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Author(s)	Ian Christie
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Potselui Meri Pikford (The Kiss of Mary Pickford), Komarov, S.
V., 1927



Sun 3 May
4.15

Don Quixote

(Don Kikhot)

Kozintsev's third solo feature (after the unmemorable biopics *Pirogov* and *Bielinsky*) is a magnificent, widescreen colour adaptation of Cervantes, again shot by Moskvina, his cameraman since *The Devil's Wheel*. As personified by Nikolai Cherkassov, Quixote is a 'lean, awkward, at once urgent and dignified old man, pathetically driving himself on' (Dilys Powell). In contrast to the corrupt, cold court, he reminds one of nothing more than Kozintsev's own, later Lear. With sterling support from Yuri Tolubeev's rotundly sensible Panza. -CK. USSR 1957.

Kozintsev had already directed Shakespeare on stage but this, hailed as the most intelligent of all Shakespeare films, was his first cinema adaptation. Using Pasternak's free, modern and brilliantly poetic translation, Kozintsev takes his cue from Hamlet's remark that Denmark is a prison. Far from the customary echoing chambers, Elsinore is crowded, bustling with activity both humdrum and diplomatic, an intricate circus, lethal to fragile puppets like Ophelia and non-conformists like Hamlet. -CK. USSR 1964. With Innokenty Smoktunovsky. 149 mins.

Fri 1 May
6.15

Hamlet

(Gamlet)



KOZINTSEV, TRAUBERG

AND THE OTHER SOVIET CINEMA

Hands up how many rare-movie buffs have ever actually seen a film by the legendary Kuleshov, of montage experiment fame? Or by Kozintsev and Trauberg, when they were still trying to live down their scandalous reputation as the 'Factory of the Eccentric Actor' (FEKS)? And did you know that Anatoly Lunacharsky, Commissar for Enlightenment throughout the 20s, scripted at least six films, of which two were rip-roaring popular melodramas? Or that Mary Pickford inadvertently starred in a 1926 Soviet comedy?

If your answers to this not-so-trivial pursuit are mostly negative, don't be surprised. The realisation that Soviet silent cinema amounted to more than *Battleship Potemkin* and *The End of St Petersburg* has been relatively slow to dawn – and nowhere slower than in Britain, where the original Soviet classics quickly became cornerstones of academic film history and theory, thus effectively neutralising their subversive potential and stifling further curiosity about what else happened during those remarkable two decades after the October Revolution.

Perhaps the most significant discovery has been the Leningrad-based 'eccentrism' of Kozintsev and Trauberg, which closely paralleled Eisenstein's move from avant-garde theatre into cinema, but avoided his taste for the monumental. Kozintsev and Trauberg's ability to forge a popular modernism from unlikely ingredients enabled them to ride the switchback of Soviet cultural policy until WWII with a rare sophistication, and produced at least two masterpieces in *The New Babylon* and *The Youth of Maxim*.

Thanks to a series of trail-blazing programmes which began with John Gillett's 'Russian Eccentrics' in 1978, the exploits of Kuleshov, Barnet, Kozintsev and Trauberg and many other unjustly neglected directors of comedy, fantasy and imagination are at last becoming known. And since almost all of the films in this short season are now available from British sources, they should become even better known in the future – Ian Christie.

We hope to make available a reprint of the dossier produced for the 1978 season.

Mon 4 May
4.00

The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr West in the Land of the Bolsheviks

(Neobychnyye priklyucheniya Mistera Vesta v Strane Bol'shevikov)

The first feature of Kuleshov's experimental workshop was also the first radically original film of the Soviet era. A gleeful satire on American anti-Bolshevik propaganda, it's also an affectionate parody/analysis of American popular cinema, complete with brilliantly choreographed fights, chases and rescues. When Mr West is separated from his bodyguard, Cowboy Jed, in Moscow by a gang intent on relieving him of his dollars, only the 'real' Bolsheviks can save him! -JC. 1924/Dir Lev Kuleshov. With Boris Barnet, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Alexandra Khokhlova.



