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NIKITA / MIKHALKOV

It seems to be hard for British commentators, stumbling about the Soviet cinema, to resist using the work 'Chekhovian'. But with Mikhalkov you can relax, because he is – very – Chekhovian.

Starting from *A Slave of Love*, one is struck by the director's affection for his all-too-fallible characters, weaklings to a man, eternally questing and questioning, and never finding or finding out. He gently guys them, he sometimes mocks them mercilessly, he moves from farce to tragedy via all the intermediate stages. It is Chekhov revisited. *Unfinished Piece for Mechanical Piano*, of course, is actually based on Chekhov's first play, the same piece recently adapted as *Wild Honey* by Michael Frayn. Though generally reckoned unstageable (and wasn't even attempted until 1954), *Platonov* contains all the prototypes for Chekhov's later characters, and Mikhalkov presents them in their purest form. What's more, and it's again maybe a Chekhovian trait, all his films, be they set in pre-revolutionary or contemporary times, based on original screenplays or

existing works, seem to have a contemporary significance far more telling than most films set in the present day.

Mikhalkov is helped immeasurably by his actors, by now almost a stock company, with Elena Solovei, Yuri Bogatyryev, Alexander Kalyagin and Mikhalkov himself at the core. Mikhalkov was already acting for ten years before his directorial début, and as an actor projects a rather engaging 'wide-boy' persona. We include a selection of his roles in other people's films: Prince Nelidov in *A Nest of Gentlefolk*, a black-marketeer in *Station for Two* and a seducer in *Cruel Romance*. His range is limited, as he is the first to admit ('I give less as an actor than I expect of others'), but his acquired technique must to some extent account for his consistently faultless handling of players. His loyal 'family' also extends to cinematographer Pavel Lebeshev, designer and co-writer Alexander Adabashian and composer Eduard Artemiev, all consummate masters of their craft.

His real family, of course, is not untalented; it includes the painter Surikov, dramatist Sergei Mikhalkov and the film director Andrei Konchalovsky. With such a pedigree, there's surely little to wonder at in such a boundless talent.

—Clare Kitson.





Tue 9 Apr

6.30

A Nest of Gentlefolk

(Dvoryanskoe gnezdo)

Mikhalkov's older brother is now best known abroad for the recent *Maria's Lovers*. *A Nest of Gentlefolk* was his second film, an authentic evocation of Turgenev's Russia, the somnolent, stultified rural society to which Fyodor Lavretsky flees from the high-life of Paris and his socialite wife. A brief re-awakening of his emotions by a neighbour, Liza (a young Irena Kupchenko – watch out for her 15 years on in *Without Witnesses*), comes to nothing. Mikhalkov plays a minor character, Prince Nelidov. 1969/Dir Andrei Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky.



