

Document Citation

Title	Russian ark
Author(s)	Deborah Young
Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	2002 Jun 03
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Russkij kovcheg (Russian ark), Sokurov, Aleksandr, 2002

CANNES

RUSSIAN ARK

(RUSSKI KOVCHEG)

(RUSSIA-GERMANY)

A Hermitage Bridge Studio/Egoli Tos-sell Film co-production. (International sales: Celluloid Dreams, Paris.) Produced by Andrei Deriabin, Jens Meurer, Karsten Stoter.

Directed by Alexander Sokurov. Screen-play by Anatoly Nikiforov, Sokurov, Boris Khaimsky, Svetlana Proskurina. Camera (color, HD to 35m) and steadicam operator, Tilman Buttner; music, Sergei Yev-tushenko; production designers, Yelena Zhukova, Natalia Kochergina; costume de-signers, Lidiya Kriukova, Tamara Sefer-yan, Maria Grishanova; sound (Dolby), Vladimir Persov, Sergei Moshkov; casting, Tatiana Komarova. **Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (competing)**, May 21, 2002. Running time: 95 MIN.

The Marquis Sergei Dreiden
Catherine the Great Maria Kuznetsova
Spy Leonid Mozgovoy
Orbeli David Giorgobiani
Boris Piotrovsky Alexander Chaban
Peter the Great Maxim Sergeyev

By DEBORAH YOUNG

No one familiar with the severe, intellectual films of helmer Alexander Sokurov can imagine the dazzling opulence that explodes in "Russian Ark," a dreamlike journey through Russian and European culture over the last three centuries that will win this difficult director festival kudos and larger audiences. They still will be a cultivated lot, however, the kind willing to spend an hour and a half of imaginative time inside St. Petersburg's Hermitage museum, where the action takes place. Critical opinion, divided by the patience-straining slowness of his earlier work up to "Mother and Son," is likely to be much more unified and should help the film over an initial distribution hump.

The Russian-German co-production seems destined to go down in film history as a technical tour de force. Not only is it the first feature-length film to be shot in one single take using an HD digital video camera suspended on a Steadicam, but it performs this feat moving through some 33 different rooms inside the Hermitage, in the midst of more than 2,000 extras in full historical costume.

