

Kiev 2004

By Ron Holloway

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KIEV INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL – "MOLODIST" 2004

The oldest independent film festival in Eastern Europe, the "Molodist" (Youth) festival in Kyiv (Kiev) was founded back in 1970 by Andriy (Andrei) Khalpakhtchi, an enterprising cineaste and film historian who felt that amateur filmmakers deserved as much a chance to show their homemade productions in Budynok Kino (House of Cinema) as the film professionals at the Alexander Dovzhenko Studios. Over the years the "Molodist" festival has grown by leaps and bounds, thanks in great part to the generous support offered by foreign consulates and cultural centres based in the city. One glance at the 200-page catalogue for the 34th Kiev International Film Festival (23-31 October 2004) confirms that this rule-of-thumb still applies today: among the festival's 25 listed partners are traditional "film friends" from France, Germany, Netherlands, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Austria, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, and, of course, Russia. Indeed, more than half of this year's program was comprised of retrospective tributes: Polish New Wave, Jean Gabin Retro, New Russian Cinema, Indian Showcase, Festival of Festivals, Best of Dogme, Yoseliani Retro, Belgian Cinema Soiree, and a handful more.

To be sure, the Kiev audiences know their cinema. How else can you explain the overflow crowds for Marcel Carné's *Le jour se lève* (*Daybreak*, France, 1939) or Otar Yoseliani's *Giorgovistve* (*Falling Leaves*, USSR-Georgia, 1966)! Just as popular was the full collection of 30 *Erotic Tales* by international directors produced by Berlin-based Regina Ziegler over the past decade. Programmed daily in the Bratyslava and Kyivska Rus venues, and boosted by 18 promotional pages in the catalogue, it made no difference if the films were screened in the afternoon or late evening, the ET fans were there. "I think if we were to program Jos Stelling's *The Waiting Room* fifty times here in Kiev, we would still get packed houses," said programming director Mila Novikova. "He's probably the best known foreign director in the Ukraine."

Molodist 2004 opened with Dmitry Meskhiev's heralded *Svoi* (*Our Own*, Russia), the Grand Prix winner at this year's Moscow festival, plus awards for Best Director and Best Actor (Bogdan Stupka). A war film set in August of 1941, shortly after the German invasion, *Us* is the first Russian feature film since Alexei Gherman's celebrated and banned *Trial on the Road* (USSR, 1971/86) to treat in an open-ended manner the conflict between the hated Chekists and heroic Partisans on the front lines in Belarus. The festival closed with the world premiere of Kira Muratova's *The Piano Tuner*, a Ukrainian-Russian coproduction about a lowly paid suitor of a spend-thrift blonde who is willing to do just about anything to provide the spoiled beauty with a life-style beyond his wildest dreams. On one level a detective thriller, on another level a black comedy, *The Piano Tuner* unmistakably takes the pulse of the *nouveau riche* in the Ukraine.

Hindered by a strike at the DHL office in Brussels, the Kiev festival had to adjust its schedule almost daily. Still, in view of the fact that Russian cinema is currently riding a wave of critical successes, the lapses in the festival program hardly affected the entries from neighbouring countries. In the Official Competition Anna Melikian's *Mars* (Russia), about a boxing professional who wakes up one morning in a train to nowhere, leans on Chagall-like images to sketch dream-like happenings in a picturesque village far away from the brutality of the boxing ring. In the New Russian Cinema section Sergei Ursulyak's *The Long Farewell* (Russia), a screen adaptation of a Yury Trifonov novel (published in 1971), captures the hysteria of the Stalinist years in a searing story about Lavrenti Beria, the dreaded NKVD monster, preying on the favours of a talented young stage actress, thereby ruining her marriage to a struggling writer. In a Special Event Viktor Turin's *Agent Provocateur* (USSR-Ukraine, 1927), a silent classic starring Ukrainian actress Anna Sten (born Anjuschka Stenskaya in 1908 in Kiev) in a tale of revolutionary romanticism, offers some persuasive clues as to why Sam Goldwyn felt this young Stanislavsky pupil might rise to become another Garbo in Hollywood of the early 1930s.

