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AELITA (RUSSIAN-B&W-SILENT)

A Mezrabom/Amkino production. Directed by Jakov Protazanov. Screenplay, Fedor Ozep, Aleksey Fajko, from Alexei Tolstoy's play. Camera (B&W), Yuri Zheliabovsky, Emil Schoenemann; art director, Isaak Rabinovitch, Vikto Simov, Sergei Kozlovski; costumes, Aleksandra Ekster. Reviewed at SF18 Science Fiction Marathon, Brookline, Mass., Feb. 14, 1993. Running time: **85 MIN.**

With: Yulia Solntseva, Nikolai Batalov, Igor Illinski, Nikolai Tseretelli, Vera Orlova, Pavel Pol, Konstantin Eggert, Yuri Zavadski, Valentina Kuindzi, N. Tretyakova.

T *VARIETY* 3.1.93.
his 1924 Soviet space epic has been recently revived in several fest and museum appearances but was never reviewed in VARIETY.

Seriocomic tale involves an inventor (Nikolai Tseretelli), a soldier (Nikolai Batalov) and a police informant (Igor Illinski), who take the first journey to Mars. Film is an adaptation of a play by Alexei Tolstoy, and is most notable for its production design, particularly the sets and costumes for the Martian sequences. Designers were alumni of the

Kamerny Theater, known for its modernist productions.

The costumes must be seen to be believed, including Aelita's handband and her assistant's pants, both of which look like complicated TV antennas. Elaborate Martian sets prefigure the Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers serials of the next decade, with stylized design suggesting much more than actually appears.

Print, supplied by the Walker Arts Center, runs 85 minutes, although sci-fi histories report an original length of two hours. Pic was also known as "Aelita: The Revolt of the Robots."

Visuals hold up nicely, as do the performances, with only Illinski's overeager police worker playing broadly. Live musical accompaniment at SF18 was a plus — in spite of the decor, pic needed the music to propel it along.

While "Aelita" doesn't surpass Fritz Lang's 1926 classic "Metropolis," it is a major early achievement in futuristic cinema, and deserves the renewed interest. — *Daniel M. Kimmel*