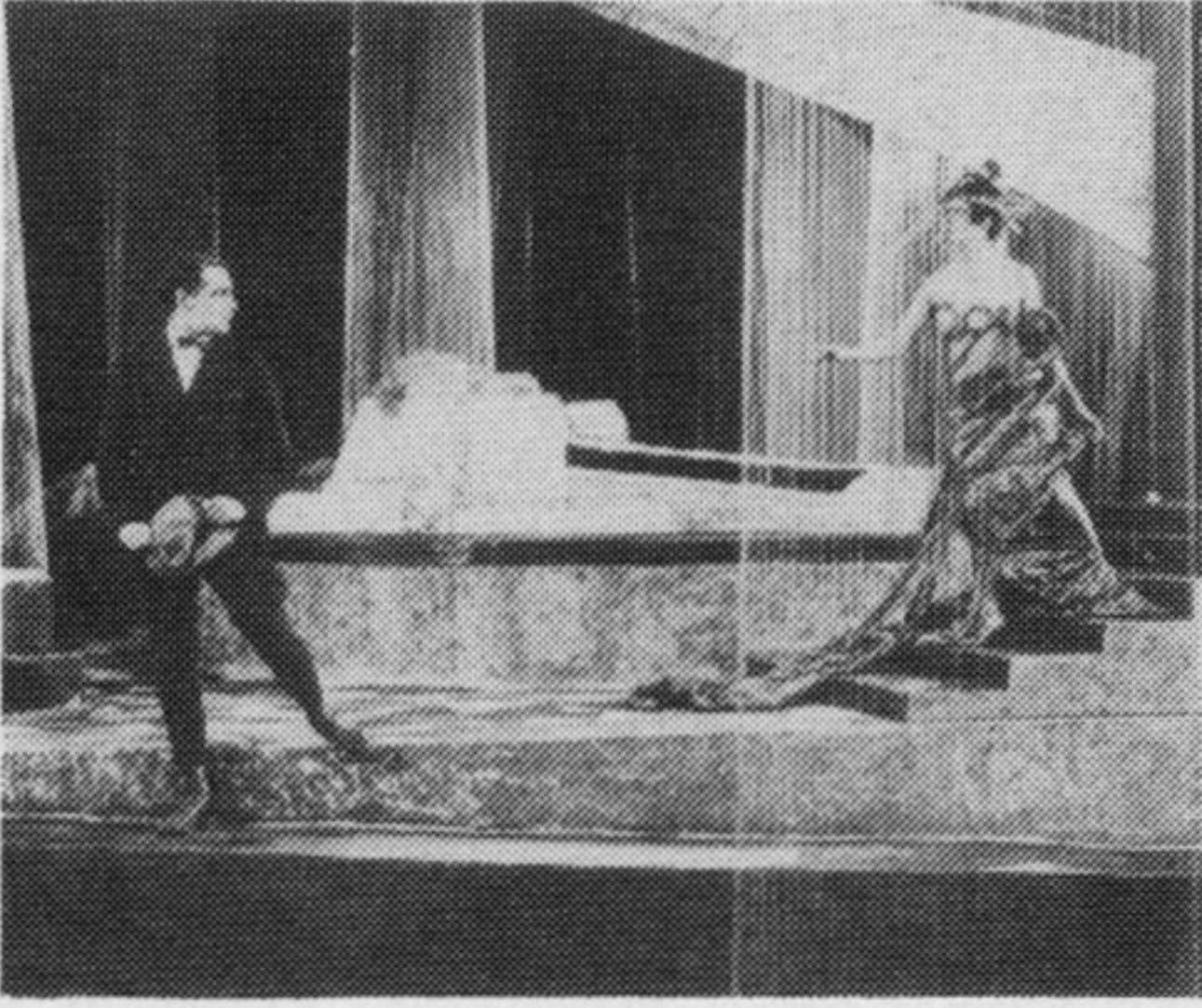
Fri 29 May
6.30

The New Babylon

(Novy Vavilon)

Kozintsev and Trauberg's masterwork was at the time a resounding critical flop. Looking for something to get their teeth into after the 'childish enthusiasm for melodramatic effects' of *The Society of the Great Cause* (see over), they happened on Marx's account of the 1871 Paris Commune. Relating also to the 1905 Russian Revolution, its tale of a militant department store salesgirl (Yelena Kuzmina) is couched in an appropriately revolutionary form – hence the furore. -CK. 1929/Dir Kozintsev, Trauberg. With Sergei Gerasimov.





