

Grindhouse Nostalgia: The Exploitation Film Career of Adrian Hoven

Interview by Uwe Huber

From 9 October until 8 November 2015, the Filmarchiv Austria offered an extensive retrospective of indigenous genre cinema; this was part of Viennale, the Vienna International Film Festival. Included were many films by Adrian Hoven, one of the most famous heartthrobs of the German *Heimatfilm* (homeland film) genre from the 1950s. Since the beginning of the 1970s, Hoven regularly acted for art-house *enfant terrible* Rainer Werner Fassbinder, but at the heart of the Filmarchiv retrospective was his alternative career in exploitation movies, which he often produced or directed. Curator Paul Poet's series "Aus Fleisch und Blut: Austrian Pulp – Genrekino aus Wien und Anderswo" ("Of Flesh and Blood: Austrian Pulp – Genre Cinema from Vienna and Elsewhere") contained both *Mark of the Devil* (*Hexen bis aufs Blut gequält*, Michael

Armstrong, 1970) and *Mark of the Devil Part II* (*Hexen geschändet und zu Tode gequält*, Adrian Hoven, 1973), but also other pictures starring or directed by Adrian Hoven such as *The Murderer with the Silk Scarf* (*Der Mörder mit dem Seidenschal*, Adrian Hoven, 1966), *Succubus* (*Necronomicon – Geträumte Sünden*, Jess Franco, 1968) and *Appointment with Lust* (*Im Schloß der blutigen Begierden*, Adrian Hoven, 1968).

After a screening of *Mark of the Devil*, Percy and Joyce Hoven, the actor's son and widow, appeared at the stage of the Viennese Metro Cinema to share their memories about Adrian's exploitation film ventures. While the young Percy appeared as an actor in *Mark of the Devil* and its sequel, Joyce was involved with her husband's productions mostly behind the scenes.

The views expressed in this interview are solely those of Percy and Joyce Hoven.

Uwe Huber: How do you remember the production of Adrian Hoven's first witchploitation film?

Joyce Hoven: In 1969 it was extremely difficult to make a movie like *Mark of the Devil*. You'd think it would be possible to produce such a film quickly, but my husband sat in the library for ages to find out about the original story and adapt it into a screenplay. You might think what you've seen in the film is very cruel, but at that time, such things actually happened. One can read all about it, these events are described in detail in all these chronicles.

Uwe Huber: You were with Adrian Hoven, whose actual name was Peter Hofkirchner, since ...

Joyce Hoven: 1964.

Uwe Huber: And this was exactly the time when he changed his career completely. Before, he had been a *matinée* idol.

Joyce Hoven: He couldn't do this any longer. He always had to play the one who'd conquer

the women and he couldn't stand it anymore.

First of all, he wanted to play a gangster and cut off his hair completely, to have a bald head over the summer, but I stopped him from doing this. I said I wouldn't walk with him on the street without hair. And then he decided to make his own movies, which started with *The Murderer with the Silk Scarf*. The film was shot in Vienna featuring the young Susanne Uhlen, it was a quite a good *Krimi* (crime film). Afterwards, for a long time he and his friends worked on the screenplay for the witch movie, which actually consisted of episodes that proved difficult to combine in order to accomplish an original script. He also had to scout locations and finally decided to shoot at Count Wilczek's Mauterndorf Castle. And there was another castle somewhere in Vienna where they shot the scenes in the courtyard with Herbert Fux. We also tried to shoot in Krems, but there were already too many television antennas and modern-day doors, so the film was mainly shot in Mauterndorf.

Uwe Huber: But the witch-burning scenes were shot in Krems.

Joyce Hoven: I see, the ones on the market place?

Uwe Huber: Yes.

