The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Serbian Filmmaker Vows 'Love and War' for St. Pete

By Galina Stolyarova

September 30, 2012



Kusturica playing the guitar with his band The No Smoking Orchestra.

Serbian filmmaker Emir Kusturica, who this year is presiding over the jury at the St. Petersburg International Film Festival, has always had fraternal feelings toward Russians. Adored by Russian audiences and a frequent guest at the country's film festivals and clubs alike, the filmmaker and musician never misses a chance to refer to the Russians and the Serbs as members of the same family.

With all of that in mind, the promise that Kusturica made in the city last Monday sounds all the more natural: The director announced that his new film with the working title "Love and War," which is currently being shot, will have its premiere at a future St. Petersburg Kinoforum. Filming is scheduled to be completed in about a year.

In the film, which will be released as a three-part series, Kusturica also plays the main character, a man at war, who ends up becoming a monk.

"The three parts of the film follow the main character during three very challenging and trying periods both for him and his native land," Kusturica said. "You will see this man at war, falling in love with a woman who sacrifices herself to save him, and living a reclusive life in a monastery. In the cloister, my hero is working with a stone, and when the work is done, he takes it to the top of the highest hill, only to push the 80-kilogram thing down. As the monk is carrying the heavy stone up the hill, scenes from his turbulent past flash through his mind."

Kusturica's son will be responsible for the soundtrack to the new film.

For Kusturica, work on "Love and War" is a long-awaited return to the filmmaking process. "I have not done any films in the last four years, and I did not want to push myself, really," the director said. "A director's job is nothing like working on an assembly line, where you have to adhere to a certain schedule. I have had a lot on my plate — from touring with concerts to writing a book — and I was waiting for the right moment to get back to filmmaking. I needed to be ready for new work."

For shooting "Love and War," Kusturica will for the first time use a digital camera, and he is hoping that this will allow him to break new ground. However, the director feels he needs to warn younger generations of film directors against focusing too heavily on new technology. "Any technology, however advanced and exciting, is just a tool that helps to deliver certain ideas, rather than the goal itself. A good film always explores existential issues, and technology alone is not enough to achieve it."

"The world of cinema is changing drastically these days; it is undergoing tectonic transformations," Kusturica added. "There is a strong tendency that is especially tangible in Western Europe that a happy ending is now seen as something of bad taste. I cannot agree with that."

As an admirer of Russian cinema icons such as Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Alexander Dovzhenko and Andrei Tarkovsky, and a regular at the Russian film events of today, Kusturica is frustrated to see a lack of independence and substance in the works of up-and-coming Russian filmmakers.

"In the younger generation of directors, there is a tendency to imitate Hollywood films" he said. From their works, one does not get a flavor of what life feels like for Russian people these days, during such a challenging time of transition. I very much hope that a new wave of Russian cinema will soon come. We all deserve it."

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