



Andrei Rublev

Among filmmakers, one of the paradigmatic cases of indomitable entrepreneurial spirit was Andrei Tarkovsky. For each of his films he had conflicts with the Soviet State Committee for Cinematography, to the point that, from 1982, his films, which triumphed in festivals around the world, were no longer screened in the Soviet Union and his name was never again mentioned in the state-controlled media. *Andrei Rublev*, especially the episode entitled 'The Bell', can be seen as a hymn to creative freedom; to the innovator as a window to creativity that opens in societies; and to courage and risk-taking as two of the fundamental characteristics that anyone who intends to transform the world must have.

Santiago Navajas, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2022-23

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

No one knows anything about Andrei Rublev save his approximate date, that he must have been a monk and that he painted. His icons stand out among those of his contemporaries not merely for their graphic virtues but for their expression of pity, charity, humanity. Too often contemporary masters reflected, of deliberate belief, only what they saw in the surface of the world around them, man in a losing contest with devils. Tarkovsky says that he considered the conventional imaginary Russian portrait of Rublev must be entirely wrong – the blue-eyed, fair-haired, suffering saint. To go against the then prevailing tradition of icon-painting, to go against the violence of his feudal surroundings, lord over serf, lord against lord, and Tartar destroying both, Rublev must have been a dark, intense, stubborn and passionate man. To dramatise the significance of his 'premature' faith in man, the events around him must all tend negative to it. It is thus not derogatory to Anatoli Solonitsyn in the name part to say that his is not a bravura but a subdued, intense performance. He has no 'big' moment. The formidable power of the film derives, as is intended in its shape, from the appalling incidents and sufferings provoked or endured by those around him. The minor characters in this film all act marvellously.

Andrei Rublev is in two parts, eight episodes dated from 1400 to 1423 with the four central ones falling within one year, 1408. It opens with a bell and it ends with a bell. To start with, craftsmen are trying to raise a bell on a church in the marshes by means of hot-air balloons. A raid of skiffs puts them to flight. Rublev and his companions take refuge in a hostelry from fearsome, quagmire-producing rain. A pair of mounted retainers enter the inn and seize a vagrant serf. From the moment, taking the man each by one arm, they drag him out and suddenly, unexpectedly, crash his forehead against a gatepost, then throw his unconscious body across a packhorse, we are in Tarkovsky's Middle Ages.

There follows a scene of argument theological, philosophical, compounded with personal rivalries and jealousies, between Rublev, his associates and a venerable icon-painter, Theophanes the Greek. As Jeanne Vronskaya quotes Tarkovsky: 'Unlike Theophanes the Greek, who propounded the idea of Judgment Day, who found in Man only an embodiment of sin and vice, and in

God a vengeful, primitive being, Rublev placed Man first. In Man he sought God, he regarded him as the house in which God lived.'

Incidents, visions of the procession of the cross and the Passion prolong the argument. A terrifying episode of peasant festival in which Rublev is bound, freed by a nude woman he rejects and who is later seized by guards and escapes flapping in the river like a great white dolphin, is succeeded by the painting of new murals in the cathedral by Rublev's group. The envious brother of the reigning prince meets a party of craftsmen in the forest on their way to join Rublev, blinds them, and then encounters a foraging party of Tartars and leads them by secret ways into the town to burn and rape and massacre. The attackers in an episode called 'Judgment Day – Summer 1408' batter in the doors of the cathedral and slaughter nearly every soul who there took refuge. Rublev, stung by the scene to kill a man who was carrying off a woman who had joined his group, sees all his effort in vain. The murals wrecked; the woman, driven mad, in spite of his care and facing the Tartars to protect her, prefers to ride off with them as a laughing-stock.

Tarkovsky, in commenting on the film, says: 'I do not understand historical films which have no relevance for the present. For me the most important thing is to use historical material to express Man's ideas and to create contemporary characters.'

