

The Congress of Penguins

A film by Hans-Ulrich Schlumpf

Photography: Pio Corradi, Luc Jacquet, Patrick Lindenmaier

Soundtrack: Dieter Meyer, Dieter Lengacher, Hans Künzi

Editing: Fee Liechti / Script: Franz Hohler / Narrator: Tim Morrand

Music: Sergei Rachmaninov, Camille Saint-Saens, Bruno Spoerri

Switzerland 1993 / 90 Min. / 35 mm 1:1.82 / Dolby Stereo

Review by Sorely Macdonald, 18th Cambridge Film Festival 1994

In Hans-Ulrich Schlumpf's dream-narrative, the location of the penguin's congress is the coldest, stormiest, the most inhospitable - and most fictitious - place on earth: the place where animals talk. The Antarctic conjured in vision and nightmare: where ghost towns like Grytviken crumble at the sea's edge but betray evidence of past slaughter, of veritable holocausts of hundred of thousands of whales, penguins and seals. Where the research vessel 'Polarstern' ploughs through frozen seas. And where a handful of scientists inhabit immemorial deserts, monitoring signs of changes in our world. The animals can talk: and for us, their message holds no comfort.

The penguins project ineluctable comedy and pathos. And if the conceit is anthropomorphic, objections are stilled by visual beauty and startling poetic flights. This film fuses breathtaking images with haunting music and sound. Penguin's Congress marries sensory exhilaration to chilling polemic. Magisterial, hectoring, poignant: a lyrical denunciation of man's rape of the earth.

Where do dreams come from?
When they are restless, they come from tranquility.
When they are calm, they come from restlessness.
When they are cold, they come from the heat.
When they are hot, they come from the cold.
But always they bring you a message
from the distant provinces of your deepest self.
And if you still have understood nothing,
they already know everything.

Franz Hohler 1993 for "The Congress of Penguins"

Website: www.film-schlumpf.ch