

Moscow TV Round-Up: Ivan the Terrible, Bimmer and More

By [Mark H. Teeter](#)

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Ivan the Terrible, Part One (1945) [IMDB](#)

It's less Prime Time and more Crime Time on Moscow TV this week, as the films for late October offer viewers a very felonious tsar, four bad dudes in a stolen BMW, a high-tone Leningrad call girl, a much-reviled wartime traitor and an updated Dostoevsky tale, with the murder framed by hip-hop. And all that *before* we hit Halloween! Here's the where and when:

For patriotic viewers miffed at missing the unveiling of the world's first monument to Ivan the Terrible in Oryol last week, the First Educational channel offers some cinematic solace: the station has been holding its own "*Ivan the Terrible*" marathon over the weekend, with three showings of both parts of Sergei Eisenstein's 1944-46 classic from Saturday night though this morning. Let's face it, *somebody* had to do it.

If historical accuracy lies somewhere beside the point in this first-tsar-of-Russia foundation

epic – and *way* beside it in the second part, according to miffed patriotic viewer Josef Stalin – few will dispute the greatness of this film *as a film*: Eisenstein’s elaborate and meticulous staging, the masterful camera work of Eduard Tisse and Andrei Moskvin, the perfectly modulated Sergei Profiev score and memorable performances from a great cast led by Nikolai Cherkassov – all these combine to create a uniquely impressive and purposeful whole that gives the phrase “auteur cinema” its meaning. As Andrei Tarkovsky put it, “There isn’t a single detail in the film that doesn’t betray [the director’s] idea or intent.” Which weren’t Stalin’s, clearly, and weren’t those of the speeches in Oryol, in case you were wondering.

Ivan the Terrible *ИВАН ГРОЗНЫЙ*. First Educational, Monday at 6:20 a.m.
Available free online at the [Mosfilm](#) site.

Pyotr Todorovsky’s once-shocking “*Interdevochka*” (1989) did massive box office here and good art house business abroad by skillfully telling a seamier-side-of-perestroika story about a Leningrad nurse turned call girl who harbors dreams of something better – as in marrying a foreigner and skipping the country. The film was more than a de-sanitized Soviet “Breakfast at Tiffany’s”: Todorovsky broke new ground with his illustrations of common but heretofore unsuitable-for-filming social phenomena, including 4-star hotel prostitution, hard-currency machinations and entrenched institutional corruption. If “*Interdevochka*” seems somewhat tamer today – and almost quaint in its concessions to “Victorian” Soviet sexual sensibilities and faux-socialist notions of morality – its narrative still offers an engaging and revealing cautionary tale, and one admirably embodied by Elena Yakovleva in the lead.

Interdevochka *Интердевочка*. Dom Kino, Tuesday at 11:10 a.m.

With four guys in a stolen BMW who either represent or run into everything wrong with this country at the street level 15 years ago, “*Bimmer*” (2003) is one badass Russian road movie – but with excellent music (Critics Guild Best Score, 2003). Yes, from corrupt cops and mafia-run businesses to crudity and brutishness so commonplace they hardly register after a while, “*Bimmer*” would be a gritty parade of stuff you’d rather avoid – except, that is, for two things: (1) the film exudes a remarkable energy (even as you flinch), with the talented guy-ensemble cast nicely handled by debut director Pyotr Buslov (using a script he wrote with Denis Rodimin); and (2) there actually is a moral here that rises above the noir-nihilism.

In the end, the heroes-in-quotation-marks do get their just deserts – and yet they still qualify, one feels, for a certain viewer sympathy. You be the judge. And when you’ve calmed down from this exciting if bumpy “*Bimmer*” ride, ask yourself what this generation of gangsters are probably doing today...

Bimmer *Бумер*. REN TV, Wednesday at 11:25 p.m.

In an era when the state struggles ceaselessly to convince its citizenry that their homeland is surrounded by enemies and infiltrated by traitors, the term “Vlasovite” comes in very handy: followers of General Andrei Vlasov can be either! The well-imagined “fascists” who took over Kiev two years ago can be termed Vlasovites on TV talk shows and in the state press, and a local pop singer or actor who disagrees with presidential policy can just as easily become an “internal Vlasovite” for the same audiences. But as Aleksei Zaitsev’s well-mounted documentary “*The Noose*” (1997) makes clear, there is a problem with playing the Vlasov

card too often. The closer disinterested historians look at the case of the Soviet general who surrendered to the Germans in 1942 and then led a sizeable force of ex-POWs and anti-Stalinist volunteers against the Red Army, the harder it is to present Vlasov as a one-dimensional villain. Tune in Who's Who Thursday and decide for yourself who actually betrayed whom – and who did it first.

The Noose. Or One General and Two Russian Armies Петля, или один генерал... и две русские армии. Who's Who, Thursday at 10:00 a.m.

For those who need to loosen up after a tough week, Roman Kachanov's "**Down House**" (2001) is just what the doctor ordered: a very loose adaptation of the Dostoevsky classic "The Idiot." Kachanov's Prince Myshkin is a late-'90s computer programmer who returns to the Wild East of Moscow after psychotherapy in Switzerland. From there on, the basic idiotic plot is maintained – but its boundaries are stretched as needed throughout, with the transition to post-Soviet modernity's manners and mores, from gangsters to techno-bop, neatly accomplished through both telling dialogue and showing the Hummers. The linchpin figure of Myshkin is wonderfully rendered in all his touching naïvete by Fyodor Bondarchuk, leading a cast that seamlessly weaves serious acting with seriously funny tongue-in-cheek. All told, the whole thing is an insistently watchable experiment that ends up commendable as both genuine homage and a big joke. And how many Dostoevsky movies have a great hip-hop soundtrack?

Down House Дaун хаус. TV 1000 Russkoye Kino, Saturday at 12:30 a.m.

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