

Strand Releasing presents

IN THE FOG

A film by Sergei Loznitsa

Starring Vladimir Svirski, Vlad Abashin, Sergei Kolesov, Vlad Ivanov

*Official Selection:
Cannes Film Festival
Toronto International Film Festival
AFI Fest*

PRELIMINARY PRESS NOTES

Country of Origin: Germany/Russia/Latvia/The Netherlands/Belarus

Format: DCP/Color

Sound Format: Dolby Digital 5.1

Running Time: 128 minutes

Genre: Drama

Not Rated

In Russian with English Subtitles

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SYNOPSIS

It is 1942 and the western edge of the USSR is under German occupation. In the region, local partisans are waging a brutal battle against their foreign enemies. Sushenya, an innocent rail worker, is arrested with a band of saboteurs when a train is derailed not far from his village. The German officer decides to set him free rather than hang him with the others, but rumors of Sushenya's treason spread quickly and partisans Burov and Voitik seek revenge. Captured by the partisans, Sushenya is led through the forest where they are ambushed. Soon he finds himself one-on-one with his wounded enemy, forced to make a moral choice under immoral circumstances.

COMMENTS FROM SERGEI LOZNITSA

THE MORAL LAW WITHIN

Sushenya is accused of something he did not do, and he has no way of proving his innocence. He is completely alone, and even his wife suspects him of wrongdoing. It is precisely this solitude of the main character in his attempt to communicate with the society, which does not trust him, that makes Vasili Bykov's book so significant. Communication is impossible because "eyes and ears are poor witnesses to those men, whose souls have barbarian nature", to quote Heraclitus. And yet the protagonist remains true to himself. He stands firm on his convictions and his decisions, and he is not capable of compromise or crime simply because the moral law within him prevents him from it. He finds himself in a situation when, in order to remain human and to preserve his dignity, he cannot live any longer. This is one of the paradoxes of being. This is what Bykov's book is about. I read Bykov's novel back in 2001 and I wrote the script almost immediately after.

SCREEN ADAPTATION: THE RULES OF VISUAL GRAMMAR

The difference between a literary text and a film is in the language itself. Everything that can be described in words cannot be represented visually, and vice versa. Any screen adaptation is effectively a "translation" into a different language. In order to be precise and powerful it has to function according to the rules of its own visual "grammar". Bykov's dialogues are very good indeed and also the way the back-ground stories of the main three characters are developed is much more sophisticated than what I could afford in the film. In the script I only give brief outlines and introduce the characters' backgrounds in laconic episodes. It is the rhythm of the film, which dictates the rules. It is the length of the scenes and the rhythm at which they follow one another which builds the dramatic narrative of the film.

A SAINT, A MAN WHO DOUBTS, AND A VILLAIN

The characters of the three main protagonists can be defined as the following prototypes: a Saint, a Man who doubts and a Villain. But I think it is far too simplistic to reduce a character to a label. One would do it if one does not have time to contemplate, and the "labels" are hardly ever going to be correct.

The "villain", Voitik, is not entirely bad. He is a person who wants to survive. And he does not have the inner strength to take action. A lot of people would be able to identify themselves with this character, who just goes with the flow and lets the external circumstances determine his actions.

The "saint", Sushenya, is also not entirely good. He has his understanding of the world and he is not able to change it. And due to this trait of his character he behaves differently and stands apart from the others.

The same applies to Burov, the "man who doubts". He cannot see things clearly and

does not quite understand in what kind of situation he finds himself. He succumbs to his emotions, which he is not able to overcome.

All these characters are quite ordinary and quite common. It is only due to a specific combination of circumstances that our protagonists display their personalities in such a way.

WAR WITHOUT COMBAT

I chose this story, which speaks about the war without talking about military actions. Everything that we see at the frontline – impressive battle scenes, for example – does not interest me. I am interested in the conditions, which force people to come to the front lines. And the origins of these conditions can be found in the routine daily life.

Why make a film about the Second World War? Due to certain reasons, artists during the Soviet era had a very limited opportunity to reflect upon the events, which took place in those tragic years. The post-Soviet culture also has produced few works, which give an unbiased representation of the events of that period. However, the tragic events need to be addressed, reflected upon and analyzed. I consider it my duty to look back and, therefore, toward the future.

ART WITHOUT DIDACTICS

Every action takes place during a certain historical period. Things that are happening right now also constitute a part of history. However we do not regard them as historical events because we do not distance ourselves from the present. Thus we do not have an understanding of the current events. And the distance (disengagement from the historical events) gives us the ability to achieve understanding.

