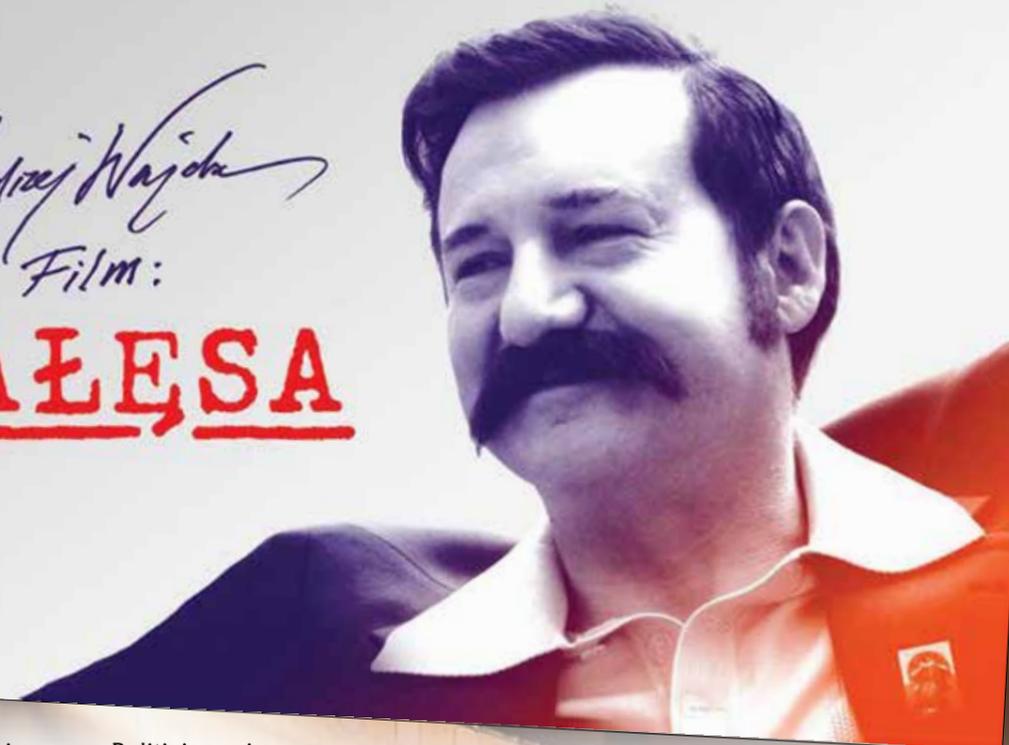
*You have been shooting films for 60 years. What and who are you working for?*

I am shooting films for the Polish public. I cannot work for the public I don't know. Even when I shot abroad Danton about the French Revolution the president of France commented after seeing it that "it is the problem of Mr. Wajda, it is not related to us." We offered a different view of the revolution.

*You have many historic films. What do you think of history? Do you believe it is the best script writer?*

We have been formed by the past both in the good and bad sense. Had it not been for Lech Walesa it would be unclear how developments could proceed and whether they

*Andrzej Wajda*  
Film:  
**WAŁĘSA**



could trigger a big war. Politicians in Poland mostly come from intelligentsia. All bloody conflicts ended in our defeat. A worker who headed such a movement as Solidarity and who balanced to avoid bloodshed is something new in Polish history.

*In your films you try to exactly follow past developments and use many documentaries. Why should you be so objective as you are shooting movies and every artist is free to offer any turns in the storyline?*

You have a commitment when you address society that already has some information. People unaware of the developments in the country rarely go to cinema. I address intelligent public which was formed by the historic developments.

*Can you distinguish any of your films? Do you have the beloved one?*

It is the one I am going to shoot. The film which does not exist yet.

*What are you shooting now?*

We are shooting a short documentary about Warsaw Ghetto revolt leader Marek Edelman. There is a recording of his last talk. Before passing away he left us his story called There was Love in Ghetto. He describes how women lost their heads and ignored the surrounding re-

ality. We united shots from the Ghetto and Warsaw of the time with his story. We shall see what comes out of it. I will think of it.

