

**THE STRANGE AFTERLIFE OF STALINIST MUSICAL
FILMS**

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Executive Summary

During the 1930s and 1940s Grigorii Aleksandrov and Ivan Pyr'ev directed a series of musical comedy films that became the most popular cinematic works of the Stalin years. Like American musicals of the Depression and war years, the Russian films lifted people's spirits and gave them a respite from the grim realities of everyday life during the difficult years of socialist construction and World War II. Aleksandrov's comedies were urban legends—Cinderella stories and show musicals in which the making of a stage performance paralleled the love interest, the making of a couple. Pyr'ev made folk musicals situated on collective farms in which the completion of an agricultural task and the formation of a community paralleled the formation of a couple. Because relatively few feature films were released during the Stalin years, the appearance of each new musical film became a major cultural event that generated scores of proverbial expressions based on dialogue from the films. The official fortunes of the musical films, which had expressed the ideological optimism of socialist construction during the Stalin years, were reversed after the 20th Party Congress in 1956. Khrushchev scapegoated Pyr'ev's Cossacks of the Kuban' in his campaign for realism in the arts, and the film disappeared from moviehouses. The Aleksandrov and Pyr'ev comedies acquired a second life when they were restored and reissued for public consumption during the Brezhnev years, but times had changed and dialogue from the films now figured in satirical popular parlance on alcoholism, sex and Socialist Realist iconography.

With the increased freedom of the press during Perestroika, the debate about Cossacks of the Kuban' erupted into a three-sided argument among those who viewed the film as a base falsehood, those who saw it as a life-affirming idealization that helped the Russian people survive the difficult post-war years, and those who viewed Cossacks as true to life and consistent with their own experiences. In their post-Soviet afterlife the musical comedies acquired a more complex signification that mediated a double deconstruction of Soviet contemporaneity. The Stalinist sign with its negative charge was both itself parodied and simultaneously employed to parody post-Soviet reality in films such as Tractor Drivers-2 (1992). In two recent Russian and Central Asian films Moskva and Maimyl (both 2001) contemporary quotations from Stalinist musicals contrapose the idealism, optimism and semiotic wholeness of the Stalinist era to the demoralized, corrupt and fragmented post-Soviet present.

Perspectives on Stalinist Musical Films During the Soviet Period

During the 1930s and 1940s Grigorii Aleksandrov and Ivan Pyr'ev directed a series of musical comedy films that became the most popular cinematic works of the Stalin years, beloved by both the Best Friend of Cinema Workers and the general population.¹ Like American musicals of the Depression and war years, the films lifted people's spirits and gave them a respite from the grim realities of everyday life. Romantic comedy with a "kheppi-end" in city or steppe and the sing-along melodies and lyrics of Dunaevskii, Lebedev-Kumach, the Pokrass brothers, Khrennikov and Vol'pin helped sustain ordinary people during the difficult years of socialist construction and World War II.

Aleksandrov's comedies were urban legends—Cinderella stories (Happy Guys, The Shining Path, Volga-Volga) and show musicals (The Circus, Spring) in which the making of a performance paralleled the love interest, the making of a couple. Between 1937 and 1949 Ivan Pyr'ev directed a series of folk musicals, among which his kolkhoz comedies (The Rich Bride, Tractor Drivers, The Swineherd and the Shepherd, Cossacks of the Kuban') were particularly successful. Although the idealized world of the musical film was a good fit with Socialist Realism's "depiction of reality in its revolutionary development," other features of the genre that engaged the spectator on an emotional level—a strong love plot, privileging of memorable songs and dance, slapstick humor—assured the continuing popularity of the Soviet musical films.

Because the number of feature films released during the Stalin years was low, ranging from 60 in 1934 to 9 in 1951, and given the paucity of other leisure activities, the appearance of each new Soviet film became a major cultural event². Russians typically viewed each work several times and, not surprisingly, lines from the Aleksandrov and Pyr'ev comedies soon entered the language as proverbial expressions. In Aleksandrov's 1934 comedy Happy Guys a driver who has not yet been paid opines: "A platit' kto budet—Pushkin?" ("And who's going to pay—Pushkin?"). The phrase came to express irritation at someone's unwillingness to bear expenses.³

The 1938 comedy Volga-Volga, its repartee sharpened by Nikolai Erdman's early work on the script, became a particularly rich source of witticisms. The bureaucrat Byvalov's water-carrier in the provincial town of Melkovodsk sings a ditty about the importance of water to all aspects of life (as he stops for a beer), and the phrase "Bez vody i ni tudy i ni siudy" ("Without water you can't go here nor there") became proverbial for something absolutely necessary in life. In a rehearsed speech Byvalov takes credit for the amateur musical activity in the town: "Blagodaria moemu chutkomu rukovodstvu . . ." ("Thanks to my sensitive leadership . . ."), and this phrase then entered the language as an ironic comment on do-nothing administrators who appropriated the work of others. Byvalov prefers to talk to his driver, waiting just outside his office building, on a phone which usually doesn't work, rather than calling to him from the balcony.

