



RESTORED

The Lighthouse (Mayak)

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Director: Maria Saakyan

Production Company:

Andreyevsky Flag Film Company

Producer: Anton Melnik

Screenplay: Ghivi Shavgulidze

Director of Photography: Maksim Drozdov

Editor: Maria Saakyan

Art Director: Ivana Krchadinac

Music: Kimmo Pohjonen

Cast:

Anna Kapaleva (*Lena*)

Sofico Chiaurelli (*Kasjana*)

Sos Sarkisyan (*grandfather*)

Olga Jakovleva (*grandmother*)

Ruzana Avetisian (*Roza*)

Sofiko Chiaureli (*elderly neighbour*)

Anastasiia Grebennikova, Mikhail Bagdasarov

(*Lena's friends*)

Armenia/Russia 2007

78 mins

Digital (restoration)

+ intro by Giulia Saccogna, Programme & Research Coordinator

Set on the fringes of an unspecified war, Lena returns home to an attractive and traditional mountain village in the Caucasus in an attempt to persuade her grandparents to leave. While the film deliberately avoids any specific reference to place, the fact that screenwriter Shavgulidze and director Saakyan come, respectively, from Abkhazia and Armenia, gives a clear indication of the film's inspiration.

This is a film that is, above all, a poetic reflection on memory and loss. A slow and languorous narrative focuses on a sense of place; of a world that remains in the imagination no matter how often one leaves or attempts to leave. The sense of leave-taking and return remain constant elements in a film that provides an unusual and lasting testimony. Reminiscent of some of the great films to have come from the Caucasus, its wider references are made apparent through the casting of Georgian actress Sofico Chiaurelli, who appeared in Paradzhanov's *The Colour of Pomegranates* and Armenian Sos Sarkisyan, who was in Tarkovsky's *Solaris*.

Peter Hames, BFI 51st London Film Festival catalogue

Maria Saakyan on 'The Lighthouse'

The Lighthouse has a very interesting mixture of fiction with real events footage. The opening and closing scenes in particular, where did you find them?

The final footage is a real documentary, which I found in an archive. It portrays pieces from different wars, Chechnya, Abhasia, Armenia and they all look so similar, which is why we wanted to make the film about general Caucasus.

Yes, you do not seem to refer to any war in particular.

That's right. Around 1992 and 1993 we had the same situation in each of these countries. In the beginning of the film the shot is real and I filmed it in Sohumi, a city which is now almost dead, after the war with Abhasia and Georgia. We suddenly saw this dancing couple and since I had my little camera on me, I just filmed them.

This scene is amazing. This couple is dancing to the sound of shooting, which was obviously added in post-production. Then there is this footage of birds flying.

This was a present from Artavazd Peleshian. This fragment appears in one of his films, which he made out of found footage. And then he gave it to me.

This is your debut feature and you made a short film before, Farewell. How did you come to make films?

You know about my short film, that's great! I finished VGIK [Russian Film Institute in Moscow] and graduated in 2003 with that film. Then I decided to make a feature but I actually prefer *Farewell* to *The Lighthouse*...

The Lighthouse touches on the issue of the personalisation of history and suggests that perhaps official history does not capture everybody's personal experiences of the war.

2K restoration within the framework of the Hamo Bek-Nazarov Project, approved by the film's cinematographer Maksim Drozdov, with support from Kino Klassika and Fixafilm. Courtesy of Second Run.

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Yeah, that is true and in fact Armenians don't like this film that much, because for them it is too personal and not enough about Armenia. They wanted it to be exclusively about the Armenian conflict but I wanted to show a part of a war. To me war is something general. It is a loss of your origins if your country suddenly disappears and this feels the same for everybody.

Your film contains everything that could be associated with Russian cinema: poetry, music, landscape. Where would you situate yourself within the Russian cinematic tradition? I can certainly see your debt to Tarkovsky, but are there any other filmmakers that influenced you?

Tarkovsky, of course! I was brought up on his films. When I was young, my mother often took me to the cinema to see Tarkovsky's films, because he was very famous at that time. I read his books and I like his understanding of cinema a lot. From him grew my fascination with Bresson. I like Aleksei German a lot. He is very interesting and his work broadened a lot of horizons to me, but it would probably be difficult to understand here as he works with language quite a lot and those nuances will probably be lost in translation. From contemporary Russian cinema Ilya Khrjanovsky is also very interesting.

Your film deals with memory and loss. To what extent was The Lighthouse your subjective vision?

The most important thing in cinema, for me, is honesty. And we are not talking about entertainment cinema here. For me this is the only thing that it is worth giving to others. If you are lying on screen, I as a spectator do not want to deal with this. Cinema is like this unique connection, it is like speaking... I don't want you to lie to me and I would not lie to you.

The film has beautiful music and the most amazing opening credits.

The music score was composed by a Finnish musician [Kimmo Pohjonen]. And on this film I had an international crew, the art director was Serbian for example. As for the opening credits, I just imagined them to be like this, because the film is like a letter and the writing of the credits reflects this.

There is a scene in the film, where the inhabitants of the village watch a TV that stands on a table outside. It is a very absurd and surreal scene.

You mentioned everything that is important in the film, you know! That's amazing! The most interesting thing was, that during shooting we had this TV, which was on all the time and this footage was a chronicle about genocide. It is by chance that it was showing just there when we were filming. It was an amazing coincidence! And it fitted into the film so well.

Was this Anna Kapaleva's [Lena] first role?

Yes, it was. She is a theatre actress and I wanted her to try to act in film. I think my approach on *The Lighthouse* wasn't right as I did not give my actors enough time to rehearse. They were given the script before but we had no time to practise, so went straight into shooting.

The film is quite short, 78 minutes...

I cut a lot of scenes out as they just didn't work and I had much more material than that but somehow it was too much of it.

Interview by Kamila Kuc, bfi.org.uk/lff, 1 November 2007