The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Bringing Complex Ideas to a Modern Film Crowd

By Aliide Naylor

June 25, 2013



Yevlakhov getting lost in the clouds emitted from a departing steam train, before going on to play out a new life.

Andrei Sigle's most notable recent work has been as producer and composer on the internationally acclaimed adaptation of "Faust," directed by Alexander Sokurov.

"The Role," his latest project, will be showing as part of the Moscow International Film Festival (MIFF). In his capacity as producer and composer, he worked alongside acclaimed director Konstantin Lopushansky, most renowned for 1986 sci-fi film "Letters From a Dead Man."

Prior to his forays into production, Sigle was involved primarily in music. In his early, years he was part of the St. Petersburg underground rock scene, going on to study composing for film at the Royal Academy of Music in Gothenburg, Sweden.

Sigle compared his transition to film music to that of a doctor choosing his specialization. "I don't write music out of this format. I write music, only for film. It's my profession," he asserted in impeccable English. The results of his work spanned a number of Sokurov's films, including the 2004 biopic "Solntse" (The Sun), which also marked his first collaboration with Sokurov as a producer.

"Sokurov is ... a genius. He is, of course, number one in Russia, but he is not just a friend, he is a teacher," he said, delighted that they had worked together on so many occasions. "I understand his talent and his position in world cinematography," he continued.

Sigle's new project, "The Role," is Lopushansky's first film in six years. The black-and-white production is set in Siberia in 1919, shortly after the revolution.

Dubbed a "theatrical experiment" by Sigle, he said the main idea behind the film was to explore a person's attempt to "live the life of another human."

The film's protagonist is an actor called Nicholas Yevlakhov whose profession begins to merge into his reality.

Yevlakhov is on a train of White Guards that is stormed by Red Army soldiers. The leader, Plotnikov, decides to spare Yevlakhov, who he notices bears a remarkable likeness to him.

The pair's mutual recognition is interrupted by battle, and Plotnikov is killed shortly afterwards. However, the leader continues to trouble Yevlakhov, who sees the situation as indicative of an opportunity for him to play the ultimate role: that of his deceased doppelganger. He begins obsessing and amassing as much information on Plotnikov as possible.

As a producer, Sigle had to focus on the practicalities of putting Lopushansky's thought-provoking vision on a modern-day screen.

"My role is to do impossibility," he said, trying to place his finger on when the film was first devised. "His [Lopushansky's] idea began 10 to 20 years ago. Sometimes he says 10, but to journalists he says 20," Sigle laughed. "He had dreamed about this film a lot of times before, and my own dream was to help him," he said.

Splitting the budget was one big task Sigle faced. "It was very expensive," he said. "These kind of films do not have an enormous budget." Sigle emphasized the need to come up with creative solutions while taking finances into consideration.

"You can invite an orchestra of 80 people like Wagner, who will play very emotional music. But at the same time you can invite a quartet, and the same emotion will follow, but you will not have spent as much money."

Sigle was naturally worried about the orchestration, having also been tasked with creating the film's music, finding that they went together very well.

"I try to find some art in the production business and it helps me to make the music for the film. I liked the films I produced so it was easy to write the music," he said, speaking highly of the film's crew.

“The film business is like a family. All the people are married for one film, and they want this baby, and after that, they go out, and they get together to make it,” he said. “They need to feel each other.”

“Faust” involved a large international group, uniting cast and crew from Germany, the Czech Republic and Canada, and although translators had to be employed on set, Sigle believes they still spoke “one language: film language.”

While “Faust” garnered a great deal of global attention, winning the Golden Lion at the 68th Venice International Film Festival, Sigle does have some reservations about a modern cinema audience’s appreciation of less “showy” pieces such as “The Role.”

“If you use a lot of special effects, you need to provide the people with a very small idea,” he said. “If the movie has a lot of special effects, a big idea will get lost inside.” He hoped that the minimalism of “The Role,” a setting for a more complex idea, would not be a deterrent.

“Younger generations don’t like to see films with a developed plan. They need something that causes excitement,” he said. MIFF keeps to its tradition of being a platform for artistic films, according to Sigle, but still needs to scatter them with “blockbusters” to draw the crowds.

Sigle has one more project appearing in MIFF: “Snegurochka” (The Snow Maiden). “It’s a much easier film,” he commented. “Not art house, of course, it’s a film for television. I don’t understand why it’s included!” he laughed.

"The Role" is showing as part of MIFF on June 27, 4:15 p.m. at Oktyabr Theater, 24 Novy Arbat, Metro Arbatskaya. +7 495-545-0505, moscowfilmfestival.ru/eng

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