In 1955 the director Sergei Gerasimov noted that Russians now labelled unnecessary telephone conversations as "Nu, poshla Volga-Volga!" ("Well, here goes Volga-Volga!").⁴ Finally, the institute administrator Bubentsov in Aleksandrov's Spring sums up his philosophy of life as "Gde by ni rabotat', tol'ko by ne rabotat'" ("Wherever you work, just as long as you don't have to work")—which soon became a proverbial label for the holders of Soviet administrative sinecures.

At the time of the films' release during the thirties and forties, possibly only ordinary viewers understood and appreciated the Aleksandrov and Pyr'ev comedies solely within the aesthetic framework of their genre—the musical comedy, with its set conventions of idealized plot and characterization, and privileging of song, dance and slapstick humor.⁵ Beginning in mid-1933, Stalin and the Politbiuro vetted all Soviet films before their release⁶, judging them by sheer political expediency: the Aleksandrov and Pyr'ev comedies pleased by expressing the ideological optimism of socialist construction.

However the official fortunes of the musical films were reversed after the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, not for aesthetic reasons, but once again due to political calculation. The brunt of the attack fell on Cossacks of the Kuban', Pyr'ev's last kolkhoz musical about a regional southern fair at which two fractious middle-aged collective farm heads, once youthful lovers, are reunited (See Figure 1),

and a young couple from rival kolkhozes overcome various obstacles to their marriage—take place against a colorful background of late summer fruits and vegetables, a lavish display of consumer goods, the Russian version of a midway, an amateur talent show and an exciting horserace. Khrushchev initially admired the film and showed it to collective farmers after his speeches in the southern agricultural districts as an upbeat closing flourish.⁷



FIGURE 1

But in 1957, after admitting the disastrous condition of post-war Soviet agriculture, he dismissed Cossacks of the Kuban' as a “vapid, sugary, saccharine” film that “offended the feelings of the Russian people.”⁸ Cossacks of the Kuban' disappeared from moviehouses and Pyr'ev never made another musical, instead directing an uncharacteristically listless treatment of kolkhoz issues in Nash obshchii drug (Our Mutual Friend) in 1961. The film combined a comic motif reminiscent of his musicals (an admirer of Liza, the kolkhoz cowherd, accuses her of un-Communist behavior because she washes her face in milk) with melodrama (Liza has a brief love affair with the local Party leader) in a non-musical work, and the film was a failure.

The Aleksandrov and Pyr'ev comedies acquired a second life during the Brezhnev years when they were restored and reissued for public consumption as part of the creeping restalinization of the late sixties and seventies. The government also made an abortive attempt to rehabilitate Cossacks of the Kuban' in the mid-seventies. Vasilii Shauro, the chief of the Central Committee's culture section,

proposed a reevaluation of the film: Cossacks of the Kuban should not be viewed as “lakirovka” (“lacquering”); rather the film was “the insight of a great master.”

At an official meeting called to discuss the rehabilitation of the film, the other speaker was Yurii Liubimov, director of the Taganka Theatre, who had played the comic role of Pliasov in Cossacks of the Kuban. Liubimov began by recounting his conversation with a local peasant woman during filming: “There I stand in a silk peasant shirt tied with a belt, my hair dyed blonde and curled into a tuft, just the way it should be in such a bad imitation of an American musical. And suddenly right here, at this exhibition of agricultural achievements, I see an old woman in a torn padded jacket looking at what’s going on—we’re playing the roles of villagers, walking about and looking. And she asked me, “Tell me, my dear, what life are they filming here?” I say, “Ours, grandma.” She says, “Aren’t you ashamed, such a young fellow and all you do is tell lies?” At the end of his story Liubimov said to Shauro: “Vasilii Filimonovich, from then on I promised myself not to participate in such trash.” A strange kind of silence descended on the group, and the rehabilitation was abandoned.⁹

It was also during the post-Stalinist years that some of the familiar lines from the Aleksandrov and Pyr’ev musicals moved into a satirical register that presupposed an ironic view of the films themselves. In Aleksandrov’s Tsirk, the Soviet circus act which is developed as a response to the foreign human cannonball act “Flight to the Moon” is christened “Polet v stratosferu” (“Flight into the Stratosphere”). In popular parlance “polet v stratosferu” came to denote a state of extreme intoxication.

The title of Pyr’ev’s Svinarka i pastukh (The Swineherdess and the Shepherd) was applied ironically to one of the most prominent icons of high Stalinism, the Mukhina sculptural duo of factory worker and peasant woman, as well as to any naive or provincial young couple. The coda of Dunaevsky’s anthem-like “Song about the Volga” from Aleksandrov’s Volga-Volga “Shiroka, gluboka, sil’na” (“Wide, deep, strong”), originally referring to the Volga river, became a tongue-in-cheek allusion to female sexual physiology.