Percy Hoven: The barbecue scene. (laughs) One night Herbert Lom looked after me when you were out. I stayed in the hotel and was terribly frightened, but Herbert Lom fluffed up my pillow and told me a bedtime story. He was lovely, but when I'm seeing him in the film ... (laughs) Of course, my memories are vague. I remember the smell of the fake blood and the feel of the straw, and was astonished at the wooden bars in the dungeon, that I can remember very well. Certainly, a child sees completely different details and notices different things. By the way, my salary was a bicycle. Mummy, tell them how father blackmailed me.

Joyce Hoven: So Percy said: "I don't like your film, I'm not taking part anymore, and that's that, I don't give a damn." My husband said: "You aren't participating? Okay, well, the bell's gone from your bicycle." Percy: "I don't care, you must shoot the scene anyway, I'm not doing it, I wanna go play." My husband: "Okay, if you don't join us, there's no front wheel for your

bicycle." (laughs) And that's how they bargained until Percy gave in: "Fair enough, I'll do it." And then he sat grumpily behind the bar.

Percy Hoven: How I cried!

Joyce Hoven: Sure, because you were afraid because of your bike. (laughs)

Percy Hoven: In the end there was only an unpainted frame.

Joyce Hoven: Well, but you got the bicycle in Munich, didn't you?

Percy Hoven: That's right.

Uwe Huber: Many who contributed to the film as actors were friends of the family.

Joyce Hoven: Yes, like Reggie Nalder, who played the murderer in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1956). In a theatre in Vienna, where Reggie and his twin brother were working, an accident occurred. His brother died, and Reggie himself was completely burned at the lower part of his face. Besides this, he wasn't very handsome. When I greeted him at the hotel and we hugged, I realised that women around reacted like: "Oh God, how can you hug this guy, a terrible man!" But he was the nicest person you could imagine and a very good

friend of the family. At all costs, he wanted to play a lover in the film. My husband said: “Well, because it’s you, we’ll do a very affectionate shot in which you can really play a lover.”

Reggie was extremely enthusiastic, but in post-production, the scene was cut.

Percy Hoven: But Uncle Reggie, who later lived in Los Angeles, came to visit us frequently. It was party time when he visited us. Children have a keen sense of people, and he was a very kind person. That’s how I remember him. We also talked to him over the phone a lot – overseas calls – he got in touch with us regularly. Somehow, he was quite attached to our family.

Joyce Hoven: He would send cowboy suits and American Disney toys. In Hollywood, Reggie got a lot of work, he acted in many TV series, but usually, he played murderers and gangsters, because he looked so terrible. But he was really a good soul.

Uwe Huber: Could you dwell a bit on his accident?

Joyce Huber: There was this accident in a theatre in Paris, where his brother, sadly to say,

suffocated in the smoke, and Reggie had severe burns. He was one of the first people to undergo cosmetic surgery. At some point, his doctors removed his cheeks, and then he arrived with these apple cheeks, which looked ridiculous. He was seriously affected by his looks. I think he tried to marry and have a family, but it never worked out for him, which he regretted a lot. We were like an *ersatz* family for him. Herbert Lom, on the other hand, was married to a literature agent. They lived in England, and Lom, as a side job, grew Christmas trees. I couldn’t believe it, but this was quite a lucrative business, he made a lot of money. Actually, he was very business-minded. In the north of England, he owned vast estates, and there he grew his trees.

Uwe Huber: He dubbed himself in the German version.

Joyce Hoven: Yes, his German was very good.

Uwe Huber: There was another actor in the cast, his name isn’t quite as familiar, but his face: Johannes Buzalski who played the advocate.

Joyce Hoven: Oh yes. He was a poor guy, he never had money or jobs, and he would always

come to us to ask for money. My husband supported him financially, and very proudly, he'd always tell us that his wife was the mistress of Joseph Goebbels.¹ My husband said: "Give it a rest! What did she get out of it?" But somehow, he found it great. Buzalski was always so broke, we had to give him money for the tram, often, he didn't have anything to eat. He was the kind of actor who wanted to be an actor very much, but when the shooting started, he had enormous fear. He would tremble before he even stood in front of the camera. Actually, he chose the completely wrong profession. He always had to drink something, be tranquilised – it was a torment from start to finish.

