

Star Filmmakers Draw Inspiration From Russia Lockdown

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Renowned director Andrei Konchalovsky invited ordinary Russians to contribute to a documentary about life in quarantine. **Maxim Grigoryev / TASS**

The coronavirus pandemic might have brought the film industry to a halt but Andrei Konchalovsky, one of Russia's most renowned film and theatre directors, is as busy as ever.

He wants to make a documentary about daily life under quarantine, exploring the poetic side of the mundane, and he has invited ordinary Russians to work with him on the project.

"All of us have ended up on a desert island and that's the most interesting thing," the 82-year-old told AFP in a video interview.

In late March, Konchalovsky issued a call on social media to his fans to make short videos for a project he has called "Quarantine Russian Style."

"Take your smartphones, film your new routines, your favorite spot at home, or even your

work web conference. And we'll make movies!" he said.

Every week the celebrated filmmaker, who is followed by more than 400,000 people on Facebook, asks his co-creators a number of questions.

He wants them to speak about their fears or new rituals or even tell him about the "craziest" thing they have purchased during the lockdown.

Konchalovsky, who has earned multiple international awards and worked with renowned filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky, has already received thousands of video clips and photos to choose from.

"They shoot them from their room, a decrepit window sill or a favorite old sofa," he said.

Sometimes contributors read out a text or wax philosophical about Russians' coping mechanisms.

Scenes have included Russians sharing a vodka bottle at a makeshift table connecting two nearby balconies or riding a bike to a neighbor's door.

Konchalovsky, who lived in the United States for many years and whose Hollywood movies include "Tango and Cash," also asked aspiring filmmakers to reflect on the nature of the quarantine in Russia and how it may be different from lockdowns in China or Europe.

The film director said his countrymen might adapt better to crises than people in the West.

"Specifics of life in Russia have fostered in man an enormous ability to resist sanctions," he said.

"That is why we will be able to tough it out."

'Tales from Quarantine'

Konchalovsky is not the only filmmaker to have found new inspiration during the lockdown.

Director and producer Timur Bekmambetov, who is regarded as one of the inventors of the "Screenlife" format, in which movies take place entirely on computer screens, wants to produce a film about the lockdown in the new genre.

Like Konchalovsky, he has invited Russians to contribute short videos and script pitches for a project he has called "Tales From The Quarantine."

The crowd-sourced stories could be real or fictional.

"Today we live more and more on our screens rather than in real life: it's where we fall in love, get angry, where we find and lose work and understand who we are," Bekmambetov told AFP in a video interview from the city of Kazan more than 800 kilometers (500 miles) east of Moscow.

The first episode is called "Telecommuting" and features professional actors in a web

conference.

"Confinement speeds up usage of a new audiovisual language," said Bekmambetov, 58, who shot to fame in the 2000s when he directed Russian fantasy thrillers "Day Watch" and "Night Watch."

"Traditional cinema, which has come to a standstill during the crisis, is outdated," he said.

"We no longer want movies about bank heists in the era of electronic payments or balcony serenades in time of social networks."

'We must survive'

Due to the epidemic the Russian film industry is likely to lose around 60% of revenue this year, according to preliminary estimates from the Culture Ministry.

But online platforms still offer an opportunity to earn an income. This is what Galiya Fatkhutdinova, who makes short films, hopes to do.

The 35-year-old was giving acting classes in China when the coronavirus epidemic struck.

Stuck in quarantine, she decided to launch a series of short films to document the experience upon her return to Russia.

She invited dozens of her actor friends — who had all lost their jobs due to the contagion — to participate in a project dubbed "The Isolated."

"'The Isolated' talks about everything that goes on in isolation: love, betrayal, politics," Fatkhutdinova told AFP.

She is now looking to sell her film to an online platform — one of the few distribution possibilities left during the lockdown — to be able to pay her actors.

"We must survive these strange times," she said.

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