



Tuesday 8 September 2020

#Klassiki

We'll Live 'Til Monday by Stanislav Rototsky (1968)

Melancholic is the best word to describe Stanislav Rostotsky's elegant melodrama. It is a film in which light and darkness are shown to be intrinsically entwined, and this interrelation is explored in a deceptively gentle manner. Underneath Kirill Molchanov's romantic, and slightly ghostly, melodies and the gorgeous black and white cinematography, is the human condition laid bare. This unflinching dive into the complexities, and often inherent sadness, within individuals is explored through three days in an ordinary Soviet high school.

Schools are a microcosm in which life's major themes are continually played out. The students are discovering a multitude of emotions for the first time and the teachers, at varying stages in their lives, are entering new life stages themselves. Their own trials and inevitable ageing play out beside a responsibility to cultivate youthful minds. A major tension in *We'll Live till Monday* is the disparity between the young and old. The film starts with a boisterous and joyful scene: a white crow is loose in an English lesson. The students' newly graduated teacher, Natasha, leads the charge on attempting to capture the bird. After Ilya Semyonovich, masterfully played by Vyachslav Tikhonov, bears witness to the unruly scene and derides her, she responds by re-entering the room and killing the crow. Natasha stands as the bridge between the students and the more mature teachers. Her crush on Ilya Semyonovich is beginning to move from charming to pathetic as she grows older. Her mannerisms are somewhere between the students and the older teachers. After her conversation with Ilya, her enthusiasm is affected by the attitude of her superiors. This leads her to behave in a brutal way. In this film, Rostostsky continually questions the cyclical nature of society and how we are taught to model ourselves on flawed individuals, often developing their own flaws through example or misinterpretation.

The literature teacher, Svetlana Mikhailovna, is a pertinent example of a well meaning woman whose own neuroses interfere with her ability to help the children. She sets her class the task of writing an essay on the meaning of happiness. When Nadia, a beautiful and popular student, writes that her dream is to marry and have children Svetlana is outraged. She attempts to confiscate Nadia's essay and calls her shameful.

After the class her hostile demeanour drops. To Natasha, she reveals her own sadness, saying that all she does is 'deal with other people's happiness', holding the children's essays aloft. Ilya Semyonovich is a mysterious and caustic figure. The school's principle, who has known him for years, describes him as a man who is 'easy to respect, but hard to love.' He is frequently cold to Natasha, despite her obvious love for him and in one scene even publicly reduces another teacher to tears. But at heart he is an idealist, albeit moral to a fault. Against his conscience, he gives an academically challenged child a passing grade instead of a failing one so he may remain in his dance institution. When the mother of this child comes to visit him, he derides her parenting. As she leaves she shouts of her hardships, of her husband's alcoholism and the difficulties in raising her son. Ilya is left stunned. The force of his principles pales in comparison to the desperation of lived experience. When Ilya asks to leave the school, the Principal tells Ilya he is happy with administration and happy to believe whatever 'new truths the newspapers print'. He questions why Ilya is unable to do the same. Ilya's disillusionment is visceral and understandable. Beyond the normal disparity of a generational divide, Ilya and the principle were former soldiers. That recent tragedy lingers over society, largely unnoticed by the post war generation. In one scene Ilya passionately describes an 1905 uprising to his students. He describes Lieutenant Schmidt as having the 'precious gift of feeling other people's pain more acutely than his own' and defies his students to question the flaws of historical figures. Their ignorance and cynicism juxtaposes his fervour. It is clear that it is the unfortunate fate of the former soldiers to be hopelessly misunderstood by the postwar generation.

The fundamental melancholic beauty that rests at the heart of Rostotsky's film is summarised perfectly by Gena, a poetic student. He tells Nadia, the girl he is infatuated with, 'Rationally I know as a person you're nothing special, yet I try to disregard it.... Everyone needs to be in love, with someone or something.' In the same way Gena picked Nadia, Natasha picked Ilya and Ilya picked heroism. The camera's lens watches their futile dance sympathetically. It is a hopeless way to be, but a beautifully human one none the less.



Stanislav Rototsky

Rostotsky was a Soviet filmmaker (1922-2001). Born in Rybinsk to a Russian-Polish family, he became obsessed with cinema after watching Sergei Eisenstein's seminal *Battleship Potemkin* at the age of five. In 1944 Rostotsky joined VGIK and trained under Grigori Kozintsev, who he was also to study under at Lenfilm studios. Between 1955 and 1989, he directed 10 feature films, most famously *We'll live Until Monday* (1968) and *The Dawns Here are Quiet* (1972). A former soldier himself, the war was a frequent subject of his films, all of which he approached with an unmistakable artistry and philosophical approach.

About Klassiki

Klassiki screens a highly curated selection of director led films, with each week's choice introducing UK audiences to an important filmmaker's work. An opportunity to experience online a weekly curated selection of the best of Soviet, Russian, Caucasian and East European cinema, KLASSIKI ranges from early silent cinema, to masterpieces of animation, from post-war classics to contemporary Cannes winners. Supplementing the film experience, KLASSIKI offers specially commissioned and downloadable programme notes as well as podcasts and filmed introductions which give biographical, social and political context to each film. We also program film seasons, including RED FRONT: 75 YEARS OF RUSSIAN WAR CINEMA and TASHKENT FILM ENCOUNTERS, to spotlight classic cinema from Central Asia.

This is the birth of Klassiki, our planned free streaming platform, which will allow you to stream great cinema from the region, literally on the hop.

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.

Our bank details are as follows:

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www.kinoklassikafoundation.org

About Kino Klassika Foundation

Kino Klassika is the only organisation in the world dedicated to spotlighting cinema from Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The foundation 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 *Hakob Havnatanyan*, *Arabesques on the Pirosmeni Theme* and *Jirdan* (1969). We have recently completed *Melodia! Discovering Musicals from Russia and the Caucasus*, a screening season in partnership with the British Film Institute, Institut Francais, Bristol Watershed and Broadway Nottingham. KLASSIKI continues Kino Klassika's longstanding undertaking to showcase classic films from the region. By giving audiences access to unseen gems as well as the opportunity to meet and chat with directors and filmmakers from Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia, Kino Klassika are a trusted, credible and essential part of the UK's specialist film exhibition sector.

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 screening could not happen without the unstinting support of the Kino Klassika team: Joseph Andreyev, Tatiana Isaeva, Zoryana Mischiy, Olja Mljjevic, Seraphina Paisey and Talitha Piggott.

Upcoming Klassiki Screenings

Klassiki will screen a new film in our weekly curated series, every Tuesday from 2pm. Please check in with us on social media or via our website to access each week's new screening. And please share the news with your friends!

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