Uwe Huber: One tends to think, because of the film's later success in the US under the title *Mark of the Devil*, that Adrian Hoven became a rich man.

Joyce Hoven: We were in the Cannes festival and at the market with the film. It was well received, because it was something completely new. There was also an American producer and salesman who wanted to have the film at all costs. We thought this a good idea, but then he

lost interest and declined our offer. At the end of the festival my husband managed to sell the movie to somebody else for a small sum in order to recoup the investment. Afterwards, we learned that Mr Arkoff had hired a straw man to buy the film cheaper, which yielded very good results for about five weeks in the US, and Mr Arkoff made a mint. But that's the film business, you wouldn't believe it, but that's how it is.

Uwe Huber: Samuel Z. Arkoff was the head of American International Pictures ...

Joyce Hoven: Exactly.

Uwe Huber: ... and the subsidiary company was Hallmark.

Joyce Hoven: That's possible.

Uwe Huber: They organised an ingenious marketing campaign.

Joyce Hoven: And they earned so much money in the US. Also in Germany, the film was profitable. Ultimately, we neither lost nor made any money.

Percy Hoven: That's the way it is.

Joyce Hoven: Of course, the actors – there were some excellent actors like Lom – cost a lot of money, just like the crew and the castle that was

rented for several weeks. All of that wasn't exactly cheap.

Uwe Huber: The film is actually a German production shot on Austrian locations, but it pretended to be British. The filmmakers decided to appear as British, as international, so they hired an English director.

Joyce Hoven: Yes. (laughs) In Cannes a young director, Michael Armstrong, was praised enormously, we saw one of his films, which was very, very interesting.² My husband decided that Armstrong was appropriate to shoot the film, he had the sensitivity to do this. Then he came to Mauterndorf and received his contract as the director. But during the first days of shooting everybody who knew a little bit about cinema realised he didn't have a clue about how to direct actors. It was awkward and weird and, in the first days, the production lost a great deal of money, because nothing worked out. Later, he made some more movies. Overall, this wasn't funny, because it cost so much money. It was very displeasing.

Uwe Huber: Is it true that Michael Armstrong wrote the actual screenplay?

Joyce Hoven: No. My husband and Friedrich Schnitzer wrote and worked on it for months. My husband wasn't a screenwriter, but he knew what he wanted to show. An acquaintance of him, Friedrich Schnitzer, who was a screenwriter, helped to conceptualise the film.

Uwe Huber: Adrian Hoven was a Catholic, right?

Percy Hoven: Yes, my father came from a Catholic environment, he went to a Catholic school in Vienna. I just recently re-read some of his letters: for him, the world was divided by Catholicism, communism and capitalism. He was very God-fearing, and, in his way, he came to terms with the Catholic madness in *Mark of the Devil* with which he was preoccupied. I think especially because of the serious illness he had to deal with and the horror of the German campaign in Russia, one's membrane becomes extremely thin and occasionally, one looks through the membrane and tries to orientate oneself. Ultimately, only faith in God helps, and that's what he actually had. He had to come to terms with Catholicism, and that's why the film is such an accusation of the Catholic Church.

Uwe Huber: Why did Adrian Hoven decide to deal with the topic again after *Mark of the Devil*?

Joyce Hoven: Because the film made so much money in America, he wanted to delve even deeper into the subject matter. There was so much more historical material he was interested in. The Church knew very well how to pressurise people in order to take possession of their belongings. They were terrible times back then.

Uwe Huber: In the spring of 1971, the production of *Mark of the Devil Part II* commenced, in which Percy advanced to the position of the third leading actor. How did you feel when you received a major credit on the film poster next to Anton Diffring?

