

Document Citation

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Title | Kozintsev and Trauberg: the tempo of the revolution |
| Author(s) | |
| Source | <i>Pacific Film Archive</i> |
| Date | |
| Type | program note |
| Language | English |
| Pagination | |
| No. of Pages | 6 |
| Subjects | Trauberg, Leonid Zakharevich (1902), Odessa, Soviet Union Kozintsev, Grigorii Mikhailovich (1905-1973), Kiev, Soviet Union |
| Film Subjects | Gamlet (Hamlet), Kozintsev, Grigorii Mikhailovich, 1964 [Young Fritz] (Young Fritz), Kozintsev, Grigorii Mikhailovich, 1942 Yunost Maksima (The youth of Maxim), Kozintsev, Grigorii Mikhailovich, 1935 Odna (Alone), Trauberg, Leonid Zakharevich, 1931 Korol Lir (King Lear), Kozintsev, Grigorii Mikhailovich, 1971 Chertovo koleso (The devil's wheel), Kozintsev, Grigorii Mikhailovich, 1926 S.V.D., Kozintsev, Grigorii Mikhailovich, 1927 Novyi Vavilon (The new Babylon), Kozintsev, Grigorii Mikhailovich, 1929 |

Don Kikhot (Don Quixote), Kozintsev, Grigorii Mikhailovich, 1957

Shinel (The overcoat), Kozintsev, Grigorii Mikhailovich, 1926

Kozintsev, Grigori

Kozintsev and Trauberg The Tempo of the Revolution

March 28, 29, 30, 31, April 5, 6, 7
at Pacific Film Archive

Grigori Kozintsev was seventeen and Leonid Trauberg twenty when they got together in 1922 with cameraman Andrei Moskvin and several actors to form the Factory of the Eccentric Actor, or FEKS, a group that later attracted Eisenstein and others. FEKS began as a futurist theater group that believed in total experimentation, excess, and rebellion. These self-styled "engineers of the spectacle" sought a distinctly modern idiom in the still infant art of cinema—in sets and costume, photography and editing, music (Dmitri Shostakovich wrote original scores for their films) and most of all acting. Influenced by American slapstick and Lev Kuleshov's theoretics, by circus and Dada, FEKS performers incorporated acrobatics, mime, and caricature, without any deference to psychology, so as to draw the viewer into the period and subject without the "naive naturalism" they abhorred. "The tempo of the revolution," believed Kozintsev, "is that of scandal and publicity."

We are pleased to present a series of fine prints from the USSR, and viewers who have followed screenings from PFA's Soviet film collection may be familiar with some of the titles—*The Devil's Wheel*, *S.V.D.*, and *The New Babylon*, the quintessence of FEKS spirit. The little shown *Alone* will be a revelation, and *The Youth of Maxim* is "the most cheerful, witty, and downright likable of all revolutionary pictures" (Elliott Stein). The Kozintsev-Trauberg collaboration continued into the 1940s, after which Kozintsev continued (still with cinematographer Moskvin and composer Shostakovich) to make such acclaimed literary adaptations as *Don Quixote*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*, the latter two being some of the best Shakespeare you will ever see on film.

THURSDAY MARCH 28

Kozintsev and Trauberg/Shostakovich

This program was organized by the Film Society of Lincoln Center in collaboration with the Russian Film Committee and Lenfilm Studios, with special thanks to Frigeta Goukasyan.

The series at PFA is made possible through the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund Museum Collections Accessibility Initiative.

The Youth of Maxim 7:00

Grigori Kozintsev, Leonid Trauberg (USSR, 1935)

Preceded by:

Young Fritz (*Kozintsev, Trauberg, USSR, 1942*). A surviving fragment of one of Kozintsev and Trauberg's rare World War II films. *Young Fritz* is the story of a teenager who turns

fascist and even joins the Gestapo. Written in verse by the poet and translator Samuil Marshak. (24 min fragment, In Russian with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm)

(*Yunost Maksima*). *The Youth of Maxim* is the first part of a classic trilogy in which Kozintsev and Trauberg evoke the disturbed, restless pre-revolutionary years on the basis of memories and experiences of Bolshevik workers. Maxim is a fictional hero, a true popular hero, with indestructible good spirit and talents. His longing after freedom is in fact a recognition of every human being's right to a normal, happy life. Maxim is subjected to hardships; he has to suffer imprisonment, but since he is a free spirit, his vitality overcomes all bitterness. The teasing freshness of popular ballads helps present serious historical events as simple, everyday human happenings. The dynamic narrative movement and the striking figure cut by Boris Chirkov as Maxim connect the film to the eccentric tradition of the 1920s, while the film's humor, Maxim's smile, and the gentleness of his gestures, give intimacy to this account of a much-glorified historical movement.—Tom Luddy and Yvette Biro

The Youth of Maxim and *Young Fritz* are repeated Friday, April 5.

