

# German filmmaker eyes America

By Mary Wade Burnside  
STAFF WRITER

After spending a few weeks film festival hopping from Portugal to Chicago, German filmmaker Oliver Herbrich took a week off in San Francisco to visit his sister.

But the prolific director, who has begun to receive international recognition at age 29, will get back in the swing at 7 p.m. today, when he presents two of his films at the West Virginia International Film Festival.

"The big festivals are a bigger deal, but I appreciate more the small ones," Herbrich said in a telephone interview from San Francisco. "At the big ones, like Cannes or Berlin or Moscow, you can make business, but you can't get involved with the people living in the town."

During his first visit to West Virginia, he hopes to get a chance to walk around and get a feel for the place. "I like to get the different point of view wherever I go."

Charleston residents should get the

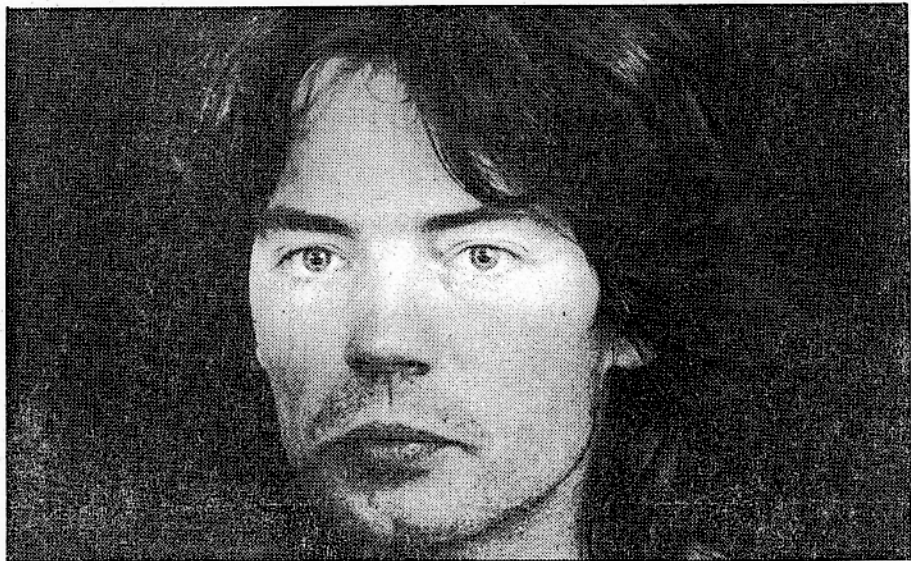
opportunity to see a different kind of film during tonight's festival offering. The first film, Herbrich's most recent work called "Earthbound," has won three major awards and tells the story of an old man in a psychiatric hospital who eventually recovers enough to build a flying machine.

"'Earthbound' is an authentic story," he said. "There really was a man who lived through the Third Reich who got put in a mental asylum, and he was forgotten there for over 30 years."

Herbrich refers often to the Third Reich, but does not believe the Holocaust has affected his work very much. "My father was born in 1940, so he was a child when the war ended," he said.

Instead, he expects the recent German reunification to affect his work, and even more so, the upcoming 1992 unified European market. Herbrich said the move should give more financial freedom to German filmmaking.

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Gazette photo by JERRY HARRIS

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German filmmaker Oliver Herbrich

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ers, who do not receive as much backing from their government as do their counterparts in France and England.

"That's really what will be good in terms of business," he said. "We'll be able to satisfy a greater market."

As for how the reunification will affect filmmaking, Herbrich does not see too many changes. Germany still does not have many deutsche marks to give to filmmakers. The topic came up among German filmmakers at the recent Chicago film festival.

"Most of them were just waiting to see what will happen. Things are turning around so quickly," Herbrich said. "Most people are just looking at it now, but everybody wants to make something on the subject."

Except perhaps for Herbrich, who has been exploring the world of freaks for his next topic. "I want to do a film here in America, of people working in circuses," he said. "It seems after some research, we've found that more or less they don't exist anymore. Our next step will be to go into the

past and see what the archives offer."