The filmmaking community's view of the Aleksandrov and Pyr'ev films during the Stagnation era naturally differed from that of both the government and the population at large. Komediia davno minuvshikh dnei (A Comedy of Bygone Days, 1980), directed by Iurii Kushnerev and released at the end of the Brezhnev era, reveals an acute professional consciousness of the comic heritage of Soviet cinema. The film reprises the comedy adventure plot of The Twelve Chairs, as a new Ostap Bender and Ippolit Matveevich search for treasure cemented into the wall of an unidentified old house. They have stolen the sole photograph of the house from another pair of crooks (Byvalyi and Trus from the Leonid Gaidai comedies), who were told by its owner that the house appears in an old movie, which is the only way to identify its location. Searching for the house, they then proceed to screen a series of 1920s-30s comedies at Mosfil'm, at a commercial theater and even at a film studies conference, until they place the house in Odessa. The house turns out to have been demolished, of course, but the gold has been used to build a new theater for comic films.

Highlights from Tractor Drivers, The Swineherdess and the Shepherd, The Shining Path, Volga-Volga and The Circus are all featured in A Comedy of Bygone Days, but most prominent is Aleksandrov's Happy Guys, which figures in four clips and frames the beginning of the film with the famous cartoon intro of Happy Guys: we're told that Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton (successive cartoon portraits appear on the screen) do NOT appear in this film, followed by an enumeration of Happy Guys stars i.e., those who *do* appear, including the cow, Mar'ia Ivanovna. By mid-film it becomes clear that the picaresque plot of A Comedy of Bygone Days has been an excuse for reacquainting Brezhnev era audiences with twenties and thirties comedies, and that the treasure the film seeks is good comedy, which resides in the comic heritage of the past.

With increased freedom of the press during Perestroika and the early post-Soviet years, the argument about Stalin era musical comedies, and particularly Cossacks of the Kuban', flared up again with full force. Unlike Pyr'ev's kolkhoz comedies, Aleksandrov's films largely escaped criticism because of the strongly Western orientation of his work. Cossacks of the Kuban' again came under attack

for *lakirovka*. His earlier kolkhoz musicals (The Rich Bride, Tractor Drivers, The Swineherdess and the Shepherd) were probably spared because they presented sincere, if misguided, initiatives, all related to the Stakhanovite movement. While the enthusiasm and optimism of The Rich Bride and Tractor Drivers reflected an aspect of late 1930s reality, the enthusiasm, optimism and material abundance of Cossacks of the Kuban' misrepresented the condition and mindset of the post-war Russian agricultural community, struggling with hunger and increasing taxes.

When Cossacks of the Kuban' was shown and discussed repeatedly on TV between 1988 and 1992, a three-sided argument erupted among 1) those who viewed the film as *lakirovka*, lambasting its false depiction of post-war rural life (these were both intellectuals and ordinary viewers), 2) those who saw the film as a life-affirming idealization, a genre film that helped the Russian people survive the difficult post-war years (other intellectuals and other ordinary viewers), and 3) those who viewed the film as literally true to life and consistent with their own experience (a number of Kuban' *kolkhozniki*).

In a 1988 Sovetskaia kul'tura article on the loss of ideals in Russian cinema, the critic Valerii Kichin initiated a new line of discourse on Cossacks of the Kuban' and the post-war national psyche: "Millions of people loved this film, although the same millions knew, according to their own opinion, how far the country was from this magnificent cinematic abundance, this splendor at the fair. We critics made this film a symbol of falsehood in art. But it was an expression of hope."¹⁰

Kichin's assertion provoked a series of letters from readers that illustrated the spectrum of reaction to the film. T. Khlopiankina wrote: "It never occurred to the inexperienced viewer that Cossacks of the Kuban' should be considered a myth. Critics rapturously repeated that the film spoke the truth, that its heroes were typical. And besides, how could one consider Cossacks of the Kuban' a myth if there were no "non-myths" at all then on the screen?"¹¹ It should be noted here that Pyr'ev consciously made

Cossacks within the genre traditions of the musical comedy. In fact, its original title Veselaia iarmarka (The Merry Fair) recalls the operetta. However he also complicated the case by assenting to the Party line on the reality of post-war prosperity, as depicted in Cossacks of the Kuban', because he wanted to see the film released.