Wed 6 May
8.30

Aelita

No illustrated cinema history is complete without a stunning still of *Aelita*'s Martian settings and costumes. Yet these justly famous scenes (partly designed by Alexandra Exter) are only a dream counterpoint to the otherwise contemporary story of an engineer trying to evade his responsibilities in the aftermath of civil war, with splendid comic relief supplied by Igor Ilinsky as an amateur detective. –IC. 1924/Dir Yakov Protazanov. With Konstantin Eggert, Nikolai Batalov. Plus *Interplanetary Revolution*, an animated satire on *Aelita* from the same year.



Sun 10 May
6.15

The Devil's Wheel

(Chertovo koleso)

My Grandmother

(Chemi bebia)

Kozintsev and Trauberg's earliest surviving film looks as modern today as it did in 1926. A sailor from the Aurora jumps ship for the sake of a girl he meets in a fairground and the pair fall in with some colourful Petrograd gangsters. USSR 1926/Dir Kozintsev, Trauberg. Ostensibly an attack on bureaucracy and corruption, the riotous satire of *My Grandmother* combines Gogol and Chaplin in a total *tour-de-force* unlike anything in Soviet cinema before Medvedkin and very little since. USSR 1929/Dir Kote Mikaberidze. –IC.

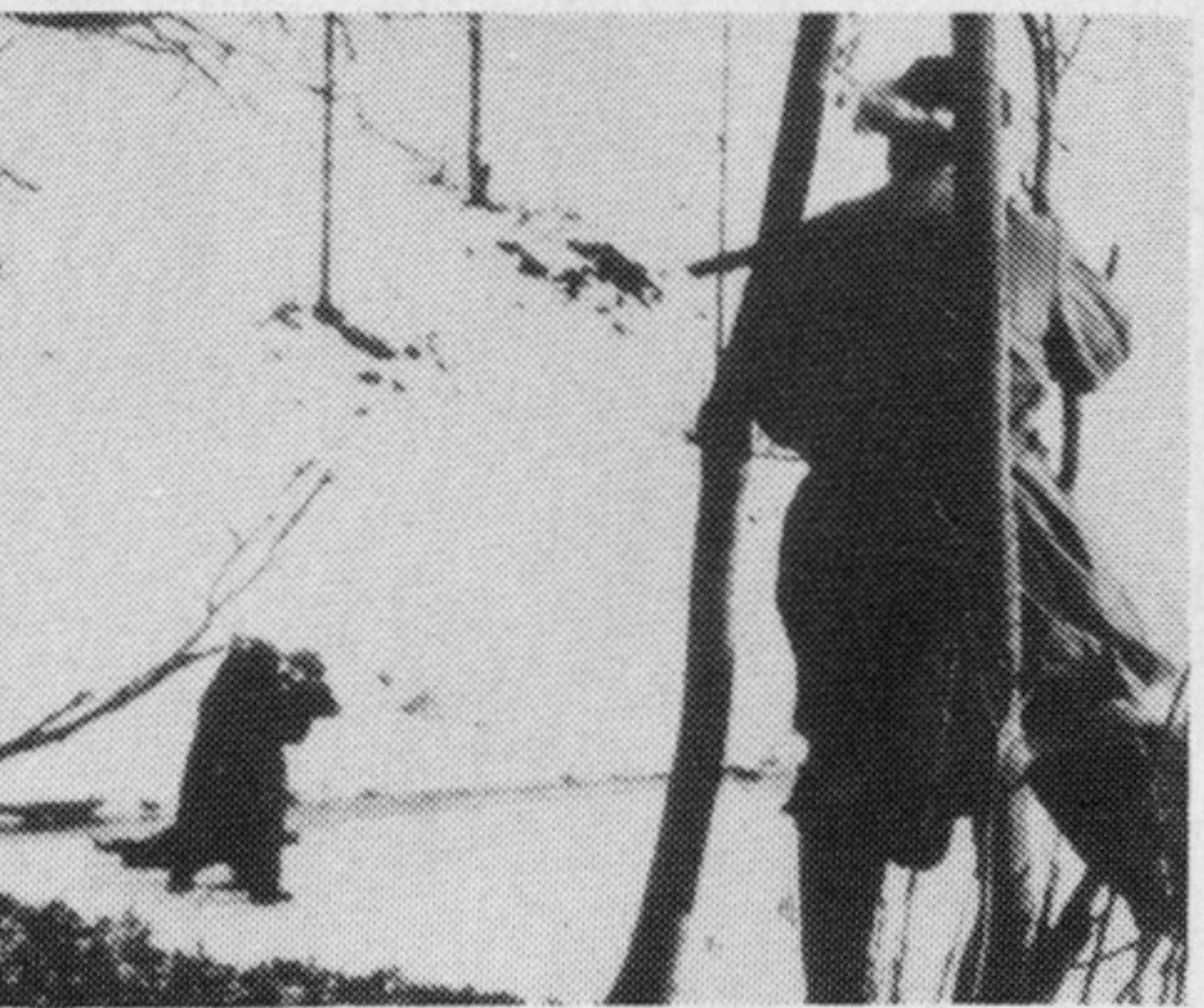


Sun 10 May
8.30

The Cloak

(Shinel)

More Expressionists sets (Yenei) and lighting (Moskvin) and a homage to Gogol, the FEKS boys' spiritual father. Kostrichkin's performance as the dry old clerk whose life begins to revolve around a new cloak would have pleased Gogol with its grotesque stylisation, though Yuri Tynyanov's script, giving the clerk a pre-history from a different Gogol story, would probably not. Kozintsev saw the film as a synthesis of what Gogol felt about St Petersburg – hence the Nevsky Prospect set, a skewed, deluded version of reality. –CK. 1926/Dir Kozintsev, Trauberg.