• Written by Kozintsev, Trauberg. Photographed by Andrei Moskvin. Music by Dmitri Shostakovich. With Boris Chirkov, Stepan Kayukov, V. Kibardina, M. Tarkhanov. (80 mins, In Russian with English subtitles, B&W, 35mm)

FRIDAY MARCH 29

Kozintsev and Trauberg/Shostakovich

Hamlet 7:30

Grigori Kozintsev (USSR, 1964)

Kozintsev spent years preparing this version of *Hamlet*. Aside from the film, his research led to the publication of one of the most intelligent reflections on Shakespeare published in recent times—*Shakespeare, Time and Conscience* (Hill and Wang, N.Y. 1966). Based on Boris Pasternak's translation, Kozintsev's *Hamlet* is highly atmospheric, charged with visual poetry and strongly accented by a brilliant Shostakovich score. In somber, windswept Baltic settings, Kozintsev has found a powerful physical equivalent to Shakespeare's Denmark: his interpretation is marked less by trendy psychological insights than by a strong awareness of the state of Denmark and its relation to the central drama. According to the French critic Georges Sadoul, Kozintsev's *Hamlet* "is perhaps the best film based on Shakespeare. It brings the ancient Kingdom of Denmark face to face with the real world in characterizing Hamlet as sincerely motivated and revolted by injustice, crime, and tyranny. 'Into this State, where everyone swims with the stream, there comes a person who is against all of this' (Kozintsev)." Aside from Innokenty Smouktenovsky's intense performance as Hamlet, outstanding acting contributions are made by Mikhail Nazvanov as Claudius and Anastasia Vertinskaya as Ophelia.—Tom Luddy and Yvette Biro

Hamlet is repeated Sunday, April 7.

• Written by Kozintsev from the play by William Shakespeare, translated by Boris Pasternak. Photographed by Ionas Gritsyus. Music by Dmitri Shostakovich. With Innokenty Smouktenovsky, Mikhail Nazvanov, Anastasia Vertinskaya, Y. Tolubeev. (149 mins, In Russian with English subtitles, B&W, 'Scope, 35mm)

Kozintsev and Trauberg/Shostakovich

King Lear 7:00

Grigori Kozintsev (USSR, 1971)

Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet* and *King Lear* bear witness to the idea that the Soviet epic style, which is so well suited to cinemascope (its dynamic compositions the heir to Eisenstein's montages), is also supremely suited to Shakespeare. Kozintsev sets *King Lear* against a barren and rocky earth, not the no-man's-land of Peter Brooks's existential reinterpretation but a powerfully physical landscape in which to frame Shakespeare's most eloquent statement on human folly and the natural order. The wizened, gnome-like figure of Yuri Jarvet as Lear carries with it a perennial entourage of ragged commoners, the flies to his initial wantonness and, in the end, the ones to whom his fate is clearly linked as he "grows" in stature from monarch to beleaguered philosopher in a barbaric society. *Soho News* critic Diane Jacobs wrote, "The structure, of course, is Shakespeare, but the nuances are Kozintsev's....There is a marvelously poetic wide-angle zoom-in on Lear and the Fool in the storm sequence where they begin no bigger than spots on the sand and are only slowly revealed as men—equal in stature....This sequence is quickly counterbalanced by the grovelling of Edgar as Tom O'Bedlam in the cave...."

- Written by Kozintsev, from Boris Pasternak's translation of the play by William Shakespeare. Photographed by Ionas Gritsyus. Music by Dmitri Shostakovich. With Yuri Jarvet, Elsa Radzin, Galina Volchek, Valentina Shendrikova, Oleg Dal. (140 mins, In Russian with English subtitles, B&W, 'Scope, 35mm, PFACollection)

Don Quixote 9:35

Grigori Kozintsev (USSR, 1957)

"The tempo of the revolution is that of scandal and publicity."—Grigori Kozintsev
 "Deeds of heroism will change the world."—Don Quixote

Don Quixote is a comic epic in a serious mode: Kozintsev's interpretation of Cervantes strips the novel down to its spirit and color, like a painting whose richness lies in the quality of the paint itself. Kozintsev is above all an actor's director—for the right actor, one willing to take risks. Nikolai Cherkasov (*Alexander Nevsky*, *Ivan the Terrible*), who had played the Knight of the Woeful Countenance in stage, opera, and ballet versions of the novel, makes himself a figure from El Greco, but his interpretation is not only physical. Precisely by being true to himself, by avoiding theatrics and psychologisms, his Don Quixote incorporates the director's vision of "a good man who wanted to establish social justice on earth...in an age when justice could only appear as an object of ridicule." This self-reflexive character takes fiction to be the gospel truth, and in a society imprisoned by boredom his delusions are infectious, but he's nobody's fool. Indeed, Kozintsev and Co. have found in Cervantes the absurd quality of the Eastern European cinema—Don Quixote and Sancho Panza (played as salt-of-the-earth by Yuri Tolubeyev), amid the nobility, file their report on the party and the guests.