Another reader responded: "I remember Cossacks of the Kuban' as a ray of light in a dark kingdom. And I don't seek to blot that ray of sun out of my memory, although my artistic tastes were and remain completely different. . . . Unlike T. Khlopiankina, I didn't perceive this film as a reflection of real life in the Kuban' at that time, although I was then a naive and trusting schoolgirl. And, as far as I remember, neither did any of the adults and children around me."¹² Yet another reader commented: "People before us weren't as stupid as some arts people think. . . . The film is a [noble] impulse, not lakirovka. We loved it because it expressed the national character."¹³

The same discussion on Cossacks of the Kuban', within the same general parameters, resumed in 1991. At a televised meeting of the Svobodnoe slovo club in the Moscow Film Center, a letter from a collective farmworker in the Kuban' was read, in which she recalled the filming of Cossacks of the Kuban' in her village and her own participation in crowd scenes. "With a sense of nostalgia she recalled how she got acquainted with the actors, with what envy she looked at the tables laden with real and unreal food, about Ivan Aleksandrovich Pyr'ev, who made a deep impression on everyone, and how afterward everyone loved the film, how the people watched it with such pleasure, and how for many years afterward they sang the good songs from the film that went straight to the heart."¹⁴

The Svobodnoe slovo members then passed judgment on Cossacks of the Kuban': "The discussion was stormy and in the end everyone agreed that the film had deceived the people and, by the same token, had served Stalinism."¹⁵ The Svobodnoe slovo discussion moved the filmmaker Georgii Chukhrai to write an article defending the film--and Pyr'ev's legacy--in the widely read Russian film journal Iskusstvo kino: "There were no ruins in Pyr'ev's film, he didn't tell about women doomed to loneliness, about the millions of men mutilated and crippled by the war, nor about the starvation or the

deprivations. . . . Unlike you, Ivan Aleksandrovich Pyr'ev wasn't thinking about "reflecting" [reality], as the Svobodnoe slovo club demands from him today. He was thinking about his exhausted people and wanted to cheer them up as well as he could. For this the people loved the film and they were grateful to the director. This is why people crowded into movie theatres, saw the film many times and sing the songs from Cossacks of the Kuban' to the present day."¹⁶

Finally, there is a small segment of viewers, mostly from the Kuban', that sees the film as true to life for localized reasons: "My grandmother, Vera Alekseevna, considered Pyr'ev's Cossacks of the Kuban' to be truthful, and not a fairytale, as people say nowadays: 'In our kolkhoz everything was as in the film: exhibitions, fairs, horseraces and holidays'."¹⁷ Local participants in the film's crowd scenes recall that they "really did live the way it was shown in the film. . . . [We had] our own winery, and a splendid summer movie theatre, and a menagerie. Peacocks strolled about the central farmstead. On Harvest Day huge tables crammed with fruits, wine and meat produced by the sovkhov were set up directly opposite the House of Culture. . . . The sovkhov Chair Prudnikov hired a sculptor from Krasnodar, Ruzheinikov. He rebuilt the entrance arch, the avenue with lion sculptures, an exact copy of the Summer Theatre in Sochi."¹⁸

Two factors bear upon the "real life" view of Cossacks of the Kuban': the psychological complexities of retrospective idealization and the actual existence of prosperous model farms, like sovkhov "Kuban'," at which Cossacks was filmed. Nevertheless these exceptions do not reflect the generally disastrous agricultural situation in the Kuban' in 1948-49.

Post-Soviet Perspectives on Stalinist Musical Films

In their post-Soviet afterlife, these Stalinist musicals have acquired a more complex signification, arising from the political divide that now separates the two eras. As the Stalinist sign acquires a different, contemporary referent, the Aleksandrov and Pyr'ev films begin to mediate a double deconstruction of

Russian contemporary society. The Stalinist sign carries a negative charge, and is therefore both itself parodied and employed to parody by post-Soviet modernity. As propaganda, the original Stalinist sign has a negative or parodic connotation for much of the population; its modern referent is therefore also validated negatively.

Secondly, we will see that contemporary quotations from Stalinist musicals contrapose the positive (in the absolute sense) idealism, optimism and semiotic wholeness of the Stalinist era to the demoralized, corrupt and fragmented post-Soviet present. In recent Russian cinema Stakhanovism, Stalinist Moscow as the metonymical epicenter of the country, and idealistic love grounded in ideology are juxtaposed with contemporary materialism, violent crime, prostitution, and the Moscow of New Russians.

Tractor Drivers-2 (Traktoristy-2, 1992) was directed by the Aleinikov brothers, members of the Parallel Cinema underground movement during the 1980's, whose short film Tractors (1987) had parodied the Socialist Realist obsession with machine power. Tractor Drivers-2 is a parodic remake of Ivan Pyr'ev's Tractor Drivers of 1939, with equally parodic relevance to post-Soviet reality. The campy—and rather uneven—Tractor Drivers-2 was financed by Mosfil'm as mainstream cinema, which was an indication of the film community's eagerness to confront the traditions of Stalinist cinema, in this instance the kolkhoz musical.

