

True romance, Soviet style

Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears
Edmonton Film Society
Sept. 21 SUB Theatre

review by Peter Melnychuk

One could not be blamed for approaching Vladimir Menshov's *Moscow Does Not Believe In Tears* with a great deal of excitement. To begin with, the Soviet cinematic heritage is formidable: until the ascent of one J. Stalin, and the subsequent hardening of Soviet artistic arteries, the country's cinema was arguably the finest in the world (the other side of that argument, incidentally, is the German cinema). Secondly, the Soviet cinema has of late experienced something of a renaissance; works such as Tarkovskii's *Mirror* and Parazhanov's *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* rank among the finest films released in the past decade. Unfortunately, *Moscow Does Not Believe In Tears* is a major disappointment.

The film could have been titled *An Unmarried Woman*, considering its similarity to that American film; this time round, however, the venue is Moscow, and the Jill Clayburgh is Vera Alentova. To be brief: Katia, a country girl, arrives in the big city to work in a factory. While she distinguishes herself, earning a promotion, she has the misfortune to become pregnant

by a no-good city slicker; not only does he decline marriage, he refuses to see or even help her. The film breaks here and resumes twenty years later: Katia is now a successful technocrat and party member, not to mention mother, and though her life is replete with TV appearances and consumer goods, something is missing. Finally, (and believe me, that's what it seems like), enter the Soviet Alan Bates, Gosha, (worker of workers, hero among research scientists), after a mercifully brief courtship of eight days, they get married and live happily ever after.

The film pushes the hollow myth that eventual happiness and immediate privilege accrue to the most productive components in a state capitalist society.

Although sprinkled with some genuinely humorous situations and dialogues, the screenplay suffers from excessive length and a surfeit of colorful caricatures. On a few occasions, what is left in the script reveals director Menshov's incompetence: in the second part of the movie, for example, one character remarks to her ex-husband, "Go away! We got divorced seven years ago. Get out!" —

as if he needs to be told.

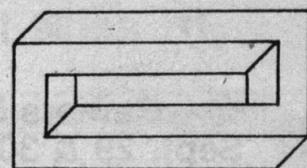
Granted, Menshov should not be gonged for his effort, but his film is marked by its inattention to detail. At one point the outline of klieg lights reflect obtrusively off a cupboard and the cluttered realism of the mise-en-scene becomes merely sloppy. So much, too, for the illusion of realism when, in one outdoor scene, montage creates a Russian dusk in which the sun sets, rises a bit, and then, in an eye-blink, is gone completely. One might forgive Menshov this to some degree, if he was to plead distraction (as we might), at the hands of a cinematographer who in some shots inexplicably jars the camera.

Before concluding it should be stated that the films three principal actors are very good. Alentova's Katia is, in fact, extraordinary: her skilful effort is transcend the lesser components of the film, and, though by fits and starts, carry it. The remainder of the cast evidently scraped through the Soviet equivalent of Drama 10, lost interest in the art, and in *Moscow* ...their comeback fails.

Yes, *Moscow Does Not Believe In Tears* addresses itself, though not very intently, to some of the problems in a purportedly socialist Soviet society. God — or rather Marx — bless its social conscience. Most of the film's "criticisms" (and I use the word loosely) concern Moscow c. 1958 (i.e., Khrushchev),

and thus none of them have enough impact to qualify as subversion. Menshov's film pushes the hollow myth that eventual happiness and immediate privilege accrue to the most productive components in a state capitalist society. Little wonder that *Time* magazine applauds and the Hollywood Academy sends an award for Best Foreign Film. Finally they're coming over to our way of thinking — that's entertainment.

Peter T. Melnychuk reviews Soviet and East European film for Student, Canada's newspaper for Ukrainian students.



Answers to Arts Quiz
1. c / 2. f / 3. d / 4. 8 / 5. b / 6. a / 7. c

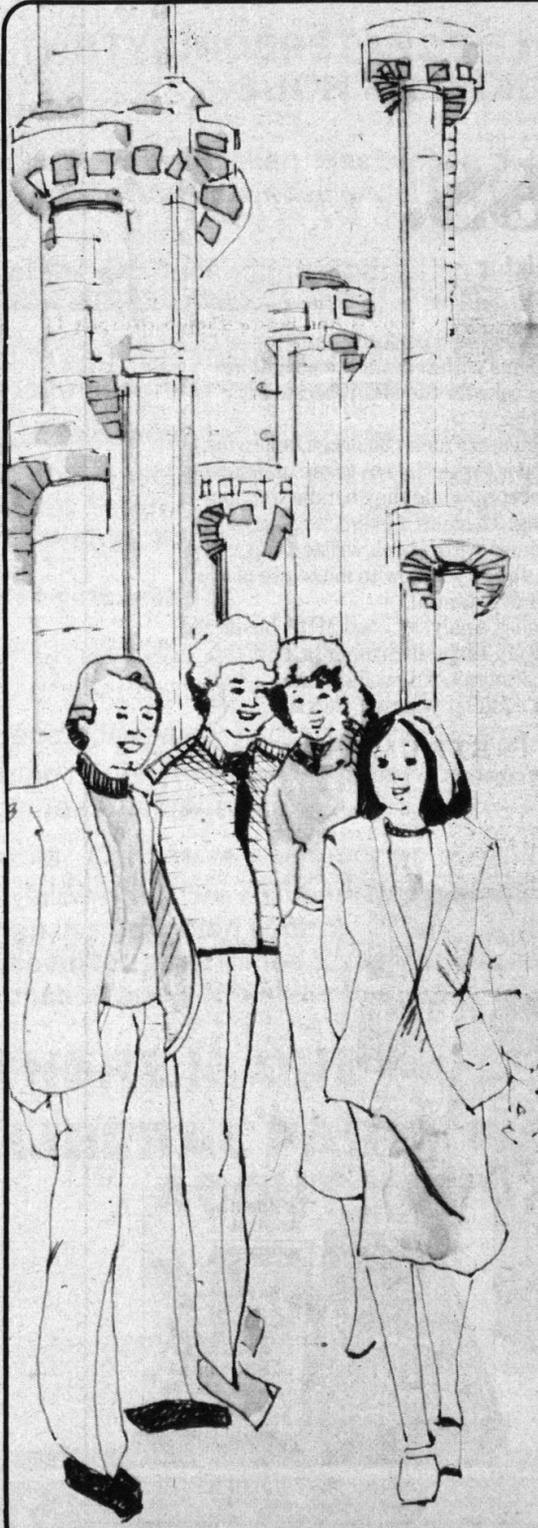
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