RUSSIA
TELEVISION AND RADIO

Cloister

Genre: Drama

Length: 8x52'

Format: HD

Director: Alexander Veledinsky

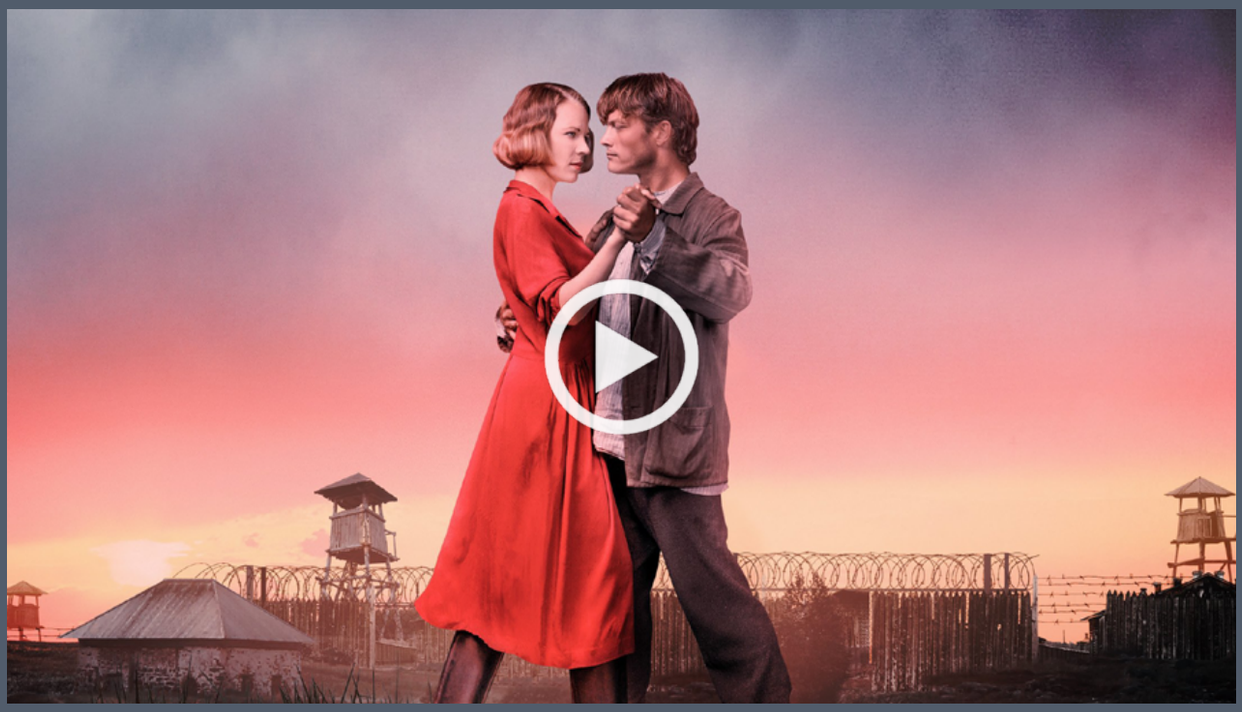
Cast: Evgeny Tkachuk, Alexandra Rebenok, Sergey Bezrukov, Victor Dobronravov, Victor Rakov, Yuriy Kuznetsov, Igor Chernevich , Yakov Shamshin

Distributor: Sovtelexport, the official sales branch of Russia Television and Radio

Synopsis

Late 1920s. Solovki. The ancient monastery, lingonberry woods, picturesque lakes and freezing cold, hunger, pain and sufferings of people in the Solovetsky concentration camp. A passionate love story between a prisoner Artyom and a Cheka officer Galina unfolds in a place where everybody is striving to survive at any cost. Their love is hopeless, dangerous and doomed to be tragical.

