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Alexandra Maria Lara learns how to “see” with her ears

The film *Imagine* shows how blind people perceive the world without posing as an expert or playing on people’s emotions. It also shows another aspect: sighted people interacting with blind people.

(caption beneath the photo) Ian is blind, but he seems to be able to see with his ears. He is hired by a world-renowned clinic. What opens up in front of his patients is a completely new way of seeing the world.

Able-bodied people often console themselves with the fact that less able people have different gifts: Sigmund Freud stated that having a club foot increases the ability to feel happiness. Someone who has problems with their hands can develop amazing skill with their feet. And common wisdom claims that the blind see better with the soul. Director Andrzej Jakimowski offers a story that brings together melancholy and optimism in a special way to people who salve their consciences like that.

His film *Imagine* begins from the perspective of the “other”. While the image shows a blurred contrast between light and dark that initially disorients the viewer, we hear a dog panting. The image then comes into focus and our eyes are presented with the courtyard of a state institution. A door is opened. “Did you knock?” asks the person who opens the door. “No. There was no one around to let me in,” answers the one who enters.

The audience intuitively knows that the newcomer is blind, although his confidence with perceiving with his senses is much greater than sighted people.

The director isn’t a know-all

Ian’s job is to teach a group of students at a state institution how to move around their surroundings without relying on the sense of sight. They are keen to use the sense of touch to get to know their new teacher better. He, however, forces them to keep their distance. He asks them to stay in their places and strain their noses and ears. The students themselves discover how much they can find out like that.

Imagine shows us very well how much one can deduce from the tone of voice when Ian challenges the shy Eva (Alexandra Maria Lara) to take a walk around the city. She manages to avoid all the hazards of the traffic by using her sharpened sense of hearing. However, when they want to go to a café to celebrate their outing, a new danger appears; the other sighted people. It quickly turns out that men begin to chat up the beautiful Eva.

The truth is that the blind hear much more than the sighted expect; for example a ship sailing out of a distant port. *Imagine* is like tuition for the audience. It manages to avoid being too clever and doesn’t appeal to lofty sentiments. Edward Hogg’s performance gives the character of Ian an impenetrability that rules out any traces of kitsch. At the end it’s an invitation to everyone; to listen and look more attentively.