

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Soviet silent cinema : Part 2 : 1926-1927 : The girl with the hatbox</b>
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Source	<i>Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.)</i>
Date	1975 Nov 13
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	3
Subjects	Barnet, Boris Vasilyevich (1902-1965), Moscow, Russia (Federation) Sten, Anna (1908)
Film Subjects	Devushka s korobkoi (The girl with the hatbox), Barnet, Boris Vasilyevich, 1927

# The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

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October 2 - November 18, 1975

(THE GIRL WITH THE HATBOX)

## SOVIET SILENT CINEMA

### Part 2: 1926-1927

By special arrangement with Gosfilmofond, the Soviet State Film Archive, and the Pacific Film Archive of the University Art Museum at Berkeley, the Department of Film will present the second of a three-part retrospective of Soviet cinema in its silent period. This program is the most comprehensive ever mounted outside the U.S.S.R. of the classic and revolutionary films of the Soviet Union.

Part I, comprising 29 titles, covered the years from 1918 through 1925, and was presented in 1974 from March 7th through April 15th. Part 2 limits itself to the two peak years, 1926 and 1927, and will include forty titles to be exhibited from October 2nd through November 18th. Part 3, completing the silent years of Soviet filmmaking, will be announced in the future.

The works in the retrospective were selected from a list of surviving Soviet silents in the Gosfilmofond Archive by Professor Jay Leyda in consultation with Victor Privato, Director of Gosfilmofond, and Tom Luddy, Program Director of the Pacific Film Archive. Professor Leyda is the author of the definitive text in English on the history of Russian and Soviet cinema, Kino.

The majority of the prints in Part 2 will contain only the original Russian intertitles. Some of the films which will complement the program will be from the Museum's own collection, and many of these will have English intertitles. Almost all the films will be in 35mm.

Synopses and detailed information will be distributed at each screening. The documentation for the notes has been supplied through the generosity of Gosfilmofond, Jay Leyda, the Pacific Film Archive, Jacques Ledoux of the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique (Brussels), Vlada Petric and Andy McKay. Additional information is also drawn from the Museum's own Study Center files. The Department of Film owes a special thanks to Sonia Volochova who is not only translating from original Russian sources but who is assisting in the compiling of these notes as well.

Thursday, November 13 (5:30)

THE GIRL WITH THE HATBOX (DEVUSHKA S KOROBKOI). 1927. Released April 19, 1927. U.S. release: New York, September 16, 1929. Comedy. 6 reels. Mezhrabpom-Rus. English intertitles. ca. 65 minutes.

Scenario: Valentin Turkin, V. Shershenevich. Direction: Boris Barnet. Photography: Boris Frantsisson, B. Filshin. Design: Sergei Kozlovsky.

Cast: Anna Sten (Natasha); V. Mikhailov (her grandfather); Vladimir Fogel (telegrapher); Ivan Koval-Samborsky (Ilya Snegirov); Serafima Birman (Mme. Iren); Pavel Pol: (Nikolai Matveich, her husband); E. Milyutina (Marfusha, their maid); V. Popov (stationmaster).

Print courtesy Artkino (New York).

What a joy to watch a 1927 Russian comedy like "The Girl With the Hatbox"! There's no filthy language, just English titles. There's no fashionable butchery or gentler sadism, no artful baring of flabby derrieres and no soulful prancing around for the truth that shall make us free. It's fun.

Mary Pickford might have envied it. Simple, guileless and utterly old-fashioned, this slight, 67-minute exercise is all about a sweet Russian girl who works in a Moscow hat show and emerges beaming from a boisterous, slapstick scramble involving a fine young man, a scheming older couple and a winning lottery ticket. The picture may be as old as the hills, but its general tone and spirit, the graceful freshness of Boris V. Barnet's direction, and the really excellent photography shine through like a newly minted kopek. As for the shine, wait till you see the eyes of Anna Sten, the winsome heroine.

For whatever reasons, the picture finally got its first commercial showing here yesterday, running through tomorrow, in the series of silent Russian classics now at the New Yorker Theater.\* Even more curiously, the work of the director, who apparently was quite active back in the good old days, is only dimly known in this country.