Mon 1 Apr

8.35/

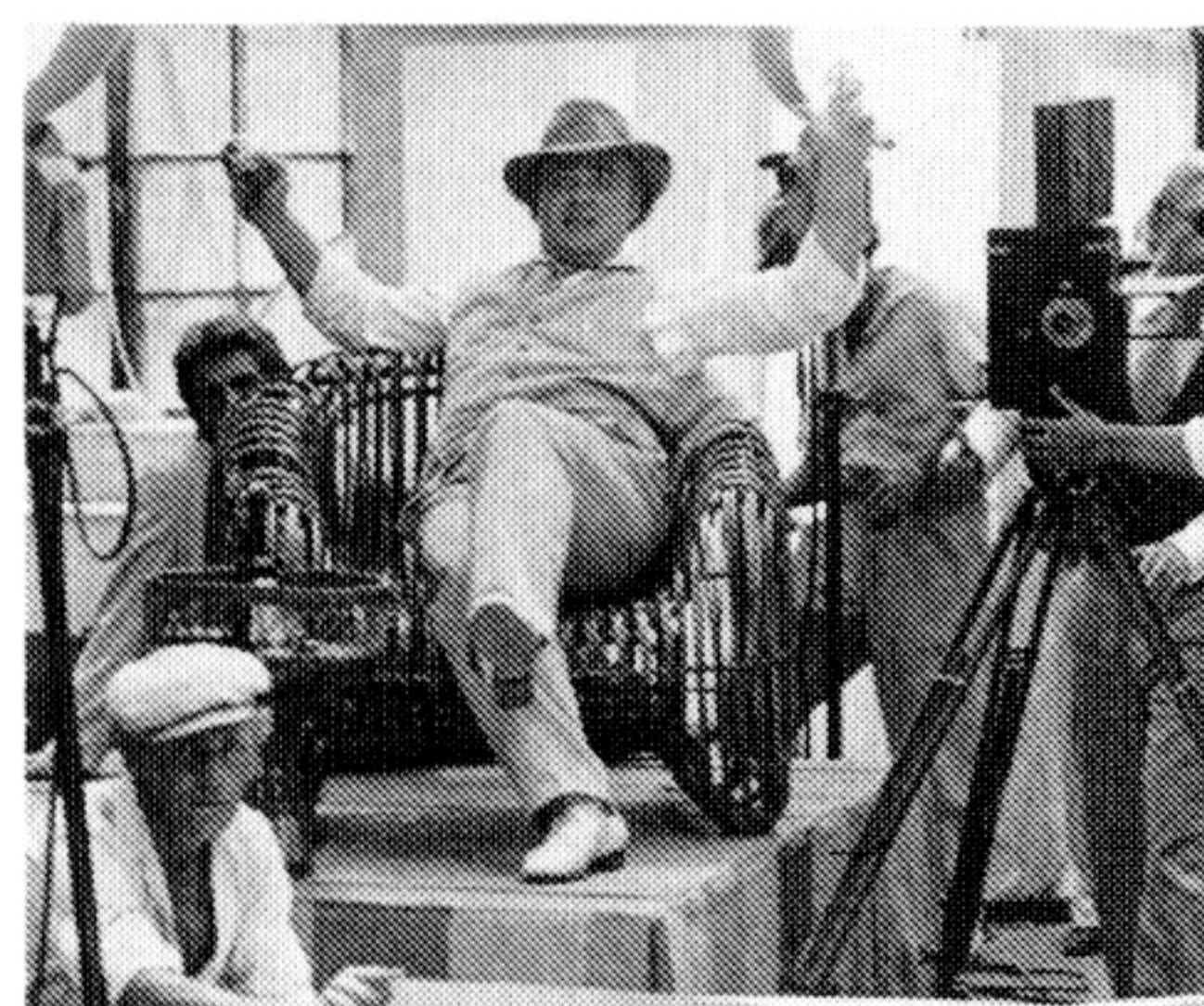
Wed 3 Apr

6.15

At Home Among Strangers

(Svoi sredi chuzhikh, chuzhoi sredi svoikh)

Gene Moskowitz's *Variety* review of Mikhalkov's first film as director praised its flamboyancy, criticised its 'artiness' and discerned a director to watch. An Eastern Western set immediately post-revolution, it has a Red Army man, falsely accused of hi-jacking gold, join the enemy and track it down. It boasts magnificent photography by Pavel Lebeshev, ravishing landscapes and a good role for Mikhalkov as leader of the anarchists. 1974/Dir Nikita Mikhalkov. With Yuri Bogatyrev, Anatoly Solonitsyn, Alexander Khaidanovsky.



Tue 9 Apr

8.45

A Slave of Love

(Raba lyubvy)

In 1917 an endearingly un-committed film crew in Odessa soldier on with a romantic melodrama, trying to ignore the revolution blazing in Moscow. From an original script by Andrei Konchalovsky but feeling, as Philip French pointed out, like the result of a *New Statesman* competition to re-write *The Last Tycoon* in the style of Chekhov, *A Slave of Love* pokes fun at film-crew and revolutionaries alike and boasts terrific performances from Alexander Kalyagin as the mad director and Elena Solovei as the vapid star finally converted to the cause. 1976/Dir Nikita Mikhalkov.



