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VISIONS

115



Russki Kovcheg

Russian Ark

Alexandr Sokurov

RUSSIA/GERMANY, 2002

96 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
Production Company: **Hermitage Bridge Studio/Egoli Tossell Film AG**
Producer: **Andrey Deryabin, Jens Meurer, Karsten Stöter**
Screenplay: **Anatoly Nikiforov, Alexandr Sokurov**
Cinematographer: **Tilman Büttner**
Editor: **Sergey Ivanov, Stefan Ciupek, Betina Kuntzsch**
Production Designer: **Yelena Zhukova, Natalia Kochergina**
Sound: **Vladimir Persov, Sergey Moshkov**
Music: **Sergey Yevtushenko**
Principal Cast: **Sergey Dreiden, Maria Kuznetsova, Leonid Mozgovoy, Mikhail Piotrovsky**

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Production: **Hermitage Bridge Studio, Dvortsovaya nab. 19, Saint Petersburg 191028 Russia. T/F (7-812) 326-8378 hbs@peterlink.ru**

Alexandr Sokurov, like his fellow countryman and spiritual father, Andrei Tarkovsky, is a lyricist of time – time unfolding and time observed. The past 15 years have seen Tarkovsky's passing and Sokurov's emergence as the most distinctive voice in Russian cinema. His new film is in every way a continuation of this obsession with time: it is constructed in one long, single take – there are no cuts. As if it were not enough to master the technical difficulties of a single-shot film, Sokurov also moves through centuries of Russian history in this spellbinding work.

Knowing Sokurov's attachment to the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, one of the world's foremost art galleries, a producer suggested to Sokurov that he work cinematically with its famed collection of treasures. This stimulated Sokurov to attempt a film in one shot or, as he describes it, "in a single breath." He brings together two characters, a witty, nineteenth-century French diplomat and his ghostly companion, a present-day filmmaker who remains just out of sight behind the camera. The two wander through the great halls of the Hermitage, their musings and observations on the paintings drawing us into Russia's turbulent history, from the exploits of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great to the time of Nicholas II and a nostalgic restaging of the last sumptuous Royal Ball in 1913 – the Bolshevik Revolution just around the corner.

The film is a technical tour de force. In its single take (the longest Steadicam shot ever recorded), we weave through 33 separate

rooms and additional mid-winter exteriors. The cast numbers almost 900, with hundreds of extras, and features three live orchestras, including one conducted by Valery Gergiev. Lighting and actors' movements were extensively rehearsed. Digital technology allowed all this to happen, but even the length restrictions of High-Definition tapes had to be overcome. However, Sokurov is much more than a technician. He turns *Russian Ark* into a sensual, dreamlike meditation on the history of his country, capturing the tragedy of Russia's past in a single extraordinary shot.

■ Dimitri Eipides

Alexandr Sokurov was born in the Irkutsk region of the former USSR. He studied history at Gorky State University before attending the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow. He has received numerous awards, among them the Vatican Award for his development of humanistic ideas in cinematic art. Selected filmography: *The Lonely Voice of Man* (78), *Painful Indifference* (83), *Days of Eclipse* (88), *Save and Protect* (89), *The Second Circle* (90), *Stone* (92), *Whispering Pages* (93), *Mother and Son* (96), *Moloch* (99), *Taurus* (00) and *Russian Ark* (02).

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