The Scythian Deer, the Grand Prix for Best Debut Feature Film, was awarded to Paprika Steen's *Aftermath* (Denmark). The story of a couple that can't adjust to the tragic death of their teenaged daughter in a road accident, the film ends pretty much on the same sad note as when it started - a dogme film for actors by an

actress turned director. Andrey Kudinenko's *Mysterium - Occupation* (Belarus), already refused a release by Belarus censors, was the talk of the Molodist festival. As a hard-hitting debut feature composed of three interlinking short stories, the focus is almost entirely on the evil side of Partisan warfare during the winter campaign at the start of the Second World War. Kudinenko appears to have hit a raw nerve in Belarus and Russian history - for, unless I have misread the English subtitles, he hints that German units were as much havens for hardened criminal types as well for national-minded freedom fighters.

Molodist is one of those festivals that barely survives while performing a herculean task of vital programming for young filmmaking talent in Central and Eastern Europe. For some time now, it has continued to survive on a minuscule budget of \$100,000, a permanent staff of four, and a score of enthusiastic volunteers. This year, Stella Artois, the Belgian beer company, has come on board as a key sponsor. For the past eight years, TV 1+1 is the principle partner. A deck of computers now service the visiting press and media professionals. Guests are still largely quartered on the Hotel Ship General Valutin on the Dnieper River. One day soon, it's hoped, this may all change for the better. Perhaps after the coming election.

References

AWARDS

INTERNATIONAL JURY

Scythian Deer (Grand Prix) - Best Feature Film in Competition

Aftermath (Denmark)

Paprika Steen

Best Feature Film

Kontroll (Control), Hungary)

Antal Nimrod

Best Short Feature Film

Sidasti Baerinn (The Last Farm), Iceland)

Runar Runarsson

Best Student Film

Dumnezeu la saxofon, draci la vioara (God Plays Sax, the Devil Violin), Romania-Germany), Alexandra Gulea - documentary

Best Performance by Young Actor-Actress

Aksel Hennie, *Uno* (Norway), Aksel Hennie

Emily Mortimer, *Dear Frankie* (UK), Shona Auerbach

Audience Award

Shade (Scotland), Dustin Demri-Burns, Matt Pinder - Short Feature Film

FIPRESCI (International Critics) Prize

Uno (Norway), Aksel Hennie

Diploma

Sidasti Baerinn (The Last Farm), Iceland), Runar Runarsson - short feature film

Don Quixote Prize - FICC (International Film Clubs)

Kontroll (Control), Hungary), Antal Nimrod

Diplomas

Marco und der Wolf (Marco and the Wolf), Germany),

Kilian von Keiserlingk - student film

Festival Diplomas

Student Films

Marco und der Wolf (Marco and the Wolf, Germany),
Kilian von Keiserlingk

Milhama a'heret (A Different War, Israel), Nadav Gal
Playing Dead (UK), David Hunt

Short Films

Ivan/Juan (Russia), Konstantin Arefyev, Stepan Biryukov - animation

Zur Zeit verstorben (Dead at the moment, Germany), Thomas Weindrich - short feature

Panorama of Ukrainian Cinema 2003-2004 Prize

Mashusia v kraini chudes (Mashusia in the Wonderland),
Marina Matveychuk.

"Ukraina 3000" Fund Prize - "for development of national cinematography"

Kira Muratova.

Author Information

Ron HOLLOWAY (1933-2009) was an American critic, film historian, filmmaker and correspondent who adopted Europe as his home in the early fifties and spent much of his life in Berlin. He was an expert on the study of German cinema and against all odds produced, with his wife Dorothea, the journal *German Film*, keeping us up-to-date with the work of directors, producers and writers and the showing of German films around the world.

In 2007, Ron Holloway and his wife were awarded the Berlinale Camera Award. Ron also received the Bundesverdienstkreuz (German Cross of Merit), Polish Rings, Cannes Gold Medaille, the American Cinema Foundation Award, the Diploma for Support of Russian Cinema and an honorary award from the German Film Critics' Association.

Ron was also a valued contributor to *Kinema* for the past fifteen years.