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Moscow TV Round-Up: Ivan the Terrible, Bimmer and More

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Ivan the Terrible, Part One (1945) **IMDB**

It's less Prime Time and more Crime Time on Moscow TV this week, as the films for late October offer viewers a very felonious tsar, four bad dudes in a stolen BMW, a high-tone Leningrad call girl, a much-reviled wartime traitor and an updated Dostoevsky tale, with the murder framed by hip-hop. And all that *before* we hit Halloween! Here's the where and when:

For patriotic viewers miffed at missing the unveiling of the world's first monument to Ivan the Terrible in Oryol last week, the First Educational channel offers some cinematic solace: the station has been holding its own "***Ivan the Terrible***" marathon over the weekend, with three showings of both parts of Sergei Eisenstein's 1944-46 classic from Saturday night though this morning. Let's face it, *somebody* had to do it.

If historical accuracy lies somewhere beside the point in this first-tsar-of-Russia foundation

epic – and *way* beside it in the second part, according to miffed patriotic viewer Josef Stalin – few will dispute the greatness of this film *as a film*: Eisenstein's elaborate and meticulous staging, the masterful camera work of Eduard Tisse and Andrei Moskvin, the perfectly modulated Sergei Profiev score and memorable performances from a great cast led by Nikolai Cherkassov – all these combine to create a uniquely impressive and purposeful whole that gives the phrase "auteur cinema" its meaning. As Andrei Tarkovsky put it, "There isn't a single detail in the film that doesn't betray [the director's] idea or intent." Which weren't Stalin's, clearly, and weren't those of the speeches in Oryol, in case you were wondering.

Ivan the Terrible Иван Грозный. First Educational, Monday at 6:20 a.m.
Available free online at the Mosfilm *site.*

Pyotr Todorovsky's once-shocking ***"Interdevochka"*** (1989) did massive box office here and good art house business abroad by skillfully telling a seamier-side-of-perestroika story about a Leningrad nurse turned call girl who harbors dreams of something better – as in marrying a foreigner and skipping the country. The film was more than a de-sanitized Soviet "Breakfast at Tiffany's": Todorovsky broke new ground with his illustrations of common but heretofore unsuitable-for-filming social phenomena, including 4-star hotel prostitution, hard-currency machinations and entrenched institutional corruption. If "Interdevochka" seems somewhat tamer today – and almost quaint in its concessions to "Victorian" Soviet sexual sensibilities and faux-socialist notions of morality – its narrative still offers an engaging and revealing cautionary tale, and one admirably embodied by Elena Yakovleva in the lead.

Interdevochka Интердевочка. Dom Kino, Tuesday at 11:10 a.m.

With four guys in a stolen BMW who either represent or run into everything wrong with this country at the street level 15 years ago, ***"Bimmer"*** (2003) is one badass Russian road movie – but with excellent music (Critics Guild Best Score, 2003). Yes, from corrupt cops and mafia-run businesses to crudity and brutishness so commonplace they hardly register after a while, "Bimmer" would be a gritty parade of stuff you'd rather avoid — except, that is, for two things: (1) the film exudes a remarkable energy (even as you flinch), with the talented guy-ensemble cast nicely handled by debut director Pyotr Buslov (using a script he wrote with Denis Rodimin); and (2) there actually is a moral here that rises above the noir-nihilism.

In the end, the heroes-in-quotation-marks do get their just deserts – and yet they still qualify, one feels, for a certain viewer sympathy. You be the judge. And when you've calmed down from this exciting if bumpy "Bimmer" ride, ask yourself what this generation of gangsters are probably doing today...

Bimmer Бумер. REN TV, Wednesday at 11:25 p.m.

In an era when the state struggles ceaselessly to convince its citizenry that their homeland is surrounded by enemies and infiltrated by traitors, the term "Vlasovite" comes in very handy: followers of General Andrei Vlasov can be either! The well-imagined "fascists" who took over Kiev two years ago can be termed Vlasovites on TV talk shows and in the state press, and a local pop singer or actor who disagrees with presidential policy can just as easily become an "internal Vlasovite" for the same audiences. But as Aleksei Zaitsev's well-mounted documentary ***"The Noose"*** (1997) makes clear, there is a problem with playing the Vlasov

card too often. The closer disinterested historians look at the case of the Soviet general who surrendered to the Germans in 1942 and then led a sizeable force of ex-POWs and anti-Stalinist volunteers against the Red Army, the harder it is to present Vlasov as a one-dimensional villain. Tune in Who's Who Thursday and decide for yourself who actually betrayed whom – and who did it first.

The Noose. Or One General and Two Russian Armies Петля, или один генерал... и две русские армии. Who's Who, Thursday at 10:00 a.m.

For those who need to loosen up after a tough week, Roman Kachanov's ***"Down House"*** (2001) is just what the doctor ordered: a very loose adaptation of the Dostoevsky classic "The Idiot." Kachanov's Prince Myshkin is a late-'90s computer programmer who returns to the Wild East of Moscow after psychotherapy in Switzerland. From there on, the basic Idiotic plot is maintained – but its boundaries are stretched as needed throughout, with the transition to post-Soviet modernity's manners and mores, from gangsters to techno-bop, neatly accomplished through both telling dialogue and showing the Hummers. The linchpin figure of Myshkin is wonderfully rendered in all his touching naïvete by Fyodor Bondarchuk, leading a cast that seamlessly weaves serious acting with seriously funny tongue-in-cheek. All told, the whole thing is an insistently watchable experiment that ends up commendable as both genuine homage and a big joke. And how many Dostoevsky movies have a great hip-hop soundtrack?

Down House Даун хаус. TV 1000 Russkoye Kino, Saturday at 12:30 a.m.

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