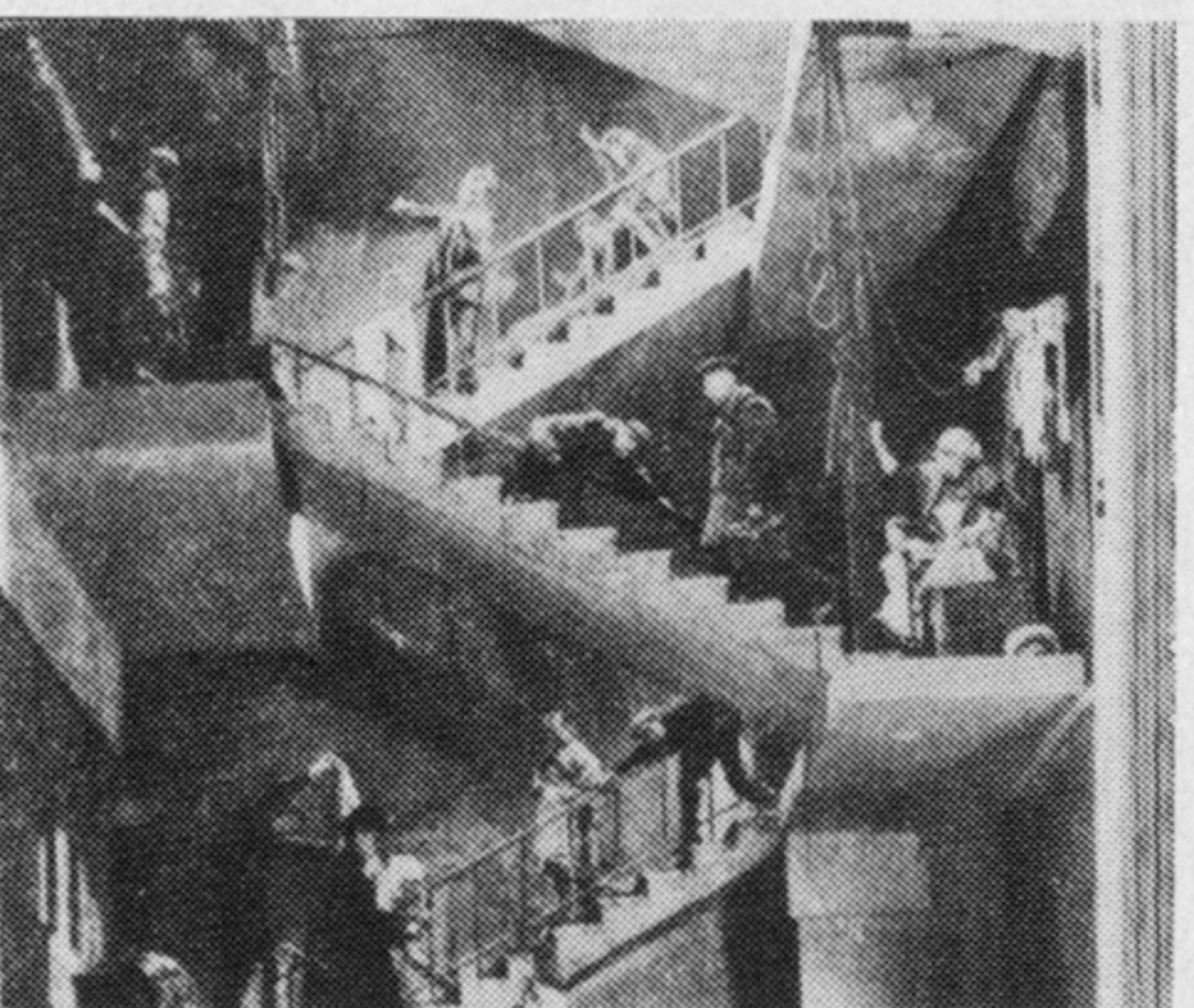


Tue 12 May
6.15

The Bear's Wedding

(Medvezhya svadba)

Lenin's Commissar for Enlightenment seems an unlikely scriptwriter for a vampire movie. Yet Lunacharsky co-authored this adaptation of a Prosper Mérimée story, in which his wife also appeared. Co-director Eggert took the lead as a nobleman subject to an hereditary curse, who preys on innocent young girls. Lunacharsky believed that the infant Soviet cinema needed to create mass entertainment as its first priority, and in this practical demonstration he was rewarded with an immense popular success. –IC. 1926/Dir Vladimir Gardin, Konstantin Eggert.



Thu 14 May
6.15

The Kiss of Mary Pickford

(Potselui Meri)

