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THE SOVIET FILM

(September 25 - November 11, 1969)

Monday, September 29th, 1969 (2:00 and 5:30)

WINGS OF A SERF (KRYLYA KHOLOPA)* 1926. Produced by Sovkino, Moscow. Directed by Yuri Tarich. Scenario by Konstantin Schildkret, Victor Shklovsky, Yuri Tarich. Co-directed by Leonid Leonidov. Photography by Mikhail Vladimirsky. Design by Vladimir Yegorov. Edited by Esther Shub.

CAST:	Leonid M. Leonidov	Ivan IV
	I Klyukvin	Nikita, the Serf
	S. Garrel	Fima, his fiancée
	Safnat Askarova	Maria Temrioukovna, Ivan's second wife
	V. Korsh	Czarevitch Ivan
	Nikolai Prozorovsky	Fedor Basmanov
	N. Vitovtov	Prince Drutskoi
	I. Arkanov	Prince Kurliatov
	M. Makarov	Lupatov

NO ENGLISH TITLES.

Ca. 125 minutes.

Theatrical distribution in the U.S.A. by Artkino Pictures, Inc.

*Silent film, piano accompaniment by Charles Hofmann.

WINGS OF A SERF (also known as WINGS OF A PEASANT, WINGS OF A SLAVE, IVAN THE TERRIBLE, CZAR IVAN THE TERRIBLE)

SYNOPSIS

The Boyar Kurliatov raids the village of his neighbor, Lupatov, after the latter refuses to lend his serf Nikita, who is reputed to be clever with mechanical appliances. Kurliatov wants him to repair a clock, one of the first that found its way into Russia.

Kurliatov's raiders also bring along Nikita's bride, a peasant girl, Fima.

In Kurliatov's bondage, Nikita repairs the clock, and all of his spare moments he spends in testing the winged contrivance fashioned after the form of a bird, with which he intends to fly.

Nikita's tests with the flying machine are duly reported to Boyar Kurliatov who orders a severe flogging for Nikita and his bride Fima, accusing them of being in league with Satan.

While in church praying, Ivan the Terrible learns that Kurliatov has swooped down upon his neighbor, Lupatov, and carried away all his serfs. He orders Drutzkoi, captain of the guards, who has just returned from a 'gallant escapade' with the czarina, to bring Boyar Kurliatov immediately before him. The Czar's messengers, headed by Drutzkoi, arrive just in time during the flogging, and declaring Kurliatov's action an offense against the authority of the Czar, make it an excuse for wrecking the household of the old influential boyar whom his master, the Czar, wanted to eliminate.

The same day Boyar Kurliatov is brought before the Czar. Indignities are heaped upon him; finally presented with a jester's cap, he is ordered to dance and presently he is dispatched by Czar Ivan to his death.

In the Spinning Mill under the supervision of the Czarina is a spinning wheel, one of the proudest possessions that Czar Ivan has as it is the only spinning wheel in Russia. The wheel is broken. Czar Ivan is greatly annoyed at having no one to repair it. It is suggested that he let Nikita repair the wheel. Nikita is released from the torture chamber where the Czar's officers are trying to extract a confession from him that he is an ally of the devil because of his flying experiments. Nikita repairs the spinning wheel and gains the favor of the Czarina. As she becomes interested in Nikita, the Czarina banishes her former lover, Drutzkoi.

At this time English merchants are buying flax of Czar Ivan and to impress his guests, the Czar, as a good merchant, orders a special entertainment at which Nikita is commanded to demonstrate his flying machine.

On a clear afternoon in the presence of a brilliant assemblage, Nikita climbs with his machine to the roof of the tallest building, and thence glides down slowly and gracefully until he lands in the snow and is acclaimed by all present. Over the protests of his English guests the Czar decides that it is ungodly for humans to want to fly and orders the execution of Nikita....

WINGS OF A SERF continued

...In an underground prison awaiting his execution, Nikita is visited on his last night by the Czarina accompanied by her maid. The Czarina cuts Nikita's bonds while the maid watches outside. Drutzkoi surprises the Czarina in Nikita's dungeon. The Czarina urges both to fight and in the struggle when Drutzkoi is getting the better of Nikita, she, with her own hand, plunges a knife in Drutzkoi's back and escapes through a secret passage. The guards are clamoring at Nikita's door and just in time the maid rescues him and they both escape from the pursuing guards, the maid into the Czarina's chambers and Nikita up the stairway presumably on the way to freedom.

The Czar is informed of what has happened. The dying words of Drutzkoi are "ask the Czarina." Meanwhile, Nikita is caught on the outside trying to escape and is brought before the Czar's chief torturer, who by chance notices the Czarina's ring on the serf's finger. He immediately brings the ring to the Czar while Nikita is flung aside. The ring and Drutzkoi's dying words are quite sufficient for the Czar. He goes to the Czarina's chambers. In his wife's chamber the Czar carefully puts the ring, taken from Nikita, on the Czarina's finger and his suspicions are confirmed. With his own hands, he strangles her.

In the meantime in the dungeon Nikita meets his fate, while Ivan the Terrible on the spire tolls the bells for the repose of the Czarina.

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One of the "masters of repertory" (the polite term for traditionalists) was Yuri Tarich who, after his move from scenarist to director in 1925, directed ten silent films, nearly all of them vigorous period pieces that took little notice of any basic change going on in the art of Russian films, for there was always a steady market in and out of the Soviet Union for efficiently told tales of the Russian past. The best of these was the first film that Tarich directed independently, released November 16, 1926, WINGS OF A SERF (shown abroad as IVAN THE TERRIBLE), a drama of the time of Ivan IV: the unhappy fate of a serf who is so unwisely clever as to invent an apparatus for flying through the air. Yet when this story leaves the memory, what stays is the extraordinary portrait of Ivan, as played by Leonid Leonidov. Of his place in the film, shrewd Shklovsky, who worked on this script, had this comment:

'In the case of WINGS OF A SERF, a film made conscientiously and, I suppose, with archaeological exactitude, talented Tarich did not realize what richer material he had at hand in the face of Leonidov; the director's hands were busy with all sorts of things, while Leonidov was left at the side.'

Another factor in the lasting quality of the film may lie in the composition of the crew. One of Tarich's assistants was Ivan Pyriev, who was not to ripen as director until the sound period; and the film was cut by Esther Shub, who was to show a new form of film -- her quiet invention -- in the following year.

-- Jay Leyda, Kino, A History of the Russian and Soviet Film.