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Moscow TV Round-Up: My Friend Ivan Lapshin, American Pie and More

By Mark H. Teeter

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Red Heat (1988) **mubi.com**

With Russian-American relations officially up the creek, we should all thank Moscow TV for five days of encouraging paddles — mostly in the form of policemen, no less. This week's movies begin with a good-guy Russian in America and end with a good-guy American in Russia – both admirably assisted by the local cops. In between we get entertaining turns by the best Russian policeman of the 1930s and America's most-loved of the 1970s, battling gangsters and terrorists, respectively. And for good measure there's also a pair of hugely popular youth movies — so we don't forget there's still a Russian or American kid in all of us just below the belligerent surface. Here's your where and when:

If people think it's funny hearing Arnold Schwarzenegger speak Russian, he probably doesn't know it: nobody's ever told him for fear of being Terminated. But relax, you'll be safe here listening to the hulking Austrian-American body builder-turned-actor lay down a few

phonetic-Russian lines as Captain Ivan Danko, a Soviet cop detailed to the Chicago police on a cross-cultural gangster hunt in ***Red Heat*** (1988). This appealingly foul-mouthed, chock-full-o'-stereotypes Walter Hill actioner was the first Hollywood movie allowed to shoot scenes on Red Square. What's more, today's Russians like it rather more than Americans do (6.7/10 on KinoPoisk vs. 6.0 on the IMDb site). Maybe it's the Prokofiev somebody snuck onto the sound track...

Red Heat Красная жара. Kinomiks, Monday at 2:35 p.m.

Late Tuesday night viewers meet the best-known Russian representative of a detective hero sub-genre you might call the "retro-totalitarian-good guy" in ***My Friend Ivan Lapshin*** (1984). This is the gumshoe who answers the bell when a society abandons the rule of law but still wants somebody hard-nosed and effective to round up garden variety non-ideological criminals, from purse snatchers to murderous gangsters. Ivan Lapshin heads a civil crimes detective unit in the fictional city of Unchansk in the 1930s, and the character became a popular icon among the Russian/Soviet detective-loving public for two reasons: his unorthodox (and un-Soviet) style and his famous raison d'être for performing police functions in a police state: "We'll clean up the countryside, plant a garden in it and stick around long enough for a walk in the garden ourselves." Directed by Aleksei German from an Eduard Volodarsky screenplay, "Lapshin" was much praised for its rare combination of mood-of-the-times authenticity and unusual multi-tiered storytelling, all of it memorably delivered by lead Andrei Boltnev and an outstanding ensemble cast.

My Friend Ivan Lapshin Мой друг Иван Лапшин. Zvezda, Wednesday at 1:55 a.m.

STS has chosen this week to toss the whole ***American Pie*** franchise at viewers' faces, starting Monday with the 1999 original, a surprise smash hit that spawned three sequels and four direct-to-DVD spinoffs. The first is, predictably, the best of the lot — raunchy, funny and sometimes touching, it actually promotes traditional values in a curiously refreshing way. But mind the 16+ rating...

For the pre-teen in you, the movie to catch Wednesday is Elem Klimov's classic summer-camp comedy "***Welcome, Campers! or No Trespassing"*** (1964). Like most great comedies, "Campers" works on several levels: you get dead-on parodies of Soviet-era Pioneer camp life that everybody over 35 remembers from childhood, plus a boatload of satire on the sillier aspects of the Khrushchev period and Soviet life generally. The latter, needless to say, practically guaranteed release problems from Soviet censors, but these magically disappeared after Khrushchev watched the film at his dacha and asked "Why are you holding this up? It's funny, put it out there." And thus, as Klimov summed it up, "an anti-Khrushchev movie was released by Khrushchev himself" — scoring a nice 11 on the irony meter.

American Pie Американский пирог I-IV. STS, Monday-Thursday at 9:00 p.m.
Welcome, Campers! or No Trespassing Добро пожаловать, или Посторонним вход воспрещен. Dom Kino, Wednesday at 8:45 a.m.

In a country where "Cheese it, the cops!" probably means your brother-in-law Petya is about to get busted for running illegal Parmesan, the question of how police are depicted on TV may seem moot. But Kultura deserves credit for airing the stereotype-busting American serial

"Columbo" (1968-1978), in which the ingenious Peter Falk plays a disheveled, working-class American detective in a rumpled raincoat — a sort of chattier Akaki Akakievich in the Los Angeles police department. The awkward Lieutenant Colombo is in fact a "dumb genius" who always gets his murderer, and Russians have come to love this cop-as-everyman: the show scores a lofty 7.9/10 on the KinoPoisk fan site. Tune in this final episode of the original series on Thursday and watch a loveable American policeman outduel a band of international terrorists – without firing a shot!

Columbo: The Conspirators Коломбо. Конспираторы. Kultura, Thursday at 11:15 a.m. and midnight.

Kultura finishes this very Russian-American week with a classic silent film by the great Lev Kuleshov, one of the progenitors and earliest master-directors of Soviet cinema. Kuleshov was much taken with things American: two of his most notable features are based on Jack London and O. Henry stories, while a third – "***The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks"*** (1924) – borrows considerably from the hallmark silent-era comedies of Mack Sennett, Harold Lloyd and Charlie Chaplin. But the slapstick humor of flail-away fisticuffs and wild car chases is only the entertainment surface of "Mr. West." Kuleshov and screenwriters Nikolai Aseyev and Vsevolod Pudovkin had a more serious message to convey, which was that then-prevalent American stereotypes of Russia were gross and misleading. This is best demonstrated in the film's last reel, when the visiting Mr. West is saved from serio-comic kidnappers — bad-guy holdovers from the *ancien regime* — and then personally shown around the New Soviet Moscow by a handsome, friendly "real Bolshevik": a police officer. Ah, 1924...

Tune in for the romp-stomp antics and good shots of Moscow – and to ponder just how far our mutual de-stereotyping has come in 92 years. Is some healthy revisionism overdue on one side of the perception wall or both?

Masterworks of Early Cinema: The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks Шедевры старого кино. "Необычайные приключения мистера Веста в стране большевиков." Kultura, Friday at 10:20 a.m.

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