

Contents

The Soviet Union's Contribution to the Defeat of Japanese Militarism	1
SCRSS News	4
Soviet Memorial Trust Fund News	5
Obituary: William Pomeroy	6
Book Reviews	7
Film Reviews	8
Radio Rossii	10
From the Russian Press	11
Listings	13

Feature

The Soviet Union's Contribution to the Defeat of Japanese Militarism

By Keith Bennett

In considering the part played by the Soviet Union in the defeat of Japanese militarism, one must locate it against the wider background of Soviet policies and realities.

The Soviet Union consistently promoted a policy of peace, seeking to preserve both the Soviet people and people throughout the world from the scourge of war, to be able to concentrate on socialist construction, and to gain maximum time to prepare for an imperialist onslaught on the USSR that Stalin knew would come at one point or another.

Furthermore, once it was clear that such an onslaught would occur sooner rather than

later, the whole thrust of Soviet strategy was directed at ensuring that the country would not be placed in a position where it would have to fight on two fronts simultaneously.

In 1904 Japan launched a war against Russia, winning a stunning victory the next year. This served notice to the whole world of the emergence of Japan as a major imperialist power, whilst the shock of Russia's defeat was a major contributory factor to the Russian Revolution of 1905.

Following the October Revolution, Japan joined all the imperialist powers in the war of intervention against the infant Soviet state. In 1918 Japan occupied Russia's far eastern provinces, including the port of Vladivostok and parts of Siberia. The Red Army forced their withdrawal in 1922.

The Soviet Union and Japan established diplomatic relations in 1925, but their relationship continued to be characterised by tension and suspicion. Such tensions and suspicions could only but increase after the Japanese aggression against China began in earnest in 1931.

The Second Five-Year Plan, commenced in 1932, attached great importance to both economic construction and the boosting of military defences in the Soviet Far East. At the same time, in December 1931, the Soviet Union proposed to conclude a non-aggression pact with Japan.

When the Japanese side rejected the Soviet proposal, the Soviet Union attempted to sell its last remaining significant economic asset in Japanese-occupied Manchuria, the Chinese Eastern Railway. The negotiations on this were difficult and protracted and the

purchase agreement was not signed until March 1935.

By this time the most acute and direct tensions between the Soviet Union and Japan were starting to focus on the Mongolian People's Republic, which at that time was the Soviet Union's only true ally. From January 1935 there were frequent clashes, numbering in the hundreds, on the border between Mongolia and Manchukuo, the name of the puppet state set up by the Japanese in occupied northeast China.

In November 1936, having spurned Soviet offers of a non-aggression treaty, Japan and Nazi Germany, later joined by Italy, signed the so-called Anti-Comintern Pact, which, in reality, could only be directed against the Soviet Union. In the same year a mutual assistance pact was concluded between the Soviet Union and Mongolia.

Major incidents occurred on the Mongolian border in 1937 and 1938. Both brought the situation to the brink of war, which was somehow averted through diplomatic communications between Moscow and Tokyo before a slide into all-out conflict.



Panorama of Port Arthur, occupied by the Soviet Navy, 1945 (SCRSS Photo Library)

Nevertheless, it was clearly a matter of when not if a major confrontation would take place between Soviet and Japanese forces in or adjacent to Mongolia. The stakes would be high. A decisive Soviet defeat would likely prompt a full-scale Japanese invasion of the Soviet Union, with the equal likelihood that this would prompt a further attack on the Soviet Union from the West. A decisive Soviet victory, on the other hand,

would contain the Japanese threat for a considerable period and allow the Soviet Union relative freedom to devote its attentions to preparations to meet an attack from the West.

That major confrontation was to take place from May to September 1939.

A minor dispute over border demarcation became the pretext for a Japanese attack. This triggered a fierce, if undeclared, war over several months between Japan and the Soviet Union on the territory of Mongolia – before war had even been declared in Europe. Known as the Battle of Khalkhin Gol, after the river of the same name, this little-known conflict actually deserves to be known as a key battle that shaped the entire subsequent course of the Second World War.

With Soviet forces under the command of Zhukov, over the several months of conflict official statistics claim the loss of 17,000 Japanese troops and 9,000 Soviets. Other estimates suggest that Japan may have lost 45,000 men as against 17,000 Soviets.

Just one day after Zhukov's decisive victory in Mongolia, Hitler invaded Poland. Mindful of the rapidly developing situation in Europe, Zhukov received orders not to press home his advantage, but rather to dig in and hold his position at Khalkhin Gol – the border they had always claimed.

For their part, in the midst of the fighting, the Japanese leadership had been shocked to learn of the conclusion of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact on 23 August.

Air clashes between the two sides continued in September, but, smarting from the betrayal of their German ally and the resolute blows of the Red Army, the Japanese signed a ceasefire agreement with the Soviets on 16 September.

The scope and results of this conflict were not widely known at the time. The Japanese sought to conceal their disgrace, whilst the Soviet Union too maintained discretion as it sought to consolidate defensive positions in the west. However, the battle earned

Zhukov the first of his four Hero of the Soviet Union awards.



The inhabitants of the Chinese city of Dalny welcoming the Red Army, 1945
(SCRSS Photo Library)

For its part, having felt betrayed by its German ally, Japan returned the compliment by concluding its own neutrality pact with the Soviet Union in April 1941, two months before the planned German attack on the Soviet Union, when Japanese Foreign Minister Matsuoka chose to go home via Moscow following a visit to Germany!

The Soviet-Japanese pact was to remain in force until nine months before its expiry date of April 1946.

