

Moscow Glimpses Backstage in Woody Allen's Life

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Allen taking a moment away from his iconic typewriter, which has helped him generate scripts since the age of 16.

In a world of YouTube, Vine and now Instagram, where the popularization of filmmaking reigns and everybody wants to shoot and produce their own movies, legendary directors can be forgotten for a while.

Yet there are one or two who cannot be sidelined for too long. One in particular springs to mind: One who never listens to producers, makes everything on his own, and still shoots a movie every year. His name is Woody Allen.

Robert Weide's
documentary
on the

screenwriter
and director's
life hits the big
screen at Pioner
cinema after
a stint at MIFF.

A two-hour documentary, "Woody Allen," shown as part of the Moscow International Film Festival and opening in Russia's cinemas on July 4, narrates the fantastic story of Allen's life right from his early years when, as a 14 year-old Jewish boy, Allen used to skip classes in order to go to the cinema. The film takes you up to his present day status as one of America's most famous filmmakers.

The film shows how he started his career writing gags for magazines and stand-up comics, how he finally became a stand-up comic himself, how he hated it and, eventually, how he broke into filmmaking.

Spectators can see his old house where he used to live as a child, the movie sets where he worked with actors and his old typewriter that he bought when he was 16 and that eventually produced everything he ever wrote.

It depicts his life without cosmetics and exaggerations: For instance, it includes how he fell in love with Soon-Yi Previn, the adopted daughter of his long term girlfriend Mia Farrow.

Allen said in the movie that everybody could form their own point of view, and many proceeded to blame him. Allen remained unreserved about his actions.

Robert Weide, the author of the documentary, confessed that he waited about thirty years to make the movie. It was the mid-1980s when young Weide first approached Allen to make the film, but Allen politely turned him down.

However, Weide did not give up. He tried and got the same answer at various points over the next two decades. Finally, in 2008, Weide wrote Allen another letter where he made two points. His first was that it was absolutely time for the film to be made. His second was that Weide should film it.

"I heard back from his assistant, who called me and said: "Well, Woody wants to know if he were to do this, what would you need from him, would you like to interview him and so on," Weide said. "As soon as I heard the word "if," I thought "That's it! I am in!"

Weide had three main ideas for this movie. The first one was to analyze how Allen started out as a humble independent filmmaker and retained this independence, bearing in mind his unprecedented place in the world of cinema. "He is the only filmmaker who is always allowed to move on and do the next one whether or not his film does well, and he has this level of independence that no one else has," said Weide.

"People who finance Woody's movies do not even read the script. He is truly the most 'independent' filmmaker."

Weide considers his independence and his perseverance to make any idea he wants into the movie the most amazing aspects of his work.

The second main point for Weide was to narrate a story of his career development: how Allen went from very shy teenager writing gags for comics to becoming a successful screenwriter and director.

The last one was to look at Allen's creative process — how he writes, how he directs and how he works with actors. Nobody had seen it before because he never allowed cameras to follow him around or for anyone to be on the movie sets.

Weide said that Allen was extremely cooperative in shooting and that there was nothing he asked him that Allen would not do and no questions that he would not answer.

"He has a sort of sense of self-deprecation: sometimes it was hard to talk him into things. When I suggested going to his old neighborhood where he grew up in Brooklyn, he said: 'Nobody is gonna be interested in it, nobody is gonna care what house I grew up in or where I went to school.' So that was always a challenge," Weide said.

Allen, who is famed for never reading any criticism of his movies, his own interviews or any TV reports about himself, watched the documentary and liked it.

Weide remembered what Allen told him a few weeks after the movie aired in the U.S. Allen started to hear from a lot of people, including strangers on the street:

"I am 76 years old, and you are the first person who's come along and who's managed to humanize me ... and that includes several shrinks," Allen said.

Woody Allen: A Documentary (2012) begins July 4 at Pioner, 21 Kutuzovsky Prospekt, Metro Kutuzovskaya. For times see pioner-cinema.ru

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