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COMPAGNIE ERIC ROHMER
AND REZO PRODUCTIONS PRESENT

KATERINA
DIDASKALOU

TRIPLE AGENT

SERGE RENKO



A FILM BY

ERIC ROHMER

WITH AMANDA LANCLET, EMMANUEL SALINGER
CYRIELLE CLAIR AND GRIGORI MANOUKOV

RELEASED IN FRANCE BY REZO FILMS ON MARCH 17, 2004

TRIPLE AGENT

A FILM BY **ERIC ROHMER**

1936, and Europe is shaken by the Popular Front and the Spanish Civil War...

Fiodor, a young General in the Tsarist army who has taken refuge in Paris, and his Greek artist wife Arsinoé, play their part in the general chaos. While she sympathises with their communist neighbours, he carries out secret missions, delighting in confusing those around him. He makes no attempt to hide the fact that he is a spy, but conceals the identity of his masters.

The White Russian anti-communists?

Their Soviet counterparts?

The Nazis?

All of these?

Does he even know himself, this man of mystery who loves his wife deeply but appears ready to sacrifice her in the name of a sordid intrigue?

Inspired by a story, the truth of which has never been fully explained, **TRIPLE AGENT** is both a dizzying tale of espionage and intrigue, and a moral story of the nature of concealment and deceit. From one of the masters of French cinema, a thrilling yet painfully intimate epic arising from the place where the private life of a man and a woman collide with the stirrings of global political conflict.

CAST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Katerina DIDASKALOU AS ARSINOÉ
Serge RENKO AS FIODOR
Cyrielle CLAIR AS MAGUY
Grigori MANOUKOV AS BORIS
Dimitri RAFALSKY AS GENERAL DOBRINSKY
Nathalia KROUGLY AS THE GENERAL
Amanda LANGLET AS JANINE
Jeanne RAMBUR AS DANY
Emmanuel SALINGER AS ANDRÉ
Vitaliy CHEREMET AS ALEXIS TCHEREPNINE
Bernard PEYSSON AS THE DOCTOR
Laurent LE DOYEN AS THE JOURNALIST
Emilie FOURRIER AS THE DRESSMAKER'S ASSISTANT
Alexandre KOLTCHAK AS THE ORDERLY
Vladimir LÉON AS TCHERNOV
Alexandre TCHERKASSOFF AS ADMIRAL GALININE
Alexandre KOUMPAN AS GENERAL MELINSKI
Jorg SCHNASS AS THE GERMAN POLICEMAN
Georges BENOIT AS THE FRENCH SUPERINTENDENT

DANCEHALL ORCHESTRA

Jean-Claude TCHEVREKDJIAN 1ST VIOLIN

Giberto CORTES ALCAYAGA 2ND VIOLIN

Arnaud LIMONAIRE VIOLA

Chahan DINANIAN CELLO

Marc GOLDFEDER PIANO

AND

Pierre CHIDYVAR / Danièle REZZI-GOUHIER / Antoine FONTAINE / Nicolas LECLERE

Alexandre LOUSCHIK / Pierre Jean LARROQUE / Elena RIVAS / Léon KOLASA / Danielle BOUTARD

Maurice LAMPEL / Petr KAPLITCHENKO / Daniel DUMARTIN / Giovanni PORTINCASA

Lothar OLSCHESKI / Thomas SEKULA / Istvan VAN HEUVERZWYN

CREW

DIRECTOR **Eric ROHMER**

SCREENPLAY **Eric ROHMER**

DP **Diane BARATIER**

CONTINUITY **Bethsabée DREYFUS**

SOUND **Pascal RIBIER**

EDITOR **Mary STEPHEN**

PRODUCTION MANAGER **Pierre WALLON**

LOCATION MANAGER **Sybil NICOLAS**

POST-PRODUCTION **Eve ALBERTINI**

ADMINISTRATION **Marie-Christine GAUCHÉE**

DIRECTOR OF FINANCE **Hélène DE FILIPPO**

LEGAL SERVICES **Antoine DENIS**

WARDROBE **Pierre Jean LARROQUE**

HAIRSTYLIST **Annie MARANDIN**

MAKE-UP **Jacques MAISTRE**

SET DESIGNER **Antoine FONTAINE**

SET DECORATOR **Cécile DELEU**

ARTWORK **Pascale BOILLOT / Charlotte VERY**

FLAGS AND HERALDRY **Valentina LA ROCCA**

RESEARCHER **Irène SKOBLINE**

COLOUR GRADING **Christian REVER**

PRODUCTION **REZO PRODUCTIONS / C.E.R.**

CO-PRODUCTION **FRANCE 2 CINÉMA / BIM DISTRIBUZIONE (ITALY)**

ALTA PRODUCCION (SPAIN) / TORNASOL FILMS (SPAIN) / STRADA PRODUCTIONS (GREECE)

MENTOR CINEMA COMPANY (RUSSIA)

PRODUCED BY **Françoise ETCHEGARAY / Jean-Michel REY / Philippe LIÉGEOIS**

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER **Laurent DANIELOU**

COPRODUCERS **Valerio DE PAOLIS / Enrique GONZALES MACHO / Gerardo HERRERO**

Mariela BESUIEVSKY / Takis VEREMIS / Yvan SOLOVOV

WITH THE SUPPORT OF **EURIMAGES**

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WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF **CINÉCINÉMA**

IN ASSOCIATION WITH **WILD BUNCH**

ERIC ROHMER FILMOGRAPHY

L'ANGLAISE ET LE DUC / THE LADY AND THE DUKE (2001)

CONTE D'AUTOMNE / AUTUMN TALE (1998)

CONTE D'ÉTÉ / A SUMMER'S TALE (1996)

LES RENDEZ-VOUS DE PARIS / RENDEZ-VOUS IN PARIS (1995)

L'ARBRE, LE MAIRE ET LA MÉDIATHÈQUE (1993)

CONTE D'HIVER / A WINTER'S TALE (1992)

CONTE DE PRINTEMPS (1990)

L'AMI DE MON AMIE / MY GIRLFRIEND'S BOYFRIEND (1987)

QUATRE AVENTURES DE REINETTE ET MIRABELLE (1987)

LE RAYON VERT / THE GREEN RAY (1986)

LES NUITS DE LA PLEINE LUNE / FULL MOON IN PARIS (1984)

PAULINE À LA PLAGE / PAULINE AT THE BEACH (1983)

LE BEAU MARIAGE / A GOOD MARRIAGE (1982)

LA FEMME DE L'AVIATEUR / THE AVIATOR'S WIFE (1980)

PERCEVAL LE GALLOIS (1978)

LA MARQUISE D'O / THE MARQUISE OF O (1976)

L'AMOUR L'APRÈS-MIDI / LOVE IN THE AFTERNOON (1972)

LE GENOU DE CLAIRE / CLAIRE'S KNEE (1970)

MA NUIT CHEZ MAUD / MY NIGHT WITH MAUD (1969)

LA COLLECTIONNEUSE / THE COLLECTOR (1967)

PARIS VU PAR...(SEGMENT OF **PLACE DE L'ETOILE**) (1965)

NADJA À PARIS (1964)

LA CARRIÈRE DE SUZANNE / SUZANNE'S CAREER (1963)

LE SIGNE DU LION / THE SIGN OF LEO (1959)

INTERVIEW WITH ERIC ROHMER

Where did the story of “Triple Agent” originate?

It developed in a very similar way to “The Lady and The Duke”: an article I read several years ago in the journal ‘Historia’ drew my attention to a shadowy affair: the abduction, in September 1937, in Paris, of General Miller, President of the Russian War Veterans. His colleague General Skobline – a double agent working for the Bolsheviks - was accused. But he too disappeared shortly after. It’s a very complex case. Firstly, it took place in the world of diplomatic agents - all of them more or less spies - with its background of secret negotiations between the Soviets, the Nazis and the French, during the period of the Popular Front, the Spanish Civil War, mounting danger; and secondly because the two main players disappeared. Only the wife of the man believed to be guilty remained, and she was accused of being an accessory, tried, condemned, and died in prison in 1940. I was able to work from articles and books on the subject (notably Marina Gray’s), and the transcript of Skobline’s wife’s trial documents.

Have you remained faithful to the story?

No. History, with a capital H, is one thing. I interpreted it and, of course, invented characters, all the dialogue, numerous situations.

When these events took place, you were 17 years old. Did the story make a big impression on you?

I no longer remember it. On the other hand, I heard talk of the executions of generals in the USSR. I was in high school at Henri IV, we discussed things, we questioned. I didn’t play at politics myself, but remember very well the lively if very civilised arguments between the students: communists, pacifists or Action Française royalists. Certainly I wanted to capture at points in the film a little of the atmosphere of the France of my youth. But certain books also made a great impression on me: Dostoyevsky’s “The Possessed” for example, itself inspired by a revolutionary plot in Russia. To a lesser degree, Conrad’s “The Secret Agent”. And obviously, I watched a number of spy films...

But your film isn’t simply a genre work. It’s a film about an unusual spy, without any spectacular displays. He’s hardly James Bond...

There’s nothing casual or careless about him, he’s a soldier. He’s concerned about maintaining a rigorous appearance. I don’t show a spy at work. Rather a woman who asks herself whether her husband is a spy, and how he manages to carry out a job about which he does not wish to speak clearly to her. This is why “Triple Agent” relies on words rather than on action. It’s the film of mine where people speak most. My character is a secret agent, he says so, but he doesn’t show how he operates, and we will never know whether he has really betrayed her, or how.

On the contrary, these secrets lie at the heart of the film...

But like an experiment with speech, with words: where does lying start? Where does truth stop? What can this man say – or not say – to his wife? What will she believe or not believe, guess or suspect?

Is there also an historical thesis in your film?

I made “Triple Agent” to illustrate the intuition of a man who, from 1936-37, senses that the Soviets and the Nazis are growing close. He foresees the German-Soviet pact, which will have a truly explosive effect when it is signed in 1939, unsettling a good part of the world, notably the French communists. That’s the hypothesis of the film: could the pact between Hitler and Stalin have been foreseen? My character scents it, and for the duration of the film tries to get it clear in his mind, searching for confirmation in the documents and information he deciphers. He asks himself constantly whether he is confronting the truth or being manipulated, discovering secrets or falling into a trap. He himself doesn’t know, and moreover neither do I. I don’t have a lead on my characters, any more than the audience does: it’s good for there to be no clear solutions to the questions being posed. It’s much more interesting.

Did you create entirely the character of Arsinoé, the spy's wife?

It was thoroughly recreated. In reality, this woman was an Italian singer, older than her husband, who appeared to lead him by the nose. She lived in the fast lane, which is what witnesses put forward as an explanation of the affair: that Skobline would have spied to finance the sort of life demanded by his wife. That it was she who in some way made him into a Soviet agent. In my film, Arsinoé is Greek, a painter, in poor health, resolutely anti-communist. Her husband no longer spies for money, but for love: he wants to return to his country, to take his wife to live by the Black Sea, in a healthy climate.

Arsinoé is a romantic rather than a Rohmerian heroine...

She resembles the women in my 'period' films: the Marquise of O, the Lady (from "The Lady and the Duke"). A beautiful, sensitive, touching woman, a foreigner borne on the tide of History. I feel very comfortable with this character.

They are foreigners, yet they speak French very well.

Naturally: educated foreigners speak better than the native French. I was very careful – and it was easy for me as I am from that generation – that they should speak no words dating from any later than 1940.

Where did you find the two lead actors?

Serge Renko is a French actor of Ukranian descent, who works widely in the theatre and has already appeared in my films: he played Vergniaud in "The Lady and the Duke", and one of the seducers in "Rendez-vous in Paris". As for Katerina Didaskalou, it was entirely fortuitous. She had never worked in France, but because she spoke French she had an agent who sent us two cassettes. In the first, I thought she was very beautiful, in the second it was her French that impressed me. She was the only actress I saw, and I chose her without hesitation.

Another characteristic of the film is your use of newsreels from the period.

When I was formulating the project, I had the idea of placing characters in the news footage, according to the same principle as in "The Lady and the Duke", where the characters move about in paintings like those of the Revolutionary era. But it proved impossible. For one thing, these newsreels were too short, too edited, too fractured. But having watched many of these films, I admired their beauty, the skill of the camerawork, and wanted to integrate them as a trace of that age. They provide a tragic, historical counterpoint to the plot I developed which at first seemed a little lightweight, rather 'everyday'. I wanted my characters to be swept along by history, by their tragic destiny, and the newsreels allowed me to achieve this.

Weren't you afraid these two very different registers of image and speech would disturb the authenticity of the film?

In "Triple Agent", there is only one instance of implausibility: reality itself, this 'preposterous' story of spies and abductions. Everything that occurred is incredible, but nonetheless it's what happened. The rest is rigorously possible. This is the groundwork that I insist upon for all my projects. In this sense, the newsreels in some way attest to the accuracy of my work. They are documents that function simultaneously as a tragic context and as proofs.

Why were you eager to make "Triple Agent"?

In all my work, I seek both unity and variety. The film functions through this double ambition: to return to certain characters and themes that interest me, and at the same time, to alter the period, to take on a new challenge.

You have directed two ‘historical dramas’, one after the other: “The Lady and the Duke” and “Triple Agent”, two films with what are for you large budgets. Is this the challenge to which you are referring?

Paradoxically, it's more complicated for me to make smaller films. It's a question of subject matter rather than money. Finding subjects sufficiently coherent and varied for small films is a really tough job. Thinking on a larger scale allows me an entirely new set of choices: of era, of character. The resources of a film, in my view, remain entirely dependent on the subject. Here I had that freedom.

The end of the film seems implacable: the plot closes like a noose around the neck of a hanging man...

It comes quickly, at a stroke. The characters are at bay, the victims of dramatic events. No longer in control of their situations. I love abrupt, compressed dénouements. The story offered me one and I took it. Certainly, for the central character, playing a triple game with the German Nazis, the Soviets and the White Russians is enough to cause embarrassment, not to say disquiet. By foreseeing the German-Soviet pact, this man becomes a threat. That's why, in my view, he was eliminated. When he says, prophetically, at the beginning of the film “Stalin wants peace, not revolution; and he will have it, even with the Nazis”, he is in some way signing his own death warrant. This is the source of the deepest tragedy: his vision leads to his fall.

How would you describe this series of historical films?

A pessimistic lucidity links “The Lady and the Duke” to “Triple Agent”. Really, one could say that I have embarked on a new series: a series of historical tragedies. Ideologically, they are tragedies: the characters possess political beliefs about which they argue, and for which they risk their lives. And they are period films as I couldn't achieve the same effect if they were set in the present day. In order to make these films I need the distance that history grants us.

THE WHITE RUSSIANS IN PARIS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Exile

Russia. November 1920. The forces led by General Wrangel are routed by the Bolsheviks. The young Red army has vanquished the badly coordinated and politically clumsy White troops. Three years after the beginning of civil war, the last remaining Russians loyal to the Tsar are forced to emigrate. 130,000 people (including 70,000 servicemen) flee to Turkey, before dispersing throughout Europe, joining one and a half million Russians leaving as a result of the revolution.

A welcome in France

France, which has actively supported the White Russian army, comes to the aid of the emigrants, and welcomes 15,000 Russians at the beginning of the 1920s, many less than Berlin however. But political instability in Germany will lead to France becoming the world centre for the Russian diaspora in the 1930s. 400,000 Russians live there now.

Survival

Disregarding military personnel, the Russian immigrants include priests, aristocrats, politicians, intellectuals opposed to the Bolshevik regime - exiled or expelled - amongst their number. In Paris or on the Côte d'Azur, these Russians must survive in a French environment into which they barely assimilate. Many experience poverty, even destitution. Officers become taxi drivers, princesses sell sandwiches in stations. Men work as labourers or in car factories in the Paris suburbs. Women of a certain cultured background paint icons or pictures. Others work in the clothing trade.

Russian Paris

An intensive social life in some part compensates for these difficulties. Orthodox churches are established, even in garages or warehouses. Circles of mutual aid develop and widen. Cossacks, officers, artists, intellectuals, the young, all have their own meeting places and entertainment venues. Russian actors squeeze into the Albatross Studios in Montreuil. A Russian Paris emerges, with its own grocery shops and canteens, music academy, bookshops, retirement homes and cemeteries. Traces of all these remain, even today.

The Military

The backbone of this emigration is constituted from the White Army soldiers. These men are convinced that the Bolshevik regime will collapse and that they will soon return home. They consider themselves always at war, always ready for action. And they follow the international crises of the period closely. The powerful Russian military association - the ROVS - founded by General Wrangel in 1924, gathers together these soldiers looking for revenge (100,000 men in the 20s, 40,000 in the following decade). The ROVS even manages to worry Stalin. The proof: the abduction, by the Soviet secret service, of two ROVS leaders - General Koutiepoft in 1930 and General Miller in 1937.

The Skobline Affair

More moderate than his predecessor at the head of the ROVS, General Miller, appointed in 1930, is considered spineless by many young Russians. He is seconded by Nikolaï Skobline, a general in the White Army since the age of 26. In 1920, Skobline married Nadejda Plevitskaya, a famous singer and star of Moscow's most celebrated gypsy restaurant. Long suspected of working for the Reds whilst informing for the Nazis, Skobline will have organised the abduction of Miller by Soviet forces on September 22, 1937. Miller disappears forever in the 16th arrondissement. Summoned to ROVS head office, Skobline himself disappears, taking refuge in the apartment of a fellow Soviet agent in the same building, subsequently escaping through Spain before being done away with. The French police stop his campaign. 'La Plevitskaya' is accused of being an accomplice and sentenced to 20

years' imprisonment. She dies in jail, in Rennes, in 1940. For the second time in a row, the ROVS has been left without a leader. Little by little, the old White Army loses all hope of taking back power. The Soviet victory in 1945 leaves them one choice only: to risk returning to Stalin's Russia, or begin again their lives abroad.

Between Hitler and Stalin

The rise of Fascism, Nazism and Nationalism in 1930s Europe concerns the White Russians deeply. Some hope the Nazis will help them defeat the Bolshevik monster. Others admire, with varying degrees of secrecy, the powerful Stalinist Russia that encourages them to return home. They declare themselves 'neither Red, nor White, but Russian'. The older generation of Tsarist servicemen is overrun by new forces.

It is in this troubled context that the Toukhatchevsky affair occurs in 1937, named after the former Tsarist officer, later a brilliant Red general, appointed Soviet marshal in 1936. In favour of a pre-emptive strike against Hitler, he aggravates Stalin, who undertakes to compromise him. Certain sources show that Skobline, very well placed among the Nazis may, on Stalin's initiative, have transmitted false information about Toukhatchevsky to the Germans, who would then have passed it on to the Soviets as if coming from their own intelligence. Information demonstrating that Toukhatchevsky was in league with the Nazis. Accused of treason, the Russian marshal is executed by firing squad in June 1937.

Other information, impossible to verify like everything in this affair, suggests the following : sent to London in 1937 to represent the Soviet Union at the funeral of George V, Toukhatchevsky would have made Miller aware of his suspicions regarding Skobline, three months before the removal of the head of the ROVS.

According to this version of events, Skobline would therefore have been at the centre of a secret collaboration between German and Soviet forces, to rid Stalin of a potential rival and ensure peace between the two powers. Preparatory to the signature of the German-Soviet pact of August 1939.

- MICHEL ELTCHANINOFF

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