Trailer



About the novel. History of the screenplay

Director Alexander Veledinsky asked Zakhar Prilepin to write a short story to use it as a basis for his future film. Together, they went to the Solovki, where they heard a love story of a camp theatre actress and a warden. The lovers were caught escaping and then sentenced to death. Prilepin liked the story so much that he started to examine the documents, evidence, memories and diaries of a real prosecutor Galina Kucherenko. Then, he wrote a long novel, which became a bestseller and won multiple national awards. But the plot was different. It focused on a love story between a Chekist officer Galina and a prisoner Artyom, unfolding on the background of cruel challenges in the Solovetsky special purpose camp.

Solovetsky special purpose camp (abbreviated SLON in Russian) is a place where destinies of victims and executors are intertwined. Alexander Solzhenitsyn called the Solovki "the mother of GULAG". In his novel, Zakhar Prilepin gives a modern view on the Solovetsky camp history. He focuses on destinies of the convicts, and tells readers about the tragedy through the storyline of the main character — Artyom Goryainov.

Zakhar Prilepin
writer

> *The Solovki of the 20s is like Noah's ark. The Civil War has just ended, and you can find there former White Guards, priests, people from all over Russia. There are Basmachis and real spies, because the Soviet Russia was full of spies. And it gives huge opportunities for writing, because there are all types of people*

Plot

Solovki, 1920s. Artyom Goryainov, a 27-year-old Moscow dropout student, is sent to a prison camp, were a Chekist officer Fyodor Eikhmanis experiments with re-educating people. The head of the camp Eikhmanis is obsessed with the idea of creating a new society and he starts building it on the site of an Orthodox monastery.

From the very first day, Artyom suffers hunger, hard labor, a dangerous confrontation with the criminal elite, the threat of execution and physical violence. He meets very different people: honest and corrupted, generous and vindictive, criminals and politicians. The young man is trying not only to survive in this deadly adventure, but also to find his truth in life.

But there is another challenge approaching him. Unexpectedly, he falls in love with a Chekist officer Galina, the lover of the almighty Eikhmanis. For their dangerous relationship they can be executed. Their love is doomed to be tragical in this awful camp filled with horror and filth.

From the creator’s view

Alexander Veledinsky
director

2013 FilmFestival Cottbus, Germany
The Major Prize
"The Geographer Drank His Globe Away"

2013 Kinotavr, Russia
Grand Prix
"The Geographer Drank His Globe Away"

2014 Golden Eagle Award, Russia
Best Director
"The Geographer Drank His Globe Away "

2014 Nika Award, Russia
Best Director
"The Geographer Drank His Globe Away "

"Cloister" is not about a camp life. We want to see the relationship between a man and society in a historical perspective. There are a lot of books and movies about the camps of the 30s, but we were attracted by the 20s. It is the most interesting period of the 20th century. The Belle Époque ended and the new state was born. The "Cloister" series is an ark on which Russian people, separated by the Civil War, sail away into the unknown. Our story shows that it is impossible to love in a cage"

Nikita Rozhdestvensky
cameraman

"This is not the easiest project in my life, but "Cloister" inspires you and makes you responsible for the result. It has three main components of a high-quality film: a powerful script, a great director, and good actors. There is not a single "serial" shot in the film. Veledinsky knew exactly what he wanted to see and demanded to maintain the classical style. He wanted the picture to look good even after ten or twenty years"

Evgeny Tkachuk
Artyom Goryainov

“We must understand what happened then. And we have to prevent it from happening again. I mean, the destruction of the personality, the destruction of thought, that inevitably comes to a person’s mind. There were over 200 prison camps in our country. It’s impossible to even realize the number, it’s simply unrealistic. You have to understand why it happened, because when it all began, the rejection of God was the first step to start the new life”