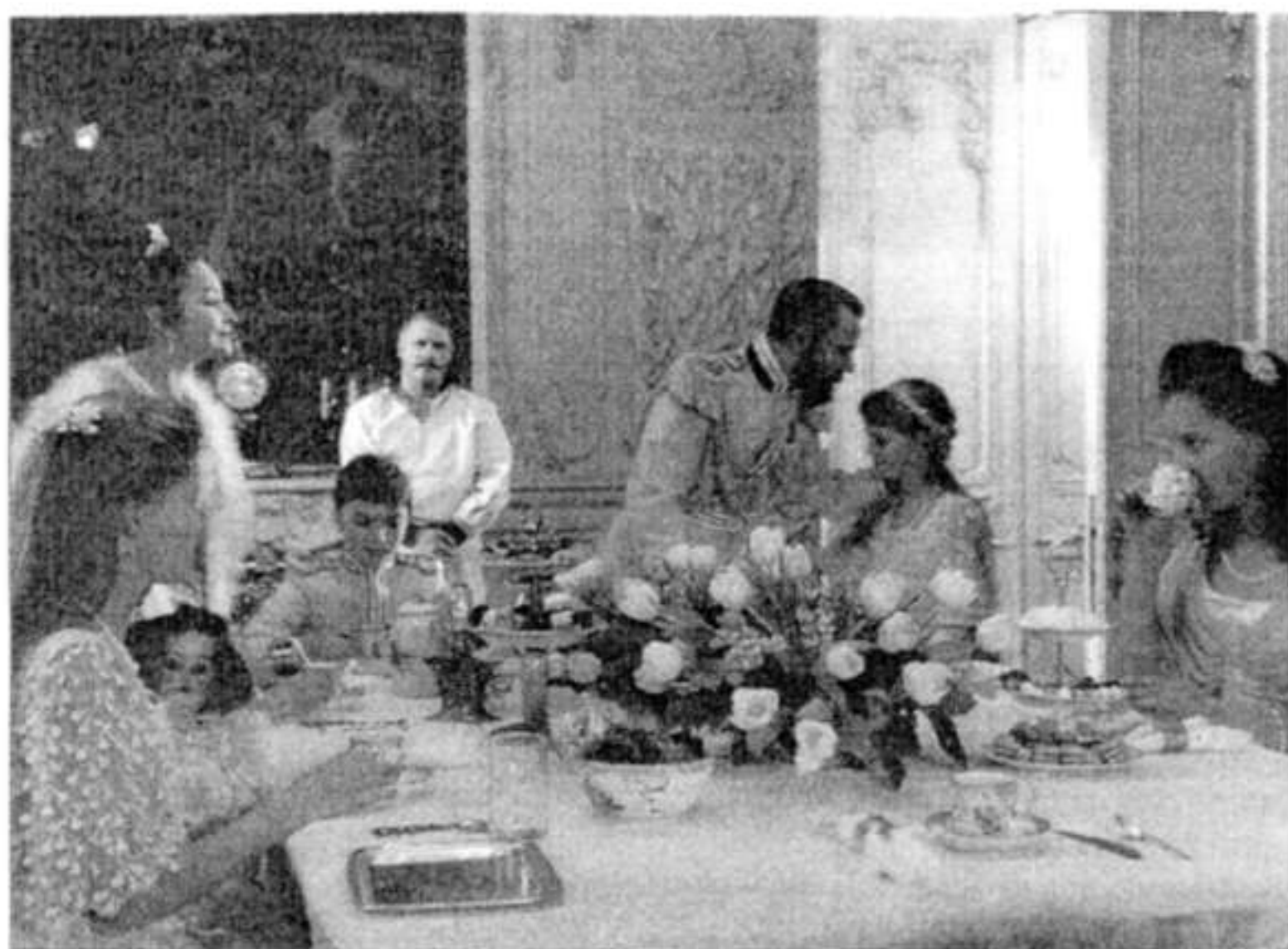
In lesser hands, a single 90-minute take would undoubtedly become just an irritating gimmick; here, miraculously, it gives the film a magical visual style, recalling the way we glide through dreams — and videogames.

Pic's astounding production values make their own comment on the role high culture — architecture, painting, sculpture, theater and music — has played in European history.

A present-day narrator (never seen in the film) finds himself suddenly transported back to the Winter Palace (today's Hermitage) in the early 1700s. The place is filled with courtiers and fine ladies, uniformed officers and members of court. He soon joins forces with a French marquis (Sergei Dreiden), a 19th century diplomat also displaced in time.

Unlike the narrator, however, the Marquis is perfectly visible to the people around him and feels at ease interacting with them. He is guided through the dazzling painting and sculpture collection by a blind

Turn to next page



STORY ARK: *The Winter Palace (today's Hermitage) in the 1700s is the sumptuous setting for "Russian Ark."*

Continued from previous page

woman, a great art connoisseur. He wanders through the emperor's official reception for the Persian ambassador, and dances the mazurka with noble dames in the Great Nicholas Hall. The narrator and Marquis have brief, eerie encounters with historical personages like Catherine the Great and Nicholas & Alexandra and their children. Sokurov keeps the tone light, led by the Marquis' one-liners about culture.

A note of sadness also creeps in along with the memory of the great wars of the 20th century and the siege that cost the city (then known as Leningrad) 1 million lives. Yet Russian culture survived even this. Pic concludes with the reflection that "we're destined to sail along forever, to live forever."

As they wander the vast labyrinth of corridors, theaters and ballrooms, quietly underscored by Sergei Yevtushenko's music, the camera performs a non-stop dance beside them, setting a brisk, sometimes dizzy pace. Apart from some longeurs in the pic's first half, the rhythm established by the long take, obviously untouchable by any kind of editing, is surprisingly strong.

East German Steadicam operator Tilman Buttner ("Run, Lola, Run") earns a place in the cinematographers' hall of fame for his remarkable physical effort and stunning aesthetic results.

Vaunting enough pomp and pageantry (and extras) to remake "War and Peace," the pic owes a huge debt to production designers Yelena Zhukova and Natalia Kochergina and costume designers Lidiya Kriukova, Tamara Seferyan and Maria Grishanova.

**Russian-German
co-production
'Russian Ark'
seems destined
to go down in
film history as a
technical tour
de force.**