

Thursday April 25th 2024

Aguirre, the Wrath of God

(Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes)

West Germany/Mexico 1972 95mins Cert PG

Widely known for *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974), *Heart of Glass* (1976) & *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (1970), German writer-director Werner Herzog's *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* is his most intense and powerful film - a visually stunning masterpiece and surreal adventure. Filmed on location in Peru and based on the somewhat fanciful journals of Brother Gaspar de Carvajal, the story resurrects the 16th-century megalomaniac dream of a motley band of Spanish conquistadors and their doomed journey along a jungle river as they seek El Dorado, the mythical City of Gold. It plays out as a brutally strange footnote to the history of the Spanish conquests - despite accurately following the recorded historical events.

Set in December 1560 in the heart of the Amazon jungle, the film opens with a magnificent shot of the ant-like army of conquistadors descending a steep narrow path in the Andes, led by Gonzalo Pizarro who has come to find El Dorado for Spain and bring Christianity to the natives. He has brought with him cannons, caged chickens, Indian slave porters and all the arrogance of his civilised world - as anyone not a Christian is looked down upon as a barbaric heathen.

Misfortune soon follows as one of the expedition's rafts is lost and Lope de Aguirre (Klaus Kinski) ruthlessly sabotages second in command Pedro de Ursua (Ruy Guerra) by overriding his orders. When Ursua orders the expedition to march back and join Pizarro, Aguirre rebels and persuades the men to follow him in his insane search for El Dorado.

Klaus Kinski's acting in the role of Aguirre demonstrates his great screen presence - reflecting evil simply by the way he slumps down and struts when walking to and fro on the raft. He characterises perfectly the ego-maniacal madman obsessed with wealth, power and fame, who plans to marry his daughter and start a new heroic dynasty that would populate this unexplored land. In a once in a lifetime role, Kinski inhabits the part with an intense portrayal of hypnotically primeval, evil instincts which, despite the well documented confrontations between him and director Herzog, gave on-screen results that were stupendous. *Aguirre* was first of five future collaborations between the two (namely *Woyzeck* (1979), *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979), *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) and *Cobra Verde* (1987)) but none of them reached the heights of intensity of *The Wrath of God*.

Herzog's brilliant and visionary film effectively debunks the pseudo-altruistic historical claims of the Spanish conquerors as a sham, showing their real intentions to be based on greed, narcissism and empire building - and, famously unique as a writer-director and film maker, he does it in a manner that is not likely to be ever forgotten.

A lively soundtrack is provided by German rock band Popol Vuh, who took their name from a Mayan creation myth. Just as the opening scene is legendary, so the closing section is equally remarkable. It has the madman Aguirre, already meeting his doom, standing, in his mind victoriously, alone on a raft overrun by monkeys and still mouthing the gibberish of a hateful, insane dreamer.

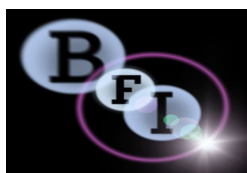
Acknowledgments: Dennis Schwartz, dennis.schwartz.com

Leading Players

Klaus Kinski	Don Lope de Aguirre
Helena Rojo	Inez de Atienza
Del Negro	Brother Caspar de Carvajal
Ruy Guerra	Don Pedro de Ursua
Peter Berling	Don Fernando de Guzman

Production Credits

Director	Werner Herzog
Producers	Werner Herzog, Hans Prescher + 2 others
Screenplay	Werner Herzog
Cinematography	Thomas Mauch
Original Music	Popol Vuh



ABCD Film Society
The Guildhall, Bridge Street
Abingdon OX14 3HU
<https://abfilms.org.uk>

**CINEMA
FOR ALL**