

Looking for 'Newrope'?

Impressions of contemporary Russian cinema at the goEast-festival, Wiesbaden (Germany) March 26 to April 2, 2003



Plakatmotiv RUSSIAN ARK

The problematic economic situation in most parts of Russia today is nevertheless the ideal climate for the flourishing of the arts.

Especially in St. Petersburg there grows a fascinating new experimental music scene, from Moscow we receive new impulses in literature such as the poet Alina Vituchnovskaja... Russian cinema always had a good reputation, and the new generation of Russian filmmakers clearly tries to keep up with it.

The goEast-festival in Wiesbaden (Germany), happening for the third time in 2003, presents documentaries and short films along feature films from various eastern European countries. And still the presence of Russian cinema is very remarkable.

Aleksandr Rastorguev made his film MAMOCKI (The Mothers, 2002) in the style of a semi-documentary: Based on real characters and events he tells the tragic story of a young couple from the Russian lower class. The young man has to live with the family of his girlfriend for his mother rejects the former prostitute. The existential conflicts caused by tradition, class conflicts and ignorance of the elder generation are played out in some intense scenes – including the birth of the couple's baby.

A clearly recognisable will for style is visible in Vera Storozevas Drama NEBO. SAMOLJOT. DEVUŠKA (The Sky. The Plane. The Girl, 2002). In radically reduced, cold arrangements she tells the story of a romantic young stewardess (screenwriter Renata Litvinova in the title-role) which is torn apart by her fear of relationships and her love for a TV-journalist who crosses her lonely way. In the end she seems to stand by her new love, but a plane-accident will end her life too soon. Despite some flaws in the wordy dialogue and the artificial acting this film creates a stunning visual beauty within aseptic surroundings and empty airport hallways.

Many eastern European films are produced in corporation with other

countries and institutions. Such is the case with Bachtijar Chudojnazarovs *ŠIK* (The Suit, 2002), a coming-of-age-drama concentrating on three adolescent boys living in a Russian village close to the Black Sea. When they discover a fine Gucci-suit displayed in a high-class boutique, they try everything to get the money to buy this suit. The occurrences connected with this object of desire – a symbol for style, wealth and the access to the high society – finally lead to the death of one of the friends.

Chudojnazarovs films clearly has the ambition to entertain and to portray the simple life in a small Russian village at the same time. He uses fast editing, a rhythmic score as well as references to the films of Federico Fellini to evoke a nostalgic youth-drama. The result is fresh and accessible cinema with a lust for life.

Radical filmmaking is the goal of Kira Muratova, who varies some *CECHOVSKIE MOTIVY* (Chechov-Motives, 2002) to show the escape of a sensitive young man out of the influence of his dominating father into a monotonous wedding-ceremony of degenerate bourgeois people. Muratova uses monochrome black-and-white-material for maximum abstraction, pushes her actors to nearly hysterical overacting and in this very grotesque way unmasks the emptied rituals of a desacralized world dominated by unreflected and hedonistic consumption. In some ways this film marks the return of a respected director to her own roots in the sixties.

The official highlight of the festival was a screening of the German version of Aleksandr Sokurov's *RUSSIAN ARK* (2002), which consist of one continuous 90-minute-travelling-shot through the various locations of the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. The camera is identified as a time-traveller who follows a dark and arrogant stranger, commenting all the incidents. In the end this stranger is unmasked as 'Europe' in a clearly recognisable state of decay. This thought-provoking technical tour-de-force is the impressive culmination of the fears and hopes concerning the construction of a new, greater Europe – based on the formerly divided eastern and western parts.

It was mentioned to general agreement at several occasions during the festival: There is no 'old' and 'new' Europe – as some people have stated. In fact the utopian Europe of the 21st century still has to be born. And the cultural exchange via cinema and critical discussion is one small but important step in the process of this birth.

Awards: The FIPRESCI-Award went to Bence Miklauzic' *ÉBRENJÁRÓK* (Sleepwalkers, Hungary 2002) for dealing with the problem of the losers after the changes in Eastern Europe giving them back the hope in a personal kind of freedom. A Special Mention went to

HLJAB NAD OGRADATA (Bred over the Fence, Bulgary 2002) by
Stephan Komandarev for documenting an example of a harmonic
and tolerant coexistence among different religious and ethnic
communities.

Marcus Stiglegger (FIPRESCI-Jury)
und Melanie Dietz (IKONEN-correspondent)

ZURÜCK

NACH OBEN

ARTIKEL DRUCKEN