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Cinema of the Soviet Union

The Soviet cinema is one of the most dynamic and aesthetically rich cinemas in the world. In the second half of this decade, Soviet film began a period of radical change: structurally, artistically, and commercially. It will take at least another decade for the change and re-organization to be completed, yet it is certain that filmmakers will remain at the cutting edge of cultural reform.

48 The examination of the legacy of Stalin is one of the most pressing concerns for Soviet artists today. Nowhere has this been quite so visible as in cinema. Topics as diverse as the prison camps, the aberrant legal system, forced relocation of ethnic minority groups, rigid centralization of the government, and the setting of the stage for the "period of stagnation" are now being brought before the public in films. In recognition of this important trend the 8th Vancouver International Film Festival will present the landmark documentary *The Power of Solovki* and several narrative films that uncompromisingly address this period of Soviet history.

Glasnost and *perestroika* have fostered a period of widespread experimentation in Soviet film, embracing the avant-garde and non-narrative forms. This recent trend is most evident in the films of the prolific Russian studios of Mosfilm (Moscow) and Lenfilm (Leningrad) yet it also can be observed in the small Central Asian republic of Tadzhikistan. Several of the resulting films have been outstanding. The majority have caused a furor among Soviet and international critics and audiences. Regardless, most would agree that this is a crucially important phase for Soviet cinema. The "new model" cinema made possible by increased artistic freedom is fitfully emerging, and film artists must explore all of the possibilities. This experimentation is especially important now, because while the Soviet film industry struggles to restructure internally, and swiftly becomes a more active member of the international film community, the pressure for Soviet films to perform at the box office is drastically increasing.

All too often, when we think of the Soviet Union, we think of Russia and exclude the other 14 republics. Similarly, when we think of Soviet film, we think of Russian film only. However, excellent films are produced in all of the lesser known republics. The V.I.F.F. continues its commitment to the cinema of the Soviet Central Asian republics by presenting feature films and short subjects from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. From the modern, socially-committed cinema of the Uzbekfilm Studios in Tashkent comes a "glasnost thriller", *The Shock*. The 8th V.I.F.F. is also proud to present the world premiere of the brilliant Stalin-era epic from Uzbekfilm Studios, *Little Man In a Big War*.

At the well-equipped Kazakhfilm Studios in Alma-Ata, a genuine "new wave" of young filmmakers has begun making provocative low-budget features. The V.I.F.F. will present Rachid Nugmanov's innovative urban thriller, *The Needle*, and two splendid short films that perfectly capture the rhythms of life in the remote, rural villages of Kazakhstan.

The Vancouver International Film Festival is proud to present this exciting selection of new films from the Soviet Union. Please join us in extending a warm welcome to the visiting Soviet filmmakers.

- Forrest S. Ciesol

The V.I.F.F. extends special thanks to Valerian Nesterov and Viktor Evseev of Goskino USSR, and Davlat Khudonazarov and Vladimir Dikov of the Union of Soviet Filmmakers for their efforts in making this program possible.



Days of Eclipse Dni Satmeniya

Thursday, Oct. 5, Van East, 9:30pm

USSR, 1988, 139 minutes

Director: Alexander Sokhurov

Production Company: Lenfilm Studio

Screenplay: Yuri Arabov, Arkadi Strugatzky, Boris Strugatzky, Piotr Kadochnikov

Cinematography: Sergei Jurisditzky

Editor: Leda Semionova

Composer: Yuri Chanin

Leading Players: Alexei Ananishov, Eskender Umarov, Irina Sokolova, Vladimir Samansky, Kyril Dudkin

Print Source: Goskino USSR

Revered as an underground legend for ten years, director Alexander Sokhurov has only recently been discovered as a major international talent. His full-length feature "graduation film", made in 1978, was rejected by the Moscow film school, and banned in the Soviet Union until 1987. He made many other short films and documentaries in the intervening years but these too were suppressed. In his third feature film, Sokhurov pays homage to his late mentor Andrei Tarkovsky, but displays a strong, innovative visual style completely his own. In a series of seemingly unrelated episodes, a newly graduated doctor from Moscow resettles in a remote corner of the Central Asian republic of Turkmenia where he experiences a succession of personal ordeals. This complex melange of symbols, allusions and story fragments can be interpreted on a number of levels, however a dominant topical theme of Stalin's arbitrary and forceful resettlement of entire nations from their homelands clearly addresses the cause of much of today's ethnic violence.

In a film of staggering visual impact, Sokhurov makes spectacular use of widescreen photography. The image is presented in yellow and sepia hues that heighten the effect of intense heat and the alien, forbidding landscape. Enigmatic and mysterious, this is a fascinating film from a startlingly original filmmaker.

Selected Filmography: *Maria* (78/88), *Days of Eclipse* (88)