The Pyr'ev film is a folk musical with the usual two-pronged plot—the making of the Soviet new man and his integration into the socialist community, which parallels the making of a couple: Delinquent tractor driver Nazar Duma is rehabilitated by recently demobilised tank commander Klim Iarko and, after the usual obstacles and misunderstandings, Klim's acquaintance with Stakhanovite brigade leader Mar'iana Bazhan leads to their marriage.¹⁹

Tractor Drivers-2 follows the dialogue and plot of the earlier film, but is set in a modern-day collective farm with luxurious offices and homes that are no less atypical and fantastic for post-Soviet rural life as were their 1930's cinematic prototypes. The film takes global aim at the kolhoz musical and

therefore incorporates a scene from Pyr'ev's preceding film The Rich Bride, in which the dusty and dirty tractor driver hero arrives at the kolkhoz barbershop demanding "a haircut, a shave, a shampoo!", and is initially rejected as an outsider ("chuzhikh ne breiu", "I don't shave strangers") and later accepted by the kolkhoz barber, who also likes to philosophize about (heterosexual) love. This motif of integration into the community is doubly negated in Tractor Drivers-2: the barber is transformed into a gay man wearing a silver lamé jacket who lulls Klim into a violent dream about the neighboring Sosnovka bandits. As he wakes, the disoriented Klim pulls a gun on the barber, thereby nullifying the possibility of integration.

Tractor Drivers-2 deconstructs its 1930's prototype by literally reversing every stereotypical ideal of the Stalinist era, as they are inscribed in the kolhoz musicals. Socialist competition (similar to the American sports ethic: play to win, then congratulate the winner) was at the heart of the Stakhanovite movement; the two villages in Pyr'ev's film compete fiercely both in agricultural production and in stealing personnel from each other. In Tractor Drivers-2 socialist collectivism is replaced by capitalist and criminal individualism. Mar'iana Bazhan's Millioner (a rich collective farm) is threatened by the armed bandits of the neighboring village, Sosnovka, who dress like Latin American guerillas and want both Millioner's assets and its best tractor driver, Klim Iarko, as captive labor.²⁰

In the Pyr'ev film one of the two plotlines has to do with the making of the "New Man" and integrating him into the socialist community. Klim gradually reeducates the slacker Nazar Duma, transforming him into a model tractor driver. The modern Nazar Duma is a calculating character: unlike Nazar's friendly pact with Mar'iana in the original film, the modern Nazar wants cold cash for pretending to be Mar'iana's fiancé. Nazar subsequently agrees to help the Sosnovka bandits plunder Millioner and tries to murder Mar'iana with a tractor. Even Kharitoshka, the "akkuratnyi pochta'on" ("conscientious mailman") of the 1939 film, now steals gin from Mar'iana's packages.

In Traktoristy-2 the "old" man not only does not become "new," he becomes a villain. The Soviet hero remains honest and brave, but Klim Iarko's strength, agility, singing voice and superhuman gopak dancing in the original Tractor Drivers undergo parodic reversal: the new Klim emits Tarzan roars,

but jumps up to grab a tree branch—and misses. His singing is offkey and off-tempo, and his gopak lands him on his back in the dirt. Mar'iana Bazhan, the new woman of Pyr'ev's Tractor Drivers is an active, lively girl-next-door type, while the modern Mar'iana is a languid, gin-swimming, New Russian. The integrity of the Party leadership is demolished as Pyr'ev's eccentric, funny Ukrainian kolhoz chair Kiril Petrovich becomes a jowly, modern Soviet bureaucrat who cowers behind his workers during a shootout and conducts NKVD-like interrogations of captured Sosnovka villagers.

The official Socialist Realist ideal of puritannical heterosexual love is humorously undermined in Tractor Drivers-2. The Sosnovka neighbors are openly homosexual, jostling each other aside to spy on a naked Klim through binoculars: “—Let me look. —Why? You'll only get upset!”. At the wedding, as the couple kisses, so do two male guests. The pure, idealized heterosexual impulses of the 1939 film are sexualized in the remake as Klim and Mar'iana openly make out when reunited, and Kiril Petrovich, whose interest in Markovna, the heroine's housekeeper, is lightly hinted at in Tractor Drivers, pursues her lasciviously at the wedding.

Stalinist xenophobia is replaced by American football and t-shirts with foreign logos in Tractor Drivers-2. The conventional stylized folklore in Pyr'ev's kolkhoz musicals (Ukrainian folksongs, dances, colorful peasant costume) is also reversed: Markovna, Mar'iana Bazhan's colorful, comically hysterical Ukrainian housekeeper, becomes a cultured, dignified Russian lady who plays classical music at home. The inhabitants of Millioner exchange their Ukrainian folk costumes for western day and evening wear. And most remarkably, instead of the Ukrainian folksong performed by the farmworkers who give Klim a lift at the beginning of the 1939 film, in the analogous scene the neighboring bandits (descendants of historically antisemitic Cossacks) croon an offkey ditty about the Christ child who waters his roses in the garden and invites Jewish children to come pick them.

