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Moscow TV Round-Up: Ring Out the Year with Laughs

By Mark H. Teeter

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This is how fate changes - it begins in a bath house and ends in love.

It's Comedy Favorites Week on Moscow TV, as the capital's small screens signal the run-up to New Year's and the long holiday with lighthearted movie hits everybody knows, loves, quotes – and enjoys watching again. In mid-week viewers also get a rare high-cultural treat: a live premiere performance from the Tchaikovsky Conservatory's Great Hall. Here's the where and when:

Leonid Gaidai's
"Ivan Vasilievich Changes Professions" (1973) has been a national favorite

for over 40 years and it's easy to see why. This classic time-travel switcheroo — in which Ivan the Terrible visits 20th century Moscow and modern Muscovites go back to Old Rus — offers both terrific costume-drama parody and some of the funniest physical comedy you'll see this year (or any year). And you don't have to be a sociologist to appreciate the film's third hook — sharp satirical commentary on the society that produced it. Many late Soviet-era ticket buyers came back time and again just to re-enjoy lines like the famous Leonid Kuravlyov ad lib: "Citizens! Keep your money in the State Bank...if, of course, you have any." Based on the Bulgakov play "Ivan Vasilievich," this is serious fun from a seriously unfunny era that will amuse you and everyone you watch it with — even those without a kopek left in Sberbank.

Ivan Vasilievich Changes Professions
Иван Васильевич
меняет
профессию. Dom Kino, Thursday at 7 p.m.; Friday at 1:05 p.m.; Saturday at 1:30 p.m. and 10:20 p.m.

Tuesday starts as a rare cross-cross-cultural day, with
The Man from Boulevard des
Capucines (1987) – easily the best "Bosrshcht Western" you'll ever see about the power of French entertainment to change people's lives in America's Wild West. Said boulevard was the Paris address of the first paying-public cinema theater, where the Lumière Bros. spent the 1890s showing "moving pictures" for fun and profit; this film created its share of both (drawing 60 million Soviet viewers), and at heart it's really a good-spirited bit of proselytizing for the medium's power to influence audiences. Cine-missionary Mr. First (Andrei Mironov) brings his newfangled "motion picture machine" to an otherwise hopelessly untamable Western town circa 1900 and duly records how flickering figures on a screen can and do turn the place civilized overnight...or do they?

Directed by Alla Surikova (from a screenplay by Eduard Akopov), "The Man" won awards at Odessa and Los Angeles, while *Soviet Screen* readers voted Mironov Actor of the Year. Hitch this one up for sure, podner.

The Man from Boulevard des Capucines
Человек с бульвара Капуцинов. Mir, Tuesday
at 9:00
a.m.

Late Tuesday night you get *"Station for Two"*
(1982), a classic of the "sad comedy" genre
that director Eldar Ryazanov and writer Emil Braginsky perfected over several decades. The tandem's success here owes much to two of the great actors of the day:
Oleg Basilashvili as the innocent but feckless Platon, a pianist detained by Fate at a railroad station, and Lyudmilla Gurchenko as Vera, the station café waitress who eventually gets him feckled – despite much hindrance from black market thug Andrei, so smoothly embodied by

Nikita Mikhalkov that it made some viewers suspicious (though not any more). Voted Movie of the Year by *Soviet Screen* readers, "Station" led the nation at the box office and remains a favorite of millions, which should include you.

Station for Two Вокзал для двоих. TV3, Wednesday at 1:00 a.m.

On Wednesday evening your TV gears up for a rare shot of direct-experience high culture, as Kultura carries a live performance from the Great Hall of Moscow's Tchaikovsky Conservatory. The orchestra of Perm's Tchaikovsky Opera and Ballet Theater will perform the music from Sergei Prokofiev's ballet
"Cinderella" (1945) – a great listen in any case,
but also a perfect excuse to upgrade your TV speakers beforehand! Tuning in is likewise a way to show indirect support for the Perm company's remarkable conductor, the Greek-Russian maestro Teodor Currentzis. An outspoken critic of re-Stalinization of the arts, Currentzis is a new-generation classicist recently described as "
the conducting equivalent of
Glenn Gould and Kurt Cobain." That's going to make for some interesting Prokofiev, now isn't it?

Sergei Prokofiev: "Cinderella" Сергей Прокофьев. "Золушка". Kultura, Wednesday at 10:45 p.m.

Early Soviet life wasn't exactly a barrel of laughs, but it did produce some outstanding satire, as "Odessa school" masters Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov demonstrated more than once. Their
first comic-picaresque novel,
"The Twelve Chairs" (1927) was hugely popular – and finally
filmed by Leonid Gaidai for Mosfilm in 1971. Set in the rough-and-tumble Russia of the mid-1920s, where a former nobleman named Vorobianinov is joined by the now-legendary "kombinator"/con man Ostap Bender on a search for the former's family jewels, Ilf and Petrov took clever potshots at a broad spectrum of "New Soviet" phenomena, including people, behaviors, institutions and lunch – giving Gaidai plenty of room to work. The director assembled a great cast for this long-awaited run at a Soviet classic, and the result was a big hit that remains great good fun today.

The Twelve Chairs Двенадцать стульев. Mir, Friday at 4:15 p.m., 7:20 p.m. and 11:50 p.m.

There are great movies on many Moscow channels on New Year's Eve, but Channel One is not Channel One for nothing: it gets the keynote feature. Rightly proclaimed "our country's best New Year's film," Eldar Ryazanov's wonderful
"An Irony of Fate" (1975) is one of the
funniest, most lovingly crafted, genuinely touching and profoundly dystopian films produced under the Soviet régime. Watched by something now approaching a billion viewers since it first aired on January 1, 1976, this story of four friends, binge drinking, Soviet housing and true love still amuses Russians no end while instructing outsiders and entertaining all comers every time they watch it. Calling "Irony" a "must see" may be too little; it is practically a "must learn Russian and see" movie, and you won't regret it if you do.

For
the rest of you, warm up your elbows, tune in and start tippin' 'em. "
Это ужасно, водку
после пива!"/"It's just terrible – vodka after beer!"

An Irony of Fate Ирония судьбы, или С легким паром! Channel One, Saturday at 6:45 p.m.; Sunday at 8:40 a.m. and 10:10 a.m.

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