Percy Hoven: I didn't quite realise this, everything was just a matter of course. All of the people I had to do with were nice, and, as a little child, you don't sense the extent of the project. The goal was to acquire the second bicycle, that's what it was all about, a yellow Bonanza bike. Actually, in hindsight this is a case for a lawyer! (laughs) You don't realise it, there are

so many nice people around you, you do it, because daddy likes it, mummy is with you, there's a beautiful hotel with a lovely swimming pool, and at night everybody sits together, and I got a little knife as a present ...

Joyce Hoven: It wasn't a present.

Percy Hoven: What? (laughs)

Joyce Hoven: One night, Percy came to the table and carried a little knife. My husband said: "What's that?" "Oh, I bought a knife down at the hotel shop." My husband: "Where did you get the money from?" "I took it from your wallet." "You're not a thief! Take back the knife." Percy didn't want to do that and left. My husband said: "We have to discipline him!" When we came to our hotel room later, there was the money on his bedside table. So my husband asked Percy: "How did you get the money?" "I took it from mummy's wallet." Then my husband said: "We have a nice child, but he has it in his blood, he'll become a criminal!" (laughs)

Percy Hoven: And actually, I became an investment banker. (laughs) For five years! But then I quit. But to get back to the main topic, in

hindsight, it's very strange for me to see myself as a leading actor. I didn't realise that this was work, it just simply happened. I loved the stuntmen, they were Frenchmen, and one of them lent me a beautiful knife, which I had to give back to him, and then I bought the small knife at the hotel.

Uwe Huber: In the cast of the sequel, there were friends of the family involved: Reggie Nalder again, and a good substitute for Herbert Lom, Anton Diffring.

Joyce Hoven: He was an amazing person, a real gentleman. During the war, he and his twin sister had to flee to the UK. His family, who were from Berlin, owned investments in Hertie, a major chain of department stores, and were bought out with a lot of money after the war. Tony would have never had to work again. He and his sister received a huge share, as their parents didn't survive. Tony was unlucky in being very blonde, he told me: "You won't believe it, but I have to play Heydrich, how come that I have to play Heydrich?"³ He played the part very well by the way. Tony always had

to play Nazis. After all, he found it quite interesting, but wasn't completely happy with it.

Uwe Huber: And again, in *Mark of the Devil Part II* the villains aren't punished. Did Adrian like them so much that he let them escape?

Joyce Hoven: That's because it was like this in real life. They weren't brought to justice.

Uwe Huber: The witches are burned, but Percy, you also had a little accident involving fire.

Percy Hoven: Well, we had a little explosion on the set. There was a scene with a witch who uses herbs to cure my knee injury. While I ran out of her hut, there was an explosion, and one of the stuntmen wrapped me up in a blanket. Ernst Kalinke, the director of photography, was hurt by a spark hitting his eye and was very upset. That's when I realised something was wrong. My father gave a bit of money to the man who 'saved' me, because he was so glad that nothing had happened.

Uwe Huber: To what extent were Adrian Hoven's films successful?

Joyce Hoven: It was always an all-or-nothing gamble. There were films that earned more and ones that earned less. You always have to take a

risk, but, of course, there's a lot of money involved. We would either have huge sums in our bank account – nevertheless, he was very economical, maybe he was used to that – or nothing at all. That's common in such a profession.

Percy Hoven: Like a ketchup bottle – either you get nothing or everything at once. (laughs)

Uwe Huber: What about *The Erotic Adventures of Siegfried* (*Siegfried und das sagenhafte Liebesleben der Nibelungen*, Adrian Hoven, 1971)?

Joyce Hoven: Also, that one didn't make that much money.