The genre tradition of the musical comedy presupposes a happy ending. The classic folk musical concludes with the integration of the outsider and the creation of community, together with the union of the lovers. In Tractor Drivers Nazar Duma is rehabilitated, becoming a productive member of the

collective, and the film ends with the marriage of Klim and Mar'iana. In the remake Nazar remains a villain, and the wedding feast turns into a shootout, when the Sosnovka neighbors mount a sudden attack. Not only is community not achieved, but the Soviet collectivist agrarian ideal is negated by Kiril Petrovich, who advises Klim and Mar'iana to leave for the city: "My heart feels that they [the bandits] won't leave us alone." Bride and groom do not live happily ever after; Mar'iana is fatally wounded and Klim leaves Millioner alone.

The melodies of Tractor Drivers were composed by the Pokrass Brothers and, like the music of Dunaevskii, are written in energetic march rhythms. Tractor Drivers-2 substitutes quiet, barely audible music for the original film's rousing intro march. Klim sings the classic "Tri Tankista (Three Tank Drivers)" parodically as a distorted, offkey melody with accompanying mock-operatic trills from his female audience. Finally, the Ukrainian folkloric element of Tractor Drivers is negated by a jazz rendition of "Spi maliutka" ("Sleep, my little one"), an old folk lullaby. The lullaby, which is absent from the 1939 film, sounds twice in the remake and its quiescent message and lazy melody parody the hyperdynamism of Pyr'ev musicals.

The most frenetic section of Pyr'ev's Tractor Drivers shows speeded-up documentary footage depicting tank maneuvers, meant to display their capabilities to Soviet audiences. The same footage is inserted into Tractor Drivers-2 as part of a film watched by Klim, who comments wryly that he has already seen this, whereupon Mar'iana hands him a bottle of Beefeaters so that you can "see it with new eyes." They then view the speeded-up tank footage to the accompaniment of the languid "Spi maliutka" lullaby. A similar dissonance occurs at the wedding and at the end of the film when Pyr'ev's original closing song, the rousing "Bronia krepka" ending ("Our armor is strong and our tanks fast") is replaced by Klim's lonely departure from Millioner with the same quiet jazz lullaby playing on the soundtrack.

By arraying the 1939 original signifier in modern garb, Tractor Drivers-2 displaces the signified onto post-Soviet society with its now overt violence, corruption, materialism and alcoholism. In place of the idealized world of Tractor Drivers, the remake creates a modern fantasy Russia, as yet without a musical tradition or myths of its own to replace the Soviet myths it so carefully dismantles.

Aleksandr Zel'dovich's Moskva (2001) chronicles the rise and fall of an extended family of New Russians in a postmodern culture of stasis, a return, after the carnivalistic iconoclasm of the Perestroika and early post-Soviet years, to the cultural immobility of the Soviet era.²¹ "Pesnia o rodine" ("Song about My Homeland"), the most famous Dunaevskii-Lebedev-Kumach song from Aleksandrov's The Circus is part of a complex of Stalin-era songs, verbal references and urban settings that permeate the film's mise-en-scène. The film's hero, New Russian businessman Mike, firmly denies that his mother, surname Babochkina, is related to Boris Babochkin of Chapaev fame. Olia, the autistic youngest daughter of a nightclub owner and the film's holy fool, is often framed with Stalinist architectural monuments in Moskva, as if to underscore the symbolic causes of her illness and the link between infantilization and totalitarian culture.

In the course of the film she performs three well-known songs of the Stalinist period, all with contemporary resonance. "Zavetnyi kamen'" ("The Cherished Stone") and "Vragi sozhgli rodnuiu khatu" ("The Enemy Burned the Homestead") treat Russian sacrifices during WWII, as well as the theme of returning to home and self, which provides ironic annotation to the luxurious and rootless life of the New Russians in Olia's nightclub audience. The film closes with "Kolkhoznaia pesnia o Moskve" ("The Kolkhoz Song about Moscow") in which the outlying areas salute the capital as the "heart of the Russian land" ("Zdravstvui nasha stolitsa rodnaia/ Zdravstvui serdtse rossiiskoi zemli"), thereby underscoring the import of the film's message for broader Russian society.

The writer Vladimir Sorokin, who coauthored the script with Zel'dovich, has earlier expressed his preference for the unity of totalitarian culture: "To me the wholeness of a phenomenon is very important, that its structure be monolithic, that there should be no lacunae. This extends to culture generally as well.

That's why, for example, I prefer Cossacks of the Kuban' to Tarkovskii, in whom I see lacunae, while Cossacks of the Kuban' is a perfect work."²² In Moskva the three Soviet songs have been transcribed atonally. They sound offkey, slow and otherworldly. In Zel'dovich's post-Soviet (and postmodern) society, totalitarian culture has fragmented into dissonances, but has not been erased.

