



Tuesday 20 October 2020

#Klassiki

Slave of Love (1976) *Nikita Mikhalkov*

Slave of Love is a tale of fiction meeting fact. Against the high stakes backdrop of the revolution, shot in a romantic and wistful summer light; the melodramas played by Olga Vozsensenskaya begin to come to life, in a totally unexpected way. Olga is based heavily on Vera Kholodnaya, a famous and much loved silent film actress, and the bourgeoisie melodramas she stars in feature extreme passion, love and death in the parlours of the wealthy. Suddenly, these emotions performed for entertainment pervade every section of society, and suddenly it is no longer a game. In the first scene that depicts the cast and crew shooting, the set designer places a revolver on the wall. Soon after, the producer comes in and demands to know from Viktor, the camera man, how the film has spoiled. This moment is a subtle reference to Chekhov's *Gun*, with the 'spoiled' film becoming the plot's most important catalyst.

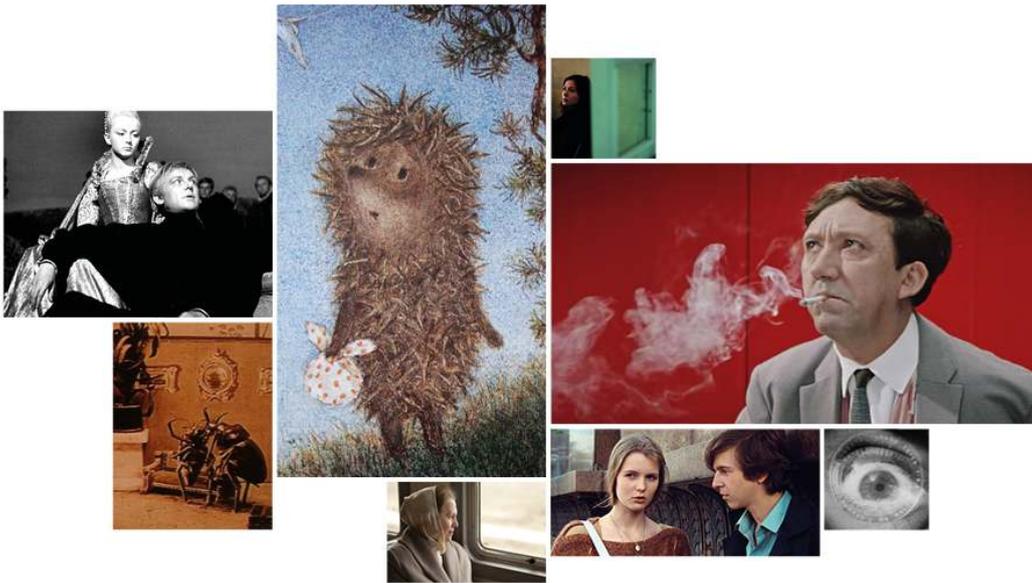
Gary Arnold, for the *Washington Post*, spoke of the titles connotations, 'The title *Slave of Love* has a charming, antique resonance. It evokes a bygone theatrical and film-making period, epitomized by heroines swooning in overstuffed or exotic, melodramatic settings. In an American context this title would suggest the movies of the '20s.' This is certainly how the film begins: first with a black and white shot of Olga's film, which itself is called 'Slave of Love', with an interlude showing the brutality inflicted on the secret theatre screening said film, and then of Olga's histrionics and the drama of a film set. The set, in relation to the scene of violence just before, is an incredibly normal environment. However it becomes clear that the cast and crew are dealing with more than the usual dramas of a set filled with big personalities, whether or not they want to admit it. Olga is initially shown as charming; but self involved and naive. Her life of stardom is one that is far removed from political concern, and her and many of the other crew members manage to isolate their lives from the wild events sweeping through the country for an unprecedentedly long time. In fact, many of them hope to be part of the wave of white immigration to Paris, and retain their bourgeoisie lifestyles and occupations.

The film begins in 1918, and Moscow is already under Bolshevik control. The filming is south, which is still under the

white army's power, the cast strategically went there to avoid conflict. Whilst as removed from the conflict as any citizen still in the country could be, their collective nostalgia is apparent. They reminisce about the recent past: the grass just outside Moscow, which was luscious and full; and sighing spell of the country's 'central' ring. A place to which they cannot return. There is an irony to their nostalgia, the location they're in is beautiful with dappled light and it's southern charm. The events and places they speak of are close by, both geographically and temporally. However, they're already aware that they cannot turn back and the Moscow of their memories is already gone.

Olga in a case of better late than never, becomes interested in the conflict. Her romantic ideation and her love for Viktor lead her to applaud him for his devotion to the rebellion. She tells him in the car, laughably, that she thinks it is 'So beautiful to love something so much you would die for it.' It is a humorous moment. Her voice is high pitched during this exchange and she remains clad in her highly fashionable and expensive clothing. She considers Viktor's place in the revolution merely exciting and idealistic. But, her love for Viktor becomes the basis of a deep and enduring change. Initially when she volunteers herself to help Viktor, she excitedly asks him what she should wear. When he says, 'It doesn't matter', rather like a child she excitedly replies, 'I'll wear something modest, so that no one will recognise me.' Olga's prototype, Vera Kholodnaya, lived one of those lives that becomes shrouded in mystery, intrigue and conspiracy. The circumstances of her death are regraded as suspicious and many think that she was a Bolshevik spy during her lifetime. We know for a fact that in her career as an actress she was a beautiful symbol for the bourgeois world of glamour.

The ever changing nature of symbols is a discourse that runs throughout Mikhalkov's film. Initially Olga is a beautiful and glamorous symbol of the bourgeoisie, but in the film's last moments she becomes an elegant symbol of the revolution; much in the same way Kholodnaya's afterlife canonised her as a revolutionary. Film also changes during *Slave of Love*, it ties together pre revolutionary film, the power of film to document, and released, in 1975, the power of modern cinema.



Nikita Mikhalkov

Nikita Mikhalkov (August 21, 1945) is a prolific and highly acclaimed actor, filmmaker, and screenwriter. He has been lauded with an Oscar and the Grand Prix at Cannes Festival for *Burnt by the Sun* and is a favourite at Venice, where his films have consistently won awards, and in 2007 he was awarded a 'Special Lion' for his contribution to cinematography. Hailing from a famous film family, his older brother is Andrei Konchalovsky, and in 1978 he starred in his brother's acclaimed epic *Siberiade*. As a cinematographer and director he is well known for his adaptations and period dramas, notably *An Unfinished Piece for Mechanical Piano* (1977) and *The Barber of Siberia* (1998).

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, and KLASSIKI choices range 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 Ploshmani 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 was founded by Justine Waddell. The trustees are Professor Ian Christie, Daniel Jowell QC, Roger Munnings CBE. 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, Alexia Claydon, Olga Doletskaya, Seraphina Paisey, Talitha Piggott and Jack Weeks.

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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