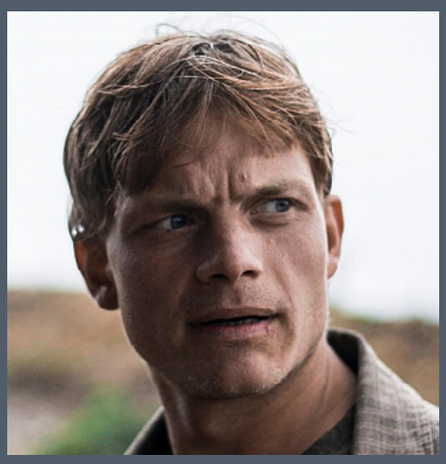
Alexandra Rebenok
Galina

> *It's a story about people who strive for light. They are looking for it in the gloomiest place. It is a strong and very powerful story. You want to dig into it, and find out what actually happened there. The themes of "Cloister" are eternal, they do not belong to a particular time. These themes are God, love, death, passion, revenge. It is just that the circumstances are simply placed in this particular time and place — in the Solovki of the 1920s*

Victor Dobronravov
Serge Mezernitsky

> *"Cloister" is about people, about the light at the end of the tunnel. If it is not there, the tunnel must be broken. The main character Artyom is a young, talented, and lucky man. Life constantly throws him here and there, and he constantly has to make choices. Before the end of the story, I thought, "Come on, I can't believe they broke you too". But they didn't, because he is different. I think he is a hero of that time, and people in their early twenties should think about what they would do in that situation. That's why "Cloister" may be called a classic*

Actors and characters



Artyom Goryainov
played by Evgeny Tkachuk

Artyom ended up in the Solovki for the murder of his father. A simple dropout student from Moscow, who likes to have fun, and read books. He does not care about the Bolsheviks. "If it happened, let it be," he says. He does not believe anyone, but wants to find the truth. This young, strong, and cheeky man falls in love with the investigator Galina and tries to "make friends" with the head of the camp. He plays with death, even though he can't win.

> Artyom has a great thirst for life, he wants to live and stay alive, although it's almost impossible. The urge to live does great things. It can save you both in war and in the camp. Without it, a person can turn into a living corpse even in a harmless situation ”

Galina Kucherenko
played by Alexandra Rebenok

An NKVD investigator in the Solovetsky camp. She is tough, smart, dedicated. She worked with Trotsky, and came to the Solovki to be closer to Eikhmanis, the man she loves. He neglects her, and she decides to get revenge on him, starting an affair with Artyom. But soon it turns into a deep, hopeless and deadly dangerous feeling.

“ Galina is able to love very strongly, although she lived in the times of new rights and relationships, when the marriage was considered old-fashioned, a time of gender equality, and free love. She wears a leather jacket, a cap, and a revolver. Like an Amazon in armor, she hides her need for tenderness, love, family. Eikhmanis likes her being strong, armed and ruthless, and she keeps pretending for him ”

Fyodor Eikhmanis
played by Sergey Bezrukov

A contradictory character. The head of the Solovetsky camp, a dedicated Chekist. One of the main "demons of the revolution" and organizers of the Gulag. He is educated, speaks French, loves music and theater, enjoys being around women. He is obsessed with his experiment on re-educating prisoners. Eikhmanis cold-bloodedly signs the execution lists. He does not doubt his right to decide the fate of thousands of people in order to "build a new life."

> “To what extent does Eikhmanis himself believe that he is creating a new civilization? This is very important — to what extent is he convinced that he does the right thing? I would like to know what he thought and felt in the last minutes of his life. As Goethe said: "There is no deed on earth without revenge." The revolution is devouring its children. It’s a law that always works”

Serge Mezernitsky
played by Victor Dobronravov

A White Guard and counterrevolutionary. In the Solovetsky camp he became a trumpeter for a brass band. Being a convinced opponent of the revolution, he does not say much, jokes wittily, plays on the stage and in life. Only in the company of close people, he dreams of how the bloody regime will fall.