Dunaevskii's "Pesnia o rodine," the most familiar Stalin-era song, possesses precisely that semantic wholeness admired by Sorokin. For many years the song served as the musical emblem of the country: it preceded announcements of WWII war victories and later became the call sign of Radio Moscow. In Aleksandrov's The Circus (1936) the camera tracks in from views of Red Square through the window of the hotel Moskva to the hero, Soviet circus artist Martynov, seated at the piano, teaching "Pesnia o rodine" to the American circus performer, Marion Dixon (played by Liubov' Orlova). The clean-cut, rather Aryan, dynamic and committed Martynov exemplifies the Soviet New Man, and by the end of the film, as she marches in the May Day parade, Dixon has become the New Woman (See Figure 2).



FIGURE 2

In Zel'dovich's Moskva the camera tracks in the window of the same hotel to an orthodox Jew, complete with sidelocks and round black hat, playing the same "Pesnia o rodine" (See Figure 3). Lev, a Russian who brings in illegal cash payments from abroad in disguise, who steals the money and waits for Mike's angry partner to assassinate him, who in the end gets both the money and the girls (marrying two

sisters at once), is the post-Soviet New Man. In Jamesonian fashion, and like the autistic Olia, Lev performs “Pesnia o rodine” as pastiche or blank imitation, devoid of parody. For the audience, however, the musical quotation comments ironically on contemporary (New) Russian society.



FIGURE 3

Maimyl (The Monkey, 2001) is the last film of Aktan Abdykalykov’s trilogy based on his childhood and adolescence in rural Kyrgyzstan. Maimyl, the 17 year old hero, spends his last weeks at home before being drafted into the Soviet army. He works on the railroad, goes to parties, tries to deal with his alcoholic father and family quarrels, worries about “becoming a man” before entering the army. By the end of the film we realize that the time must be the Brezhnev era, but the narrative of isolation, sexual initiation, revenge and family is presented as both timeless and contemporary.

The return of the Russian prostitute Zina to the settlement disrupts life for the young hero: she lures Maimyl’s father into heavy drinking, tries to seduce the boy, and drives a lovesick railroad worker to despair. Two formal elements from Pyr’ev’s Cossacks of the Kuban’ (geese and the song “Oi, tsvetet kalina” [Oh, the Guelder- Rose Blooms]) function intertextually in the Zina episodes of Maimyl. In an important early episode of Cossacks the comic gossips Khristoforovna and Nikanorovna, who keep up a running commentary on the love intrigues of the film, are poultrykeepers accompanying a wagon loaded with crates of geese to the fall fair and are clearly associated with the honking birds. Later in the film Dasha Shelest, the radiant ingenue, who has fallen in love with a Cossack from a neighboring kolkhoz, leads the farm girls in an amateur stage performance of “Oi tsvetet kalina,” a modern folksong composed

by Dunaevskii for Cossacks of the Kuban', telling of a maiden's love for a young man which she dares not confess. In the Soviet period the song was a staple of school talent shows and became a kitsch classic.²³

Abdykalykov places the two formal elements from Cossacks of the Kuban' into a different, but still recognizable, narrative pattern in *Maimyl*. The boy offers to give Zina a ride into town on the back of his motorcycle. She makes her move by singing "Oi, tsvetet kalina" ("Oh, the guelder-rose blooms in the field by the brook. I've fallen in love with a young fellow") in the strongly accented folk rhythm used in Cossacks (See Figure 4). Embarrassed and afraid, Maimyl stops the motorcycle and walks off as she taunts him: "What? Have you run out of gas?" Zina is then picked up by a passerby carrying a truckload of crated geese. Later Maimyl and his friends steal into Zina's house, planning to prove their manhood by raping her, but are scared off by sudden footsteps. After the boys' flight, in waddles their bogeyman—the goose left by the truckdriver as payment for Zina's services.



FIGURE 4

Abdykalykov parodies "Oi, tsvetet kalina" and the Russian folkloric ethos of Cossacks of the Kuban' by inscribing the innocent maiden's song into the comic advances of a Russian prostitute. The radiant and idealistic Dasha Shelest, zveno leader and hero of socialist labor in Cossacks, has morphed into a jolly Russian whore, another comment—this time from a Central Asian perspective—on both the

Brezhnev era and post-Soviet modernity, since the setting is made purposely timeless.²⁴ To the adolescent boy, Zina also represents the national-cultural other: it is acceptable to contemplate raping a Russian, i.e., non-Islamic woman of loose morals. Beneath the humor and gentle ironies of Maimyl lies an undercurrent of cultural tension and aggression.

Contemporary Russian audiences approach the musical comedy films of Aleksandrov and Pyr'ev from differing perspectives—as classics of Russian cinema, as comforting myths, as base deception or even as truth. For contemporary filmmakers the musical comedies define a past in whose cinematic mirror post-Soviet culture sees its own distorted visage.