- Written by Evgeni Schwartz, based on the novel by Miguel de Cervantes. Photographed by Andrei Moskvina, A. Dudko. Music by Kara Karayev. With Nikolai Cherkasov, Yuri Tolubeyev, S. Birman, S. Grigoreyeva. (110 mins, In Russian with English subtitles, Color, 35mm)

Kozintsev and Trauberg

The Devil's Wheel and The Overcoat 5:30

Bruce Loeb on Piano

The Devil's Wheel

Grigori Kozintsev, Leonid Trauberg (USSR, 1926)

(*Chyortovo Koleso*). In *The Devil's Wheel*, FEKS's eccentricism found an ideal outlet in the bizarre characters and decadent environment called for by the subject—a drama of the gangster bands that preyed upon St. Petersburg/Leningrad during the Civil War period. (This colorful underground milieu apparently existed well into the twenties). "Shorin is a sailor from the *Aurora* who jumps ship to spend the night with Valya, a girl he has met in the Leningrad amusement park, and their clandestine affair is abetted by a sinister petty criminal who also performs at the park as a magician. If the storyline of Kozintsev and Trauberg's first full feature sounds more like a French New Wave film of forty years later than a venerable Soviet classic, this shouldn't surprise us.... 'Better to be a young pup than an old bird of paradise' was the original FEKS slogan in 1922 (borrowed from Mark Twain), and they stood above all for a cinema attuned to the interests of young audiences rather than the straight-laced prescriptions of Moscow administrators. Their witty irreverence attracted a strong following...and provided a dynamic working model for a cinema that would be both contemporary and revolutionary. Shorin and Valya's adventures in the Leningrad underworld lead them to a new sense of responsibility, but the moral never swamps the message of cinematic discovery." (Ian Christie)

- Written by Andrei Piotrovsky, based on *The End of the Khaza* (Konets Khazy) by V. Kaverin. Photographed by Andrei Moskvin. With Pyotr Sobolevsky, Ludmilla Semyonova, Sergei Gerasimov, Emil Gal. (52 mins, Silent, Russian intertitles with live English translation, B&W, 35mm, PFA Collection)

Intermission

The Overcoat

Grigori Kozintsev, Leonid Trauberg (USSR, 1926)

(*Shinel*). Gogol's famous story has been filmed at least five times, but never more imaginatively than in this silent version, which also incorporates elements from a second Gogol story, "The Nevsky Prospect," in its grotesque evocation of nineteenth-century St. Petersburg. The script was written by the critic Yuri Tynyanov of Leningrad's Formalist school, who subtitled *The Overcoat* "a comedy in the Gogol manner." The key eccentric element lay in the relation between the protagonist—a small man, Akaki Akakievitch—and the oversized decor, enormous bronze monuments, etc. Presenting "objects" was the best way for Kozintsev and Trauberg to give free rein to their fantasy. The eccentricity of *The Overcoat* was oriented towards expressionism, and more specifically, towards the *Caligari* end of the expressionist spectrum with its grotesque, elongated lighting, the weird ghostly style of acting, the juxtaposition of reality and dream and the fabulous sets.—Tom Luddy and Yvette Biro

- Written by Yuri Tynyanov, based on stories by Nikolai Gogol. Photographed by Andrei Moskvin, Yevgeni Mikhailov. With Andrei Kostrichkin, Antonina Yeremeyeva, Sergei Gerasimov. (66 mins, Silent with Russian intertitles and English subtitles, B&W, 35mm)

FRIDAY APRIL 5

Kozintsev and Trauberg/Shostakovich

The Youth of Maxim 7:00

Grigori Kozintsev, Leonid Trauberg (USSR, 1935)

Preceded by:

Young Fritz (*Kozintsev, Trauberg, USSR, 1942*).

For program notes, please see March 28.