What are the ideas here? Tarkovsky tells us that he and his group studied the graphics and architecture of the period for a long time – many artists contributed to the sets, many real surviving structures were used in the exteriors. Never have I seen in a historical film before so extraordinary and 'seamless' a conjunction of 'period' and nature: buildings, people, clothing, fields and weather. So far the graphics have carried us along through cruelty and catastrophe; we have identified with Rublev. He has abandoned creation and speech. He no longer works, he no longer interferes. He wanders passive. But now, in an 'appendix', the situation resolves itself, the wall crumbles. The prince's guards descend on a burnt-out village, seeking a craftsman capable of building to their master's glory a mighty bell, bigger than any before.

The village is waste, its inhabitants dead or fled. One boy remains, the son of the craftsman, who calls to the departing retainers of the prince to take him on their saddles, his father before dying imparted to him his secrets; he will build the bell. There follows the process of casting the monster bell, as the boy demands ever more and more men and metal and hurries men twice his age to do his bidding. At last all is ready, the populace is assembled, the prince and his guests ride out for the great hour. The clay cools, gingerly the craftsmen remove it. The boy – played again, brilliantly, by a now five years older Burlyayev – can stand it no longer. He runs and falls to earth, sobbing into Rublev's arms that there was no secret, he had no idea how to make a bell, but he had watched, he could not but try. There is no crack in the bell. It is hoisted successfully. It rings.

There follows, in a paean of blazing colour replacing the black and white of the film's action, image after image drawn from Rublev's icons. The point is clear. If the boy cannot forbear, but must create, how can Rublev, for very shame, accept frustration? Is this not a topical question, unanswerably answered? No words could be more explicit. Tortured, and torturing, this is yet a masterpiece.

Ivor Montagu, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1973

ANDREI RUBLEV

Director: Andrei Tarkovsky
Production Company: Mosfilm
Production Manager: Tamara Ogorodnikova
1st Assistant Director: Igor Petrov
2nd Assistant Directors: Bagrat Oganesyanyan, A. Macharet, M. Volovich
Screenplay: Andrei Konchalovsky, Andrei Tarkovsky
Director of Photography: Vadim Iusov
Special Effects: V. Sevostyanov
Editor: Lyudmila Feiginova
Assistant Editors: T. Egorychev, O. Shevkunenko
Art Director: Yevgeni Chernyaev
Costumes: L. Novy, Maia Abar-Baranovskaia
Music: Vyacheslav Ovchinnikov
Sound: E. Zelentsova
Historical Adviser: V.G. Pashuto

Cast

Anatoli Solonitsyn (*Andrei Rublev*)
Ivan Lapikov (*Kyryll*)
Nikolai Grinko (*Daniel the Black*)
Nikolai Sergeyev (*Theophanes the Greek*)
Irina Tarkovskaya (*mute girl*)
Kolya Burlyaev (*Boriska*)
Rolan Bykov (*the fool*)
Yuri Nikulin (*Patrikey*)
Mikhail Kononov (*Fomka*)
Yuri Nazarov (*Grand Duke/his brother*)
S. Krylov (*bell founder*)
Bolot Ishalanov (*Tartar Khan*)
Sos Sarkisyan (*Christ*)
Tamara Ogorodnikova (*Mary*)
N. Grabbe
B. Beizhenaliev
B. Matisik
A. Obukhov
Volodya Titov

USSR 1966©
183 mins

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The Spirit of the Beehive (El espíritu de la colmena)

Sat 28 Jan 13:50

A Brighter Summer Day (Guling jie shaonian sha ren shijian)

Sat 28 Jan 16:00

A Man Escaped (Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé)

Sat 28 Jan 20:30

Imitation of Life

Sun 29 Jan 12:30

The General

Sun 29 Jan 15:10

Touki-Bouki

Tue 31 Jan 17:40

Metropolis

Mon 30 Jan 16:30 BFI IMAX

L'avventura (The Adventure)

Mon 30 Jan 20:15

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