



HEIDI is a Fourth Quarter 2018 LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.

14 of a possible 20 points

*****1/2 of a possible *******

Switzerland / Germany 2015 color 111 minutes subtitled / dubbed in English live action feature children's drama Claussen + Putz Filmproduktion GmbH / Studio Canal GmbH / Zodiac Pictures Ltd. / Omnibus Entertainment Producers: Reto Schaerli, Lukas Hobi, Uli Putz, Jakob Claussen, Rodolphe Buet, Kalle Friz, Isabel Hurd, Urs Fitze

**Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

Points:

- 1 Direction: Alain Gsponer**
- 1 Editing: Michael Schaerer**
- 2 Cinematography: Matthias Fleischer**
Stills Photography: Walter Wehner
- 2 Lighting: Uwe Greiner**
Special Visual Effects: Nils Engler (Supervisor), Simone de Salvatore
- 1 Screenplay: Petra Volpe based on a novel by Johanna Spyri and its first continuation by Charles Tritten**
Script Supervision: Katrin Barden

- 2 Music: Niki Reiser*
- 2 Production Design: Christian Goldbeck
- Art Direction Supervision: Georg Bringolf, Daniel Chour
- Set Design: Stefan Speth*
- Set Decoration: Eva Stiebler
- Set Dressing: Martina Baumgartner, Ron Büttner, Klaus Eckmann,
Sarah Hesse, Helko Klünder, Bettina Saul, Max Schindler,
Christoph Sieber, David Thummerer
- Props: Arndt Kühne, Johannes Pfaller
- Costume Design: Anke Winckler
- Makeup & Hair Design: Georg Korpas (Head) and Juliane Hübner
- 2 Sound Design and Sound Editing Supervision: Sebastian Schmidt*
- Sound Effects: Martin Langenbach, Christoph Wieczorek
- Sound Mixing: Marco Teufen, Olaf Mehl
- Casting Direction: Corinna Glaus, Daniele Tolkien
- 1 Acting
- 0 Creativity
- 14 total points

Cast: Anuk Steffen (j) (Heidi), Bruno Ganz (Grandfather), Isabelle Ottmann (j) (Klara Sesemann), Quirin Agrippi (j) (Peter), Katharina Schüttler (Fraulein Rottenmeier), Hannelore Hoger* (Grandmother Sesemann), Maxim Mehmet (Herr Sesemann), Peter Lohmeyer (Sebastian), Anna Schinz (Dete, Heidi's Aunt), Jella Haase (Tinette, the French maid), Lilian Naef (Barbel, woman talking to Dete), Peter Jecklin (Pastor), Christoph Gaugler (Dairyman), Rebecca Indermaus (Peter's Mother, Bridget), Monica Gubser (Grandmother of Peter), Arthur Bühler (Dörfler), Marietta Jemmi (Woman in Dorfli), Michael Kranz (Herr Kandidat, Klara's tutor), Laura Parker (Market Woman), Marchus Hering (Dr. Classen), others

Though still not the definitive film adaptation of Johanna Spyri's *Heidi* novel and its initial sequel written by Charles Tritten, Alain Gsponer's recent version does at least offer a properly youthful and naïve heroine. Its chief novelty lies in Dorfli schoolroom scenes. In one of those, Heidi announces her intention of becoming a teacher, an aspiration not declared in the original book. Otherwise,

the screenplay rehashes familiar territory, frequently meandering into buffoonery, particularly in scenes involving butler Sebastian and housekeeper Fraulein Rottenmeier, the latter named most fittingly.

Orphan Heidi, cared for by an aunt in domestic service, is five years old when the story begins and a drag on career ambitions of her guardian. So Dete hauls her up to the isolated Alpine home of Heidi's paternal grandfather, a recluse who has turned his back on the people and church of Dorfli. Grandfather has also washed his hands of any obligation towards a granddaughter who probably wouldn't be happy living in bachelor digs anyway. He's perturbed and wrathful when a niece who otherwise keeps her distance suddenly shows up on a whirlwind mission, leaving a child to his tender mercies while she speeds off to Frankfurt, Germany and its waiting salary increase.

Spurned by both surviving relatives, the lonely dependent new arrival betakes herself to a barn, Spyri's rather heavy-handed analogy to the infant Jesus story. Of course, Heidi is no baby and can manage some things for herself. Finding suitable nourishment and learning to read don't appear to be among those successes. With nowhere else to go short of a trip to the local orphanage, the girl elects instead to hang out at Grandpa's, hoping for a change in her elder's disposition.

Which of course will occur, her own character being irresistibly sunny and upbeat, two qualities not completely communicated by Anuk Steffen in her film debut. Needing to be as irresistibly charming as Shirley Temple, though not necessarily a terpsichorean adept or pint-size prima donna, Anuk settles for being comfortably inquisitive and only moderately endearing. In the original German she shines somewhat brighter, being able to deliver speeches in her native tongue. The English dubbing unfortunately serves to aggravate the child's helplessness by preserving queries while omitting peremptory announcements, making her more passive than the author intended.