Alone 9:00

Grigori Kozintsev, Leonid Trauberg (USSR, 1931)

(*Odna*). A young woman's carefree life in Leningrad is abruptly ended when she is assigned to teach in Altai, a town that hasn't progressed far beyond the Middle Ages. Her feelings of revulsion and longing are beautifully visualized in striking images of the wilds of Altai and "civilized" Leningrad. *Alone* was planned and photographed as a silent film; the sound track was added after the film was completed. This track includes a few words of dialogue but depends largely on the music of Dmitri Shostakovich. Georges Sadoul wrote, "This is the best film score he ever wrote and incorporates not only certain musical themes used for dramatic effect but also natural sounds [such] as a typewriter, a telegraph and a radio." *Alone* received only a limited release outside of the Soviet Union, and while it is considered, together with *Road to Life*, the most important early Soviet sound film, it is only rarely seen today. Elena Kuzmina's performance as the young teacher is superbly natural and unforced, and the conception, based on a true story, rings surprisingly modern (for example, Elena Kuzmina shares her name with her character).

Alone is repeated Saturday, April 6.

- Written by Kozintsev, Trauberg. Photographed by Andrei Moskvin. Music by Dmitri Shostakovich. With Elena Kuzmina, Pyotr Sobolevsky, Sergei Gerasimov. (80 mins, English intertitles, B&W, 35mm)

SATURDAY APRIL 6

Kozintsev and Trauberg/Shostakovich

Alone 7:00

Grigori Kozintsev, Leonid Trauberg (USSR, 1931)

For program notes, please see April 5.

The New Babylon 8:35

Grigori Kozintsev, Leonid Trauberg (USSR, 1929)

(*Novyi Vavilon*). We are pleased to present *The New Babylon* with the original Shostakovich symphonic score now synced to film. This energetic avant-garde extravaganza represents a culmination of the experimental Factory of the Eccentric Actor. FEKS may have rejected the old but it knew history—and recognized its collective influences. The story of *The New Babylon* is set in the 1871 Paris Commune and centers around a posh department store modeled after that found in Emile Zola's novel *Au Bonheur des dames*, which in turn satirized the circus of consumer fetishism represented by the Paris emporium Le Bon Marché. All of Paris is galvanized by the

Commune but the film focuses on a shopgirl (*Alone's* Elena Kuzmina) and a heroic young soldier. The extroverted acting style that FEKS developed pushed away feelings (theirs and ours) in a kind of pre-Brechtian carnival of alienation; caricature replaced character. But the inspiration for the photography came from the impressionists—Manet, Degas, Renoir—and there are some magnificent scenes shot in fog, shadow, and moonlight. The rhythms set up from the choreography of shots approach those of ballet in this film that has been called “the *danse macabre* of the Second Empire and Paris Commune.”

• Written by Kozintsev, Trauberg. Photographed by Andrei Moskvin, E. Mikhailov. With Elena Kuzmina, Pyotr Sobolevsky, David Gutman, Sophie Magarill. (85 mins, Silent, Russian intertitles with English subtitles, Music track, B&W, 35mm)

SUNDAY APRIL 7

Kozintsev and Trauberg

S.V.D. (The Club of the Big Deed) 5:30

Grigori Kozintsev, Leonid Trauberg (USSR, 1927)

Bruce Loeb on Piano

The FEKS spirit of experimentation, excess, and rebellion is the essence of this film about an adventure-seeker and confidence man who attempts to betray the activities of a secret society of progressive-minded military officers.

“S.V.D. is the story of the Decembrists’ revolt in 1825, but it is not an historical film. The story is used as a springboard for developing a romantic, revolutionary melodrama, with its artistic roots in such disparate areas as the Russian romantic painters of the nineteenth century and ‘American Eccentrism,’ the FEKS term for the ‘new aspect of the comic outlook on life, created by Anglo-American genius’—slapstick, chases, slim escapes, unbelievable heroism. S.V.D. sometimes has the tempo of an American western, sometimes reminds one of *Fantomas*, and then still draws you into the period the directors were trying to recreate. [Its] romanticism is an important link between the expressionism of *The Overcoat* and the precise ‘materialistic’ formalism of *The New Babylon*.”—Tom Luddy

Kozintsev spoke of the rationale for Andrei Moskvin’s camera style which created distortions using protrait lenses for long-shots, softening lenses for foreground, etc.: “We wanted to replace [the] parade of historical costumes...by a feeling of the epoch, in other words purposely to replace it with a general style and not the naturalism of details. From the cameraman’s viewpoint we were interested in obtaining photography that should be extremely picturesque....At once spots appeared instead of lines. The spot became the basic element at the expense of the graphic...essentially the same process which is to be observed in pictorial art, when the impressionists...

exhibited not so much the object...as the atmosphere around the object.”

• Written by Yuri Tinyanov, Yuri Oxman. Photographed by Andrei Moskvin. With Sergei Gerasimov, Pyotr Sobolevsky, Andrei Kostrichkin, K. Khokhlov, Sophie Magarill. (61 mins (incomplete), Silent, Russian intertitles with live English translation, B&W, 35mm, PFA Collection)

Hamlet 7:00

Grigori Kozintsev (USSR, 1964)

For program notes, please see March 29.