

Fondazione Prada

mostra internazionale d'arte cinematografica
mostra internazionale d'arte cinematografica



The Secret History of Russian Cinema at 63rd Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica

The Secret history of Russian Cinema is offered by the **Festival** in collaboration with the **Fondazione Prada**, chaired by **Miuccia Prada** and directed by **Germano Celant**, and with the **Federal Agency for Culture and Film-making** and **Sovexportfilm** of Moscow. The section of works proposed is the ideal continuation following on from the success of *The Secret History of Italian Cinema* of 2004, and of *The Secret History of Asian Cinema* of 2005.

The new series of repertory films that the Biennale di Venezia will present under the title of **The Secret History of Russian Cinema**, in collaboration with the Federal Agency for Culture and Cinematography of the Russian Federation, will be dedicated to the film-makers from that area and their works which have remained or have become “invisible”. The **63rd Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica** will present 18 surprising titles, ranging from milestone works in the history of Soviet cinema, to films condemned to remain in the archives, including 10 restored films. The works and authors of this popular avant-garde cinema, including some that have rarely or never been seen in Italy, will be presented by a group of exceptional “godfathers”, led by the most famous of contemporary Russian directors, **Nikita Mikhalkov**, who commented the presentation of the retrospective in the following words: “As a director, I know how difficult it is to find a balance between intimate film and epic film. Through song, Soviet film has achieved this balance, creating a cinema that is immediately affecting and opens the path to new stylistic possibilities. The combination of extraordinary talents: actors, directors, composers, has been and remains a guarantee of the fact that the films have not aged. Splendid inventions by the directors and splendid performances by the actors: above all, by the Soviet divas. As a Russian proverb recites, it is better to see once than to hear a hundred times. Though a hundred times we have heard the magical voices of these musical comedies which have accompanied us throughout our history....”

The program will highlight the careers, marked by a constant dialectic between the old and the new, of two directors: **Grigorij Aleksandrov** and **Ivan Pyr'ev**. The end of the innovative impetus of the Soviet musical has been set at 1974, the year of the very "Nouvelle Vague" musical comedy by **Andreij Koncalovskij** (another of the "godfathers" or "witnesses" who will be present at the Mostra to accompany the program).

The plurality of the esthetic products of Russian or Soviet cinema seem to have been forgotten today. Yet, a fervid motivation to reconsider an artistic-commercial type of film that need not renounce its own intelligence, and can still captivate the audience, a people's cinema that looked to the most ardent avant-garde, have come to us from that very continent of cinema which is no longer being surveyed yet presents largely unexplored areas, despite the monographs and festivals that have scrutinized it over the past twenty-five years (in Pesaro, Venice and Turin). Since the early Thirties (and the journey made by Ejzenstejn and Aleksandrov to Los Angeles, upon invitation by Upton Sinclair), the "New" Russian and Soviet cinema has often harbored both the impossible dream of reconciling Hollywood and Mosfil'm, as well as a project defended by film-makers who were "non-conforming" and in love with "pure" and "abstract" film, which to them was represented by the musical. They were directors, divas (especially two highly cultured divas who accepted to be "popularized": Lyubov' Orlova and Marina Ladynina), scriptwriters, directors of photography and set and costume designers who worked within a very solid industrial system, exploring its most extreme borders (and thus promptly accused of "formalism" and "cosmopolitanism"), or using satirical comedy to provide a critical reading of the society of the time (thus many films were banned).

The restoration and re-release by the Biennale di Venezia, in the wake of the workshops initiated with the Secret History of Italian Cinema and The Secret History of Asian Cinema, will thus continue through the year 2006. The choice of 18 films has privileged both the two "pillars" of musical film (**Grigorij Aleksandrov** and **Ivan Pyr'ev**, both students and collaborators of Ejzenstein), and films which have rarely or never been seen even at home, such as Cheriomushki by Gerbert Rappaport with musical score by Dmitrij Shostakovich, or Save the Drowning Man! by Pavel Arsenov, which cost the director years of forced silence. Following World War II Soviet musicals won the attention of foreign scholars, provoking, on several rare occasions, enthusiastic reaction during their screenings at festivals. Jazz Comedy by Grigorij Aleksandrov triumphed in Venice in 1934. Only a few years after this film was released, jazz (a founding element in Aleksandrov's film, with the Leonid Utiosov band) was banned in the Soviet Union. This fate was shared by the scriptwriters and directors of photography in another film by Aleksandrov: Volga-Volga. Having canceled the undesirable names from the credits at the end of the film, the censors were however unable to eliminate many of the protagonists of Soviet culture who appeared in the film (one name above all: Solomon Mihoels), who later ended up in the Stalinist prisons in the late Thirties. The retrospective examines the history of Soviet musical comedy, a cinema poised between Stalin's praise and the danger of serious accusations. A systematic program of this magnitude has never been attempted, and many of the titles, which had never undergone restoration, were becoming impossible to view.

The films from The Secret History of Russian Cinema

- Vesiolye rebiata** /Jazz Comedy by **Grigorij Aleksandrov**, 1934
- Garmon'**/The Accordeon by **Igor Savchenko and Evgenij Sneider**, 1934
- Cirk** /The Circus by **Grigorij Aleksandrov**, 1936
- Bogataja nevesta** / The Rich Bride by **Ivan Pyr'ev**, 1938
- Volga-Volga** by **Grigorij Aleksandrov**, 1938
- Traktoristy**/Tractor-Drivers by **Ivan Pyr'ev**, 1939
- Muzykal'naja istoria** / A musical History by **Aleksandr Ivanovskij** and **Gerbert Rappaport**, 1940
- Svetlyj put'** /The Radiant Path by **Grigorij Aleksandrov**, 1940
- Svinarka i pastukh** / The swineherd and the shepherd by **Ivan Pyr'ev**, 1941
- V shest' chasov vechera posle vojny** /At six o'clock in the evening after the war by **Ivan Pyr'ev**, 1944
- Vesna** / Spring by **Grigorij Aleksandrov**, 1947
- Kubanskie kazaki** / Cossacks of the Kuban' by **Ivan Pyr'ev**, 1950
- Scedroe leto** / A Generous Summer by **Boris Barnet**, 1950
- Karnaval'naja noc'** / Carnival Night by **El'dar Rjazanov**, 1956
- Nas milyj doktor** / Our Sweet Doctor by **Shaken Ajmanov**, 1956
- Cheriomushki** / Cheriomushki by **Gerbert Rappaport**, 1963
- Sparite utopajuscego** /Save the Drowning Man by **Pavel Arsenov**, 1969
- Romans o vlyoblionnykh** / Romance for Lovers by **Andrei Konchalovskij**, 1974

For any further information please contact:

La Biennale di Venezia – Press Office

tel. 041 5218859 – 041 5218861, e-mail: ufficiostampa@labiennale.org

Fondazione Prada – Press Office

tel. 02 54670515, fax 02 54670258, e-mail: press@fondazioneprada.org