At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, Stalin agreed with Churchill and Roosevelt that the Soviet Union would enter the war against Japan 90 days after the defeat of Germany. Stalin fulfilled his agreement to the letter with the launch of Operation August Storm on 8 August 1945.

However, even whilst professing neutrality with Japan, and despite the huge burden of the war with Germany, it would be quite wrong to assume that the Soviet Union was indifferent to the struggle against Japanese militarism in the intervening years. In fact, the Soviet Union was deeply involved in military struggle against Japan the whole time. In July 1942 it took the initiative to form, in the Soviet Union, the International Allied Forces (IAF), together with the Korean guerrillas led by Kim Il Sung and the revolutionaries in northeast China. It also supplied massive support to both the official

Chinese government then led by Chiang Kai-shek and the armies led by the Chinese communists.

Operation August Storm entailed the massive mobilisation of more than 1.7 million men of the Soviet Red Army, many of them freshly deployed from the victorious western front. They played the decisive role in the rapid liberation of northeast China and the north of Korea. Had the United States not brought forward the Japanese surrender by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Soviet Union had planned to invade the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido before the planned invasion of the southern Japanese island of Kyushu by the USA and other allied powers.

Within a week of the launch of this historic offensive, on 15 August, Emperor Hirohito had gone on the radio to announce that Japan would surrender. In his book *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman and the Surrender of Japan* Japanese historian Tsuyoshi Hasegawa concludes that the atomic bombings were not the principal reason for Japan's capitulation. Instead, he contends, it was the swift and devastating Soviet victories on the Asian mainland in the week following Stalin's declaration of war on 8 August that forced the Japanese surrender on 15 August.

Keith Bennett studied the history and politics of China, Japan and South East Asia at the School for Oriental and African Studies (University of London) in the late 1970s.

He was publications officer for the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding from 1979-81 and political editor of the weekly newspaper Asian Times for 10 years. He is currently a political and government relations consultant for the private sector, specialising in China and Korea. He has written and lectured extensively on the politics, history and economics of the Far East.

SCRSS News

Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given that the SCRSS AGM will take place at 10.30am on Saturday 16 May 2009 at the Society's premises in Brixton. The meeting is open to SCRSS members only. Nominations for members for election to the next Council and motions for the AGM should be sent to Head Office no later than Friday 17 April 2008. All nominations and motions must be seconded by another SCRSS member.

Following the AGM, refreshments will be served and Council member Christine Lindey will talk about her exhibition on display in the Society's seminar rooms (see Events below for more detail).

2nd Forum of the Russian-Speaking Community in UK

The second forum of the Russian-Speaking Community in the UK took place on 15 November 2008 in London. Organised by the Russian-Speaking Community Council (RSCC) in association with the Russian Embassy, the Russian Foreign Ministry and Roszarubezhtsentr, Moscow, its theme was *Ways of Consolidating Russian-Speaking Community Initiatives*.

Some 100 organisations that undertook activities relating to the Russian-speaking community in the UK were represented. These included the SCRSS, represented by its Honorary Secretary, Jean Turner.

The plenary session was opened by HE Yuri Fedotov, the Russian Ambassador, who welcomed forum delegates and spoke of developments in British relations with Russia. He was followed by leaders of the Russian religious and cultural community in Britain and speakers from British organisations linked with Russian culture. These included Julian Gallant, who described the activities of Pushkin House in Bloomsbury, and Jean Turner, who spoke of

our Society's 84 years of promoting knowledge of and providing material on Russian and Soviet culture.

Following the plenary session, the forum broke up into three meetings:

- *Russian Language and Culture* chaired by Olga Bramley with Dr E Protasova and Dr G Ivanitskaya
- *Students' and Young Professionals' Organisations* opened by Ivan Kukhnin and Denis Menshikov
- *Russians in Britain: Historical Aspects and Cultural Interchange*, a round table discussion chaired by Natalia Makarova with Dr Anthony Cross (Cambridge University), Father Mikhail Ludko, Oksana Morgunova (Glasgow University) Kitty Stidworthy (Pushkin House) and Jean Turner. The work of the SCRSS was recognised as an important source of information in this area.

The forum represented a welcome step forward in bringing together teachers, academics, professionals and cultural organisations to record the work of and promote the many strong links, both past and present, between Britain and Russia.

Next Events

Friday 20 February 7pm

Film: Daughter in Law

In a bleak desert region a young woman waits in vain for her husband to return from the Second World War. Turkmen actors star in a beautiful and delicate study in human relationships. Directors: Hodjakuli and Hadjadurdy Narliyev, Turkmen Film Studios 1972, 82 mins, colour, English subtitles.

Friday 6 March 7pm

Lecture: Diaghilev & the Ballets Russes

An illustrated talk by Charlotte Kasner to mark the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the Ballets Russes. Ms Kasner trained as an actor, musician and dancer, and was a professional performer for 25 years.

Friday 27 March 7pm

Lecture: The Soviet Animator Yuri Norstein

An illustrated talk by Clare Kitson. Ms Kitson was a programmer at the National Film Theatre in the 1980s and Channel 4's commissioning editor for animation in the 1990s. She is the author of *Norstein and the Tale of Tales: An Animator's Journey* (2005).

Wednesday 1 April 6.30pm

Exhibition: Mir Isskustva Arts Journal

Formal opening of an exhibition at the SCRSS to mark the 110th anniversary of the founding by Diaghilev of the *Mir Isskustva* arts journal. The exhibition includes material from the State Museum of Theatre and Music in St Petersburg and the SCRSS. Further details to be confirmed.