*Do you see modern films?*

I see much less than I should. I am no longer that healthy. It is strange as earlier I could cope with everything. Now it is different.

*Do you have a writer or film director or any personality who you admire?*

No. It depends on who I work with. I cooperated with many modern writers and each time he was the most important person for me. I can name the film which impressed me most of all. I was a student of the Academy of Arts in Krakow at the time. Citizen Kane by Orson Welles was on after the war. It stunned my imagination. It was excellent. I cannot forget it.

*There were no special effects, computer technologies and electronic possibilities at the time. Do you believe the innovations help or impede cinema art?*

I survived a genuine revolution only once. It was transition from black-and-white to color films. Many objected as they feared that cinema would imitate reality. It was similar to the struggle for silent screen. It shows that whether you like it or not innovations should be introduced.

In Walesa movie they helped us save documentaries of the past years and helped properly adjust them to a big screen. Many technical opportunities are sometimes necessary. But I am not planning to shoot a movie in which special effects would play the main role.

*You are the head of the Andrzej Wajda film-making school. What do you teach your students?*

The school replaces the system created by the Polish cinema school after the war. It means films are produced by creative teams rather than production amalgamations to which there are big queues. There are senior supervisors heading a group of 8-10 film directors. All films are discussed. We deal with those who already graduated from film-making and scriptwriter faculties and are going to shoot their first movie. We are their allies who have no personal interests but moral and artistic responsibility to better their work for the producer. We help them make the first step and the first film. It is a unique international school which gives young film directors from various countries a chance to discuss the movie they plan to shoot.

*Is there any formula of good cinema, a formula of Wajda?*

No, I do not think so. Today such shocking films appear that if somebody describes them to me in his own word I would say it is impossible. However the films determine new trends. Polish cinema could see some experi-

ence as there was Italian neo-realism that was a guideline for us. But when I shot *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958) I was looking at American cinema and tried to produce more action. We follow rapid cinema development.



*Do you believe Hollywood has finally conquered the world or European cinema still has a chance to win broad audiences?*

We produce merchandise. It is another business to sell it. It is like with any goods. They are produced in big numbers. The problem is with cinemas and those who offer the films to spectators. It is the reason for the emergence of many small and local festivals. There are films on show only at the festivals. It is a great success if some distributor notices it.

*What do you think about Russian cinema?*

It has always been fantastic cinema. I made friends with many film directors, with Tarkovsky. I remember that he wanted to be my assistant when I was shooting *Kanal*. It was

impossible at the time. The matter was decided in the Communist Central Committee which said a young Soviet film producer can be no assistant to a Polish director. Tarkovsky was a wonderful man. Today I see less movies but Russian cinema attracts attention. Everything I saw had excellent ac-



tors and interesting cameramen. Soviet cinema tradition remains.

*In 2015 there will be Russia-Poland cross-year. What do you expect from the event?*

As far as cinema is concerned, they will find good movies on both sides. There are so many festivals today so I do not worry about that. Personally I would like Russia to bring an exhibition of Soviet Avant Garde art of the '20s. It is my dream. I think they have to look for something of the kind. Naturally, more people will see movies and less people will go to the exhibition. But I would greatly enjoy it.

*The Russian Wikipedia says that: "Wajda is a consistent anti-Communist and does not conceal his negative attitude to the USSR, Russia and Russians." Is it true?*

No. In the Soviet Union there were also Tarkovsky and Konchalovsky who loved me and showed what cinema was like in the most difficult times. I had a lot of friends there! Why should they say so? It is unfair. It is offensive. I always looked with surprise at my Soviet colleagues and was astonished how much they had to brave out while I hadn't. They shot so little because of various barriers while a film director has to work constantly.

*How would you define happiness?*

A person should not focus on himself as it results in big mistakes and misunderstanding. When a person works with others and for others he becomes a part of something. It is bad when he analyzes and considers whether he's fit for it, etc.

*What is the goal of life?*

To leave something behind you. I left some films and plays.

*Are you glad to be a film director? Maybe you wanted to be something else in childhood?*

I do not think I lived my life in vain.

*Thank you for the interview.*

**Irina Polina,**  
ITAR-TASS,  
for Amber Bridge