

# New Film About Writer Sergei Dovlatov

German's film "Dovlatov" gets a Silver Bear at Berlinale, sells rights to Netflix

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"Dovlatov" **WDSSPR**

One of the most anticipated movies of 2018 is "Dovlatov," a biopic of Sergei Dovlatov, the Soviet dissident writer who was forced to emigrate to the U.S. in 1979. Directed by Alexei German, Jr., "Dovlatov" premiered at the Berlin Film Festival (Berlinale) to much critical acclaim. Elena Okopnaya's costume design won the Silver Bear for Outstanding Artistic Contribution, and the film was given the Berliner Morgenpost Reader's Jury Award. It was immediately picked up by Netflix for the English-speaking territories and Scandinavian countries and by other companies for showings in virtually all of Europe.

## The Real Dovlatov

Sergei Dovlatov is not as well-known as his more celebrated compatriot in exile, Joseph

Brodsky, the 1987 Nobel Prize winner. Dovlatov was born in 1941 in Ufa during his parents' evacuation from Leningrad. Half-Jewish, half-Armenian, Dovlatov studied literature in St. Petersburg and eventually started working as a journalist while writing stories that were partially autobiographical, partially fiction. But since Dovlatov was not admitted to the official Writers' Guild, he couldn't publish his fictional works.

Recognition as a writer came only when Dovlatov emigrated to the U.S. and translations of his short stories were published in *The New Yorker* in the 1980s, although during his lifetime he was more often known as one of Brodsky's "writer friends." Dovlatov prematurely died of heart attack in 1990 in New York and became one of the most popular 20th-century writers in Russia only after his death. He's known for his comic, extremely sarcastic depiction of the everyday realities of the Soviet Union. Dovlatov also became a master of one-liners, some of which are now firmly entrenched in Russian folklore, such as "you can't ask God for seconds" or "a decent person is someone who does nasty things without any pleasure."

## **The Film Dovlatov**

Alexei German, Jr. is the son of the Alexei German, one of the pillars of Soviet and Russian cinema. German, Jr.'s previous film, "Under Electric Clouds," was also recognized at the Berlinale, while one of his earlier works, "Paper Soldier," got an award at the Venice festival.

The movie's cinematographer is Lukasz Zal, known for his work on Oscar winner "Ida." Silver Bear winner Elena Okopnaya is the director's wife and regular collaborator. She brilliantly reconstructed well-known hangouts of 1970s Leningrad bohemian crowd and, even more importantly, she created the recognizable atmosphere in which dissident intellectuals spent their lives.

German is not the first filmmaker attracted by the subject of Dovlatov's life. Less than three years ago controversial director and State Duma deputy Stanislav Govorukhin made a film called "The End of a Great Era," based on Dovlatov's short story collection "Compromise," about the writer's alter ego working as a journalist in Tallinn, Estonia.

Unlike Govorukhin's film, "Dovlatov" is not based on any particular book by the writer. Instead, it focuses on six days in the life of Sergei Dovlatov before November 7, the major Soviet holiday celebrating the anniversary of the October revolution. While working on the movie, German had extensive consultations with the writer's family and friends.

For the main role German cast Milan Maric, a relative newcomer from Serbia, who has an uncanny resemblance to Dovlatov. His foreignness in 1970s Leningrad is both visible and intentional: Dovlatov really seemed to belong to a different world and was out of place in the Soviet Union.

People who don't know much about Dovlatov or the era are helped by several title screens with information about the time and place. The characters of Dovlatov and his friend Joseph Brodsky also voice basic historical facts and details from their biographies.

The film is more atmospheric and sad than comical, although moviegoers will enjoy the depictions of the writer's vivid dreams, where he complains to Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet Union's General Secretary, about not being published and the nation's leader offers him a

book collaboration.

*“Dovlatov” will be shown in cinemas as a one-time special cultural event only on March 1-4. The Moskino chain will show the film with English subtitles at Zvezda, Fakel and Salut. For more details, check [here](#).*

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