Wednesday 15 and Thursday 16 April, 10am – 4.15pm daily

Event: 3rd SCRSS Russian Language Seminar

Two-day intensive programme of lectures in Russian, given by lecturers from St Petersburg University, on contemporary Russian linguistics, culture and society. The seminar is aimed at teachers of Russian, graduates of Russian and final-year undergraduates of Russian with good comprehension of spoken Russian. Fee: £45 one day, £80 two days. Application deadline: 27 March. Payment deadline: 6 April. Early booking advised. For further details and an application form, visit the SCRSS website (www.scrss.org.uk) or telephone 020-7272-2282.

Wednesday 29 April – Saturday 23 May

Exhibition: Inner Worlds – Outer Worlds

Christine Lindey is a writer and painter. She works from memory to evoke both her inner and outer life. This exhibition depicts her participation in peace demonstrations and those in which she confronts memories of her Paris childhood. Half the proceeds of all sales will be donated to the SCRSS. The exhibition is open from 12am – 5pm Wednesday – Saturday, except Saturday 16 May when it will open exclusively to SCRSS members at the AGM.

Russian Visa Applications

From 1 January 2009 all Russian visa applications must be made online using a new visa application form. Visa fees are also changing. For further information visit the Russian Consulate website at www.rusemblon.org/logon_en.htm (English-language version).

Soviet Memorial Trust Fund News

Holocaust Memorial Day Ceremony

Over 100 people gathered at the Soviet War Memorial in London on 27 January to mark Holocaust Memorial Day, the anniversary of the Red Army's liberation of the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz.

The Act of Remembrance at the Memorial followed a short service at Southwark Council's nearby Holocaust Memorial Tree. The participants heard addresses from Mayor of Southwark, Cllr Eliza Mann, the Russian Ambassador, HE Yuri Fedotov, and local MP Simon Hughes. Attention was drawn to the theme of this year's Holocaust Memorial Day - Stand up to Hatred - and the necessity for everyone not only to remember the millions who died in the Holocaust of the Second World War, but to combat the many manifestations of hatred that continue to exist in the modern world.

27 January also marked the 65th anniversary of the lifting of the siege of Leningrad in 1944. In St Petersburg Russian President Dmitry Medvedev laid a wreath at the city's Piskaryovskoye Memorial Cemetery where it is estimated over 500,000 of the one million who died during the 900-day blockade are buried. During an address to veterans at a memorial concert, he said: "Everything that happened in Leningrad under siege will forever rest in the hearts of an enormous number of people living in our country, as well as people living beyond its borders.

This memory must be passed on from generation to generation; after all, it is a truly heroic memory for our people. It represents pride for our historic past. It represents mutual support, compassion, and grace."

Next Events

Saturday 9 May 11am Victory Day Ceremony

On 9 May there will be a day of events at the Soviet War Memorial and the Imperial War Museum (IWM), organised by the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund (SMTF) in cooperation with Southwark Council and the IWM. This year not only marks the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War, but also the 10th anniversary of the unveiling of the Memorial.



Unveiling the Soviet War Memorial in London, May 1999: HE Yuri Fokine, Russian Ambassador, and Rt Hon George Robertson MP, Secretary of State for Defence (SCRSS Archive)

As Victory Day falls on a Saturday, the SMTF is anticipating large numbers of participants. The formal Act of Remembrance will begin at 11am. This is likely to be followed by an informal 'Victory Toast' in the open air. Later, inside the museum, Michael Jones, author of books on

the siege of Leningrad and the battle of Stalingrad, will deliver a lecture. The events will end with the showing of films from the IWM archives.

For full advanced information about the programme of events – and the opportunity to reserve seats (free of charge) – please send your contact details as soon as possible to the Honorary Secretary, SMTF, c/o 320 Brixton Road, London SW9 6AB or email smtf@hotmail.co.uk. If you are already on the SMTF mailing list, you should automatically receive details in February.

The Soviet War Memorial is located in the Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, (adjacent to the Imperial War Museum), Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ.

Obituary

William Pomeroy (1916–2009)

US-born William (Bill) Pomeroy was a journalist and author of several books about his life in the Philippines. He had served there while in the US forces and later returned to study at the University of the Philippines. There he married Celia Mariano, his life-long partner and fellow member of the Huk guerrilla army that fought the Japanese and then the US occupation.

Both were imprisoned for their activities and released on a presidential pardon in 1962. Eventually they settled in London where Bill took up work as a full-time writer and journalist. He was awarded a doctorate in history by the USSR Academy of Sciences for his *American Neo-Colonialism: Its Emergence in the Philippines and Asia*, published in 1970.

He and Celia travelled widely in the Soviet Union, enabling Bill to write two books on life there. He joined the SCR (now the SCRSS) in 1985.

In 1986 Bill joined the editorial board of the Society's *Anglo-Soviet Journal*. He remained on the board until its final issue in 1992. He was also elected to the Society's Council in 1987, serving until 1992.

Overtaken by deafness, he had to give up his commitments to the Society, but he and Celia remained members. He died on 12 January 2009, aged 92. His wife survives him.

The Society wishes to record its sincere condolences to Celia on her loss. We are also grateful to the SCRSS member who in recent years regularly visited Bill and Celia in their nursing home, ensuring that they were kept in touch with the Society's activities and that their memoirs were fully recorded.

By Jean Turner

Book Reviews

A History of Russian Cinema

By Birgit Beumers (Berg Publishers, December 2008, ISBN 9781845202156, Pbk, 320pp, £16.99)

Can it really be 26 years since *Kino*, Jay Leyda's history of Russian and Soviet film, was published? Well no, actually, that was the revised third edition: the bulk of it came out in 1960. And in that half century, the world – and the cinema world – has become unrecognisable.

