



Cine Lumiere
Tues 7 January 2020

We are from Jazz (1983)
Dir. Karen Shakhnazarov

'When you live in a country with no religion, you have to believe in something, so you believe in music.' These are the words of Igor Butman, the internationally acclaimed jazz saxophonist, born in Leningrad in 1961. It is this sense of intense belief, belief so strong it develops a religious profundity, that Karen Shakhnazarov communicates through his debut film, 'We are From Jazz'.

Shakhnazarov himself was born in 1952, in a Soviet Union on the precipice of change. 'We are from Jazz', was released in 1983, a time of economic and political dislocation in the USSR. At the point of the Soviet Union's decay, Shakhnazarov and his co-writer Alexandr Borodyansky made a film about its beginnings. The USSR of the 1920s, as depicted in 'We are from Jazz' is a recent project. The revolution is a recent memory and the imperial past is alluded to throughout, most notably through the character of Ivan Bavurin, who learned saxophone in the courts of Alexander II. A character with imperial education playing a revolutionary form of music is no accident. The irony of the film is, that in this new world, this revolutionary form of music is not accepted.

Jazz within the Soviet Union has a history as erratic and changeable as the politics of the federation itself. Jazz came to the USSR in the 1920s, roughly five years after finding mass appeal America and Europe. Jazz went through prohibition to acceptance by the avant-garde and back to being prohibited. However, at all times jazz was still considered to be bourgeois and therefore rebellious. The lead character Kostya tries to dispel this notion to his music teachers. He asserts that jazz is the music of the proletariat: developed by African Americans under the oppression of the American state. It is not the music of the bourgeois. His argument falls on deaf ears.

But despite the state's anti-jazz stance, Soviet musicians were inexorably drawn to it. 'We are From Jazz' displays the intensity and the call of that passion. And yet, the quartet's

misadventures provide many funny moments, a reminder that creativity and subversion go hand in hand with laughter. After Kostya falls into despairing apathy, it is a comedic mishap that pulls him out. Their collective refusal to be defined by defeat highlights their film belief in jazz. It is this reckless belief that provides the charm of the film. Shakhnazarov and Borodyansky had been inspired by the Soviet jazz men they met while writing the script. One, Alexander Varlaman, is thought to be the prototype for Kostya's character. Shakhnazarov and Borodyansky were taken by his fervour, energy and the fantastical stories he told about the USSR's earliest jazzmen.

Jazz as an art form has always captivated people and artists. Drawn to the departure from formal structures and the improvisation and experimentation that defines the genre, jazz produces a mindset of revolutionary thinking that is mirrored in the film's events. The quartet travel through the USSR, improvising and trying every conceivable means of being heard, but all they meet with is public apathy. Interestingly, the production of the film was as experimental and improvised as the music form the film depicts. Many scenes in the film were improvised, including the scene where Kostya and the thief tap out rhythms with forks at dinner. Nikolai Averyushkin, who played Zhora, lied about his musical prowess and had to be taught how to play the drums during filming. Peter Scherbakov, who played Bavurin had no musical ear, and the film makers had to combat this issue with backing tracks and miming. The cast and crew were truly as unlikely jazz musicians as the characters depicted. The sound of jazz starts before the film's content does. It begins playfully over the brief opening credits before being contextualised by Kostya's playing. Kostya looks up and winks, briefly breaking the fourth wall. From the first moment, Shakhnazarov tells us that jazz, and everything it stands for, is the star of this film.

This screening is introduced by the Guardian film critic Peter Bradshaw

MELODIA! DISCOVERING MUSICALS FROM RUSSIA & THE CAUCASUS

Melodia! celebrates the diversity and complexity of Soviet, Russian and Caucasian musicals. It gives UK and Russian speaking audiences a unique opportunity to explore an undiscovered musical tradition.

WE ARE FROM JAZZ (1983)

KAREN SHAKNAZAROV

Introduced by Peter Bradshaw

This film casts an eye back to the jazz's beginnings in 1920s USSR. Released into the harsh economic reality of the 1980s, it is an example of the loosening of censorship in the late Soviet film.

7 Jan 6.30pm

CHERYOMUSHKI (1963)

GERBERT RAPPAPORT

Introduced by Owen Hatherley

An adaptation of Dmitri Shostakovich operetta, which subtly criticises Soviet life, raising intriguing questions about whether Shostakovich was a dissident or an ideologue. Screening on 35mm.

8 Jan, 6.30pm

CARNIVAL NIGHT (1956)

ELDAR RYAZANOV

A brilliant parody of Soviet top-down bureaucracy, Carnival Night satirise the appointment of a new director at a House of Culture, who threatens the New Year's party plans of his co-workers.