Subjects exploring a darker side fascinate Herbrich, whose first film at age 18 dramatized the life of a 19th century Bavarian Robin Hood. He made the film while he attended college for two years to study film and television.

"I'm most interested in people living on the edge of society, criminals, the insane, something like that," he said.

He also likes to alternate between making documentaries and feature films. "With fiction films, you have perfect control over everything. You decide the interior, the clothing, the actors and what they're going to talk about. But I also like making documentary films."

Both "Earthbound" and "Wodzek," the second feature to be shown tonight, fall under the feature film category. "Wodzek" comes from a play by Georg Buchner about a factory worker whose monotonous life eventually leads him to commit murder.

"It deals with the relationship between society and the individual," he said. "Society turns out a

very poor soldier who murders his wife, but he didn't seem to have another choice."

In a country with no major studios, where most directors shoot their films on location out of necessity, Herbrich runs a camera equipment business to get by financially. He made his first film for about \$30,000. "Earthbound" cost less than \$1 million.

But America's film industry, which spends millions of dollars to produce "Batman" and "Ghostbusters," does not anger him. He also believes Germans would prefer to see big blockbusters than small films made in their own country.

"It's really different in France, where people just go to the movies to see what's presented," he said. "They have about 200 cinemas and it's part of their cultural life. In Germany, people go to movies which are most successful."



## EARTHBOUND

*Erdenschwer*

Director: Oliver Herbrich

*Variety* touts this film has "wit charm and substance". Hanna Frey (Vera Tischechowa) is the outgoing director of a mental institution and feels herself going crazy because spends all her time with crazy people. This can be termed a psychosomatic "disease of association". Dr. Frank (Rudiger Vogler) is her successor. Both are consumed with the case of 75 year old Franz Seeliger (Hannes Thanheiser), the earthbound flyer. Franz, is consumed

with thoughts about flying. His only dream is to take off with a self-built, muscle-propelled flying machine and fly over the trees from one village to another. Franz is a perfect case study for Dr. Frank. Yet Dr. Frank himself also proves to be something of a case study—for Hanna—as they become romantically involved. Clever, and humorous, this first feature by Oliver Herbrich has is a true "gem". 94 minutes. German with English subtitles.

**Erdenschwer  
(Earthbound)  
(WEST GERMAN)**

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**Berlin** An Oliver Herbrich and WDR tv coproduction with Calypso Film of Cologne. Directed by Oliver Herbrich. Screenplay, Herbrich, Andreas Hamburger; dialog author, Friedemann Schulz; camera (color), Ludolph Weyer; editor, Romy Schumann; music, Hannes Thanheiser; sound, Gerd Metz; art direction, Tobias Siemsen, Gerald Darnowsky. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival, (New German Films), Feb. 16, 1990. Running time: 94 MIN.

Franz Seeliger. . . . . Hannes Thanheiser  
Hanna Frey. . . . . Vera Tschechowa  
Dr. Frank. . . . . Rüdiger Vogler  
Head doctor. . . . . Hark Böhm  
Brittle man. . . . . Peter Radtke  
Circus director. . . . . Alfred Edel  
Young Seeliger. . . . . Martin Abram  
Midgit. . . . . Alida Pisu

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■ **This gem of a first feature by 28-year-old Oliver Herbrich bodes well for the future. Pic has wit, charm and substance. German tv execs in search of directing talent will be looking his way.**

The plot itself — a pinch of “One Flew Over The Cuckoo’s Nest” and a dash of “King of Hearts” — is hardly new, but Herbrich seems in firm control of his strong cast.

Vera Tschechowa is tops as the mental institution director who is going crazy being stuck with crazy people all the time. Hannes Thanheiser is a delight as the octogenarian who is convinced he can fly, and who helps the frau doctor loosen the fetters which keep her “earthbound.”

Tech credits above average for this low-budgeter. — *Gill*.