Mon 15 Apr

6.30/

Mon-Fri

15-19 Apr

2.30 daily

Unfinished Piece for Mechanical Piano

(Neokonchennaya pyesa dlya mekhanicheskovo pianina)

Chekhov's rambling first play, written when a busy medical student, seems never to have been properly finished, and hence offers carte blanche to any adaptor. Michael Frayn's wonderful version, *Wild Honey*, is as much Frayn as Chekhov. Mikhalkov's adaptation, equally free, is quintessential Chekhov. His regular stock company is at its best – Kalyagin as Platonov, the 35-year-old schoolteacher suddenly faced with realisations of inadequacy, Elena Solovei as the cause of his problems and Mikhalkov himself as the drunken doctor. 1976/Dir Nikita Mikhalkov.



Mon 15 Apr

8.45

Five Evenings

(Pyat vecherov)

Set in 1957, and based on Alexander Volodin's play, *Five Evenings* deals with a man and woman who had lost touch 25 years previously at the outbreak of war, when they were engaged to be married. The couple, both now embittered, grope, with lies and embellishments, towards a new relationship. The lives and the settings are bleak, depressing – far from the optimistic atmosphere of much contemporary Soviet cinema. Yet there's tenderness and humour in script and direction, and Lyudmila Gurchenko and Stanislav Lyubshin are superb. 1978/Dir Nikita Mikhalkov.

It is amazing that anything at all could be made out of Goncharov's massive satire on the lethargic 19th-century Russian aristocracy – let alone a gem of a film like this. The indolent Oblomov (Oleg Tabakov) is momentarily shaken from his dreams by his athletic German friend Stolz (Yuri Bogatyryev), who arranges a brief idyll with the lovely Olga (Elena Solovei). Mikhalkov and Tabakov have together created the most lovable, infuriating hero ever, the secondary characters are finely drawn and the photography is ravishing. 1979/Dir Nikita Mikhalkov. 140 mins.

Fri 19 Apr
8.20

Oblomov

(Neskolko dnei iz zhizni
I I Oblomova)