14 May, 6.30pm

MELODIES OF THE VERA QUARTER (1987)

GIORGI SHENGELAIA

Melodies extols the quintessential Soviet values of socialism and hard work through a charming tale that clearly has its origins in folklore. The film's Soviet context is infused with marvellous Georgian music and dance and featuring a performance from Sofiko Chiaureli, is a celebration of Georgian culture's vibrancy.

15 Jan, 6.30pm

KARINE (1969)

ARMAN MANARYAN

Based on an operetta by Tigran Chukhajian, *Karine* includes everything an operetta is supposed to have. Performed in Armenian and released shortly after the 1965 demonstrations in Yerevan, it is important to see this film as a reclamation also of Armenian identity.

21 Jan, 6.30pm

A MAN FROM BLVD DES CAPUCINES

ALLA SURIKOVA

Introduced by Hope Dickson Leech

This rare red Western acts as an exploration into the nature of cinema. Lovingly playing with devices of American film and the birth of cinema, it is the only film in the season to be directed by a woman.

Wed 22 January 6.30pm

HIPSTERS (2008)

VALERY TODOROVSKY

Todorovsky's musical provides a contemporary view on the 'Stilgyagi' counter-culture (parallel to the Beat Generation). A melange of 1950s music with contemporary score, this eclectic film contextualises Russian musical tradition within its Soviet past.

Screening on 35mm.

Sunday 26 Jan, 6.00pm

LETO (2018)

KIRILL SERREBRENNIKOV

Kirill Serebrennikov's film is a foray into Leningrad's 1980's music scene. Depicting real cult figures from the time, and showcasing a nostalgia for the time's epoch, it explores Western music's impact on the underground scene.

Friday 31 Jan, 7.30pm

About Peter Bradshaw

Peter Bradshaw has been chief film critic at The Guardian since 1999. Bradshaw is also the author of several novels, including *Lucky Baby Jesus* (1999), *Dr Sweet and his Daughter* (2003) and *Night of Triumph* (2013). He has co-written and performed in *Baddiel's Syndrome* (2001) with David Baddiel for Sky One and for radio he has written and performed *For One Horrible Moment* for Radio 4 and the stories *Reunion* (read by Tom Hollander) and *Neighbours Of Zero* (read by Daniel Mays). A selection of his film reviews, *The Films That Made Me*, is now on sale in bookshops nationwide.

About Karen Shaknazarov

Karen Shaknazarov was born on July 8th 1952. 'We are from Jazz' (1983) was his debut film. The early comedic promise of 'We are from Jazz' and teen comedy 'Courier' (1987), which won a special prize at the Moscow Film Festival that year, was followed by films in a variety of genres including literary adaptations such as 'Ward No. 6'; musicals like 'Winter in Gagra' and the historical drama 'The Assassination of the Tsar'. He became the director of Russia's largest film studio, Mosfilm, in 1998.

About Kino Klassika Foundation

Kino Klassika creates programmes of film restorations, publications, art commissions and events to educate audiences about classic Russian language and Eastern cinema. This includes a 2-year programme to spotlight the pioneering work of filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, and our first restoration projects of Parajanov's *Hakob Havtatanyan*, and *Arabesques on the Pirosmiani Theme* as well as *Jirtdan*. Kino Klassika's trustees are Professor Ian Christie, Daniel Jowell QC, Roger Munnings CBE and Justine Waddell. The patron of Kino Klassika is Ralph Fiennes.

The Kino Klassika Team

This evening's screening could not happen without the support of the Kino Klassika team Josepha Andreyev, Talitha Piggott, Tatiana Isaeva, Zoryana Mischiy, Maria Egieva, Seraphina Paisey & Nathaniel Dampier.

Support Us

Kino Klassika is a UK registered charity (1150791). We rely on the generosity of our supporters. If you want to encourage education and engagement with classic Russian language, Eastern and East European film, please support us by making a donation.

We are fundraising to complete a restoration of **Parajanov's Arabesques on a Pirosmiani Theme (1985)**. This short film, about Georgian painter Niko Pirosmiani, is a meditation by one great Georgian artist (Parajanov), on another (Niko Pirosmiani). Parajanov, of both Georgian and Armenian descent, is considered one of the most lyrical and imaginative figures of 20th century cinema, developing the art form with unique, poetic vision, and leaving a legacy that has influenced countless subsequent directors. He is arguably best known for his film *The Colour of Pomegranates*.

Our bank details are as follows:

Account no. 69358087

Sort code 60-15-33

Or please donate at our website:

www.kinoklassikafoundation.org

@kinoklassika #KinoKlassika #MelodiaMusicals

Melodia! Discovering Musicals from Russia and the Caucasus is made possible by generous support from the National Lottery



CINÉ
LUMIÈRE



BFI
FAN