It seems to me that after the experiences of mankind in the 20th Century, it is appropriate to speak about the collapse of humanism, as it has been conventionally interpreted in literature and art. I share the view of the Russian writer Varlam Shalamov, who had been through all the circles of inferno in Stalin's Gulag: "In new prose – after Hiroshima, after the self-service of Auschwitz and after the Serpantinka Gulag in Kolyma, after all the wars and revolutions – everything that is didactic should be rejected. Art does not have the right to preach. Nobody can teach anybody, nobody has the right to. Art does not improve people, nor does it make them more noble".

NO SIGN OF CONTEMPORARY LIFE

The choice of locations was determined by the book. In Bykov's story the action takes place in a Belorussian forest. I started looking for locations in the summer of 2010. I traveled extensively in Belarus, in the area described by Bykov. However, it became clear that we could not film there – the region has changed significantly in the past 50 years and there were modern signs everywhere: houses painted in bright green and pink, electricity poles, industrial buildings, etc. So, I continued my journey across the border and I found what I was looking for in eastern Latvia, in the region called Latgale. I

found the beautiful wild landscape, where one could place the camera anywhere one wants and turn it 360 degrees without stumbling across any sign of contemporary life. The forestation in that area is quite similar to the one in Belarus. And we found a very good and compact location with a “train station”, “Gestapo building” and “Market Square” which could serve as a perfect setting for the execution scene.

The population of Latgale is a mixture of ethnic Russians, Belarusians, Poles and Latvians. It’s a very rich palette of faces and characters. This was exactly what I needed, as I was also looking for some non-professional actors and for extras to play Belorussian civilians in the market scene.

AUTHENTICITY

Sushenya’s house was built from scratch and so were all the interiors. Our designer brought a lot of artifacts from Belarus, as the interiors of the Belorussian farmhouse are, of course, quite different from those of a Latvian house. We studied thousands of photographs and we built the interiors meticulously. I wanted the characters to “live” in those spaces, and not to “act” there.

COLLABORATION WITH CINEMATOGRAPHER OLEG MUTU

In my opinion, Oleg Mutu is one of the best cinematographers in Europe. He is an intellectual and he has a perfect sense of style. He has a very strong vision and he is a perfectionist, just like me. When I was preparing for “MY JOY”, I was looking for a DOP who could work in a “documentary” style, with a hand held camera and as little lighting as possible. I was very impressed by the camera in Mungiu’s 4 MONTHS, 3 WEEKS AND 2 DAYS, and I thought how great it would be to find somebody who could work in a similar manner. And then we found out that Oleg was born in Moldavia and spoke perfect Russian. I sent him the script of MY JOY and several weeks after that we had our first meeting in Chisinau. We talked for hours – about literature, philosophy and art. I knew instantly that he was the man I was looking for.

ONLY 72 CUTS

The camerawork in “IN THE FOG” is quite different from the camera of “MY JOY”. I would describe it as “monumental”, rather conservative. Due to the fact that a lot of shooting was taking place in the forest, Oleg suggested that we had to put the camera on tracks, to achieve a steady and fluid image. Thus we went from the hand-held, documentary camera of MY JOY to the much more “monumental” image of IN THE FOG. Of course, in this film there are also episodes, which were filmed with a hand-held camera, but in general the cinematography of IN THE FOG is quite classical. The challenge, Oleg and I had, was to film every scene with one shot, to use the movement of the camera as a tool of “inner montage” and to introduce cuts only in places when there is a development of the plot and a new episode begins. The camera is instrumental in the dramaturgy of the film. There are only 72 cuts in IN THE FOG, which, for a film of 127 minutes, is rather ambitious.

CAST

SUSHENYA His appearance gives a false impression of someone very gullible and easily led. In reality, he is an emotionally intelligent person, a man of dignity; he is very consistent in his actions and in his ideas.

VLADIMIR SVIRSKI as Sushenya – born on December 7th, 1982 in Borisov (Belarus). Graduated from the Minsk Academy of Arts and then studied at the Russian Academy of Theatrical Arts (GITIS) in Moscow, in the class of Evgeny Kamenkovich and Dmitry Krymov. Vladimir is a trainee actor at the Pyotr Fomenko Theatre Studio in Moscow.

BUROV He ended up in a partisan camp only because he was ill treated by his neighbor and could not cope with the feeling of humiliation and the desire of revenge. He is tough, opinionated and passionate, yet, at the same time he attempts to reflect upon the situation and to find some justification for his actions.