The House on Trubnaya

(Dom na Trubnoi)

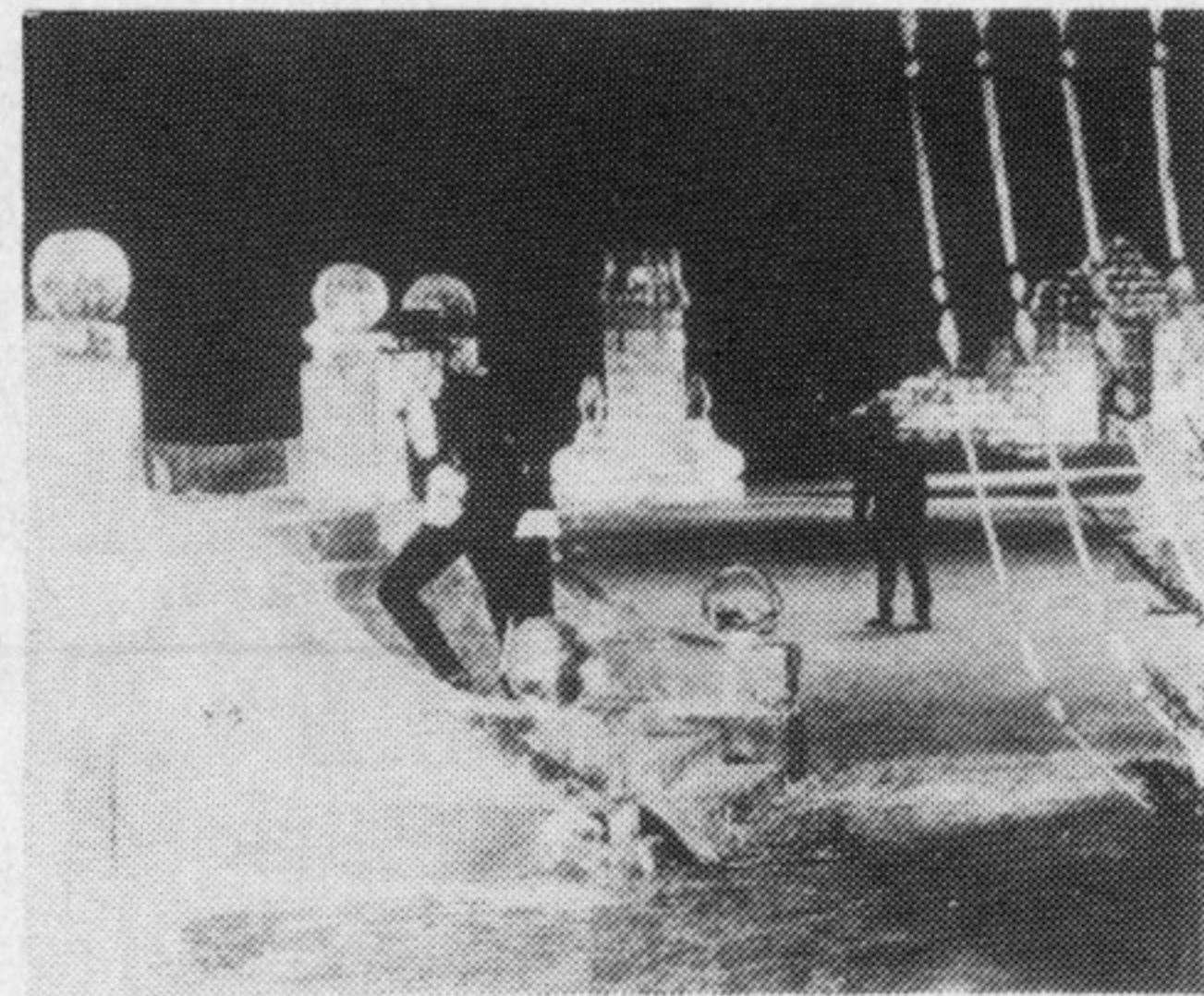
Fairbanks' and Pickfords' triumphal 1926 visit to Moscow enabled members of Kuleshov's group to demonstrate their montage 'magic' in a delightfully original fashion. One of Mary's devoted fans plans to steal a kiss and – thanks to snappy editing – he succeeds. 1926/Dir Sergei Komarov. With Igor Ilinsky. Of Barnet's two great silent comedies, *The House on Trubnaya* is a highly topical comedy of the NEP years, with its merciless portrayal of a petty bourgeois couple persecuting a simple country girl, until she unexpectedly becomes a celebrity. 1927/Dir Boris Barnet. With Vladimir Fogel, Vera Maretskaya. –IC. 150 mins.