> “A White Guard officer, a servant of his people, who no longer exists. He is educated, smart, talented. But how to use these qualities now? My character’s story is quite sad. He used to fight, command, kill, but now he turned into a tiger without teeth and claws. But he is still a tiger. Nobody believes in the light at the end of the tunnel. They are White Guards, they have no way back. They are not doing their time for just stealing a loaf of bread, but for something way more serious. Their life is already over”

Poet Afanasiev
played by Yakov Shamshin

A hustler and a swindler. He says there is no difference between a camp and a monastery. In general, he looks at life as an excuse to write new poems, but only as long as nothing threatens him. He can easily betray a friend to save himself. Afanasiev finds common language with local criminal elite, dreams to escape and cannot stop himself from telling insulting jokes about the authorities, even if it costs him life.

> “My character is sneaky, but he’s not an evil guy. He is a half-criminal, half-bohemian poet, who used to hang around Yesenin's friends. He is doing his time for organizing a brothel, and finds inspiration on the very bottom of his own fall”

Vasiliy Petrovich Vershilin
played by Victor Rakov

A former officer, he does not allow himself to swear, and has a strong sense of his own dignity. He helped Artyom to settle in when the latter just arrived in the camp, and takes care of him like a father. Vasiliy Petrovich likes to talk about the new life with bitter irony, but he is careful. He keeps aloof, tries to make Artyom speak frankly, but doesn't talk much about himself.

Bishop John
played by Igor Chernevich

The Orthodox priest, Father John, helped maintain the strength of spirit of many prisoners. People call him "bishop", and it suits Father John the best way possible. He speaks about obedience, humbleness, and faith with love and a smile on his face, and even those who cannot accept pain and humiliation of the camp life listen to him. The priest believes: prisoners still have the hope of salvation as long as at least one of them is able to keep his spirit up, and not fall into darkness.

Shooting

"Cloister" was filmed in Moscow, Vyborg, Yaroslavl, Arkhangelsk, Leningrad and Vologda region. The creators refused to film in the Solovetsky archipelago because they did not want to violate the strict order of the existing monastery. The Solovetsky Monastery was depicted by Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery.

Accuracy is the word that best describes the filming process. The creators paid great attention to the smallest details. The snow-white walls of the Vologodsky monastery were decorated with stone. The filming crew built a camp store, post office, hospital and theater there. They masterfully recreated the atmoshphere of the1920s. In the film, you can notice the forgotten brands of cigarettes, old poetry books, authentic pistols, security officers' leather jackets, posters, a portrait of Trotsky in Galina's room.

WIKIPEDIA
about Solovki prison camp

“ Solovetsky special purpose camp (abbreviated SLON in Russian) — was the first and only prison camp in the USSR up to 1929. It was located on the Solovetsky islands and operated in 1920s-1930s. A remote and inaccessible, it was created to isolate, and re-educate especially dangerous political and ordinary criminals. The hard labor was thought to inspire and taught prisoners to work in order to give them a chance to live an honest working life and be useful citizens of the USSR upon their return from the camp.

Many organizers involved in the creation of the Solovetsky prison camp were convicted or executed: **the first head of the camp, Nogtev, was sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment, but was later granted an amnesty; the second head of the camp, Eikhmanis, was executed as a British spy; the head of the Solovetsky Special Prison, Apeter, was executed, too** ”

TV dramas & literature

The film versions of the Russian classics are Russia Television and Radio’s catalogue hallmark:

"Anna Karenina"
by Leo Tolstoy

"The Idiot", "Demons"
by Fyodor Dostoevsky

"Blackout"
by Alexey Ivanov

"And Quiet Flows the Don"
by Mikhail Sholohov

"Fathers and Sons"
by Ivan Turgenev

"The White Guard"
by Mikhail Bulgakov

"Zuleikha Opens Her Eyes"
by Guzel Yakhina

"Cloister" is the film adaptation of Zakhar Prilepin’s novel. The series is not trying to find whom to blame or what to do. The screenplay of "Cloister" was created according to the laws of commercial films dramaturgy. Just one destiny, one tragic love story, opens up a whole endless world, where each person makes his own choice despite fear, pain and danger. And, at the same time, it is a deep reflection on topics relevant to any era, such as faith and love, good and evil, value and meaning of the human life.

CLOISTER

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