

## Alyrzaeva Analytical Note

This interview was conducted with 59 year old Natalia Alexandrovna Alyrzaeva in her home in St. Petersburg in July of 2012. Andrew Andell and Rachel Faith conducted the interview and transcribed and translated it with the help of Alex McGrath in the Fall of the same year.

Natalia Alexandrovna grew up at her house in a village, but spent a large portion of her time in what was then Leningrad. Since there were no movie theaters in the village outside the city, she instead attended a 'club' (a local community center) in which movies were shown. However, when in the city she went to theaters near her home on Vasilevsky Island such as the "Baltica" (Baltika) and "Surf" (Priboi) neither of which function as movie theaters in the present day. When she was young, Natalia Alexandrovna went to the movie theater often, two or three times a week; to her, it was something normal, "Going to the movies was like going to work" (7:33). She remembers how she and her friends would go to the movies whenever something new was out, either by foot or on the tram. Since she had school or work during the day, she would attend the evening screenings at 6 or 9 p.m. She remembers buffets served at the movie theater quite vividly, listing tea, coffee, pastries, ice cream, and little pies immediately as items commonly served there. She also remarks that while there was beer, there were no spirits or hard liquor served in the theater (16:44). As she has grown older, however, her movie attendance has decreased, though she remembers going often with her son. In the last decade she states that she, "would go to the movies...two times a year." (25:29) Though she attributes this to having a television, she also states that she lacks the health to go to the movies anymore (29:20).

The first time she went to the movies was to see Sergei Gerasimov's film *The Young Guard* (1949) about Uliyana Gromova and Lyubov Shevtsova, heroes of the Great Patriotic War (the Russian name for the Second World War). Like many Russians Natalia remembers this war melodrama for the young actors and actresses who later became major Soviet film stars. Her favorite childhood genre however is film comedy. She states that children like herself would be turned away from more grown up theme films toward comedy fairy tales like *The Bun* (?) or *Jack Frost* (1964). Sometimes she and her friends, in trying to sneak into a movie, attempted to hide under a woman's large fur coat in order to enter together. (19:10) As she matured, her taste in movies expanded to include films about love. In fact, when talking about adolescence and early adulthood, she often refers back to French films with [Allen Delon](#) and Italian films with actor and

singer [Adriano Celentano](#). She describes these films as 'beautiful' with queues that were 'kilometers long' (9:37). She also remembers these as the films which children were not allowed into because they, "Showed lots of love and bedroom scenes" (20:08). She remembers the popular films of her youth, Soviet films like [The Diamond Arm](#), [The Young Guard](#), and [War and Peace](#) (18:17). Later she adds [Ivan Brovkin](#) in [The Virgin Land](#) to this list, stating that, "you know all of them but don't remember them exactly, because we've watched millions of them over and over." (27:18) At times Natalia seems to overlap movies and television productions, listing [17 Moments of Spring](#), a television serial, as her favorite moviegoing experience along with the popular films of the time. Indeed, this blurring of film and television in her memory occurs again as she describes films with sound. She believes that, "films with sound [appeared] somewhere at the beginning of the 60s because in the 60s the TVs were that way, with some kind of magnifying glass. The glass was put on the little screen...In the 60s...there were already more or less normal televisions with sound" (26:07).

When describing movies from her own experience Natalia Alexandrovna seems to remember the actors and actresses in each film more than the title of the film. She remembers Celentano, Delon, and Sophie Lauren but does not mention any films in which any of these actors participated. She states that her favorite movies are not Russian films, but films with Patrick Swayze (all of them), as well as films with Richard Gere and Julia Roberts. (9:02) While she doesn't mention the names of any particular favorite movies, she makes it clear that they're the ones starring her favorite actors. Her moviegoing experience also includes a wide variety of foreign films. Not only did Indian movies make her cry, (6:15) but she also attended French, Italian, and Polish film screenings, more often than American films. Less frequently, she remembers attending Hungarian, Czech, and German films showings as well. (18: 54) While she mentions "banned" films existing, Natalia Alexandrovna states that she never attended them and that she doesn't even know who banned them. "Probably Stalin" (21:35). Upbeat and energetic throughout the interview, she seems to prefer speaking on her positive experiences, with negative impressions few and far between.

However, Natalia Alexandrovna draws heavy distinctions between modern theaters and those with which she grew up, though when prompted she has difficulty explaining the differences. Describing general 'difference,' she cites modern theaters as "beautiful, big, and '3-D'" (7:50). She describes the modern theater experience as one in which the film commands the attention of the viewer, where "You sit and you watch as if you were actually taking part in the film yourself" (7:50). However, in describing the theaters of

her childhood, her attention seems to be drawn more toward the people and experiences occurring there. She remembers the smell of beer and tobacco, and how young people would occasionally make noise if they didn't like the movie. She remembers a distinct difference in the lengths of lines for movie tickets, saying that now lines have no more than 10 or 12 people while in the past one could stand in line for 40 minutes. Here she interjects an aside, stating, "by the way, there were two times when we stood in line for longer than an hour and a half to buy tickets." (12:30) In this anecdote, she talks about lines that extended down two major streets consisting of "thousands" of people. The ushers too, were different than today. When she was young, the ushers were retirees, people older than 60. Today however, young people work in theaters and tear tickets instead of the old ladies of her youth (17:02). Additionally, she remembers a much greater variety of people, men and women of all ages, attending films in the past, while modern attendance seems to consist mainly of youth, which she puts at between 15 and 45 years old (11:20). In describing the armchairs, she remarks retrospectively that, "For that time and for those theaters it was comfortable. Today you lay down in these arm chairs. In my time, they were only what was needed, only what was necessary" (15:28). This statement characterizes her perspective on modern and old theaters; while modern theaters are comfortable, they seem excessive – in her time, only what was needed was implemented and at the time, that was perfectly fine. She has very little negative to say about either experience, remembering very fondly her past moviegoing days and remarking with awe at the enormity in both size and scale of the modern movie theater.

Natalia Alexandrovna concludes her interview by describing her views on changing youth culture. She decries the evils and 'filth' found through the internet and how it is corrupting young people. "Young people nowadays," she states, "live on their computers and don't know anything anymore" (30:10). She instead points to literature as one of the highest forms of knowledge and culture, motioning toward the books she has scattered throughout the room. Of modern youth, she suggests, "that's why they're much more stupid than we are: because they don't read, and if you don't read books, you don't know anything." It may be worth noting that, while she remained positive for the majority of the interview concerning film, when confronted briefly with literature she became more animated; her previously contented responses turning then more passionate and opinionated.