The geopolitical shift has been seismic: the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of the European Union and the complete realignment of East European politics are events that would have been unimaginable to Leyda.

Of course, Russian cinema continued – sometimes under incredible strain. After the weight of stagnation, perestroika left the industry temporarily reeling, though it

reconfigured itself and is now enjoying something of a renaissance.



Still from Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, 1925 (SCRSS Library)

'Classic' film-makers died or had their careers reassessed and a new generation of film-makers appeared. The year after *Kino*'s third edition Yuri Gherman's *My Friend Ivan Lapshin* was released and a few years later a group of Russian critics described it as the greatest Russian film ever made. 1984 also saw Yuri Norstein's *Tale of Tales* voted the best animated film ever made, while Paradzhanov returned to directing after a 16-year hiatus. In 1985 Elem Klimov released his masterpiece *Come and See* and a year later Tarkovsky was dead. 1987 saw the beginnings of perestroika and eventually hundreds of previously banned films would be released. Andrei Konchalovsky had moved to America, but became disillusioned and returned home. His brother Nikita Mikhailkov stayed put, moved on the periphery of politics and made *The Barber of Siberia*, the most expensive Russian film to date. Meanwhile, the careers of directors such as Karen Shakhnazarov, Pavel Lungin and Valery Todorovsky almost completely post-date Leyda.

Even this abbreviated list gives an idea of the dizzying rate of change, but Beumers' book isn't intended to supplant Leyda's. The fact that he was there, on the ground, makes it invaluable, but at a distance we can see its problems. A student of Eisenstein, Leyda put him at the top of the pantheon and others were sometimes overlooked. In 1983 he took the opportunity to fill out the previously little-studied area of pre-Revolutionary cinema, admitting that these were first tentative steps. A few years later the topic exploded as the archives spilled out films, as well as previously unpublished diaries and official documents, from throughout the Russian and Soviet period.

But for all the excitement of Leyda's reports of seeing the very first screenings of classic films and discussing them with the makers, 26 years is a long time.

Apart from anything, Beumers gives us the simple facts that were previously so difficult to corral: synopses of films that used to be little more than titles, deft biographical portraits, and the constant weaving of national and international politics into the artistic and industrial story of 'the most important art'. Beumers' book is not simply an update to *Kino* but sits invaluable beside it, not only an expansion but also a judicious reassessment in the light of new evidence and the perspective of history.

By John Riley

Film Reviews

Defiance

In December 1941 a mass execution of Jews in the Baranovichi district of the Soviet Republic of Belorussia (Brest Oblast') was carried out by Nazis. The mother, father and two sons of a Jewish farming family, the Bielskis, were executed. Four other sons, Zus, Tuvia, Asael and Aron, fled to the forest with another 13 companions. This

was the beginning of the Bielski Brigade, one of many Soviet partisan detachments that harried the Nazis from the Belorussian forests, but unique in how it maintained a microcosm of Jewish life that included a gun workshop, a bakery, a synagogue, a communal bath and even a theatre company.

No Jew was turned away, no matter how old or sick. The Bielskis insisted that resistance and rescue must go hand in hand. By the time of their liberation by the Red Army in 1944, the Bielskis had managed to save more than 1,200 men, women and children, 'the largest armed rescue of Jews by Jews in all of World War II'.

The film *Defiance*, currently on general release, is a dramatisation of the history of the Bielski Brigade, based on the book by Nechama Tec (screenplay by Clayton Froman and Edward Zwick). Publicised as a hitherto unknown example of Jewish resistance in Eastern Europe, in fact its history is well documented (*see footnote*).

Marginalising the Brigade's relationship with the Red Army partisan units, alongside which it fought, it takes a side swipe at anti-Semitism amongst the Russians (although the Red Army commander insists that this is against the Soviet Constitution). It also deals with conflict among the brothers – Tuvia (Daniel Craig) preferring to save 'one Jewish life than kill 10 Nazis', and Zus (Liev Schreiber) wanting to concentrate on killing the Nazis by leaving to join a Red Army partisan unit.

Shot in the Lithuanian forests throughout the four seasons, the film is visually stunning. The portrayal of the various ghetto Jews who join the Brigade is honest and reflects the difficulties of maintaining and feeding a balanced community in such dangerous circumstances.

There is the usual hint of anti-Soviet prejudice, not borne out by the history of the Belorussian resistance. However, if seen alongside the Soviet film *Come and See* by Elem Klimov, one glimpses the horrors experienced by all the people during that

terrible period, when 25% of the population of Belorussia was killed by the Nazis.

Footnote:

Jews from the Minsk ghetto made up a significant portion of nine partisan detachments in the Belorussian forests, alongside Red Army soldiers. For instance, in the Lenin Brigade (Baranovichi district), 202 of the 695 fighters and commanders were Jews. Some 150 Jews were commanders, chiefs of staff and commissars of partisan brigades and detachments, according to *The Holocaust Encyclopaedia*, (Yale University Press, 2001).



Food arrives for Belorussian partisans lying in ambush, 1942 (SCRSS Photo Library)

Tuvia and Zus survived the war and emigrated first to Palestine and then to the USA, where their experiences were recorded and books and films made about them. Asael fought with the Red Army and was killed in February 1945. Aron Bielski, the youngest, featured in a documentary in the US for the History Channel in 1997.

Another survivor, Jack Kagan, who lives in Britain and has participated in ceremonies associated with the Soviet Memorial Trust Fund, has written a book about his experiences, *Surviving the Holocaust with the Russian Jewish Partisans*.

