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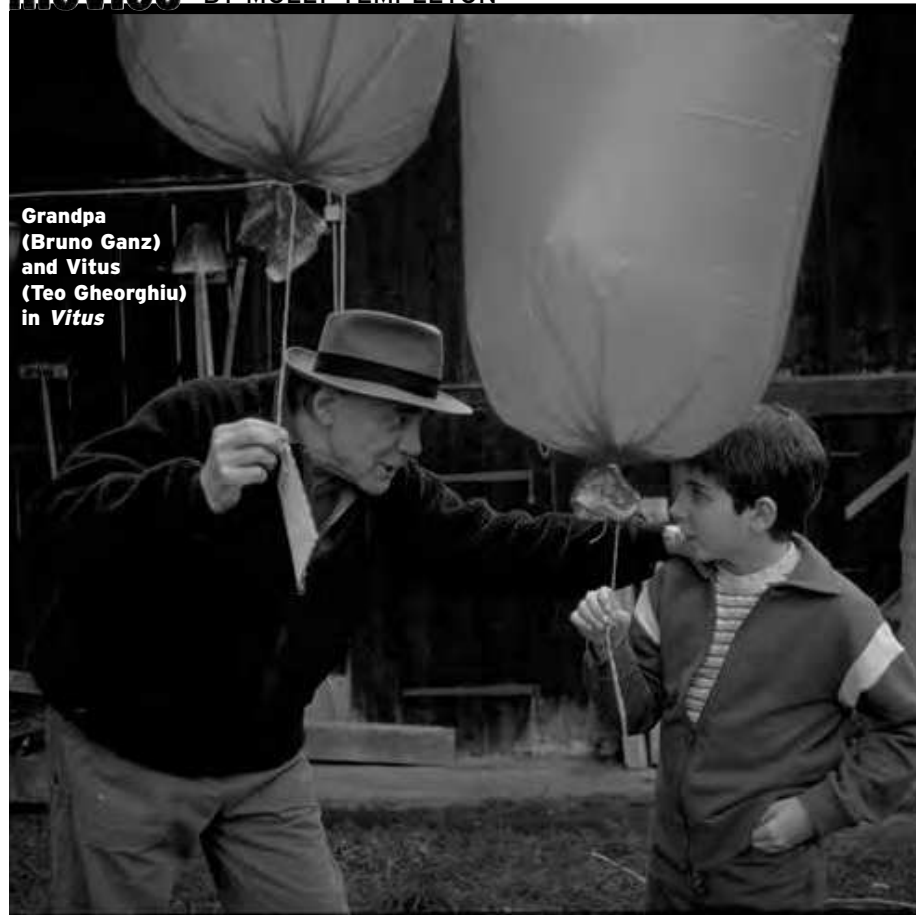
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Our Energy Management and Renewable Energy Technician programs are funded by **EWEB**



movies BY MOLLY TEMPLETON



Grandpa (Bruno Ganz) and Vitus (Teo Gheorghiu) in Vitus

This Movie Doesn't Dance

Child prodigy flick goes awry

VITUS: Directed by Fredi M. Murer. Written by Peter Luisi, Fredi M. Murer and Lukas B. Suter. Starring Fabrizio Borsani, Teo Gheorghiu, Julika Jenkins, Urs Jucker, Bruno Ganz and Eleni Haupt. Sony Pictures Classics, 2007. PG. 117 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

Vitus, a film about the difficulties of being or raising an (often eerily self-possessed) child prodigy who wants to be normal, set my teeth a little on edge. It's not the fault of the two lads who play the title character — Fabrizio Borsani at age six and Teo Gheorghiu at age 12 — but of the filmmakers, who seem to hold out Vitus' story limply in one hand, asking for us to feel uplifted by his tale without offering any real reason to feel any way at all.

A meandering almost-two-hours long, *Vitus* begins with Vitus as a very small boy who wants a real piano. One simply appears before long, and it becomes clear that the clever child, who looks up big words in the dictionary and reads to his classmates about global warming, is not only brilliant but also something of a prodigy at the keys. So long as he gets what he wants, anyway. Take away the babysitter on whom young Vitus has a crush, and he'll throw books off shelves and lock his parents out of the apartment. Later, he refuses to play on command, resisting the attempts of his mother, Helen (Julika Jenkins), to stage-mother him to greatness. At Grandpa's (Bruno Ganz), Vitus relaxes, sharing his grandpappy's fascination with flight, but Mom intrudes again.

Eventually, slowly, Vitus ages into a 12-year-old, still resisting his mother's efforts to settle him at the piano. And then, a strange miracle occurs: Vitus falls from a

balcony but lands without a visible injury; only his brain suffers. He becomes normal, and with normality comes niceness. The formerly stiff, snotty boy hugs his mother and appears to make friends with a kid in his new, normal class. But a pretty scene shows that music still separates Vitus from those around him. It's not hip hop playing in his headphones.

Only Grandpa can be trusted with Vitus' secret, which is handy, since it's Grandpa who confides in Vitus that his finances are troubled. So is Vitus' father's workplace, and the boy manipulates these two pieces of information into a brilliant scheme of questionable legality. Money buys freedom and confidence for the 12-year-old, who can indulge his own whims and secretly make his family happier — quite a change from locking Mom out of the house (though you might notice it's understanding Dad who gets the direct benefits of Vitus' scheme; the character of his mother, who quits her job to take care of the boy, is composed primarily of her reactions to the males around her).

Vitus' growth from a selfish child into a loving tween who accepts himself and his talents is hard to see on the mild face of real-life pianist Gheorghiu. *Vitus* moves sedately from one nice family home to a nicer one, stopping here and there to admire the countryside or the numerous cranes outside a window but forgetting to find depth in its characters, who are neither sympathetic enough nor full enough to hold our interest and attention. If you're smart enough, *Vitus* suggests, you'll find a way to make a ton of cash, and that will help you find yourself. Otherwise? You'd best hope you've got a prodigy in the family.

Vitus opens Friday, Aug. 24, at the Bijou.

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