NOTES

¹ Grigorii Aleksandrov: Veselye rebiata (Happy Guys) 1934, Tsirk (The Circus) 1936, Volga-Volga 1938, Svetlyi put' (The Shining Path) 1940, Vesna (Spring) 1947. Ivan Pyr'ev: Bogataia nevesta (The Rich Bride) 1937, Traktoristy (Tractor Drivers) 1939, Svinarka i pastukh (The Swineherd and the Shepherd) 1941, V shest' chasov vechera posle voiny (At 6 pm after the War) 1944, Skazanie o zemle sibirskoi (Tale of the Siberian Land) 1947, Kubanskiye kazaki (Cossacks of the Kuban') 1949

² Sergei Zemlianukhin and Miroslava Segida, Domashniaia sinemateka. Otechestvennoe kino. 1918-1996 (Moscow: Dubl'-D, 1996) 6.

³ The source for the proverbial expressions in this paragraph is V.S. Elistratov, Slovar' krylatykh slov (Russkii kinematograf) (Moscow: Russkie slovari, 1999) 15, 20, 21, 34.

⁴ S. Gerasimov, "Sovetskaia dramaturgiia. Sodoklad na vtorom vsesoiuznom s"ezde sovetskikh pisatelei," Iskusstvo kino 1 (January 1955): 27.

⁵ See Rick Altman, The American Film Musical (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987).

⁶ RGASPI, f. 17/114/364.

⁷ R. Iurenev, "Ivan Aleksandrovich Pyr'ev," in Ivan Pyr'ev v zhizni i na ekrane, ed. E. N. Mendel'son (Moscow: Kinotsentr, 1994) 48.

⁸ N.S. Khrushchev, Za tesnuiu sviaz' literatury i iskusstva s zhizn'iu naroda (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1957) 25.

⁹ 2001 Radio Svoboda broadcast, <http://koi.svoboda.org/programs/cicles/CossacksOfTheKuban.shtml>. See also Liubimov's recently published memoirs Rasskazy starogo trepacha (Moscow: Novosti, 2001) 452-53.

¹⁰ Valerii Kichin, "Zerkalo? Uvelichivaiushchee steklo?" Sovetskaia kul'tura 1 Jan. 1988: 4.

¹¹ T. Khlopiankina, "Ne stoit vpadat' v paniku" Sovetskaia kul'tura 23 Jan. 1988:4.

¹² G. Sen'kina, "Zhivaia voda" Sovetskaia kul'tura 20 Febr. 1988: 6.

¹³ V. Sherstiukov, "Chtoby ne preryvalas' sviaz' vremen" Sovetskaia kul'tura 20 Febr. 1988: 6. Other reader responses may be found in Sovetskaia kul'tura 3 Mar. 1988: 4 and 12 Mar. 1988: 4.

¹⁴ G. Chukhrai, "Lichnost'" Iskusstvo kino 11 (1991): 126.

¹⁵ Chukhrai, 126.

¹⁶ Chukhrai, 127.

¹⁷ Karina Mirakova in Vol'naia Kuban' 30 Dec. 2000, <http://school87.kubannet.ru/uvarova.htm>

¹⁸ V. Brodzkii et al., "'Kubanskiye kazaki': skazka prodolzhaetsia uzhe 50 let" Komsomol'skaia pravda 22-29 Sept. 2000: 34-5. For a good bibliography of publications on Kubanskiye kazaki, see Kinograf 11 (2002): 6-82.

¹⁹ On the folk musical, see Altman, 272-327.

²⁰ Prosperous Soviet collective farms, like "Kuban'" were called "kolkhozy-millionery."

²¹ On the alternation of active and static cultures, see Vladimir Papernyi, Kul'tura Dva (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1996). For an application of the theory to Moskva see Mark Lipovetskii, "'Moskva'—'Kul'tura Dva'": opyt parallel'nogo chteniia" Iskusstvo kino 2 (1998), online version: <http://kinoart.ru/1998/2/16.html>

²² Vladimir Sorokin, "Samoe skuchnoe—eto zdorovyie pisateli," Stolitsa 42 (1994), p. 44.

²³ In Martha Fiennes's *Onegin* (1999) Lenskii and Ol'ga sing "Oi tsvetet kalina" in an anachronistic duet which, given the source of the song in *Cossacks of the Kuban*, Russian audiences find hilarious.

²⁴ In interviews Abdykalykov has acknowledged the contemporary mood of the film: "Vos films décrivent-ils une situation passée? Pas du tout. Même s'il agit de mon enfance, ils portent les traces de l'atmosphère du moment où je les ai tournés. . . . *Le Singe* est plus sombre, la situation est devenue angoissante et triste, les dirigeants ne cessent de repousser les élections. Nous aurons été une démocratie durant quelques années . . . (Aktan Abdykalykov, "Je me sens plus peintre que metteur en scène" *Le Monde* 22 Jan. 2002: 11.