

Analysis of Interview with Liudmila Danilenko  
Conducted by Michael Roberts on 19 July 2008  
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Analysis written and published by Alex McGrath on 12 November 2012

On July 18th, 2008, William and Mary student Michael Roberts, while on his university's study abroad program to St. Petersburg Russia, interviewed Liudmila Danilenko about her movie going experiences. The interview was done as part of the project, headed by William and Mary Professor Alexander Prokhorov, entitled "Russian Movie Theater Project." The project is designed to record the movie-going experiences of ordinary Russians in the Soviet and Post-Soviet periods.

Like many Russians who grew up in the Soviet era, Liudmila greatly enjoyed fairy tales in her childhood, and her first movie going experiences which she remembers involve fairy tales (0:52). As a child she also liked popular science television shows, such as [\*In the World of Animals\*](#). But most of all, Liudmila enjoys films where she can identify with the characters, or can "live vicariously through them" (5:23). She enjoyed the classic Soviet western/youth adventure [\*The Elusive Avengers \(1967\)\*](#) and the ballet film [\*The Swan Lake \(1958\)\*](#), which she remembers for the beauty of the ballerinas and the spectacle of their performance. She especially likes [\*Alla Pygachova's\*](#) role in [\*A Woman That Sings \(1980\)\*](#).

Liudmila has a greater appreciation for the classic movies of the Soviet era than the modern blockbusters that now appear in Russian theaters. She says that Soviet cinema is "more vital" for people than modern cinema (3:13). She has a strong taste for Soviet comedy. Her favorite director, [\*Leonid Gaidai\*](#), directed two of her favorite movies (and Soviet comedy classics) [\*The Diamond Arm \(1969\)\*](#) and [\*Ivan Vasilievich Changes His Profession \(1973\)\*](#). Interestingly, Liudmila believes that such movies are easier to identify with, and are more closely connected to the viewer, despite being objectively unrealistic comedies. Two of her favorite actors are Russian actor [\*Yevgeniy Leonov\*](#) and French actor [\*Louis De Funes\*](#), both known for their archetypal comedic characters.

In addition to the movies themselves, Liudmila feels that theaters and screening rooms have changed dramatically. In earlier times movie theaters weren't trying to "make a buck," but now it's all business, and cinema has lost its character (19:30). Liudmila sees movie going as a high art experience, one that requires one's full attention. She believes one should not eat while watching a movie, as it is improper and disrespectful to the presentation (12:06). For these reasons, she no longer goes to the movies.

Although Liudmila never goes to the theater to see new movies. She said the last time she went to the movie theater was "about 10 years" prior to the interview. However, she says she does occasionally watch modern films, even blockbusters. While she claims disapproval of such films, she highlighted [\*Gladiator \(2000\)\*](#), [\*Spartacus \(2004\)\*](#), [\*Troy \(2004\)\*](#), and [\*Alexander \(2004\)\*](#) as recent productions she enjoys watching on television at home. These movies share a common theme in that they are all historical epics which emphasize the virility of their male leads. In addition, her favorite actors include French

actor [Jean Marais](#), Dutch actor [Rutger Hauer](#), British actor [Timothy Dalton](#)<sup>1</sup> and American movie star [Mickey Rourke](#). Her choice of favorite actors and movies reveals her taste for strong and charismatic male leads.

Liudmila Danilenko's movie watching habits appear contradictory, but in sum, her movie going experience can be characterized as Soviet. She enjoys classic Soviet films and is not a fan of the modern, market driven movie industry. Despite her professed dislike for show business, she is drawn to many modern films that are historically based and exude masculinity. She enjoys being able to identify with and live vicariously through her film experiences. Often these films favor alternative fantasy worlds rather than reality.

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<sup>1</sup> Important to note that Lyudmila would not have come across Timothy Dalton in his roles as James Bond, as they were blocked in the USSR by Soviet censors, but rather through the British TV miniseries [Jane Eyre](#).