



Tuesday 26 January 2021

#Klassiki

Twelve Months (1956) by *Ivan Ivanov-Vano*

'The possibilities of animation are unlimited. In the images of conventional, drawn characters, great human feelings and characters are revealed. In what other art is it possible, under the guise of a doe...to give a gentle, wise, brave and sacrificial image of the mother, how to reveal the image of the polar night, which binds the whole nature of the north? ...Only in animation, in its characteristic pictorial form, you can figuratively show some natural phenomena, and make them play, talk and sing. You can revive the stream, and it will talk. The leaves of the trees will literally whisper, and the breeze will sigh.' Ivan Ivanov-Vano, 1947

'Twelve Months' is the eighth full-length film from Soyuzmultfilm, directed by Ivan Petrovich Ivanov-Vano. Born in 1900, the director, artist and screenwriter is one of the pioneers of Soviet animation. His cartoons, made over half a century ago, immediately became classics, and remain firmly entrenched in Russian consciousness. A New Year without watching 'Twelve Months', say the Russians, is simply unimaginable.

Adapted from the play of the same name, written in 1942 by Samuel Marshak (who also co-wrote the script for the film with Nikolai Erdman), '12 Months' tells the story of a spoiled princess who demands that she be brought a basket of snowdrop flowers in the dead of winter. Her teacher (voiced by Erast Garin) insists that this is impossible, though is forced to play along so as to avoid her capricious ire. The person capable of this miraculous feat, she decrees, will be given in exchange a basket of gold. Upon hearing the proposal, a greedy stepmother sends her stepdaughter (voiced by Lyudmila Kasatkina) into the forest alone, where she meets the twelve months of the year personified. With their help, the season miraculously changes to spring and snowdrops appear, and April himself even gives her a magical ring to be used should she run into trouble. Speak the magic words, he assures her, and the twelve months will come to her rescue. Trouble, of course, awaits the young girl, whose stepmother takes from her both the snowdrops and the ring.

The illustrious interiors of the palace and the gorgeous, fleecy winter landscapes were painted by artist Anatoly Sazanov, and it boasts an impassioned score by Moisey Vaynberg (who

would later go on to collaborate with Georgiy Daneliya on 'Afonya'). It's not specified where and when the action takes place, though we can assume it's somewhere in the west at the turn eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, which was the setting of Marshak's original folktale.

Western viewers may worry that '12 Months' won't appeal to them in quite the same way as it does to Russians. Yet the miracle of animation is that these stories, wherever they come from, often seem to us more real and universal than other types of film. The drawings and music, instead of depicting exactly how magical scenes might look if they actually materialised, show us how we might imagine them. In that sense, they appeal to the child in us, our fantasies and nightmares; they fill a hole in our imagination, and ultimately shape who we are and how we think about the universe and our position within it. And since we normally first see these films at a very young age, they tend to sound within us a deeply felt truth that will go on to resonate with us forever.

There is a subtext to 'Twelve Months' that doesn't detract from this child-like simplicity, grappling with questions that, even as adults, we tend to ignore. At its heart lies the dangerously impulsive princess, who stands for a terrible image of authority that decides literally to issue new laws of nature. By the same token, the stepmother and her daughter are bad tempered and lazy, demanding of nature and authority rewards they don't deserve. As a consequence both the princess and her subjects must come to terms with the immutable power of natural and supernatural forces, which ultimately lie beyond their control. Compare this with the hardworking, cheerful and honest stepdaughter, whose behaviour is rewarded by the tempestuous seasons, and we have a tale that teaches us to be grateful to our origins for the natural gifts they bestow on us.

More pertinently, we could see an affinity here with the fairytales of Eugene Schwartz, whose fantasy kingdoms reveal the destructive psychological damage of totalitarian rule. Marshak's original story was written in 1942, towards the end of the Second World War, and so its otherworldly images remain inextricably linked to the spirits of the time. And the film, made just ten years later, perhaps reiterates the restoration of justice that took place across Europe.



Ivan Ivanov-Vano

Born in 1900, Ivan Ivanov-Vano is a director, artist and screenwriter, and one of the pioneers of Soviet animation. His cartoons, made over half a century ago, immediately became classics, and remain firmly entrenched in Russian consciousness. He was well versed in the visual arts of Russian folklore from a very young age: fairs, folk toys, Russian cuisine, church symbols and children's games would all go on to feature heavily in his works, including the beloved New Year classic, *Twelve Months*.

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 Piromani 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, until February 4, 2021, where encouraged by the success of this weekly film season, we are launching our new VOD platform, klassiki.online. Please share the news with your friends!

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