The least-known of Kozintsev and Trauberg's surviving silent films (and then only in a truncated version), this historical melodrama about the Decembrist uprising of 1825 was also their least controversial work until the Maxim trilogy – no doubt because it fitted the popular demand for costume drama. Yet the script was brought to them by a leading Formalist critic, Tynyanov, after their collaboration on *The Cloak*, and it served to develop the stark, stylised clarity that would result in *New Babylon*.—IC. 1927/Dir Kozintsev, Trauberg.

Thu 14 May
9.00

SGC – The Society of the Great Cause

(SVD – Soyuz Velikovo Dela)

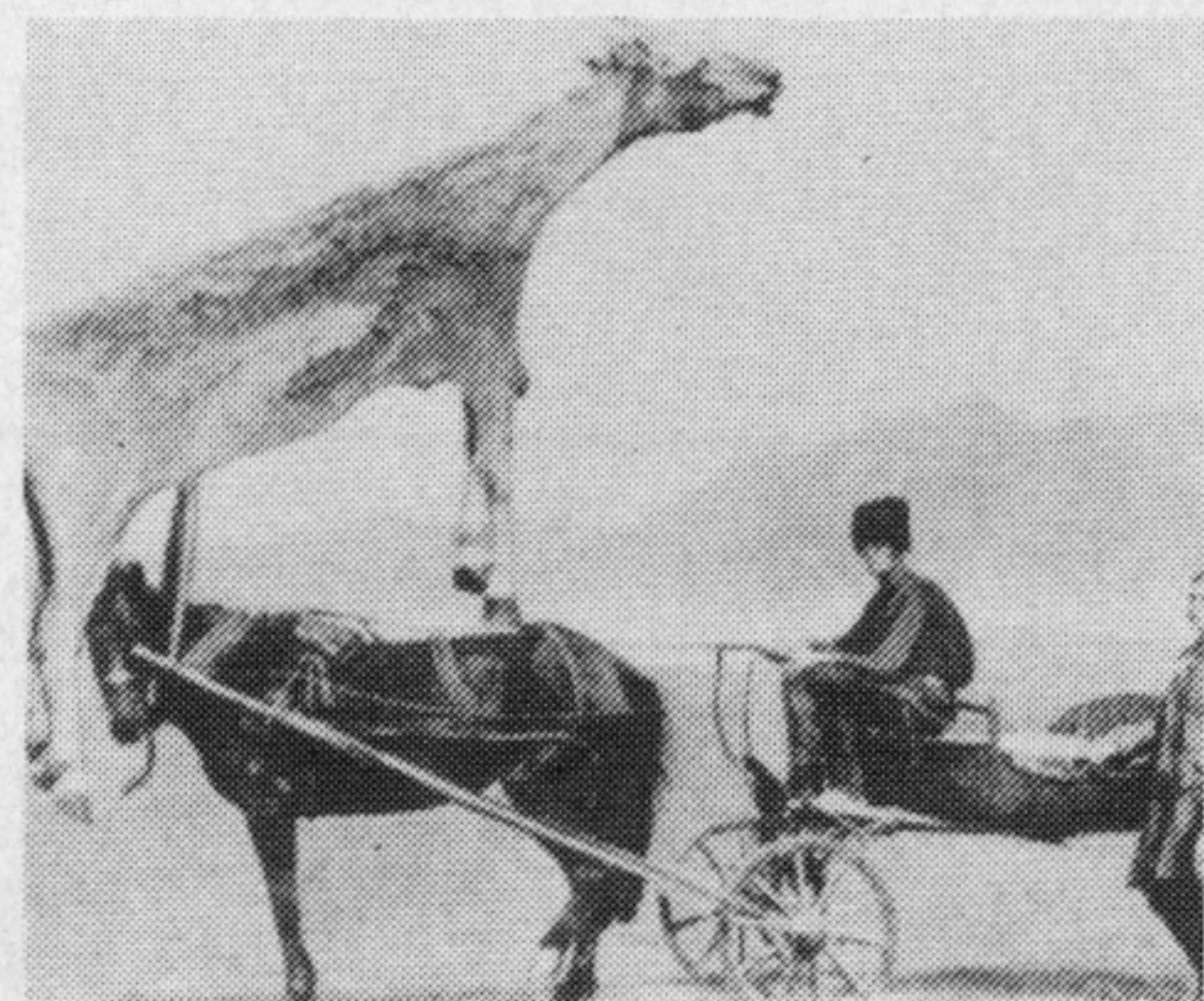


An early sound film, which benefited from the flexibility of silent shooting techniques but suffered from a sound system unable to cope with the complexities of Shostakovich's inventive score. A playful opening locates Yelena Kuzmina in a symphonic city of alarm clocks and traffic – whence she is whisked from her boyfriend Boris Chirkov, to teach in the snowy wastes of the Altai region. She comes to like it there despite hindrance from a corrupt Soviet official (Gerasimov completing the stock company).—CK. 1931/Dir Kozintsev, Trauberg.

Sun 17 May
6.15

Alone

(Odna)



Maxim was an unusual revolutionary hero – totally unromanticised, jolly, optimistic, stubborn, a fancy accordion-player and a revolutionary almost by accident. The first part of the trilogy starts in 1910, showing workers' exploitation, Maxim's conversion, his imprisonment and the underground