Mr. Barnet knew--and may still know--how to make a movie that holds up charmingly and ever so amusingly, combining a frank barrage of pratfall confusion that spells Mack Sennett and subtle touches pointing ahead to Ernest Lubitsch. The charm extends to the snowy backgrounds of Old Russia, nostalgically evoked by those squat, frame houses, the wooden picket fences and some fine, careful panoramic arrangements gently suggesting the world beyond the small fable and modest cast.

Miss Sten, with those melting eyes, is a slightly chunky doll. This is the lady, you'll recall, who was imported to Hollywood several years later by producer Samuel Goldwyn as a new siren-queen only to have the American public hand her right back. Why, remains a mystery, for she certainly could act, as she does here, bearing a striking resemblance to the young Lillian Roth.

The others in the cast may also stir moviegoing memories. The handsome young hero, Ivan Koval-Samborsky, looks a bit like Wallace Reid. Serafima Birma and Pavel Pol, as the wily shop owners, thrash around like Polly Moran and Jean Hersholt. And the old actor who plays Miss Sten's foxy grandpa surely must be named Ouspenskaya."

-Howard Thompson, The New York Times, November 16, 1970

\*Thompson is mistaken. As indicated in the credits, the film was shown in New York, September 16, 1929.

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Anna Sten, the very young and charming "girl with the hatbox," was another Soviet emigre of the late twenties whose "transgression" was punished by deletion of her name from all Soviet film records. The last Soviet mention of her, in a 1932 issue of Proletarskoye Kino, was an ungallant comparison of her Soviet autobiography with the version--and adjusted birthdate--she gave to the German press.

According to Richard Lamparski (Whatever Became of...?) her real name is Anjuchka Stenska, and she was born in 1910. Of the several films she made in the Soviet Union, only THE GIRL WITH THE HATBOX, Fyodor Otsep's THE YELLOW TICKET, or THE EARTH IN CHAINS (ZEMLYA V PLENU), 1928, and Yakov Protazanov's THE WHITE EAGLE (BELY OREL), 1928, are notable. Abroad, her work in Otsep's MÖRDER DIMITRI KARAMASOFF (MURDER OF KARAMAZOV), 1931, caught the attention of Samuel Goldwyn. He brought her to Hollywood, to groom as another Garbo. Despite a sensational publicity campaign, his efforts failed. Of the three



lms she made for him (NANA, 1934, directed by Dorothy Arzner; WE LIVE AGAIN, 1934, directed by Rouben Mamoulian; and THE WEDDING NIGHT, 1935, directed by King Vidor), only the last is of importance. None pleased the public. Goldwyn and Anna parted. The films she made subsequently were also unsuccessful. Except for a British picture, THE NUN AND THE SERGEANT (1962), and an occasional TV appearance, she now devotes herself to painting.

Barnet (June 18, 1902 -- January 8, 1964) was not a major talent. But his films are, in the main, excellent examples of Soviet comedy. They were popular as entertainment, with a minimum of overt ideological orientation. A former boxer, Barnet studied in Kuleshov's workshop, where he played the stunt-like role of the cowboy in THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF MR. WEST IN THE LAND OF THE BOLSHEVIKS, 1924 (shown in Part I of the Soviet Silent Cinema). For MISS MEND (1926), the adventure film that followed, he did a triple stint: actor, co-scenarist (with B. Sakhnovsky and Fyodor Otsep, and co-director (with Otsep). GIRL WITH THE HAT-BOX, his debut effort as sole director, established his reputation and led to the assignment of MOSCOW IN OCTOBER. A number of other films followed, the best of which are reputed to be HOUSE ON TRUBNAYA SQUARE (DOM NA TRUBNOI), 1928, OUTSKIRTS, or BORDERLAND (OKRAINA: U.S. title: PATRIOTS), 1933, his first sound film, and BY THE BLUEST OF SEAS (U SAMOVO SINEVO MORYA), 1936. In the forties he made a number of war films. Throughout his career he continued to appear as actor, in minor or supporting roles. His last recorded film is ALYONKA, 1961.

Sonia Volochova