The Republic of Belarus has been honoured by Israel for its part in saving so many Jewish lives in World War II.

By Jean Turner

Elem Klimov's *Come and See*

The pointed satire of Klimov's early comedies (*Welcome or No Unauthorised Admittance*, 1964, and *The Adventures of a Dentist*, 1965) meant that both encountered distribution problems.

Agony, his drama about Rasputin, was halted and Klimov returned to comedy with *Sport, Sport, Sport* (1970), commenting dryly (and unacceptably) on the role of sport in the Cold War.

In 1975 the finally completed *Agony* was shelved for portraying the Tsar too sympathetically. In 1979 Klimov's wife, Larissa Shepitko, was killed in a car crash whilst filming *Farewell*, so he completed the ambiguous story of a village being flooded to make a reservoir. Another problematic film, it was only released three years after his 1980 *Larissa*.

Klimov's masterpiece is the apocalyptic *Come and See* (1985), based on Ales Adamovich's book and taking its title from the Book of Revelation. It too had been held up by nearly a decade of bureaucratic delays.

It unflinchingly shows the Nazis' Belorussian atrocities in 1943. The adolescent Floria's excitement when partisans decide to take him with them is shattered when they change their minds. When a German attack temporarily deafens him, he decides to return to his village to find his family, but realises that they have not survived and leaves with three partisans. They encounter a group of Nazis who pick off the partisans one by one, leaving Floria alone. The next morning the Nazis round up everyone in the village, herd them into a church and, in an almost unbearable scene, torch it. Floria escapes and finds a group of partisans who execute some captured Nazis and collaborators. Floria sees a photograph of Hitler in a puddle. He begins to shoot at the portrait and, with each shot, the photograph transforms into an earlier incarnation until we see Hitler as a baby in his mother's arms. The shockingly prematurely-aged

Floria faces an agonising philosophical question.

Unrelentingly grim, *Come and See* concentrates on the cost of war, with strange and hallucinogenic images and a shell-shocked soundtrack sometimes reduced to a post-bombing ringing in the ears. Astonishingly, Klimov claimed it was a “lightened up version of the truth”. Stories abound about the production: that live bullets were used to give a feeling of authenticity, that Alexei Kravchenko as Floria was hypnotised for various scenes. Whatever the truth, the film is a shattering experience and the subjective soundtrack certainly inspired Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* and Malick’s *The Thin Red Line*.

After *Come and See* won first prize at the Moscow Film Festival, Klimov sat on the Venice Film Festival jury and *Agony* was finally released. In 1986 he headed the Film-makers’ Union, releasing hundreds of previously banned films and supporting controversial projects. After two years of attacks from both progressives and conservatives, he left, but none of his various plans came to fruition. He died in October 2003.

By John Riley

Come and See is available as a double disc DVD from Nouveaux Pictures (NPD1034). (Dir: Elem Klimov, Belorussia, 1985, 137 mins, colour, English sub-titles)

Feature

Radio Rossii

By L Kaplunova

Radio Rossii celebrated its 18th anniversary in December 2008 and is a radio station in its prime.

A small team of first-class, committed journalists, most of whom had previously worked at Yunost’ Radio, founded the

station in the heady days of perestroika and glasnost. In those days the team occupied two small rooms with one studio in the Ostankino television centre in Moscow. The station’s first live broadcast went out on 10 December 1990 and it quickly won fans. Although limited to four hours’ air time a day, its programmes were characterised by freedom of expression, lack of censorship and the opportunity to comment personally on events. It was the first radio station of its kind in the Soviet Union.

However, within a short time Radio Rossii began to attract criticism from the Communist Party press, led by *Pravda*, and it was moved twice from one frequency to another. Finally, it was cut off the air, together with the Televideniye Rossii television channel and Ekho Moskvyy, on 19 August 1991 – the first day of the attempted coup by Soviet government hardliners. From 19–21 August, a small studio was made available to Radio Rossii journalists in the White House, the Russian parliament building. From here they broadcast throughout the defence of the building. After the collapse of the coup, the formerly disgraced radio station came under state control on 22 August 1991.

Today Radio Rossii is Russia’s largest state-run radio station. There is a certain irony in its transition from independent to state-run radio and some commentators have expressed concern that it is too close to the Russian government. However, Leonid Azarkh, one of its leading broadcasters, is adamant on the radio’s website that he has never experienced editorial interference.

Radio Rossii has the largest number of radio transmitters of any Russian radio station and is the only general radio broadcaster to cover all regions of the Russian Federation. The station is available on FM, long, medium and short wave, as well as online, with the potential to reach an audience of over 120 million listeners daily. It now broadcasts 24 hours a day.

Its 174 programmes range from news and music – including an alternative music show

from cult musician Boris Grebenshchikov of former *Akvarium* fame – to drama, popular science, light entertainment and children's programmes. The radio station's live phone-ins and chat shows, presented by a host of well-known figures, are particularly popular.

Ot pervogo litsa (In the First Person) is produced and presented by Natalia Bekhtina. Her guests are politicians, scientists and doctors active in Russian society. Bekhtina herself is a master of live broadcasting who has worked at Radio Rossii since its foundation. It was her chat show – the first of its kind in the Soviet Union – that launched the radio station in 1990. She was also one of the journalists to broadcast from the White House during the coup in 1991.

Osoboye mneniye (Personal Opinion) is a live phone-in presented by Igor Gmyza. His studio guests are key Russian political leaders who take questions from listeners.