Bruno Ganz, whose hearty physique embodies fully the rugged robustness of Grandfather, is less convincing in an emotional turnaround from haughty disinheritance to doting accommodation. In the novel, he's a paragon of the "tough love" philosophy, mixing it with Rousseau's unstructured approach to basic education. Unlike the local cleric, who urges placing Heidi under the daytime management of Dorfli's schoolmaster, a stern disciplinarian with no inclination to encourage cultural development and advancement in students, he

abdicates any responsibility for social training in favor of goatherd Peter's assumption of that task. The girl is permitted to become a veritable hoyden, perhaps fulfilling some childhood wish of the author's to break free of oppressive traditional gender roles. If Peter despises reading, she will follow suit. For he is older and ought to know what's best. Grandfather isn't promoting education either, claiming winter travel to and from school would be dangerous and deforming. He's keen on keeping the girl as unacquainted as possible with hamlet gossip, much of it painting him in demonic or villainous colors.

Into this world of pastoral ignorance Dete again intrudes, seizing upon her niece as a useful bargaining chip in negotiations with the patrician Sesemann family, who have an invalid daughter the Swiss domestic asserts is about Heidi's age. The unspoiled, young foreigner would be a perfect companion and playmate for lonely Clara Sesemann. At least, according to her. As usual, Heidi's preferences are discounted. The rural innocent is effectively kidnapped, an obtuse Peter being easily outwitted by adult prevarications and Grandfather, as usual, being too remotely placed for intervention.

Quirin Agrippi's singularly unappealing Peter is presented throughout the melodrama as selfish, crude, ignorant, sneaky, and swinish. There are no indications he sees in Heidi anything more than a steady source of free grub. She's also someone to boss around with impunity, a verbal punching bag on which to unload resentment after Grandfather's frequent scoldings about shortcomings. Of which Peter has more than a few.

Fortunately for her, Heidi is removed from his bullying ministrations and taken to Frankfurt, Germany. But not before meeting Peter's blind grandmother, whose inability to read the Bible for herself is actually the traveler's chief prod to acquire literacy. This instigating cause is eradicated in Gsponer's film, which substitutes a far less credible laissez-faire combination of picture book and oral storytelling with suspended conclusion to explain how the heroine finally teaches herself to decode words, a process which has presumably been delayed by Herr Kandidat's rote memorization tutorials. In the meantime, his charge pines for a return to Grandfather and Peter's Grandmother, both easily explicable, and reunion with Peter, far less so. She begins, in her unhappiness, to dream about remembered scenes from a native land now invisible. This leads to sleepwalking, a risky condition which could ultimately prove fatal. Herr Sesemann, his daughter Klara, and Fraulein

Rottenmeier can and will tolerate such a state of affairs. But the Sesemann family physician and Herr Sesemann's mother are wiser. They know their involuntary emigrant must be returned to beloved lofty pastures as soon as possible. That decision rankles the paterfamilias and a pampered homebound princess whose egocentricity spills over into direct animosity towards her houseguest.

Will Heidi be stuck in what has become a prison to her? Or will she get liberated and return to a healthier environment? Borrow the dvd from the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library and find out for yourself.

Most of the cast is no more than adequate in their performances, the sole notable exception being Hannelore Hoger as Grandmother Sesemann, whose amiable, soft-spoken, welcoming personality contrasts sharply with exaggerated poses and gesticulations of other Sesemanns and their servants. Isabelle Ottmann's Klara displays too little solicitude for her junior playmate, though angry recriminations against a homesick malcontent are certainly convincing enough. Maxim Mehmet's Herr Sesemann is an unbelievably incompetent petty dictator. His decisions to hire Fraulein Rottenmeier and time-serving Herr Kandidat, while ignoring sensible advice of Dr. Klassen and challenging wisdom of his mother, indicate a weak, bumbling character far removed from the prudent, if somewhat overprotective parent delineated by *Heidi's* creator.

However, the cinematography and music are delightful and, like the sound recording, expertly crafted, providing much-needed scope and liveliness. Lighting captures changing shapes of shadows while maximizing luminosity. It does complete justice to interiors and uplands. Period decorations seem harmonious with the era depicted, equally suggestive of Victorian stuffiness and gloriously radiant natural environs. Especially authoritative are the cottage and outbuilding sets used.

Quite satisfactory as children's film fare, the current production of *Heidi* is acceptably literate for adults, if falling considerably short of memorable classic status. There is nothing in the presentation which families should find offensive, even for watchers of preschool ages. Just be sure to use the English language option for child viewers.

Film Movement's dvd release of this heart-warmer lacks any bonus materials. So how much it will be enjoyed will vary according to individual viewer responses to the feature film itself.