



Tuesday 3 November 2020
#Klassiki

Beshkempir (1998)
Aktan Abdykalykov

The shift from childhood to adulthood is uncomfortable at best. It happens gradually, but suddenly there is an inescapable realisation that the way we look at the world has changed and innocence lost cannot be regained. In Aktan Abdykalykov's deeply personal and heartbreakingly honest bildungsroman, the first of his highly acclaimed trilogy of autobiographical films, these natural growing pains are combined with a rupture. At a tender moment of adolescence, Beshkempir has to contend with the shattering revelation that he is adopted and is forced to interrogate his sense of belonging.

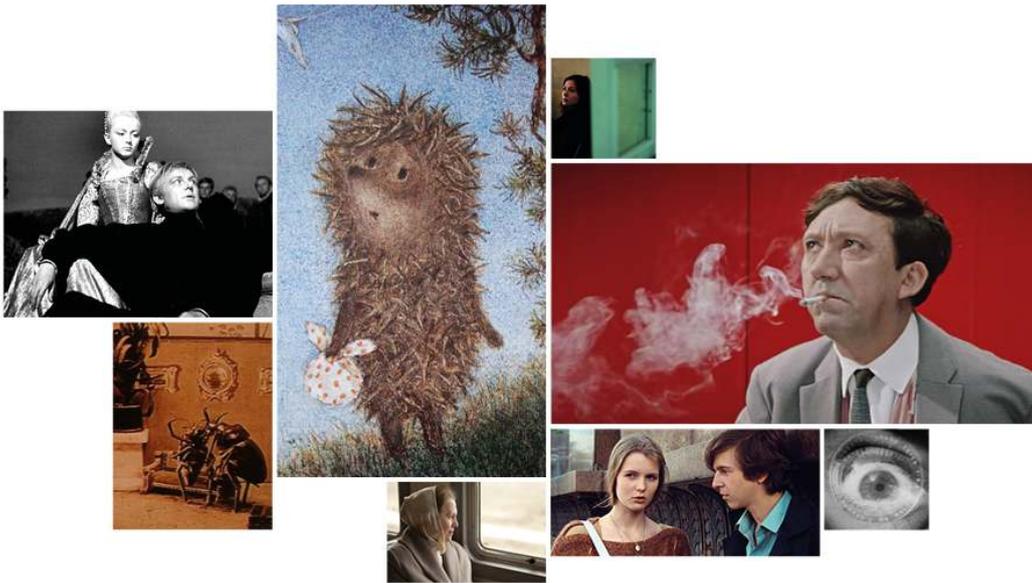
One of the most striking things about *Beshkempir* is the sound. As the protagonist played by Mirlan Abdykalykov, the director's own son, idles around the village in forlorn solitude the sounds of the Kyrgyz countryside fill the static camera shots. The sound of birds during the daytime chirp against the image of the boy's loneliness, crickets are deafening at nighttime and when Beshkempir is beaten up by his friends we can hear the splash of water as they fight in the lake. In fact, whenever Beshkempir is in a state of tension, either on the receiving end of violence from his father or violence from his friends, the diegetic soundtrack is turned up. It evokes the same fraught sensory overload we all experience under stress and transports the viewer to those moments in their own life. Stephen Holden for The New York Times commented on how the soundtrack simultaneously captures the specific Kyrgyz landscape and the universal experience of childhood: 'With a soundtrack filled with the sounds of nature, and frequent images of the wind in the trees, the movie transports you back to an age when, no matter how sophisticated your environment might have been, your experience of the natural world was fresh and filled with sense of discovery, an age when time seemed to open up endlessly.'

Beshkempir is the first film released after Kyrgyzstan's independence from the Soviet Union. Released in 1998, it is the trailblazer for the new wave of films coming out of the country. Following a neorealist tradition and belonging to the same milieu as works such as *The Bicycle Thief* and *The Apu Trilogy*; Abdykalykov depicts the real people's Kyrgyzstan. The film is free from political rumination and the place of

Kyrgyzstan in the world is not referenced. In fact the only element of life from outside the village that occurs is in the form of the glamorous Bollywood films that transfix the whole village. There is great attention paid to the scenes of quotidian life and the rituals of the people of Kyrgyz: from a five minute depiction of Beshkempir's christening at the beginning of the film; scenes of the village work and a shot of the woman singing and performing funeral rites after Beshkempir's grandmother's death. Whilst most of the film is in black and white, sometimes it bursts into high colour close ups of traditional items or elements of the beautiful nature surrounding them. This is clearly intended to provide a depictions of the rich and beautiful aesthetics of the region.

The film culminates in Beshkempir's grandmother's funeral. It is in this pivotal moment that the director remembers becoming a man. Beshkempir must stand up and speak, he wipes away a single tear, and is harshly told not to cry by his father. Following their traditions, as her male heir he accepts responsibility for his grandmother's debts and voids any that are due to her. Death is a maturing experience in and of itself, but in the context of his recent discovery it is even more potent. His father is an alcoholic who he has a tense relationship with, he is not particularly close to his mother and his most important familial relationship to him was the one he had with his grandmother. By speaking at her funeral, not only does he maturely reckon with the death of a loved one, he reorients his sense of belonging and accepts his place within the family. At the funeral, his friends whom he had been fighting with hug him. There is an innate understanding that some things are most important than their altercation, and this is a symbol of acceptance back into his community.

The film ends with a shot, in high colour, of Beshkempir and Aynura's engagement ceremony. At first only their hands are in view as they play a game of cat's cradle against a stunning, striped blanket. It is an ending which depicts a new union, happiness, and possibility which follows a scene of ultimate sorrow. From the vantage point of one boy's experience Abdykalykov depicts the highs and lows of one life and the wide breadth of human experience in a small town.



Aktan Abdykalykov

A Kyrgyz director, screenwriter and actor born in 1957 in Soviet Kyrgyzstan, he was adopted, as it was customary for parents of a large family to offer a baby boy to an infertile couple. Raised in the village of Kuntu where he still resides, he grew up fascinated by the Russian and Indian movies shown in the little village theatre village. He studied painting and technical drawing at Kyrgyz Fine Arts College and in 1981 he began his work in film as a set decorator at Kyrgyzfilm, leading to his career directing. He is known for his deeply personal, symbolic films which both reflect his own life and provide a voice for Kyrgyzstan's specific social issues, and is best known for his work *Beshkempir* (1998) which won the Silver Leopard and is regarded as one of the greatest pieces of Asian cinema. *Centaur* (2017) stunned the festival circuit received to great applause.

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 Central Asian 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.

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:

Account no. 69358087

Sort code 60-15-33

Or please donate at our website:

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 *Jirtan* (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!

#kinoklassika #cinemaonthehop #kinoklassiki



@kinoklassika



@kinoklassikafoundation