Andrei Dement'yev presents another live chat show, *Virazhi vremeni* (Twists in Time). Dement'yev is one of the country's best loved and most talented poets, many of whose poems have been set to music. His guests are leading cultural figures, actors, musicians, poets and politicians.

Last but not least, the well-known writer and philosopher Mikhail Veller presents *Pogovorim* (Let's Talk). The programme is a live phone-in in which Veller answers listeners' questions on a range of topics. Veller is notable for his excellent knowledge of history, politics and economics. With his sharp wit, intuition and sincerity, his replies are always disarming. Veller is the author of many bestsellers, including the comic *Legends of Nevsky Prospect* (1993).

Radio Rossii is a must for anyone who speaks Russian and is interested in Russian culture. The radio station is a rare example today of continuing high broadcasting standards, in particular the quality of language. With good diction and a respect for 'correct' Russian language, it is an excellent tool for those wishing to improve their Russian comprehension.

In the UK you can tune into Radio Rossii on short wave radio on the following frequencies: 12.07, 9.85, 7.12 MHz. The station also broadcasts online at www.radiorus.ru, where you can find programme listings. Don't forget the time difference – Russia is three hours ahead.

From the Russian Press

Russian Orthodox Church Mourns Passing of Patriarch Alexiy II

The funeral of Alexiy II, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, in December 2008 and preparations to appoint a successor were covered extensively in the Russian press, including *Argumenty i Fakty Online*. It was a time for reflection on the Moscow Patriarch's work over the preceding 20 years.

His greatest achievement had been the unification of the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow with the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad after a schism lasting more than 70 years ('Vera – eto sovest' strany', No. 3, 14.1.09, www.aif.ru). When the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad was founded by members who had fled the Russian Revolution, it had declared itself an integral part of the Russian Orthodox Church but had suspended relations with Moscow as the latter was not 'free'. With the collapse of communism, there was no longer any reason for a divided church. In the words of one Washington-based Orthodox priest interviewed by *Argumenty i Fakty*, the Russian Orthodox Church was the only institution from the tsarist period which the Soviets had been unable to destroy. He also emphasised how vital it was that today's Church was "nationalist" but independent of the state.

Svetlana Medvedeva, wife of the Russian president, was one many Russian and international public figures to express their condolences. She praised Alexiy II's many good works, including the renaissance of churches and monasteries, the growth of

Sunday schools and church-run orphanages, and the acquisition of new sacred objects and relics ('On s dostoinstvom nyos svoy Krest', No. 51, 17.12.08, www.aif.ru). He had also been instrumental in pushing through a new public holiday – Day of the Family, Love and Loyalty.

Following Alexiy II's funeral, the Church had moved quickly to elect a new leader. Qualifications for the post were stipulated as being over 40 years, having a theology degree and adequate experience of managing a diocese, and enjoying a good reputation and the trust of senior church leaders, the clergy and the people ('Tserkov' pered vyborom', No. 50, 10.12.08, www.aif.ru). An assembly of senior church leaders met on 25 January 2009 to draw up a list of candidates for consideration by the general assembly. On 28 January Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, who had headed the Church's external relations department under Alexiy II, was elected as the new Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Dramatising Army Life

In September 2007 the Russian Army Theatre, together with the education department of the Ministry of Defence, had launched a competition to find new plays about contemporary army life. The results were finally announced in December 2008 (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 'Spetsifika voyennogo dela', 15.1.09, www.ng.ru).

The theatre had received only 45 plays. Of these, in the words of the theatre's chief director Boris Morozov, 20 had been out-of-date plays about the Second World War and most of the rest, while nominally about the army today, had been devoid of originality or character development. What he had sought was intrigue, colloquial language and realistic situations without unnecessary pathos, moralising or populist dialogue.

In the event, the theatre had declined to announce a first prize, instead awarding second prize and the promise of a

production at the Russian Army Theatre in 2010 to Vasily Loza for his comedy *Ryadovoy Kashtanov End Syurpraiz* ('Private Kashtanov End Surprise').

There was currently no school of military drama in Russia. The competition had been one measure to redress the balance. Another was the Russian Army Theatre's plan to set up a Laboratory for Army Playwrights in the spring under the direction of the well-known playwright and director Sergei Kokovkin. The young authors given a place at the Laboratory would work side by side with the Russian Army Theatre's directors and actors, and join them on tour to military units.

Births, Marriages and Divorces – The View from Moscow

In early January the board of the Moscow Registry Office published its statistics for 2008 (*Izvestiya*, 'God sem'i prinyos men'she brakov i bol'she rasvodov', 13.1.09, www.izvestiya.ru).

Following a record 88,060 civil weddings in 2007, the Board had hoped that the declaration of 2008 as the Year of the Family would encourage even greater numbers of young Muscovites to tie the knot. In fact, the figure had fallen to 84,028, which Irina Murav'yova, head of the board, put down to superstition about marrying during a leap year.

The 2008 statistics showed a large number of marriages between Muscovites and non-Russians from some 106 countries. They included 198 marriages with Turkish citizens, 156 with Germans and 3,933 with Ukrainians, to name a few. Partners from the USA, Israel and UK were also popular, while there were not a few marriages between Muscovites and Armenians, Moldovans, Usbeks and Azerbaijanis.

There had also been a rise in the number of wedding ceremonies held in licensed venues outside the traditional registry office. It had become popular in the capital to get married at historic and cultural sites, such as

the museum at Poklonnaya Gora and the estate-museums of Ostankino, Kuskovo and Tsaritsyna.

In contrast to the marriage figures, the number of divorces in Moscow had increased to 48,827 in 2008. Divorced couples were generally in the 25 – 39 age range.