life of the Bolshevik networks. But the joy of *The Youth of Maxim* (1935) lies mainly in the delicious humour leavening the revolutionary message, such as the cherishable moment when Maxim's boss, hoping to recruit him as a spy, asks, in significant tones, if he's read 'any books', upon which our hero gives a lively and very complete rendition of a blood and thunder novelette he's just finished. *The Return of Maxim* (1937), set in July 1914, deals with disarray in the Duma and Bolshevik operations to discover an armaments factory. Again, there's much good fun (with aged parliamentarians swapping recipes); a billiards match to worry Scorsese, stirring crowd scenes and stirring music, with Shostakovich again taking second place to the accordionist. *The Vyborg Side* (1939) is set in 1918, from the capture of the Winter Palace to the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly, and features classic performances from Maxim Strauch and Mikhail Gelovani as Lenin and Stalin respectively. By now Maxim is in charge of the State Bank and his comrade Natasha is a judge. Moskvina's compositions remain as potent, even if the characters, weighed down by their positions, have lost a little sparkle.—CK. Dir Kozintsev, Trauberg. Programmes bookable separately with special ticket price for all three parts £7.50, advance booking only.

Wed 20 May 6.15/
Thu 28 May 9.00
The Youth of Maxim

(Yunost Maksima)



Wed 20 May 8.30
The Return of Maxim

(Vosvrashchenie Maksima)



Mon 25 May 6.15
The Vyborg Side

(Vyborgskaya storona)

