

## **Analysis of Interview with Viktoria Sorkina**

Conducted by Maggie Burke

Transcribed and analyzed by Maggie Burke, Alex McGrath, Jennifer Stolz

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In July 2010, Mary Burke, a student from the College of William and Mary, conducted an interview with Viktoria Sorkina in St. Petersburg, Russia. This interview was collected as part of the ongoing Russian Movie Theater Project directed by Professor Alexander Prokhorov, compiling oral histories of the movie-going experience in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia. Sorkina is a young Russian language instructor working with international students at the Philological Faculty of Saint Petersburg State University, and taught one of the groups of students from the College of William and Mary in the summer of 2010.

Sorkina is primarily interested in *auteur* cinema, and attaches great importance to the director of a film and his particular vision. Sorkina says that she likes “classical, non-traditional, good cinema” and cites directors such as Ingmar Bergman, Woody Allen and Milosh Forman as making “her type of films” (12:42). She remarks that as a child she was more interested in the story a film told, but now she is more interested in the quality of the story and *how* it is told (23:15). Sorkina says (14:10) that her taste in films is inclined more towards foreign films - American, but especially Italian and Chinese films - rather than Russian films. Her remembrances of films from her childhood which she saw in the movie theater are mostly of foreign films such as *Gone with the Wind* or *Roman Holiday*. Many of them, like *Gone with the Wind*, were released in the late Soviet period and sponsored by Ted Turner. However, she has also watched classic Russian films like *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*, which she says she was too young to see when it first came out, on television several years after their release.

These foreign and/or *auteur* films to which she refers are primarily films which were featured in or won awards at festivals, especially Cannes, which Sorkina says that she follows to find out what is new in terms of international films (16:22). She mentions as one of her favorite films the recent winner of the Cannes Festival *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010). She also mentioned that she follows film festivals in Berlin, Moscow, and of course the Oscars.

Because of her preferences for art cinema, Sorkina does not go to movie theaters very often. Most of her recollections of theater-going are from early childhood, when she and her classmates were taken to the theater once a month as part of a school trip (10:34) or going to the movies while on vacation with her grandmother (2:45), but her primary impressions of these visits are not of the theaters themselves. Sorkina says that all theaters were very much alike, not very comfortable, and she did not give them much thought (10:20). However, she goes on to say that when she was younger the “performance” of the movie theater was “magical” and somewhat overwhelming. When she was very young, she says the most exciting thing about going to the movie theater was getting to eat ice cream (10:34), much as eating popcorn is a huge part of American movie going, but as she got older it was the films themselves, rather than the theater, which made a significant impression on her. She cites *Gone With the Wind* as one such case (6:17).

When watching movies now, Sorkina says that she avoids modern Russian movies because of their banal plots and character construction (26:00). She points out that Nikita Mikhalkov is a great actor but the recent films that he has directed, such as *Burnt by the Sun 2*, are one-dimensional and distastefully nationalist (26:00). She also finds problematic recent action flicks such as Andrei Kravchuk's action melodrama *Admiral*, because they depict the Russian Civil War in the same Soviet style only now the bad guys are the Reds and the good guys are the Whites. The film avoids examining the ambiguities and complexities of human relations in this tragic period of Russian history (27:00). Furthermore, she is nostalgic for Soviet cinema (29:11) and claims that today's cinema is too simple, too pro-government, and too speedily done.

Sorkina very rarely goes to the theater, preferring to watch movies on the Internet with her laptop. The value she sees in going to a movie theater over watching a movie at home on the computer is found when a movie is made so that it requires a very large screen for proper viewing - that is, a small screen will not do a given film justice (21:15).