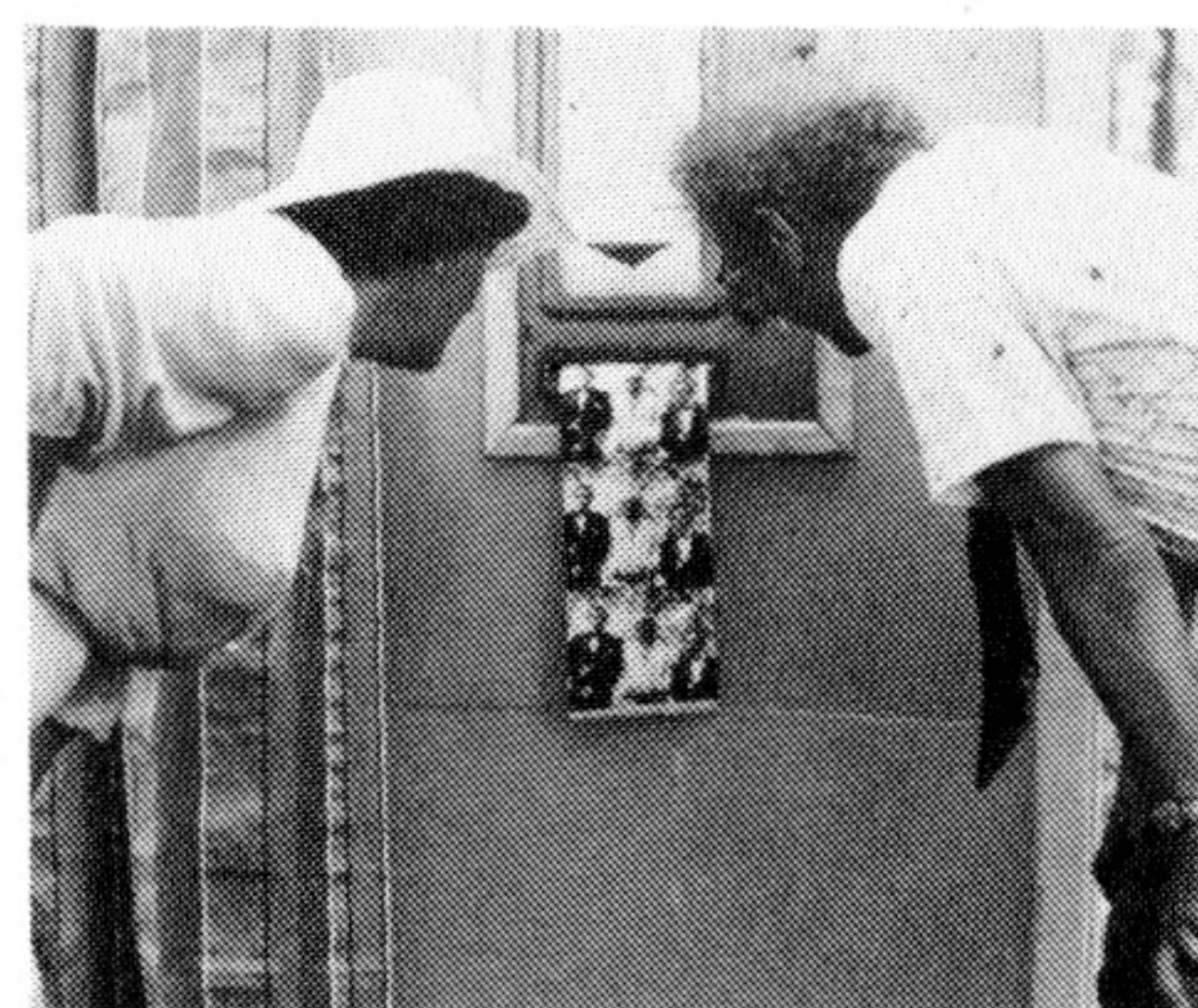


An unusual film for Mikhalkov, and based on an original script (which Viktor Merezhko wrote for actress Nonna Mordyukova – Mikhalkov was only brought in at a later stage). Mordyukova is radiant as the buxom provincial mother who bursts on the capital to poke her nose into her daughter's affairs, and gets the cold Muscovite shoulder. It's a slighter cinema, and some of the humour misfires. But it exudes genuine Russian warmth and emotion and indicates an un-tapped side of the astonishing Mikhalkov talent. 1981/Dir Nikita Mikhalkov.

Tue 23 Apr
8.45

Kinfolk

(Rodnya)



It's been boffo bizz in the USSR but thumbs down in international festival circles for Ryazanov's extraordinary comedy. For Western sophisticates the improbable, romantic plot is hard to take, with two world-weary, ageing 'singles' meeting in a station and negotiating a minefield of a romance, the last few scenes of which take place in a Siberian prison camp. Even so, Lyudmila Gurchenko makes a delicious self-deprecating heroine and the black market milieu (in which Mikhalkov has his part) is amazingly forthright and very funny. 1983/Dir Eldar Ryazanov. 138 mins.

Thu 25 Apr
8.20

Station for Two

(Vokzal dlya dvoikh)



Claimed by some as Mikhalkov's best film, *Without Witnesses* is dismissed by others as 'theatrical' – as though the two were mutually exclusive. The theatrical nature derives from its bizarre conception as both stage play *and* film – though the former never materialised. An ex-married couple (Mikhail Ulyanov and Irena Kupchenko), try desperately to wound each other with their words and their ploys. First one gains ground, then the other. The intensity of dialogue and delivery, relieved as ever by comic interludes, leaves one shattered. 1983/Dir Nikita Mikhalkov.

Fri 26 Apr
8.45

Without Witnesses

(Bez svidetelei)



We are pleased to preview in this season Mikhalkov's very latest acting role, in Eldar Ryazanov's *Cruel Romance*. A new departure for humourist Ryazanov, it is a classical drama, based on Ostrovsky's 1878 play, *The Dowerless Bride*, about a virtuous girl who, without fortune, is negotiated between mother and suitors like a chattel. Mikhalkov plays the magnetic playboy who wins her heart and tramples on it, and fragile beauty Larisa Guseyeva as the heroine is winning in her first film role. 1984/Dir Eldar Ryazanov. With Alisa Freindlich. 160 mins.

Mon 29 Apr
8.10

Cruel Romance

(Zhestoki romans)