Births too had increased on the preceding year –108,340 babies had been born in 2008.

It was always interesting to follow fashions in children's names. For the sixth year running Sasha had topped the list of most popular names for boys, while Alexandra featured high in the top 10 for girls. Parents were also opting for Old Russian and Old Slavonic names, for example Yaroslava, Zabava, Svyatoslav and Dobrynya. However, Muscovites were also using their imagination – there had been two boys called Sever (North) and the list of fantasy names included Angel, Veter (Wind), Del'fin (Dolphin), Luna (Moon) and Lyalya.

Il'ya Kabakov Retrospective in Moscow

A major retrospective of Il'ya Kabakov's work to mark his 75th birthday and the 20th anniversary of his emigration became the must-see event of the autumn season in Moscow (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 'Total'no installirovan', 31.12.08, www.ng.ru).

The exhibition was spread ambitiously across three venues – the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Vinzavod (a new space that in just over a year has become Moscow's leading centre for modern art) and Garazh (Dasha Zhukova's centre for contemporary culture based in the former Bakhmet'yev bus station designed by Konstantin Mel'nikov).

Gate, a new installation in the Pushkin Museum's European and American gallery, presented an imposing wooden door worthy of a director's office, surrounded by a collection of dull pastel drawings and

canvases of gates and triumphal arches – a metaphor for both 'the artist's last work' (the sub-title of the piece) and Judgment Day.

At Garazh *An Alternative History of Art* and *Red Coach* were on display. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta's* reviewer felt that these works did not do justice to the guru of Moscow conceptualism, being from his late period rather than his heyday. More classic Kabakov, in the form of *Toilet* and *The Life of Flies*, was to be found at Vinzavod. These works were formed from both casual and contrived combinations of ordinary words and images that transformed into a critical play on those words and images.

The exhibition in Moscow had proved a highly successful commercial event, sponsored by Abramovich and attended by the great and the good. For the reviewer, this all underlined the extent to which Kabakov had become a 'brand'. It also showed how fashionable it had now become to like 'unofficial art'.

Summarised and translated by Diana Turner

Listings

Art

Chambers Gallery

23 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HL, Tel: 0207 778 1600, www.thechambersgallery.co.uk
6 August–11 September 2009: *Soviet Socialist Realism*. Open Monday–Friday 10–6pm.

Tate Modern

Bankside, London SE1 9TG, Tel: 020 7887 8888, www.tate.org.uk/modern
12 February–17 May 2009: *Rodchenko & Popova – Defining Constructivism*.
Explores the work of Alexander Rodchenko and Lyubov Popova between 1917–29. Arguably two of the Russian avant-garde's most influential and important artists, they were integral to the stylistic and theoretical underpinning of Russian Constructivism.

With over 350 objects, the exhibition charts the evolution of their aesthetics from abstract painting to graphic design. It includes their designs for cinema and theatre, as well as numerous posters, books, and costumes.

Victoria & Albert Museum

Cromwell Road, London SW7 2RL, Tel: 020 7942 2000,

www.vam.ac.uk

Until 29 March 2009: *Magnificence of the Tsars*. The grandeur of Imperial Russia is captured in this display of the dress and uniforms of emperors and officials of the Russian imperial court. Starting in the 1720s with the lavishly embroidered coats and elaborately patterned silk banyans from the wardrobe of Peter the Great, the display spans a period of almost two centuries. Garments include coronation uniforms and regalia of Paul I, Alexander I, Nicholas I, Alexander II and Alexander III. The exhibition explores the influences and crossovers between military uniform, court dress, European fashion and traditional Russian dress, and presents the power and majesty of masculine uniform at its finest. Admission £5.00 (adults), £3.00 (concessions).

Events

Maslenitsa Festival of Russian Culture

Sunday 1 March, 1–6pm

Potters Fields Park, between Tower Bridge and City Hall, London, Tel 020 8832 7424, Email info@ensembleproductions.co.uk

This Shrovetide festival of Russian culture will include music, dance and theatre performances by well-known and up-and-coming Russian performers, as well as some local groups. Traditional Russian pancakes and other national food will also be available. Admission free. Maslenitsa is organised by Ensemble Productions and sponsored by the Mayor of London, the Moscow City Administration, the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, Pushkin House, the Russian Embassy in London and Rossotrudnichestva.

Film

Tate Modern

Bankside, London SE1 9TG, Tel: 020 7887 8888, www.tate.org.uk/modern

Sunday 8 March, 10.00 (start): *Lithuania and the Collapse of the USSR* (directed by Jonas Mekas, 2008). The documentary film is a chronological overview of Lithuania's birth as an independent nation, recorded by Mekas on video camera from news broadcasts that played daily from 1989–91 on his TV set at home. The film is comprised of four chapters with a total running time of 4 hours and 46 minutes. Admission: £5.00 (full price), £4.00 (concessions). Booking recommended.



Still from Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, 1925 (SCRSS Library)

Russian Film DVDs for Sale

SCRSS member Deryk Brown has some 400 DVDs of Russian feature films for sale at £3.00 each (£1.00 for the Society, £1.00 for charity, £1.00 for postage and packing). To receive a list, please email derykbrown41@aol.com or telephone 020 8941 6150.

Lectures

Sutton Russian Circle

Sutton College of Learning for Adults, Room B1, First Floor, St Nicholas Way, Sutton SM1 1EA. Contact: Leslie Dommett (Tel 01403 256593)

13 February 6.50–9.20pm: *Five Russian Officers in Tolstoy's War and Peace* by Bob Dommett.

27 March 6.50–9.20pm: *Isaak Levitan* by Natasha Dissanayake. *The Battle for Ennismore Gardens: Recent Developments in the Russian Orthodox Cathedral* by Jill Crow.

