

Document Citation

Title	House in the snowdrifts
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Source	<i>Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.)</i>
Date	
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	3
Subjects	Ermler, Fridrikh (1898-1967), Soviet Union Nikitin, Fyodor
Film Subjects	Dom v sugrobakh (House in the snowdrifts), Ermler, Fridrikh, 1927

HOUSE IN THE SNOWDRIFTS (DOM V SUGROBAKH). 1927. Released March 23, 1928. Drama.
6 reels. Sovkino (Leningrad). Incomplete. Russian intertitles. ca. 35 minutes.
Alternate Russian title: DOM V RAZREZE (THE SUBDIVIDED HOUSE).

Scenario (from Yevgeni Zamyatin's story "The Cave" ("Peshchera"): Boris Leonidov.
Direction: Friedrich Ermler. Photography: Yevgeni Mikhailov, G. Bushtuyev.
Design: Yevgeni Enei. Assistant director: Robert Maiman.

Cast: Fyodor Nikitin (musician); T. Okova (his wife); Valeri Solovtsov (speculator);
A. Bastunova (his wife); Yakov Gudkin (Yasha); G. Shaposhnikova (his sister);
V. Plotnikov (spectator); Masayev (worker).

Synopsis

Petrograd, 1919. Workers brigades are leaving for the front to fight the approaching White Army. Food and fuel are scarce. The houses are buried in snow. In one such house live three families: a musician and his wife, a speculator in wood and his wife, and, in the cellar, a worker and his children. The musician and his wife are cold and hungry. But most of all they suffer from the feeling that they are useless people, no longer needed, outcasts. The musician is convinced that in these difficult times he and his music are superfluous. Nevertheless, he is determined to celebrate his wife's name day, no matter what the cost. But he humiliates himself in vain by begging a few logs from the speculator. In despair, he steals the logs, as well as the parrot of the worker's children. Charred remnants of the logs and the plucked feathers of the cooked parrot, which masqueraded as "chicken" expose the "criminal."

The new humiliation is more than the musician can bear. He's on the verge of suicide. At that moment he's asked to play the piano at a party welcoming the Red soldiers back from the front. He plays his favorite pieces. Their enthusiastic reception brings realization that the new society needs and wants the art of the past. He's imbued with new hope: active participation in the new life.

Soviet Fiction Films:
An Annotated Catalog, Vol. 1.
Moscow, 1961, p. 192, No. 450
Translated and revised by Sonia Volochova

Friedrich Ermler (May 13, 1898 - July 12, 1967) is best known for FRAGMENT OF AN EMPIRE (OBLOMOK IMPERII), 1929, (intermittently shown at the Museum), and PEASANTS (KRESTYANE) 1935 (shown some years ago).

"The little boy who ran errands for a pharmacist and organized the other children of the neighbourhood to act out his filmscripts in the backyard, was at last prepared to put his dreams and hopes on celluloid. His days as bit player (in Viskovsky's RED PARTISANS) and student of the Leningrad Film Technicum ended with a clear position of his future 'fundamentalist' approach to realism. Being the only communist among the students led him to take a position for 'revolutionary content' as against 'revolutionary form', then being noisily declared by the FEX group. To oppose this emphasis on outer effects Ermler organized KEM (Experimental Film Workshop) among the students; the group planned and staged films without film-stock. On graduating from Technicum he and another beginner-director, Eduard Johanson, proceeded to put their principles on film. Their first jointly directed film was CHILDREN OF STORM (released August 17, 1926), on the role played by young communists in the defense of Petrograd during the Civil War; the adventures of one Komsomol group captured by the White Guards, and of another group endeavouring to rescue them, kept the film moving, but with no especial revelation of character. The two young men were still learning their craft. Their next effort was more memorable, more quiet in tone and closer in spirit to Ermler's mature work, still to come, KATKA'S REINETTE APPLES" (shown October 4 and 6), followed by HOUSE IN THE SNOWDRIFTS, directed by Ermler alone.

Jay Leyda, Kino, pp. 216-17

Ermler may be regarded as a model Communist director. The son of a cabinet maker, he is one of the few prominent Soviet directors who joined the Communist Party as a young man. After applying for Party membership in 1919 he enrolled as a student in the Leningrad Film Institute. Ermler began work at the Leningrad studios in 1924 and directed four films within the next five years. Although his work was criticized for 'impressionism' and 'Freudianism,' Ermler became editor of the journal Proletarskoye kino (Proletarian Film) and was sent to study at a Communist academy for two years. He joined Sergei Yutkevich in directing COUNTERPLAN (1932), one of the first films to introduce socialist realism to the Soviet screen. The film, which concerned sabotage in Soviet industry, was well received by Communist critics. Ermler spent three years writing and directing his next film, PEASANTS (1935) and was awarded the Order of Lenin the year of its release, although censors finally deleted one scene of the film after criticism of Ermler's 'naturalistic tendencies.' His film GREAT CITIZEN (Part One, 1937; Part Two, 1939) was a fictionalized biography of the assassinated Communist leader Kirov.

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During the Second World War Ermler became a supervising director. He was made responsible for the work of A. Ivanovski, who directed the picture ANTON IVANOVICH GETS MAD (1942). In addition to supervisory work, Ermler directed his own film SHE DEFENDS HER COUNTRY (1943). After the war THE TURNIGN POINT (1946), a fictionalized version of the battle for Stalingrad made under his direction, won high praise from Soviet critics. While Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Ludov, Kozintsev, and Trauberg found themselves in serious trouble because of 'ideological errors' in their latest films, Ermler won a Stalin Prize d for 1946. Later he directed GREAT FORCE (1950), which deals with the campaign by Communist scientists to end 'obseisance to foreign science,'"

Paul Babitsky and John Linberg,
The Soviet Film Industry, pp. 310-11

Ermler's early silent films owe a large debt to the acting of Nikitin (b. May 3, 1900 --_) who played Vadka, the intellectual gone to seed, in KATKA'S REINETTE APPLES, the deaf-mute in THE PARISIAN COBBLER, and the musician in HOUSE IN THE SNOWDRIFTS. A noted stage actor, Nikitin began his theatrical career in 1917, his screen career in 1926, with KATKA'S REINETTE APPLES. Three more Ermler films followed: HOUSE IN THE SNOWDRIFTS, THE PARISIAN COBBLER (1927), and FRAGMENT OF AN EMPIRE, 1929 (shown intermittently), in which he created his most famous role, the man who lost his memory. He played (mostly supporting roles) in many other films, too numerous to list. None is outstanding. The best known are LONE WHITE SAIL (BELEYET PARUS ODINODY), 1937, directed by Vladimir Legoshin, ACADEMICIAN IVAN PAVLOV (AKADEMIK IVAN PAVLOV), 1949, and MUSSORGSKY, 1951 both directed by Grigori Roshal. He was still acting in 1968.

Sonia Volochova