VLAD ABASHIN as Burov – born on June 28th, 1975 in Ryazan. Received technical professional education and worked as a car mechanic in Ryazan. In 1999 joined the company of Ryazan Drama Theatre. In 2000 moved to Moscow and entered the Russian Academy of Theatrical Arts (GITIS). Graduated in 2006.

Selected filmography: “Youri’s Day” (2008), “Obratnoye Dvizhenije” (2010), “There lived once a woman” (2011).

VOITIK He is a typical representative of “new Soviet formation” – undignified, cowardly, indifferent, unremarkable. He is capable of killing someone without giving it a second thought. He is only preoccupied with his personal safety and provision of food for himself. As far as he is concerned, the rest of the world exists only as an obstacle or as a means of achieving his personal goals.

SERGEI KOLESOV as Voitek – born on June 24th, 1973 in Kovdor, Murmansk region. Graduated from the Russian Academy of Theatrical Arts (GITIS) in 1997. A principle actor at the “Kolyada-Theatre” in Ekaterinburg.

Selected filmography: “My joy” (2010)

GROSSMEIER. SD officer: smart, insidious and ruthless.

VLAD IVANOV as Grossmeier – born on June 25th, 1969 in Botosari (Romania). Graduated from the Academy of Theatre and Film in Bucharest. Principle actor of the Bucharest National Theatre Company.

Selected filmography: “4 months, 3 weeks, 2 days” (2007), “Police, Adjective” (2009), “The Concert” (2009), “My joy” (2010), “Principles of Life” (2010), “The Whistle-blower” (2010)

SERGEI LOZNITSA

Sergei Loznitsa was born on September 5th 1964 in Baranovichi (Belarus, former USSR). He grew up in Kiev, and in 1987 graduated from the Kiev Polytechnic with a degree in Applied Mathematics. In 1987-1991 he was employed at the Kiev Institute of Cybernetics, working on Artificial Intelligence research. He also worked as a translator from Japanese.

In 1997 Sergei Loznitsa graduated from the Russian State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow with a degree in feature filmmaking.

Sergei Loznitsa has been making documentary films since 1996, and he has directed 11 documentaries. He has received numerous international and national awards, including festival prizes in Karlovy Vary, Leipzig, Oberhausen, Paris, Madrid, Toronto, Jerusalem, St-Peters- burg, as well as the Russian National Film Awards “Nika” and “Laurel”. Sergei Loznitsa’s montage oeuvre “Blockade” (2005) is based on the archive footage of besieged Leningrad.

In May 2010 Loznitsa’s feature debut “MY JOY” premiered in the main competition at the Festival de Cannes. The film has been awarded the Best Director’s prize and the prize of the Russian Film Critic’s Guild at the “Kinotavr” FF in Sochi, the Grand Prix at the IFF VOICES in Vologda, the “Silver Apricot” award at the IFF in Yerevan, the Best Script award at the “Kino- shock” IFF in Anapa, the FIPRESCI Prize and the Grand Prix at the “Molodist” IFF in Kiev, the Grand Prix at the “Listopad” IFF in Minsk, the Grand Prix at the “Black Nights” IFF in Tallinn.

CAST

Vladimir Svirski	Sushenya
Vlad Abashin	Burov
Sergei Kolesov	Voitik
Nikita Peremotovs	Grisha
Yuliya Peresild	Anelya
Kirill Petrov	Koroban
Dmitrijs Kolosovs	Mishuk
Stepans Bogdanovs	Topchievsky
Dmitry Bykovskiy	Yaroshevich
Vlad Ivanov	Grossmeier
Igor Khripunov	Mirokha
Nadezhda Markina	Burov's mother
Boris Kamorzin	First policeman
Mikhail Evlanov	Second policeman
Sergey Russkin	Third policeman
Timofey Tributntsev	Fourth policeman

CREW

Director & Writer	SERGEI LOZNITSA
Based on a novel by	VASIL BYKOV
Director of Photography	OLEG MUTU RSC
Production Designer	KIRILL SHUVALOV
Art Director	JURIS ZUKOVSKIS
Sound	VLADIMIR GOLOVNITSKI
Editor	DANIELIUS KOKANAUSKIS
Casting	MARIA BAKER-CHOUSTOVA
Costume Designer	DOROTA ROQUEPLO
Make-up Designer	TAMARA FRID
1 st Assistant Director	MARTIN SEBIK
Line Producer	MARTIN SCHLUTER
Associate Producer	MIKHAIL BASHARATYAN
Co-Producers	GALINA SEMENTSEVA
	VALENTINA MIKHALEVA
	VILNIS KALNAELLIS
	LEONTINE PETIT
	JOOST DE VRIES
	OLEG SILVANOVICH
Producer	HEINO DECKERT