30 April: Special 25th anniversary 'Candlelight' Russian dinner, Nightingale Restaurant, Carshalton College, Nightingale Road, Carshalton, SM5.

8 May 6.50–9.20pm: *Leningrad: State of Siege* by Michael Jones.

19 June 6.50–9.20pm: *Russia in 2009: The Views of the Editor-in-Chief of the Russian Weekly Newsletter* by Margo Grigorian. Film: *Moscow Art Nouveau*.

28 June: 25th anniversary Russian summer garden party with Russian music.

Music

St James's, Piccadilly

London

Saturday 28 February: 'The Third Rome' concert explores the Russian Orthodox musical inheritance from the 17th century onwards. Performed by Collegium Musicum of London Chamber Choir.

Publications

The Degradation of the International Legal Order? The Rehabilitation of Law and the Possibility of Politics
By Bill Bowring (Taylor and Francis/ A Glasshouse Book, 2008, 243pp inc 21pp of references, £28.99)

Bill Bowring is Professor of Law at Birkbeck College, University of London, and a practising barrister. His research interests

include international law, human rights and Soviet and Russian law. He is also a legal and political activist and has taken many cases to the European Court of Human Rights. Providing the basis for critical engagement with the pessimism of the contemporary age, Professor Bowring's new book argues passionately for a rehabilitation of the honour of historic events and processes, and of their role in generating legal concepts. Drawing primarily from the Marxian tradition, but also engaging with a range of contemporary work in critical theory and critical legal and human rights scholarship, the book analyses historical and recent international events and processes in order to challenge their orthodox interpretation. What is thus proposed is a new evaluation of international legal principles and human rights norms, the revolutionary character of which, it is argued, turns them from mere rhetoric into powerful weapons of struggle. Accessibly written, but theoretically sophisticated, the book is intended for critical teachers and students of international law, human rights, and international relations, as well as legal and political activists.

Bill Bowring is president of the SCRSS.

Russian Language

ALL Russian Essay Competition 2009

Students learning Russian in schools, adult education colleges and universities in the UK are invited to participate in the 3rd National Russian Essay Competition 2009, organised by the Russian Committee of the Association for Language Learning (ALL). Contestants should submit their essays by 14 March and winners will be announced by 30 April 2009. Winners in each category will receive prizes and their essays will be published on the ALL website, in *Rusistika* journal and in *Angliya* newspaper. Winning essays from 2008 are available to view at <http://sites.google.com/a/russianteachersgroup.org/www/>. Teachers are asked to encourage their students to take part as this is an excellent way for them to compete

nationwide with their peers and to raise the profile of Russian at their institution. For further information, contact Natalia Tronenko by email on natalia@tronenko.com.

Russian Language Evening Classes

Civil Service Recreation Centre, 1 Chadwick Street, London SW1P 2EP. Contact: Charles Stewart, Email charles0207@yahoo.co.uk

Tuesdays 5.30pm: post-beginners (started as beginners May 2008); 7pm: intermediates. Thursdays 5.30pm: beginners (started January 2009); 7pm: advanced. Cost per 6- week half-term: post-beginners £45.00, intermediate / advanced £60.00. Single (trial) class: post-beginners £10.00; intermediate / advanced £15.00. Everyone has two grace admissions to the centre without membership, but thereafter Civil Service Sports Council membership or associate membership of the recreation centre, for as little as £35.00 per annum, is required.

Russian Spring Course: Y-c-n-e-x (Success)

Battersea Central Methodist Church, Battersea, London SW11 (near to Clapham Junction station). Contact: Victoria, Tel 07948 378332, Email victorian2005@hotmail.co.uk

Thursdays from 19 February–19 March, 7–9pm. 5-week intensive Russian language course with opportunity for further Russian courses. The programme includes vocabulary, grammar, reading and conversation, translation, Russian songs and guest speakers. Taught by a qualified native Russian speaker with more than 20 years' experience in teaching Russian at all levels in the UK. Cost: £100.00 for 5 weeks, paid in advance (some concessionary places available). No beginners.

3rd SCRSS Russian Language Seminar

SCRSS, London

Wednesday 15 and Thursday 16 April, 10am – 4.15pm daily. Two-day intensive programme of lectures in Russian, given by lecturers from St Petersburg University, on

contemporary Russian linguistics, culture and society. See page 5 for details.

Theatre

Lyric, Hammersmith

Lyric Square, King Street, London W6 0QL, Tel: 0871 22 117 29

20 March–11 April: *The Overcoat*. Inspired by Gogol's legendary short story, physical theatre pioneers Gecko create an intoxicating imaginative world where a man's secret thoughts and dreams spill out into his everyday life. Capturing the unruly spirit of Gogol's irreverent masterpiece, this award-winning company celebrates the birth of this revolutionary Russian writer with a riotous blend of physical comedy, movement, cinematic images and evocative music.

The SCRSS cannot accept responsibility for incorrect information or unsatisfactory products. Always check with the organisation concerned before sending money. Reviews and articles are the opinions of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the SCRSS.

Copyright notice: All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the permission of the copyright owner. © SCRSS 2009

**Printed and published by:
SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London SW9
6AB**

Tel: 020 7274 2282, Fax: 020 7274 3230

Email: ruslibrary@scrss.org.uk

Website: www.scrss.org.uk

Registered Charity No 1104012

Editor: Diana Turner