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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Director Georgy Daneliya Has Died

The celebrated film director was 88 years old.

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Georgy Daneliya **Vladimir Ostapkovich / TASS**

The film director Georgy Daneliya died in a Moscow hospital on Thursday. The cause of death was a heart attack, but he had been hospitalized since February with an acute respiratory ailment. He was 88 years old.

Daneliya was one of the Soviet Union's most popular screenwriters and directors, whose gently satirical films managed to poke fun at just about everyone without offending anyone — or getting into too much trouble with the censors.

Born in Tiflis (now Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia), he moved to Moscow with his family in his youth and graduated from an architectural institute. After working as an architect for several years and playing a few minor parts in movies, he entered the famed Higher Director's Courses that had recently opened under the auspices of Mosfilm.

After graduation, he began to work at the studio, directing in 1959 one of the classic films of the Khrushchev "Thaw" era, "Walking the Streets of Moscow." The film, which stars a very

young Nikita Mikhalkov, doesn't have much of a plot but somehow conveys the non-political, optimistic spirit of the times. It was the first of Daneliya's trademark "sad comedies" that resonated with audiences in the late Soviet era.

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He directed and wrote many popular and award-winning films in the 1960s and 1970s. His biggest hit was the 1971 comedy "Gentlemen of Fortune," starring Yevgeny Leonov as a mild-mannered kindergarten teacher and his criminal look-alike. The film, for which Daneliya wrote the script and assisted the director, was seen by more than 65 million viewers.

Another public favorite was "Mimino" (1977) about a Georgian bush pilot who longs to pilot a large commercial liner. He comes to Moscow to study and ends up being put in a hotel room with another guest — a common Soviet practice. The other guest is a bus driver from Armenia. Daneliya plays with ethnic stereotypes and the travails of Soviet life as the two men attempt to see the sights in the Soviet capital.

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Daneliya's "sad comedy" "Autumn Marathon" (1979) presented a reality that differed from the usual family values of Soviet cinema. Oleg Basilashvili plays a Russian-English translator with wife and mistress troubles that spill over into his relations with his co-workers and neighbors.

Daneliya's last film was an animated movie called "Ku! Kin-dza-dza" released in 2013.

Over the course of his long career, Daneliya won hundreds of awards both in the U.S.S.R. and at international film festivals.

He will be interred at Novodevichy Cemetery.

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