Uwe Huber: I'd like to mention another film, and nobody is aware of it. Interestingly, for *Hot and Sexy* (*Bademeister-Report*, Adrian Hoven, 1973), Adrian Hoven used the pseudonym Sergio Casstner, which Michael Armstrong had used for the screenplay of *Mark of the Devil*. I wonder whether he wanted to let the audience think that Armstrong made *Hot and Sexy*? (laughs)

Joyce Hoven: When making *Mark of the Devil*, my husband was just so happy when Armstrong

waltzed off to London, because it was such a disaster. I can remember, when Armstrong said he'd have a nervous breakdown, Olivera Vučo, an Italian of Serbian descent, always responded: "So you're having a nervous breakdown?"

Lovely, go to the hotel to your room and have it all to yourself." (laughs)

Uwe Huber: Michael Armstrong blamed Adrian Hoven for wanting to direct the film himself, but actually he didn't want to because of his difficult state of health.

Joyce Hoven: My husband had a problem with his heart, he didn't plan to direct the movie, because producing alone was extremely exhausting ... with all these monies involved which had to be administrated accurately. One person is in charge of the finances, another is the coordinator, but the director and the director of photography have to be independent from organisational matters in order to focus on the artistic aspect. It was a catastrophe, to put it mildly.

Uwe Huber: Usually, Adrian Hoven made his films with the same group of people – Janine Reynaud, Michel Lemoine, Jess Franco; for

example *Appointment with Lust, Sadist Erotica* (*Rote Lippen, Sadisterotica*, Jess Franco, 1969), *Kiss Me Monster* (*Bésame monstruo*, Jess Franco, 1969) ...

Joyce Hoven: Eventually, he became ill on account of his heart and he couldn't go on. He had his first heart attack in his early forties. In the long run, making films became too exhausting. Then Rainer Werner Fassbinder used to ring him asking him to work together. For him, this was a way to get out of his usual genre, which he enjoyed very much. Fassbinder had his own team, he could be extremely difficult, but, then again, very kind.

Uwe Huber: Adrian Hoven started to make *Mark of the Devil Part II* in spring 1971 – Percy, I think you were a witness to this – and then the heart attack occurred.

Percy Hoven: Yes, I had experienced this before in my family, my uncle had had a heart attack recently. We were having lunch with a group of people and my father said: “I feel such a terrible burning in my chest.” I, as a little boy, said: “Oh yes, daddy, you'll have a heart attack

soon.” Huge laughter at the table. But that's what happened anyway.

Joyce Hoven: We had to keep this a secret. He was brought to the ear, nose and throat department of the Nymphenburg clinic in Munich, so that nobody would know he had a heart problem. Otherwise, he wouldn't be covered by insurance for the next film. Every production required insurance which testified that you were healthy and would make it through the shooting, otherwise, you wouldn't be paid. With such a problem, your whole life changes, as you have to deal with the illness a lot.

Uwe Huber: So the production of *Mark of the Devil Part II* paused for a year and then it was re-cast.

Joyce Hoven: Yes, indeed, it had to be completed a year later. My husband also thought about a third part of the series, but he knew that he couldn't make it through a new film, the doctors told him to give himself a break, to change his lifestyle. He had never lived excessively, but if you have a heart attack once, you're in danger. Once in a while, he would

disappear into rehab at the Tegernsee to recover.

But every time you feel your heart, you're

scared to death. Ultimately, he died at the

Tegernsee in rehab on a heavy *Föhn* day.⁴

¹ Joseph Goebbels was the minister of propaganda of Nazi Germany and a close associate of Adolf Hitler.

² Most likely, Joyce Hoven is referring to *The Haunted House of Horror* (Michael Armstrong, 1969).

³ Reinhard Heydrich was a high-ranking Nazi official who played a key role in the organisation of the Holocaust. Diffing played Heydrich twice, once in

the 1965 episode "Geld, Geld, Geld" of the TV series *Interpol* (1963–1967) and later in the theatrically released film *Operation: Daybreak* (Lewis Gilbert, 1975).

⁴ The *Föhn* is a warm wind that occurs in the lee of mountain ranges, and is often thought to cause ill-health.