

'Stalingrad' Lands in U.S., Hoping for Profits

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"Stalingrad" has attracted attention abroad, unusual for a Russian film.

HOLLYWOOD — As the buzz surrounding the motion picture "Stalingrad" continues, Sony Entertainment is hoping that it will pick up more steam as its U.S. release date of Feb. 28 approaches.

Although the \$30 million battle epic was unveiled around the world some weeks ago, Sony held up the U.S. release, counting on more positive recognition during the awards season. However, the movie failed to garner either Golden Globe or Oscar nods in the form of best foreign film nominations.

Now, Sony is betting on the blockbuster success Stalingrad is enjoying around the world, especially in Russia and China where it has grossed nearly \$100 million.

A Sony marketing executive told The St. Petersburg Times that the studio is very excited about the prospects of this production as it possesses an unusual appeal for U.S. audiences. Stalingrad director Fyodor Bondarchuk himself noted that "it has been said our film takes all

the cliches from Hollywood movies," and this adherence to Hollywood traditions may help to break through to U.S. audiences.

The story line is one factor that sets Stalingrad apart from other war movies: Even though the movie tells the story of one of the greatest and bloodiest battles of World War II, it focuses on a poignant love story involving a German commanding officer and a Soviet woman.

Ilya Tilkin's script reportedly came in for criticism from Russian film buffs for its concentration on the romantic aspects of the story at the expense of paying proper tribute to Russian sacrifices.

Stalingrad director Fyodor Bondarchuk sidestepped the negative comments preferring instead to compare the film to Steven Spielberg's battlefield epic "Saving Private Ryan."

Technically, Stalingrad brings to mind other epic productions. St. Petersburg plays a pivotal role here since the huge sets were constructed at the former Krasny Triugolnik factory at a cost in excess of 100 million rubles (\$2.87 million) for the picture's key sequences.

Another plus for international audiences has been the IMAX 3D technology used for the first time in a Russian film, an aspect Sony attributes to the success of the film.

For emphasis, studio publicists point to the film's opening four-day receipts of \$8.5 million in China, which make it the highest grossing non-U.S. film in that market.

When the picture opened in Europe, The New York Times headlined "Russia's 'Stalingrad' is a hit on screen." Sony is hoping for an encore in the U.S. as well as in other remaining territories.

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