

## Document Citation

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A tale of gypsy love & jealousy, uxoricide & remorse in old Bessarabia, "a denunciation of the unnatural wickedness of vengeance", "a plea for anarchism", a glimpse "of Nemesis working as an inevitable law of nature".

Based on the poetic tragedy, Tsygàny ["Gypsies" (1824; 1827)] by Aleksàndr Ser-gèyevich Pùshkin (1799-1837) & the one-act opera, Alèko (1897), by Sergèi Vasilye-vich Rachmàninov (1873-1943). Screenplay by A. Abramov & G. Roshal.

Décor by A. Veksler & V. Volin. Dances: R. Gerbek.

Photographed in Agfacolor [Sovcolor] by A. Nazarov. Music by Sergei Rachmàninov. Sound recording: A. Shargorodsky.

Directed by Sergèi Sidekov. Produced as a three-dimensional film by G. Roshal for Lenfilm.

Distributed in Britain by Gala (60 mts.); in the United States by Artkino Pic-tures, Inc. 5432 ft.; 61 minutes on 16 mm.

First shown in New York at the Stanley Theatre, Saturday, 25 December 1954.

[C A S T]

- A. Ognivtsev--Alèko, a Russian nobleman--arrogant, jealous, sophisticated
- I. Zubkovskaya--Zemphyra, a gypsy wooed & won by Alèko, as free as the wind
- Mark Reizen--An old gypsy, her father
- S. Kuznetsov--A young gypsy, a freshman in the ways of love, Zemphyra's delight
- B. Zkatogorova--The old gypsy woman

[C O M M E N T A R Y]

Watching the obviously faithful reprise of Rachmàninoff's one-act opera, Alèko, the Western spectator can easily understand why the work remains less than hallowed over there & here. Handsomely tinted in Sovcolor by Lenfilm Productions, & superbly sung throughout, it emerges as a static, old-fashioned opera--& film--rigidly checked by footlight staging under Sergèi Sidekov, director. It also is long on recitative, short on melody.

Lenfilm cameras have shown a surprising lack of nimbleness, considering the ope-ra's brevity & its passionate text, which traces a tragic romantic triangle in the steppes. But the pulsations remain strictly vocal, as A. Ognivtsev, in the title role; M. Reizen, I. Zubkovskaya, S. Kuznetsov & the chorus ponderously thron-g a one-set background spiked with some realistic countryside glimpses. And they all sing wonderfully.

Still, the sound-track of this stilted curio should intrigue Rachmàninoff devo-tees as an index of the composer's simmering talent at 24. The Rimsky-Kòrsakov over-tones are obvious, but the orchestral colorations & many interludes are strikingly his own. Take the marvelous title aria, one tender lakeside duet of the young lovers & the opening lament by M. Reizen, by far the most distinguished voice. It all sounds wonderful, & unfortunately looks long & dull....--H. H. T. in The New York Times 104:35401 27 December 1954, p. 22.

Rachmàninov's one-act opera...seems to be a dull work rarely performed perhaps because of the excessively melodramatic & wholly unconvincing double murder, which, even by operatic libretti standards, must offer the singer-actors an unusually lurid task. The film version appears as an academically correct presentation, relieved partly by extensive outdoor shooting, but otherwise unrelentingly faithful to a te-dious operatic tradition. Constant references to the weather, with countless shots of varying skies, eventually produce the effect of a training film for meteorolo-gists. The standard of performance is stolidly professional, although some of the cast appear to have a very limited conception of the techniques of post-synchronisa-tion. The most interesting voice is that of Reizen, a fine Russian bass already fa-miliar to British audiences. The film was originally shown in Russia in 3-D, al-though there is little evidence in this flat version of standard three-dimensional tricks & techniques. Alèko, the film, is destined to take the place of Alèko, the opera; it is a collector's piece with limited appeal & little to justify wider re-cognition.--J. P. H. in the Monthly Film Bulletin of the British Film Institute Issue 254 22:31 March 1955.

Shown to members of the class in "Memorable European Films" (Series VIII) on Friday evening, 8 April 1960, at 7:45, in Room 102, Science Hall, on the downtown campus of the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee.