

Document Citation

Title	Psychological realism in early Soviet cinema : The girl with a hatbox
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Source	<i>Pacific Film Archive Calendar</i>
Date	1992 Feb 22
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	Barnet, Boris Vasilyevich (1902-1965), Moscow, Russia (Federation) Motion pictures -- Soviet Union
Film Subjects	Devushka s korobkoi (The girl with the hatbox), Barnet, Boris Vasilyevich, 1927

Psychological Realism in Early Soviet Cinema YURI TSELIAN

Introduced by Naum Kleiman

The early Russian cinema is known primarily for the epic films of the post-Revolutionary era. These films reflected the social ideas and shocks of the time. But the chef-d'oeuvres of Eisenstein and Vertov, Pudovkin and Dovzhenko eclipsed another line of film development, one which was much closer to the world of the human soul. In pre-Revolutionary Russia, the two deans of psychological cinema were Yevgeny Bauer and Yakov Protazanov. Bauer's love melodramas such as Silent Witnesses were distinguished by the delicate nuance of the hero's experiences and by their refined atmosphere of action. (See sidebar, this page). The post-Revolutionary psychological cinema considered new emotional and moral collisions: the emancipation of women from public prejudices and male egotism, as in Room's Bed and Sofa; the soul's

revival following social and personal stresses, as in Ermler's The Parisian Cobbler; the awakening of human dignity and social consciousness in a "small man"; and the integration of young provincials into the new city life, particularly in the Boris Barnet comedies such as The Girl with a Hatbox.
—Naum Kleiman

The Girl with a Hatbox 7:30 Boris Barnet (USSR, 1927)

(*Devushhka s korobkoi*). Anna Sten, popular star of several Russian and German films before Samuel Goldwyn brought her to Hollywood, was at her youthful prime when she played *The Girl with the Hatbox*. In this charming comedy, she is given a supposedly worthless lottery ticket instead of her wages by an unscrupulous pair of shopkeepers. The ticket wins her a fortune, which she happily shares with her husband, whom she only agreed to marry so that they might share a room during the Moscow housing shortage. Barnet, a former boxer, was trained in Lev Kuleshov's famous school of acting. (He played the cowboy Jeb in *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West*, among other wonderful character roles.) *The Girl with the Hatbox*, his first successful comedy as director, moves with the speed of the American comedies of the period, makes lively use of locations, and was, as historian Jay Leyda said, seasoned with satirical overtones and "bourgeois leftovers."

• Written by Valentin Turkin, V. Shershenevich. Photographed by Boris Frantissison, B. Filshin. With Anna Sten, Ivan Koval-Samborsky, Vladimir Fogel, Serafima Birman. (66 mins, Silent with English intertitles, Music score, B&W, 16mm, Print courtesy David Shepard)

80" @ 20 fps